

ASSESSMENT TOOLS USED

For Children

- School Readiness Instruments (SRI)
- Achievement Tests for 6, 7 & 8 year olds

For Programmes

- ECEQAS - Early Childhood Education Quality Assessment Scale
- Interview schedule for teachers

Others

- House Hold Survey Questionnaire
- Interview Schedules

* All assessment tools are under standardization process

IECEI STUDY: THE INCEPTION

First of its kind in South Asia Region

Do you think pre-school experience should be the right of every child? Is it important for the child's overall development? Are parents and preschools so obsessed with the notion of formal education that the real objectives of pre-school education are getting neglected? These questions rarely dominate the discourse among policy makers, educationists or caregivers. There is little concern about the availability of and access to preschools, the quality of the preschools and its impact on children and whether the available preschools are regulated. Further, no reliable data or records are available on how many children are attending preschools or the diverse centres they are attending.

We are currently in a situation where we have a National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Education (2013) which has defined certain quality standards. Yet, in the absence of regulatory measures preschools seem to be mushrooming all over urban and rural parts of India in all kinds of facilities, either as Anganwadis or private preschools, both with little quality control. It was this concern that made it imperative to make an empirical assessment of what are the kind of early learning opportunities children are getting in the early childhood years and how these are impacting their learning levels as they move into primary schools. What are the quality factors that can be considered as non-negotiable?

It was in response to some of these concerns that the Indian Early Childhood Education Impact (IECEI) Study was initiated in 2010 by CECEI in collaboration with ASER Center and UNICEF and with support of several international agencies, MHRD and Govt. of Andhra Pradesh. This multi-strand longitudinal study, carried out in three geographically and demographically different states namely; Assam, Rajasthan and Telangana, followed around 13,000 four year olds for five years to understand the trends of participation of preschool

aged children in ECE programmes and the quality of their experience in preschool and later in primary school. The study also aimed to estimate the levels of school readiness among children at age 5 and learning levels at age 6, 7 and 8 and relate it to the quality of early education they had experienced and their home environment.

The main objective of the study has thus been to explore the quality variations in preschool experience across anjanwadis, private preschools and programmes run by NGOs and identify those non-negotiables, which have significant impact on the learning levels of children. The study tries to answer an important question i.e. whether quality of preschool experience has an impact on school readiness levels of children at entry to grade 1 and to what extent is this impact sustained in terms of educational and behavioural outcomes in early primary grades.



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4 YEAR OLDS ARE IN PRESCHOOL & TAKE VARIED PATHWAYS TO PRIMARY SCHOOL

The government run Anganwadi centres and public schools have almost universal coverage in rural India where the IECEI study was conducted, which include 362 villages across two districts each in the sampled states. The striking feature across all these villages was the expanding prevalence of private schooling, where the preschool grades were observed. This trend was most visible in Rajasthan where more than 80% of the villages had a private school. A quarter of the villages in Assam and Telangana had private provisioning available to young children. Many children went to private preschools in neighbouring villages. Some highlights -

Access to preschools is not that much of an issue now. It's time to focus on quality..

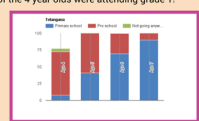
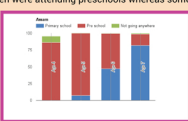
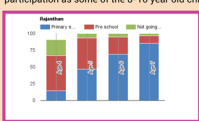
About 95% four year olds participate in an ECE programme in Assam and Telangana

One-third of the sample was not participating anywhere at the preschool stage .

Under-age participation seen in primary school, which was higher in Rajasthan and Telangana

The RTE (2009) and National ECCE policy (2013) prescribe preschool for children between ages of 3-6 years followed by primary school at age 6. But the patterns emerging from the data exhibits multiple pathways taken by children. It was seen that during the early years, until age 6, children were found to be changing pre-/schools frequently within an academic year. Following are a few patterns:

However, as the children grow, these patterns start to fade away and the participation also increases. Also, there existed irregularities in the participation as some of the 8-10 year old children were attending preschools whereas some of the 4 year olds were attending grade 1!



PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS AND QUALITY OF PROGRAMMES AVAILABLE TO CHILDREN



Parents are more inclined towards sending their children to private schools as they are of the view that only private schools can provide learning environment, which according to them is appropriate for their children. The negative views attached to the government schools had an important role to play in the mushrooming of the private schools. The parents contemplate that no teaching happens in the government schools though the teachers are far better qualified and well paid in comparison to the teachers of the private schools. Further with advent of RTE, the parents' belief strengthened that without proper attendance, mechanism for assessment of the children and corporal punishment, the government school cannot function smoothly. Over the period of 5 years one could see a considerable increase in the number of private schools and the participation of children in those schools.

Most of the private schools in Rajasthan are in disarray. They were functioning from abandoned Havelis as well as rented households without proper rooms or ventilation. Infrastructure-wise, the classrooms lacked space; the schools did not have proper toilets and drinking water facilities and at times were not safe with thatched roof, broken floors, classes on open roof without safety railings, etc. Further, the teachers too are under qualified with a teacher as low as 8th grade pass teach the primary grades without any training. The teachers did not have any idea as to what was to be taught in the pre-primary grades which were mostly downward extension of primary grades with rote memorization as a method.

QUALITY FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO LEARNING LEVELS

PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

- Toilet availability & use
- Availability of clean water for drinking
- No hazardous and unclean conditions around the school
- Safety level of building maintained

CLASSROOM PLANNING

- Age/development appropriateness of activities ensured by teacher
- Weekly/Daily schedule followed by teacher
- Classroom arrangement & management to facilitate group and individual activities

TEACHER

- Democratic & interactive teacher
- Teacher introduces a new lesson/concept/activity innovatively
- Asks children questions and encourages children's questions
- Promotes higher order thinking

CURRICULAR TRANSACTION

- Opportunity for creative and divergent thinking
- Opportunity to participate in both individual & group activities
- Opportunities for free choice play
- Activities conducted for number readiness and learning maths concepts

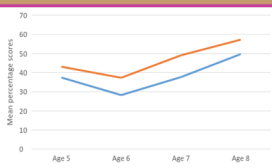
CHILDREN ARE NOT READY FOR SCHOOL

More than 13000 five year olds across Assam, Rajasthan and Telangana were assessed on school readiness in terms of cognitive, language and psycho-social competencies. It is a matter of great concern that, most children did not demonstrate the pre-requisites skills required for the Grade 1 curriculum at the time of entry to school, indicating that they were not yet ready for school, and literacy and phonemic awareness. However, the children were better equipped in psychosocial development which would facilitate their adjustment to the environment at school.

Participation in a preschool programme had a positive impact on the readiness levels of children with this impact becoming significantly higher if the programme attended by the children followed a play based, age and developmentally appropriate and contextually relevant curriculum. The data also shows that 4-5 year olds benefit more from a good quality preschool experience in comparison to children who are younger and this has a serious implication for age-appropriate curriculum development.

Household environment in terms of availability of print, learning support provided to the children along with socio-economic level of the family and mothers' education also influenced children's levels of school readiness.

Longitudinal assessment of the children's performance at ages 6, 7 and 8 years shows that some of the school readiness skills expected from a 5 year old are often not achieved by children even at 7 or 8 years of age. The analysis of the data further shows that school readiness levels are a strong predictor of learning levels at later years i.e., children who had high school readiness levels at age 5 did well on different competencies at the elementary school at ages 6, 7 and 8 years. We conclude with a clear evidence that if, as annually reported, there is an acute learning deficit in children's performance at the primary stage across states, a major reason for this situation is possibly that the children are coming into schools without the required foundational competencies, due to lack of adequate exposure and stimulation in the early years. Ensuring good quality preschool education can therefore play a key role in improving learning levels in schools.



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