



CENTRAL SQUARE
FOUNDATION



Building Strong Foundations: Examining Early Childhood Education in India

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Foreword	4
Executive Summary	5
Chapter 1: ECE in India - National Snapshot	8
The Policies Governing Early Childhood Care and Education In India	10
Learning Outcomes of Students Enrolled in Early Childhood Education Programmes	13
Structural Factors that Affect Service Delivery of ECE in India	18
Discussion	34
Chapter 2: Study Overview and Methodology	35
Overview of the Study	36
Data Analysis	41
Ethical Considerations & Key Limitations	41
Chapter 3: Curriculum Analysis	43
Overview Analysis	45
National Trends and Insights	46
Recommendations and Way Forward	67
Chapter 4: Insights from Primary Research	71
Classroom	73
Teachers	79
Classroom Transactions	84
Parents	92
Governance	94
Chapter 5: Way Forward	97
List of Abbreviations	105
Annexures	106

Acknowledgements

We extend our gratitude to all those who have played a pivotal role in carrying out the survey and writing this report. Their unwavering support has made this endeavour successful.

We acknowledge the invaluable contributions of the State Education Departments in Assam, Madhya Pradesh, and Punjab, who permitted us to survey pre-primary sections of government primary schools. Additionally, we express our deep appreciation to the leadership in the District Women and Child Development Departments in Chattarpur (Madhya Pradesh), Medchal (Telangana), Aurangabad and Solapur (Maharashtra), and Gorakhpur (Uttar Pradesh) for their consent to conduct surveys in Anganwadi centres. We also thank the state Women and Child Development Department in Andhra Pradesh for their cooperation.

At our foundation, numerous colleagues played key roles in shaping and completing this report. We are immensely thankful to them. Special credit goes to our teams in Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Telangana, and Uttar Pradesh for their exceptional efforts in liaising with the Education and Women and Child Development Departments. Their efforts were key to conduct and complete the survey. In addition, gratitude to Key Education Foundation, Rocket Learning, and The Education Alliance for their support in rolling out the survey in select states. Key Education Foundation, our curriculum partner, made valuable contributions to the analysis and writing of Chapter 3.

We also extend appreciation and gratitude to Sambodhi Research and Communications Ltd, our esteemed data collection partner, for their rigour and expertise in conducting the survey.

A team of independent experts meticulously reviewed this report. We are very grateful to Professor Venita Kaul, Mrs. Lata Menon, and Dr. Jayshree Oza for their invaluable feedback.

The report is co-authored by various CSF team members: Aditi Nangia, Ashna Shah, Garima Grover, Jithu Paulson, and Udit Ranjan.

Lastly, we are indebted to the survey respondents for their generous allocation of time and participation, without which this study would not have been possible.

With profound appreciation and gratitude,

Early Childhood Education Team
Central Square Foundation

Foreword

Today, India holds a coveted global position because of its demographic structure. With more than 54 percent of its population under 25 years of age, the country can harness a massive economic dividend as this young workforce begins to contribute to the labour force and overall economic activities. However, to fully realise this dividend, India must strategically channel all available resources towards education and skill development to ensure that the youth contribute meaningfully to the economy. So the question before us is, where do we begin? Globally, the evidence is clear: Investments in Early Childhood Education (ECE) are essential to draw this dividend.

Recognising this priority, India's NEP (2020) has placed an unprecedented emphasis on (ECE), integrating it as an integral part of school education by defining it as the foundational stage, which includes curriculum integration for Grades 1 and 2. Furthermore, India has recently introduced a National Curriculum Framework for foundational years (2023) to support planning and implementation. Historically, India had already established a progressive policy framework to underscore the importance of ECE as a crucial stage in human development. This policy guidance was also clear on emphasising on appropriate play-based pedagogy while actively discouraging the formal instruction of the 3Rs (Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic) (NPE, 1986/92; NPECCE, 2013). However, this ECE-centric approach needed more investment and advocacy for effective implementation. With the renewed commitment, the challenge is ensuring high-quality and holistic Early Childhood Education and Development for every Indian child.

But where do we stand on ECE in India today? Only when we have insight into the current status can we create interventions that drive better learning outcomes for all. To this end, Central Square Foundation's (CSF) report, 'Building Strong Foundations: Examining Early Childhood Education in India', presents a comprehensive and evidence-based picture. I congratulate their team for this exceptional report based on which targeted efforts at driving improvements in ECE delivery can be made by several stakeholders. The report, first of its kind in India, has covered several critical aspects of ECE delivery, ranging from budgetary analysis, curricula review, and classroom practices carried out by teachers. These aspects are crucial to developing an in-depth understanding of the systems change needed for effective delivery of ECE.

The report's findings and recommendations offer an invaluable starting point for all stakeholders who want to achieve NEP's vision and goals. I am confident that by leveraging these findings and building programmatic interventions based on them, we will ensure that we give every child in our country high-quality early childhood education, which sets them up for a productive life.



Venita Kaul
Professor Emerita (Education)
Ambedkar University Delhi

Executive Summary

India is home to nearly 8 crore children aged 3-6 years. Extensive multi-disciplinary research has firmly established the long-term positive effects of investing in high-quality Early Childhood Education (ECE) programmes for children, their families, and society as a whole. The 2013 National ECCE Policy (Ministry of Women and Child Development) and National Education Policy 2020 (Ministry of Education) are progressive and far reaching; emphasising the importance of holistic, play-based early education. However, the learning outcomes of children continue to be suboptimal. Our study involved a thorough examination of challenges and opportunities to enhance learning for young children through in-depth curriculum analysis, classroom observations, and interactions with key stakeholders

Observations and Insights: Curriculum Analysis



Play as a powerful medium for children to learn is recognised in curricula.

However, its implementation could be strengthened further

Both indoor and outdoor play is recognised as a fundamental component in all curricula for young children. The provision of structures and guidelines for implementation would promote the adoption of play-based approaches. For example, the recommended daily playtime of approximately 30 minutes does not include specific guidance on organising the learning environment to effectively facilitate free play. It is essential to incorporate designated areas for various play experiences to optimise the benefits of play-based learning.



Stronger approach needed for pre-literacy and language development

For early numeracy, the curricula introduces number sense through play-based activities and emphasises using concrete materials to teach numbers. However, early literacy instruction

is hindered by the choice of language and the teaching approach. Most curricula introduce two languages: a Home Language and English. Curricula often provide rich conversation activities and stories for the Home Language. A lack of similar resources and premature exposure to English script can challenge oral language development. Script introduction, for the Home Language and English, is accorded precedence over exposure to print and building pre-reading skills.



Classroom resources need to be user-friendly to promote their usage

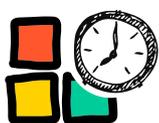
Curriculum activity plans typically include a list of supplementary materials and instructions. These plans do not have intuitive flows, require extensive cross-referencing by the teacher, and therefore are not 'user-friendly'. As a result, using these plans to support instruction may be confusing and time-consuming for a teacher. For example, in a typical instructional plan, the teacher must refer to multiple resources, including the weekly calendar, curriculum handbook, and the list of teaching and learning materials (TLMs). The teacher must create new teaching and learning materials most of the time. This process of referring to multiple resources must be repeated daily, which consumes a significant portion of their time.

Observations and Insights: Classroom Observations and Interviews



ECE classrooms had an enabling physical environment to support learning

Most classrooms have a dedicated space that is comfortable for the teacher and children, and a meaningful print-rich environment is available.



Time spent on ECE activities in the classroom was low

No ECE activity took place in 23% of the classrooms that were observed. In classrooms where an ECE activity did take place, it was found that these activities accounted for only an average of 35 minutes out of a two-hour observation period. The average time spent on each activity was 13 minutes, with 86% lasting under 20 minutes and nearly half (45%) lasting under 10 minutes.



The activities conducted were largely teacher-led, incorporating little time for hands-on activities and practice by children

Only 14% of the observed ECE activities followed the recommended approach of carrying out age-appropriate, student-led small-group interactions. Additionally, the presence of activities involving play materials were limited. In cases where these activities did occur, they were primarily led by the teacher, leaving little time for students to engage in independent exploration and practice.



Student engagement was suboptimal in current teaching practices

The majority of teachers across all provision types (61%) did not ask questions to assess student understanding when introducing new concepts. When questions were asked, students' responses tended to be in a chorus format (83%).



Need for better teacher preparedness and readiness to implement the curriculum

While 66% of the teachers had knowledge of the monthly plan in their curriculums, only 50% of the teachers could show the lesson plan for the day of the observation. This may indicate lack of clarity of curriculum progression, leading to low usage and fidelity to lesson plans.



Parents showing an active interest in their child's learning, but are unaware of how to best support them

Although there is an active interest in children's learning, there is limited knowledge of what constitutes as good ECE learning, school readiness, what to expect from an ECE teacher and how to best support at-home learning of the child.



Interaction with officials indicated that there were competing priorities for their focus and implementation

ECE data demand and availability at the state and national level is limited. A limited number of officials reported observing teachers engaging in ECE activities and actively monitoring student engagement, as well as offering constructive feedback.

Way Forward for ECE in India



Identification of specific responsibilities between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Women and Child Development, ensuring children receive adequate support for development of crucial skills in the early years

There is a need for a structured realignment of roles between the MoE and the MWCD. MWCD could take the responsibility for health and nutrition of 3 to 6-year-olds. The MoE could take full responsibility for preschool education (3 to 6-year-olds), ensuring clarity in roles and efficient allocation of resources.



Increase funding to adequate number of classrooms with teachers and establish model schools

Allocate ECE-specific funding with clear priorities for yearly expenses, and incentivise states to meet their ECE goals. The budget analysis reveals a shortfall in ECE funding and classrooms. Allocating budgets through Samagra Shiksha Abhiyaan for learning pilots and a dedicated teacher allocation budget could be explored. State governments could allocate funds for pre-primary sections, prioritise teacher allocation in ECE classrooms, and strategically use funds to establish model schools.



Strengthen data systems and build a strong monitoring framework for co-located Anganwadis and pre-primary sections in government schools

Increased data availability could ensure comprehensive monitoring of ECE classrooms. Additionally, to take corrective action, it is important to

define measurable indicators. This involves cascaded review meetings at various levels, fostering a shift towards supportive observation and mentoring in classrooms. Periodic school readiness surveys are crucial to assess the overall health of the system.



Promote parental awareness and encourage them to actively champion for quality education

Launch a comprehensive awareness campaign directed at parents, emphasising their crucial role in their child's education. Equip parents with essential tools, resources and guidance to actively engage in at-home learning activities, thereby extending the educational experience beyond traditional settings.



Civil Society Organisations are encouraged to identify best practices and innovative scalable models to strengthen quality ECE. Funders and researchers are urged to champion and reinforce these efforts

Donors and philanthropists are urged to champion for more learning time, provide technical resources and support the Pre-Primary Sections (PPS). Civil Society Organisations could work towards securing dedicated teachers, shaping curriculum and engaging communities for quality at-home learning. Researchers are encouraged to generate evidence through targeted pilots and disseminate findings to drive evidence-based enhancements in ECE practices.



Chapter 1

ECE in India – National Snapshot

Highlights

- » Reiterating India's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals, the national policies governing ECE are progressive and meet global standards. The primary policies that establish the provision of ECE in India are - the National ECCE Policy (2013) and the National Education Policy (2020).
- » Despite progressive and far-reaching policies, India's early learning outcomes are suboptimal. With limited government surveys and national data on ECE, independent studies and surveys - conducted by reputed researchers and institutions - provide insights into the learning levels of preschool children.
- » The existence of two separate government channels - through the Ministry of Women and Child Development and the Ministry of Education - to deliver preschool education may lead to overlap in responsibility, ownership and accountability for early childhood education. This could result in siloed and duplicated efforts, and affect ECE quality and learning outcomes.
- » Within the national ECCE programmes, there is a greater focus on the improvement of health and nutrition outcomes. While care is surely of vital importance, the limited focus on education may result in de-prioritisation of the children's learning outcomes and school readiness.
- » Relatively low emphasis to ECE becomes apparent in the budgetary proposal and outlays by both ministries. Further, the utilisation of funds also remains low.
- » The relative shortage of budget allocation impacts the availability of dedicated teachers for ECE classrooms, especially in government primary schools. Teachers are allocated pre-primary sections in addition to grades 1 or 2, leading to multi-grade classroom set-ups.



The Policies Governing Early Childhood Care & Education in India

In line with research evidence and international benchmarks, the policies governing ECE in India are laudable. Two broad policy documents govern the provision of ECE in India - the National ECCE Policy (2013) and the National Education Policy (2020)

National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy, 2013

The National ECCE policy emphasises the synergistic and inseparable elements of health and education in children's early development. It reaffirms the need for a safe and enabling

environment to nurture nutrition, psychosocial and emotional needs, play, and early learning for the country's youngest citizens. Furthermore, the policy calls for holistic and integrated development of children at each sub-stage of the early developmental continuum - prenatal to birth, 0 to 3 years, and 3 to 6 years.

This report focuses exclusively on the provisions and measures in the third sub stage (3–6 years). The policy acknowledged that, at the time it was released, the quality of early education, imparted through multiple service providers, was uneven to the extent that it varied from a minimalist approach to an accelerated academic programme. Against this backdrop, it laid out provisions, measures, and corrective actions to reform early childhood education and care.

Sub-stages of the Early Development Continuum	Age-specific needs at each stage
Conception to birth	Ante and postnatal health and nutritional care of the mother, maternal counselling, safe childbirth, maternity entitlements, child protection, and non-discrimination
Birth to three years	Survival, safety, protective environment, health care, nutrition including infant and young child feeding practices for the first six months, attachment to an adult, the opportunity for psycho-social stimulation and early interaction in safe, nurturing, and stimulating environments within the home and appropriate child care centres.
Three to six years	Protection from hazards, health care, nutrition, attachment to an adult, and developmentally appropriate play-based preschool education with a structured and planned school readiness component for 5 to 6-year-olds

Table: The sub-stages with their age-specific needs as in the National ECCE Policy, 2013

The policy was envisioned with the goal to “achieve holistic development and active learning capacity of all children below 6 years of age by promoting free, universal, inclusive, equitable, joyful and contextualised opportunities for laying the foundation and attaining full potential.”¹ Eleven key areas are outlined to realise this goal. Some of these are universal access with equity and inclusion, improvement of the quality of ECCE programmes, the strengthened capacity of institutions and personnel, supportive supervision and tighter monitoring, a strong linkage between policy, research, and practice, convergence and coordination between all policies with bearing on ECCE, programmatic implementation arrangement, increased budgetary allocation, and regular review of the policy.

To ensure the quality of ECE, the policy prescribes progressive provisions for the basic quality of inputs and outcomes. These include providing age and developmentally-appropriate curriculum, safe, child-friendly play and learning materials, and appropriate play spaces. The guidelines underscore the use of a multilingual strategy for teaching, which includes teaching in the child’s home language and at the same time, exposing the child to many other languages. Further, the policy emphasises formative and continuous child assessments to ensure that ECE remains responsive to the developmental needs of children.

The document also acknowledges the substantial gap in the availability of trained resources and asks the government to develop a proactive plan for strengthening training institutes for early childhood development and to bring professionalism to the sector at all levels with qualifications, development pathways, precise role definitions, and capacity building specified for different ECCE personnel. Another noteworthy aspect is the focus on monitoring. The policy calls out the need to

establish sound data collection/generation processes and implementation of information management systems to compile and analyse the data on various elements of ECCE delivery.

National Education Policy (NEP), 2020

The National Education Policy, 2020 begins by acknowledging that the rapidly changing global, social and economic world has increasingly made it critical for “children to not only learn but more importantly, learn how to learn.” The basic developmental skills children pick up during a quality early childhood education programme set them on the joyful path of exploration that leads to learning. The formal inclusion of pre-primary education in the purview of the country’s education policy is recent. It was only in 2018-19 that budgetary provisions were made to allocate funds under the newly consolidated Samagra Shiksha Scheme. While several states had started introducing pre-primary sections in government schools, integrating pre-primary education in schooling did not have a strong policy push until the NEP was released. The NEP definitively brings the pre-primary stage under the same umbrella as all other levels of schooling. The policy establishes a continuum of early learning with three years of preschool/ Anganwadi and two foundational learning years in formal school grades 1 and 2. In a significant and necessary ask, the policy directs government schools to ensure that only children aged 6 and above enter grade 1.

NEP calls out that quality ECCE is still unavailable to crores of children, particularly those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, inhibiting them from participating and flourishing further in their K–12 learning journey. The policy aims to achieve universal provisioning of quality early childhood development as soon as possible and no later than 2030. The NEP echoes the National ECCE Policy to lay out

the overall aim of ECCE “to attain optimal outcomes in the domains of physical and motor development, cognitive development, socio-emotional-ethical development, cultural/ artistic development, and the development of communication and early language, literacy, and numeracy.” The document further states that mastery of these competencies may be termed “school readiness” when a child enters grade 1.

NEP recommends ECE be delivered through a strengthened system of ECE institutions comprising the Anganwadi Centres and “Preparatory Class” or “Balvatikas”. For universal access to ECCE, the policy asserts that “Anganwadi Centres will be strengthened with high-quality infrastructure, play equipment, and well-trained AWTs/teachers.” It further envisages that before age 5, every child will move to Balvatikas, preceding grade 1, which will have an ECCE-qualified teacher. “The learning in Balvatikas shall be based primarily on play-based learning with a focus on developing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor abilities and early literacy and numeracy.” The NEP mentions that ECE is to be delivered through the following provisions:

Government Provisions for ECCE
Standalone Anganwadis
Anganwadis co-located with primary schools
Pre-primary schools/sections (Balvatikas) covering children aged at least 5 to 6 years co-located with existing primary schools
Standalone Preschools

The policy mentions that the responsibility for ECCE curriculum and pedagogy will lie with MoE to ensure curricular continuity from pre-primary school through primary school, and to ensure due attention to the foundational aspects of education. The policy emphasises integrating a play-based pedagogy in early primary grades in this continuum. For this, it suggests recruiting workers/teachers specially trained in the curriculum and pedagogy of ECE to fill the gap in the availability of qualified teachers.

Both the policies, released seven years apart, are sound and progressive in their intent and recommendations. The NEP largely concurs with National ECCE policy, and both predominantly align with global policies, research and evidence on ECCE. They emphasise on the holistic early development of children in a play-based yet structured manner, nourishing their physical being and nurturing their minds. However, the litmus test of a good policy lies not just in its contents, but in the feasibility of implementing its visions and objectives. The quality of implementation of a policy is determined by two aspects. First, the relevance, applicability and efficacy of the inputs designed at the state level, and second, the fidelity of input used at the last mile, i.e., in ECE classrooms. For both policies, the true test is whether they have realised the intended outcomes and impacted the complexity of driving children’s learning levels in early childhood. Given the scope of this report, the next section looks deeper into the extent of the impact that the execution of policies has made on the learning levels of children.



Learning Outcomes of Students Enrolled in Early Childhood Education Programmes

Despite progressive and far-reaching policies, India's early learning outcomes are suboptimal. With limited government surveys and national data on ECE, independent studies and surveys - conducted by reputed researchers and institutions - provide insights into the learning levels of pre-school children



Why assess learning outcomes?

The policy asserts that assessments during ECCE are crucial to evaluate if the curriculum, programme design and teaching are adequately catering to children's development needs. Since early childhood education and foundational learning are now viewed as a continuum (preschool to grade 2), it is necessary to reliably know if children have acquired the development skills in preschool to smoothly transition to higher grades.

Currently, no large-scale government survey is available to measure school readiness or evaluate whether young children are being supported to develop a strong foundation upon which to build their learning journey. Without a large-scale government survey, independent studies and surveys have provided insights into the learning levels of the preschool age group.

This section details the findings from three learning surveys - two large-scale surveys and one survey conducted on a smaller scale.



Findings from two independent large-scale learning surveys

Two major surveys have been conducted to evaluate the learning levels of students enrolled in structured ECE programmes. The India Early Childhood Education Impact Study (IECEI), 2017 is a longitudinal study that followed one cohort of children for five years from ages 4 to 8 (from 2011 -2016) in three states in India, namely, Assam, Rajasthan, and Telangana. This study was led by Centre for Early Childhood Education and Development (CECED) at Ambedkar University in collaboration with UNICEF and the ASER Centre. The researchers assessed the impact of early learning, socialisation, and school readiness experiences in preschool settings on educational and behavioral outcomes along the primary stages.² The Annual Status of Education Report, ASER (Rural) - Early Years conducted by the ASER Centre followed IECEI in 2019 and reported the preschooling/schooling status of children in the age group 4 to 8 by exploring their performance on competencies identified as important predictors of future success.³ Both studies have played an instrumental role in furnishing important information on the learning levels of preschool children.



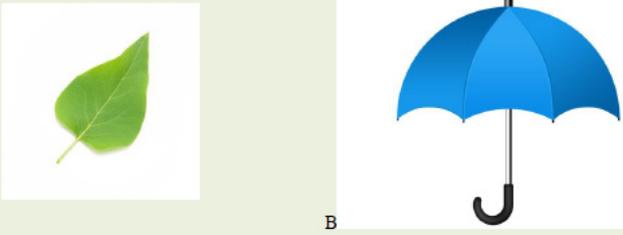
IECEI, 2017 The India Early Childhood Education Impact Study	ASER, 2019 Annual Status of Education Report (Rural) - Early Years
<p>The first large-scale longitudinal study was conducted in 2017 in rural India to examine participation in preschools, the quality of the institutions, and the short-and medium-term impact and outcomes of preschool participation</p> <p>Conducted in two districts each for the following states: Assam, Rajasthan and Telangana</p> <p>Tracked preschool participation of ~14,000 children over time and assessed their school readiness outcomes (at ages 4 and 5) and early grade learning outcomes (at ages 6, 7 and 8) from the perspective of emergent and early literacy and numeracy.</p>	<p>ASER 2019, also referred to as 'Early Years', was a household rapid assessment of 4 to 8-year-olds</p> <p>The sample consisted of 26 districts spread across 24 states</p> <p>Reported on the preschooling or schooling status of ~37,000 children (ages 4 to 8) and assessed their performance on competencies categorised into four domains: cognitive development, early language, early numeracy, and social and emotional development</p>

Table: Details about the two large-scale studies on ECE learning levels conducted in India

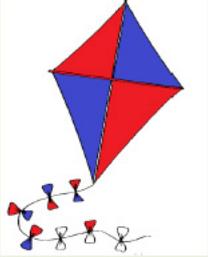
Findings from the India Early Childhood Education Impact Study (IECEI), 2017

The IECEI longitudinal study was conducted in three states - Assam, Rajasthan, and Telangana - and tracked ~14,000 children for 5 years. We discuss below the findings of the school readiness assessment of 5-year-olds (assessed in 2012). The study offers interesting insights into participation in preschool facilities and its impact on school readiness

Which of the following two pictures/objects begin with the same sound?

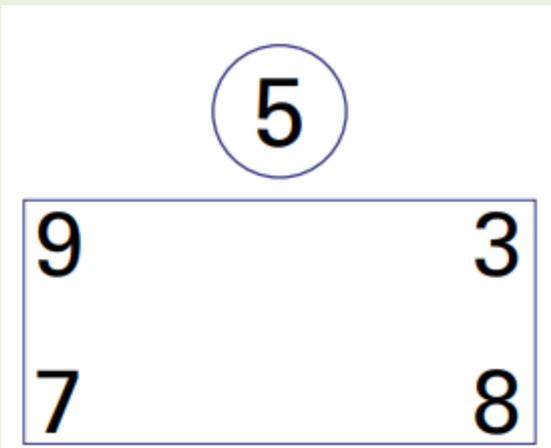


B



C

Relative comparisons task



Show the pattern to the child and ask him/her to identify shapes or the colors in the given pattern. Explain the pattern to the child and then ask him/her to complete the pattern after handing over the cut-outs to the child.



Fig: Overview of the tasks used in the IECEI assessment. Top left: match two pictures beginning with the same sound (in Hindi), Top right: point to a number (among 9, 3, 7, 8) that was less than the number 5, Bottom: complete a simple pictorial pattern

The study determined that children at age 5 performed poorly relative to the expected school readiness standards. These were the findings across key competencies and three domains⁴:

- **Pre-literacy Task:** Only **15%** of children could correctly identify and match pictures of two everyday objects beginning with the same sound on a phonemic awareness task. Phonemic awareness is an essential milestone in acquiring language and literacy skills.
- **Pre-numeracy Task:** Only **30%** of children tested were able to correctly identify larger and smaller numbers from a given set of single-digit numbers. To

complete this task, children had to be well-versed in both the concept and the representation of single-digit numbers.

- **Cognitive Task:** On a simple pictorial pattern-making task, only **17.5%** of children could complete the pattern. The ability to recognise a pattern is a cognitive skill that supports numeracy learning and logical thinking among children. The study found that the children who performed well on these tasks at age 5 scored consistently higher in language and numeracy in primary grades, which establishes a significant association between the cognitive skills at the end of preschool and its impact on learning levels in primary grades.

Findings from the Annual Status of Education Report (Rural) - Early Years, 2019

The ASER report in 2019 specifically focused on the early years and covered nearly 37,000 children from rural India in the 4-8 age group

Some highlights from the study findings are presented below⁵:

- **Early Language Tasks:** Only **13.8% of 4-year-olds** and **23.5% of 5-year-olds** were able to complete a simple listening comprehension task based on an easy-to-relate four-sentence story in the local language. In comparison, children enrolled in private schools showed relatively better performance with 24.8% of 4-year-olds and 40.4% of 5-year-olds completing the listening comprehension task.
- **Early Numeracy Tasks:** Only **23.1% of 4-year-olds** and **36.8% of 5-year-olds** were able to correctly do a task involving counting objects. In comparison, children enrolled in private schools showed better

performance with 40.1% of 4-year-olds and 57.6% of 5-year-olds completing the counting objects task.

- **Cognitive Tasks:** Only **31% of 4-year-olds** and **45% of 5-year-olds** were able to complete a 4-piece puzzle, while **47.1% of 4-year-olds** and **58.9% of 5-year-olds** private school children completed the puzzle task.

It is evident that even though 5-year-old children should be able to perform these simple tasks with ease, a large proportion is not able to do so, especially those who are enrolled in government preschools. While both means of provision fail to meet the development needs of a significant section of children, the performance of students enrolled in private schools is relatively better.



Findings from an independent small-scale learning survey

FSG conducted an assessment of 248 children entering Grade 1 (2016-17) in Affordable Private Schools (APS) and government schools across Bangalore, Delhi, Hyderabad, and Mumbai, to measure their school readiness

Findings⁶ for children entering grade 1 enrolled in affordable private and government schools on various early learning competencies⁷:

- Early Numeracy Tasks: In a single-digit number comparison task, **33% of children in APS** and **46% of children in government schools** could not compare single-digit numbers.
- Early Language tasks: **76% in APS** and **88% in government schools** could not complete a phonemic awareness task and correctly match three simple words with their respective starting sounds.
- Cognitive Tasks: **82% of children entering grade 1 in APS** and **73% of children in government schools** could not complete a simple four-piece puzzle.

An assessment of 248 children by FSG revealed that many children entering grade 1 in APS or government schools are not school-ready.

There is sufficient evidence to indicate that absolute levels of cognitive learning for preschool children are low. The findings from these learning surveys show that despite best-in-class and progressive ECCE policies, we have not been able to improve learning outcomes substantially. It is reasonable to believe that the wide divergence between policy and impact emerges due to fault lines

in ECE's implementation and service delivery. In the next section, we unpack some of the challenges that affect the delivery of ECE.





Structural Factors that Affect Service Delivery of ECE in India

The Structure of Provision and Trends in Enrolment Across ECE Provisions

The existence of two separate government channels to deliver preschool education may lead to overlap in responsibility, ownership, and accountability for early childhood education. This could result in siloed and duplicated efforts and severely affect ECE quality and learning outcomes.



ECE Provision

ECE provision in the government schooling system is steered by the the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) and the Ministry of Education (MoE).

MWCD provides preschool services through its flagship welfare programme - Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). In 2021-22, ICDS was restructured into Saksham Anganwadi Mission and POSHAN 2.0 (Prime Minister's Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nourishment). Through nearly 14 lakh operational Anganwadi Centres across the country, MWCD facilitates services to meet the health and nutrition needs of 6-month to 6-year-olds and the educational needs of 3 to 6-year-olds, in addition to services for pregnant and lactating mothers, and infants. The Anganwadi can either be a standalone Anganwadi Centre, i.e., situated

outside the premises, but in proximity to the government primary school, or can be a co-located Anganwadi Centre, i.e., situated within the premises of the government school.

Through its Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) scheme, the MoE provides children with access to Balvatikas, a pre-primary section inside the main government school premises, before the children enter grade 1. In some cases, it is also possible for a government primary school to have a co-located Anganwadi and Balvatika. The provision of Balvatikas is still nascent in most states. Only ~2 lakh pre-primary sections have been reported in government schools, and of these, only 56,000 have been determined as functioning, with at least one child enrolled and one teacher teaching the class⁸.

Provision type	Management	Centre	Staff
Standalone Anganwadi Centre	Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD)	Anganwadi Centre is situated outside the premises but in proximity to the government primary school	All Anganwadi Centres are managed by two frontline staff, an Anganwadi Teacher (AWT) and a helper (supports the worker in carrying out their responsibilities). Usually, mini centres do not have an Anganwadi helper The Anganwadis are monitored by supervisors and Child Development Project Officers
Co-located Anganwadi Centre		Anganwadi Centre is situated within the premises of the government school	
Balvatikas	Ministry of Education (MoE)	Pre-primary section (PPS) in government primary schools	Some schools have a dedicated pre-primary teacher, while in others, a primary school teacher volunteers to teach the children along with her regular classes The schools are monitored by a cluster-level official, usually a Cluster Resource Centre Coordinator

Table: Board Types of Provision for Early Childhood Education in India

Anganwadi Centres	
Number of AWCs	13,99,697
Number of Operational AWCs	13,97,523
Number of AWC Workers	13.62,944
Number of children (age 3-6) enrolled in AWCs	3,03,17,251 ⁹

Table: Data on Anganwadi Centres¹⁰

Balvatikas	
Number of reported Balvatikas	1,99,854
Number of Balvatikas with at least 1 student and a teacher	87,287
Number of dedicated pre-primary teachers	35,250 in 17,800 schools
Number of allocated pre-primary teachers (who teach other grades as well)	2,40,172 in 76,435 schools
Number of children enrolled in Balvatikas	31,29,552

Table: Data on Balvatikas¹¹

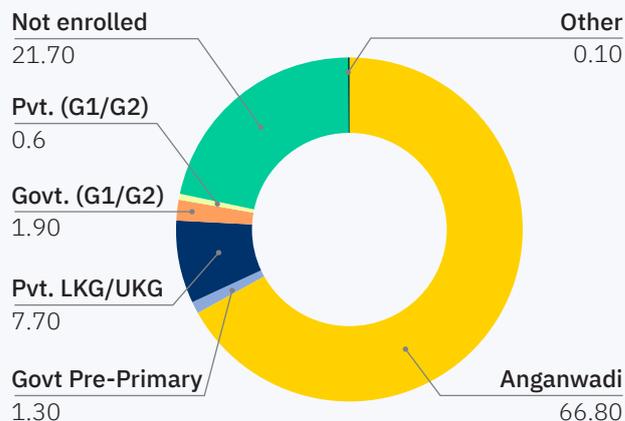


Where are 3 to 6-year-olds? Enrolment Pattern and Coverage

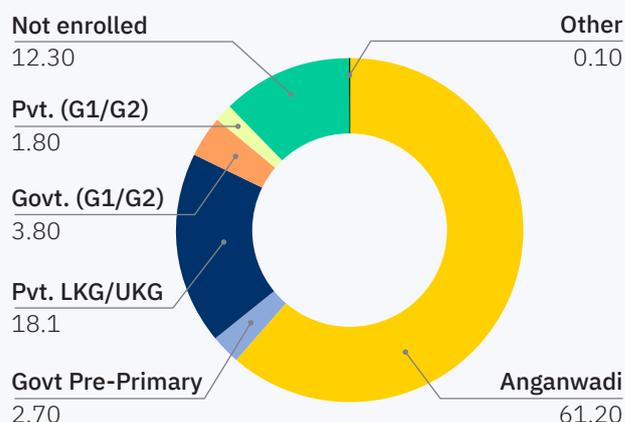
Currently, India has nearly 9.18 lakh government primary schools with nearly 7.97 crore students from Balvatikas to grade 5. Approximately 31.29 lakh children are enrolled in pre-primary sections.¹² Over 2 crore children aged 3-6 years go to an Anganwadi centre, of which, 93.58 lakh children are enrolled in co-located Anganwadis¹³ and about 2.09 crore are enrolled in a standalone Anganwadi.¹⁴

The enrolment trend from 2021-2022 shows that, of the parents who are enrolling their children in preschools, most prefer to send their 3 and 4-year-olds to Anganwadi centres (there may be state wise variations). 66.8% of age 3 and 61.2% of age 4 children are enrolled in Anganwadis. This is followed by parents sending their children to private pre-primary schools, with 7.7% age 3 and 18.1% age 4 children enrolled in these schools. Noticeably, a very small proportion of parents are enrolling their children in Balvatikas in government schools, with only 1.3% 3-year-olds and 2.7% 4-year-olds in Balvatikas. A major cause could be the limited accessibility and coverage of Balvatikas. It is concerning that still more than a third of students in these age groups (~34%) are not enrolled in any preschool provision.

Enrolment Pattern of 3-5-year-olds in India



4-year-olds



5-year-olds

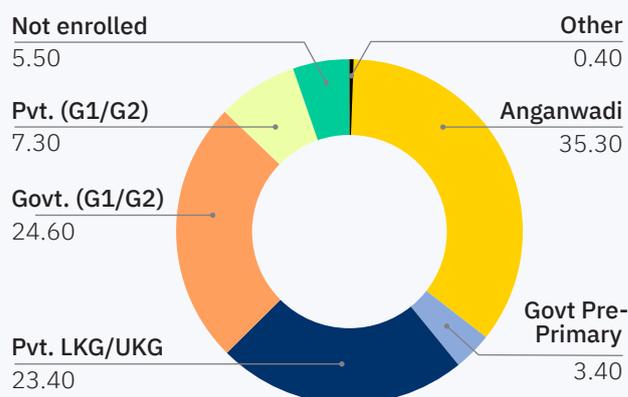


Fig: Enrolment trends show that most parents prefer to send their 3 and 4-year-olds to Anganwadi centres. However, the trend shifts for 5-year-olds as half of these children drop out of Anganwadi centres and enrol in other provisions, most prominently private pre-primary schools.

The preference for the choice of ECE provision changes drastically for 5-year-old children. Remarkably, a lot more children are enrolled in some form of schooling - preschool or formal school - at age 5. Only 5.5% remain unenrolled. A notable trend is that children at this age, drop out of Anganwadi centres in large numbers, and only 35% of age 5 children remain in them. 23.4% are enrolled in private pre-primary and a meagre 3.4% are enrolled in Balvatikas. A clear trend has emerged in enrolment patterns in the last few years. Anganwadis have very few and a decreasing number of 5-year-olds enrolled. An analysis of Preschool Education (PSE) beneficiary data shows that despite an increase in the provisioning of Anganwadi centres over the last decade, the number of PSE beneficiaries has declined substantially.

The enrolment data also highlights that many children in the 3-5 year cohort (2.5% age 3, 5.6% age 4, and 31.9% age 5) are in grades 1 and 2 in government or private schools. In effect, children are skipping the crucial years of ECE and pre-maturely entering formal

academic learning by enrolling in grades 1 and 2 before they turn 6 years old. (Fig: Enrolment of 3-5-year-olds)¹⁶

The Right to Education Act (RTE), 2009 mandates that the entry age to grade 1 has to be 6 years and the NEP, too, directs the same. The MoE has reiterated its call to states to ensure that only children aged “6+” years are granted admission in grade 1.

However, the situation on the ground is very different. As per Students’ and Teachers’ Holistic Advancement through Quality Education (SARATHQ) India, MoE’s implementation plan for ECE, currently at least 21 States continue to have a starting age of 5 years in grade 1.¹⁷ The departure of 5-year-old children from Anganwadis, and a significant number enrolled in grades 1 and 2 in schools also indicates that perhaps parents are not considering Anganwadis as centres of learning and would rather prefer to directly enrol their children in formal education even before they are developmentally “ready”.

Number of Anganwadi centres and PSE beneficiaries over the years



Fig: Despite a steady increase in the number of Anganwadi centres over the last decade, the number of children enrolling in preschool education in Anganwadis has declined substantially.¹⁵

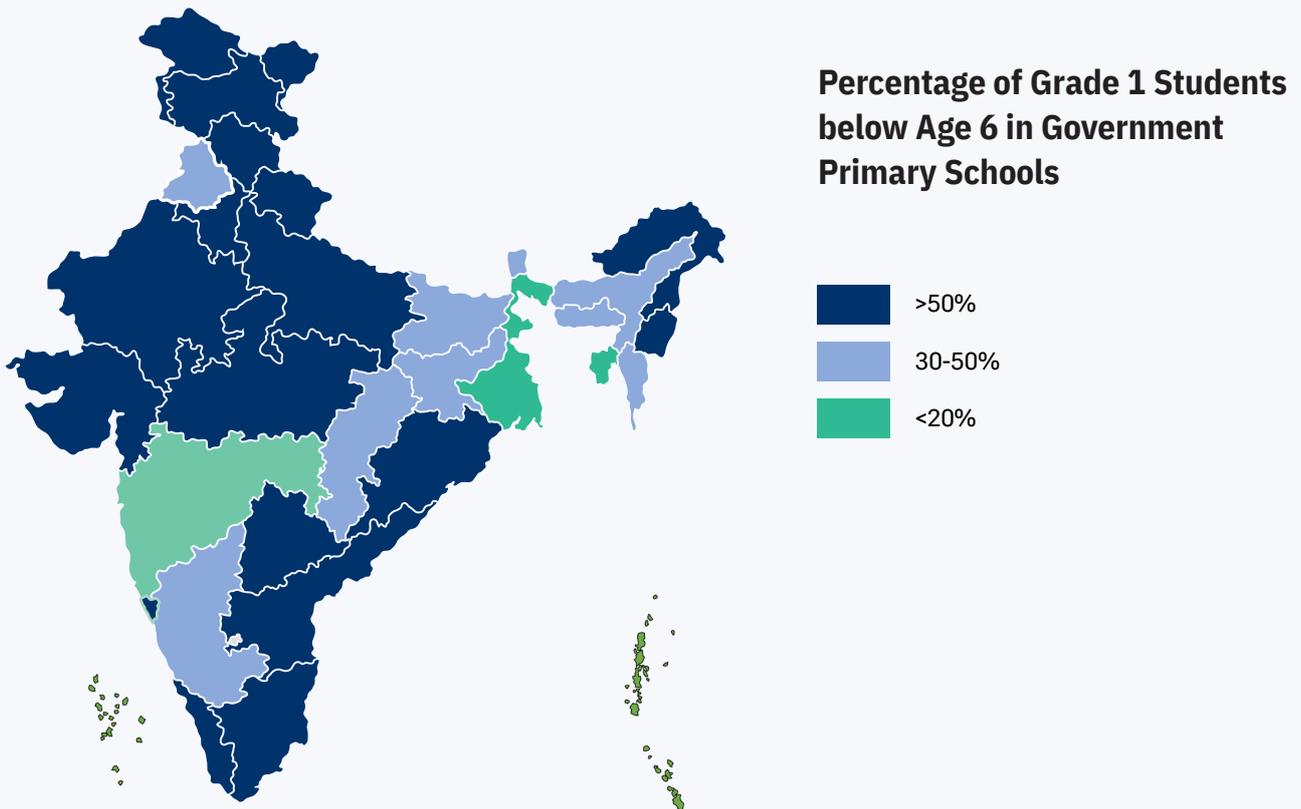


Fig: In majority of the states in India, more than 50% of children in grade 1 are below the age of 6, despite RTE, 2009 mandating that the entry age to grade 1 has to be 6+ years.¹⁸

The 5-6 year cohort is bearing the brunt of non-standardised ECE and falling through the cracks in public provisioning of ECE. The public provisioning of early childhood education through two different ministries has resulted in scattered service delivery. The lack of clarity on ownership and accountability for ECE has led to fragmented efforts, which affect the learning outcomes of the 3-6 age group

The Status of Prioritisation Accorded to ECE in India

The focus within National ECCE programmes is higher for improvement of nutrition and health outcomes. While care is surely of vital importance, the limited focus on education may result in deprioritisation of the children’s learning outcomes and school readiness.



Many roles of an Anganwadi Teacher

An Anganwadi Teacher (AWT) is the designated pre-primary teacher in the centre. However, she has multiple responsibilities. The MWCD highlights 25 points on the roles and responsibilities of AWT in the Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0 guidelines. “Organising preschool activities” is only one of the 25 roles and responsibilities of an AWT. Their other responsibilities include tracking children’s health and nutrition indicators, organising supplementary nutrition (hot cooked meals and take-home ration) for children and expecting/nursing mothers, educating and counseling mothers on breastfeeding, organising play-based teaching activities, populating data

Frontline workers at Anganwadi centres, AWTs and helpers are pressed for time to deliver the enormous package of ICDS services effectively. The overlap of responsibilities between the AWTs, ASHA workers, and the Auxiliary Nurse Midwives does little to alleviate the burden of work and often only leads to duplication of work. Estimates from a study in Telangana showed that AWTs’ workload is 33% above capacity based on 24 working days in a month. AWTs fall short of 2.5 days per month to complete their on-paper roles and responsibilities, while on-ground, this could be up to eight days per month.

A cross-state study commissioned by the World Bank conducted across six states in India, found that the time required by the AWT to accomplish the full range of mandated activities exceeds the time available to them.²² Several other studies echo the high volume of the workload of Anganwadis.²³ Another cross-sectional study, conducted in Madhya Pradesh, found that AWTs spend more than expected time on administrative and operational tasks, such as filling out their paper registers, even when a smartphone-based application is available.²⁴ The findings also indicate a lack of goal alignment and high variation in the workers’ perceived responsibilities. Most AWTs responded that filling registers, and data forms are of the highest priority.

Package of Six Services²¹ under the Anganwadi Services scheme:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| i. Supplementary Nutrition (SNP) | iv. Immunisation |
| ii. Preschool Non-formal Education | v. Health Check-up |
| iii. Nutrition & Health Education | vi. Referral Services |

Table: Services provided under the Anganwadi Services Scheme

on the Poshan tracker and maintaining other files and records, undertaking community and home visits, assisting primary health care staff in programme implementation, etc. A clear thrust on nutrition, health, and immunisation through Poshan Abhiyan, although critical for the country, has resulted in deprioritisation of the PSE component. An initial diagnostic check on time allocation on ECE by AWTs in Tamil Nadu revealed that, on an average, an AWT spent only 38 minutes per day on preschool instruction out of a scheduled two hours.²⁰

With the pressure to fulfil all responsibilities in addition to early childhood education, pre-primary education in Anganwadi Centres inevitably ends up being deprioritised. AWCs usually have children of all ages (3-6 years) sitting together for preschool activities, and workers have very little time to undertake effective teaching activities, let alone facilitate separate, age and developmentally-appropriate, child-friendly preschool activities/curricula for each. Thus, they tend to revert to a minimalist curriculum.



Prioritisation of ECE in Monitoring

At a national level, the Ministry of Finance annually releases a monitorable output-outcome framework for major Central Sector (CS) Schemes and Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) with an outlay of Rs. 500 crore or greater. For the financial year 2023-24, the expected outcome of the fiscal allocation to Mission Saksham Anganwadi and POSHAN 2.0 is exclusively focused on operationalising Anganwadi centres (with a focus on the provision of basic amenities and infrastructure) and improvement of nutritional and health status of children in the age group of 6 months to 6 years.²⁵ While the importance of these cannot be understated, the absence of clear indicators for education leads to a lack of monitoring and accountability for ensuring learning outcomes. This becomes apparent in the field as well.

In the roles and responsibilities of the Child Development Project Officer (CDPO), who is a key monitoring official and is expected to handle the administration and implementation of ICDS, assessment of the quality of preschool is mentioned; however, no clear protocols and review mechanisms have been established.

Subsequently, ECE ends up constituting only a small component of the supervisor/CDPO checklist, which underscores the low priority given to ECE in implementation. For instance, in the Monthly Progress Reports (MPR), prepared by CDPO/Supervisor and sought by all Anganwadi services functionaries (at the National, State, District, Block, and Village levels), the only information reported on preschool education pertains to the coverage of 3-6-year-old children.²⁶ Unsurprisingly, there is limited emphasis on monitoring learning activities in Anganwadi centres and surface-level feedback and support are provided to improve teaching-learning practices.

Checklist of the registers and records to be maintained

Registers & Records by Anganwadi worker	Registers and Records by Supervisor at village level	Material and Records to be maintained at CDPO
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Register Supplementary Food Stock Register Supplementary Food Distribution Register Pre-School Education Register Pregnancy and Delivery Register Immunisation and Village Health and Nutrition Day (VHND) Vitamin A Biannual Rounds Register Home Visits Planner Referrals Summaries (Monthly & Annual) Weight Records of Children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly Progress Report Annual Plans of the respective cluster All the information collected from Anganwadi workers under supervisor's Jurisdiction in the respective registers Attendance and other administrative registers pertaining to AWWS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manual on ICDS/ICDS Booklet Guidebook for AWWS/ Supervisors Growth Monitoring Manual Growth Chart Register Compilation of Guidelines & Instruction of ICDS (Issued by State & GoI) PSE Kit Material NHED Kit Material National Guidelines on Optimal IYCF practices Booklet on SHG/Mahila Mandal & Community Participation MPRS & MIS Manual Records & Registers collected from Supervisors Guide on MCP Card Availability of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Guidelines Five tier Monitoring System Guidelines Monitoring Guidelines

Fig: Samples of information required to be maintained and collected by monitoring officials during visits show that no information is collected on student learning in pre-school education.

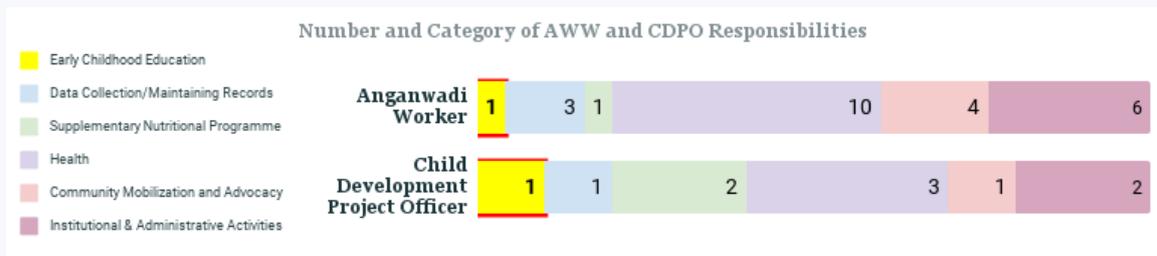
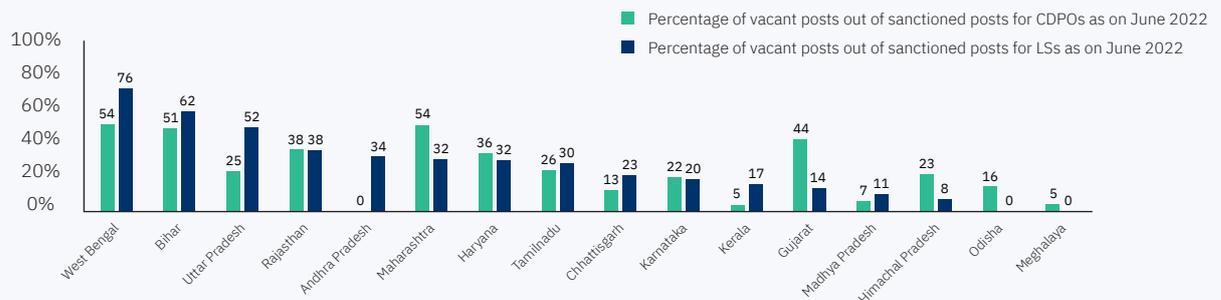


Fig: Number and Category of AWW and CDPO responsibilities as per Saksham Anganwadi guidelines²⁷ show that priority accorded to early childhood education is significantly skewed.

To add to this, there exists an inadequate number of officials for monitoring. As per the official statistics, there are only 4,833 CDPOs for ~13.63 lakh Anganwadi workers²⁸, which comes down to an insufficient span ratio of 1:282. Based on a Right to Information request filed by the Accountability Initiative, the percentage of vacancies for CDPOs run as high as 50% in the states of West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Gujarat.²⁹

The situation is not very different in pre-primary sections in government primary schools, where the coverage is significantly low and the availability of adequate teaching staff is even lower. This will be covered in greater detail under the section concerning the availability of ECE teachers.

Percentage of vacant posts out of sanctioned posts of monitoring officials



Source: RTI response by MWCD, dated 3 January 2023

Fig: Vacancies for monitoring officials and lady supervisors are high across many states (Source: Accountability Initiative).



Budget Allocated to ECE by the Ministry of Women and Child Development and Ministry of Education

Low priority to ECE becomes apparent in the budgetary proposals and outlays by both ministries. Further, the utilisation of funds also remains low.

Both ministries allocate funds to ECCE under different schemes. MoE allocates funds to ECE under Samagra Shiksha through the annual Project Approval Board (PAB) meeting and review of the Annual Workplan and Budget (AWP&B) submitted by all states and Union Territories (UTs). Similarly, MWCD allocates funds to ECCE under the Saksham Anganwadi Scheme through the Empowered Programme Committee (EPC) meeting and review of the Annual Programme Implementation Plan (APIP) prepared by all states and UTs.



Budget Allocation Under the Samagra Shiksha Scheme

Over the last few years, the number of states for which funds have been allocated to ECE under Samagra Shiksha have increased considerably. In 2018-19, of the 36 states and UTs,³⁰ only two states had non-recurring funds for ECE allocated in PAB, which has increased to 22 in the most recent allocation in 2023-24. Noticeably, all states do not ask for non-recurring funds each year given the frequent sizable spillovers under this head from the preceding year.

Likewise, in 2018-19, only 23 states had recurring fund allocation, which increased to 34 states in 2023-24.³¹ (Fig: States that received recurring and non-recurring funding under Samagra Shiksha). For yearly financial outlay, in absolute terms as well as in totality after accounting for spillovers, the allocation of funds for ECE has seen an upward trend. In 2018-19, the total budget allocated to ECE across states stood at ₹160 crores and the nominal value increased seven times to ₹1,117 crores in 2023-24 (Fig: Allocation to ECE, including spillovers - 2018-19 to 2023-24).³²

States that received recurring and non-recurring funding under Samagra Shiksha - 2018-19 to 2023-24

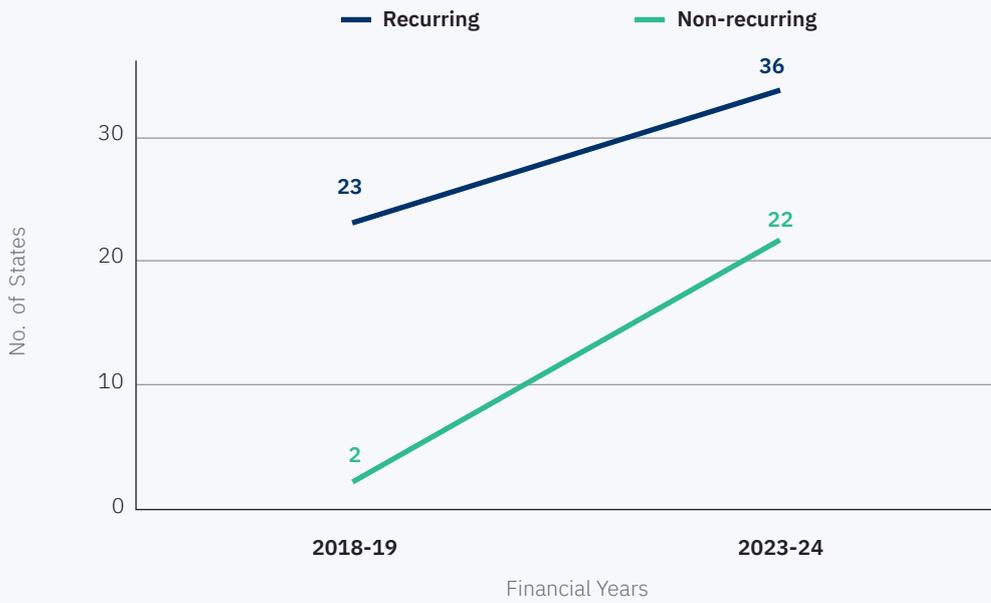


Fig: The number of states seeking ECE funds under recurring and non-recurring budget heads has significantly grown in the past five years

Allocation to ECE including Spillovers

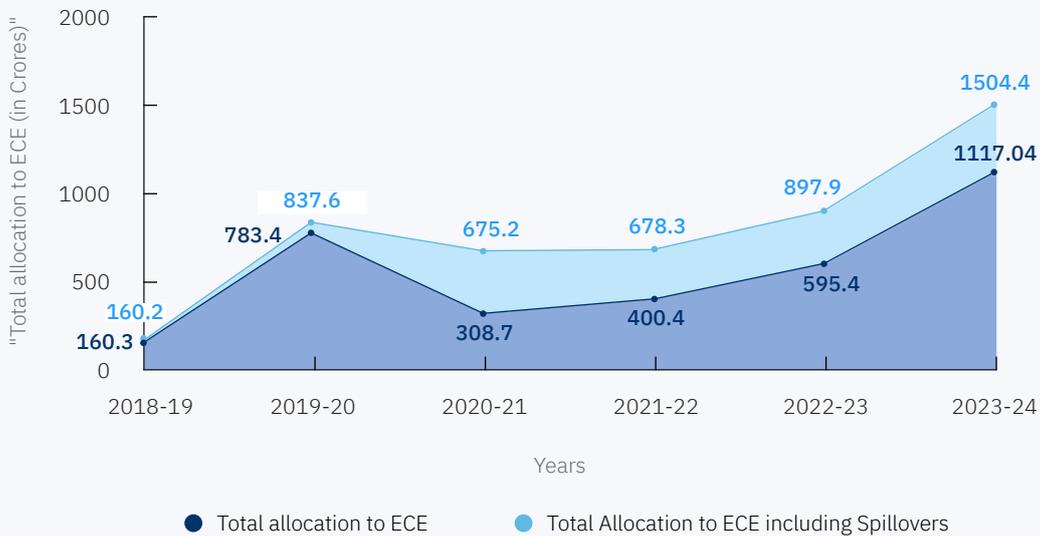


Fig: The share of ECE spillovers to next financial year have remained high since 2020

However, a closer review of the Samagra Shiksha budget reveals that allocation to ECE in the past few years has been a mere 2-3% of the total allocation. Despite the increasing ECE share, preschools receive significantly less funding than other grades.

Budget allocated to ECE as a % of Samagra Shiksha budget allocation

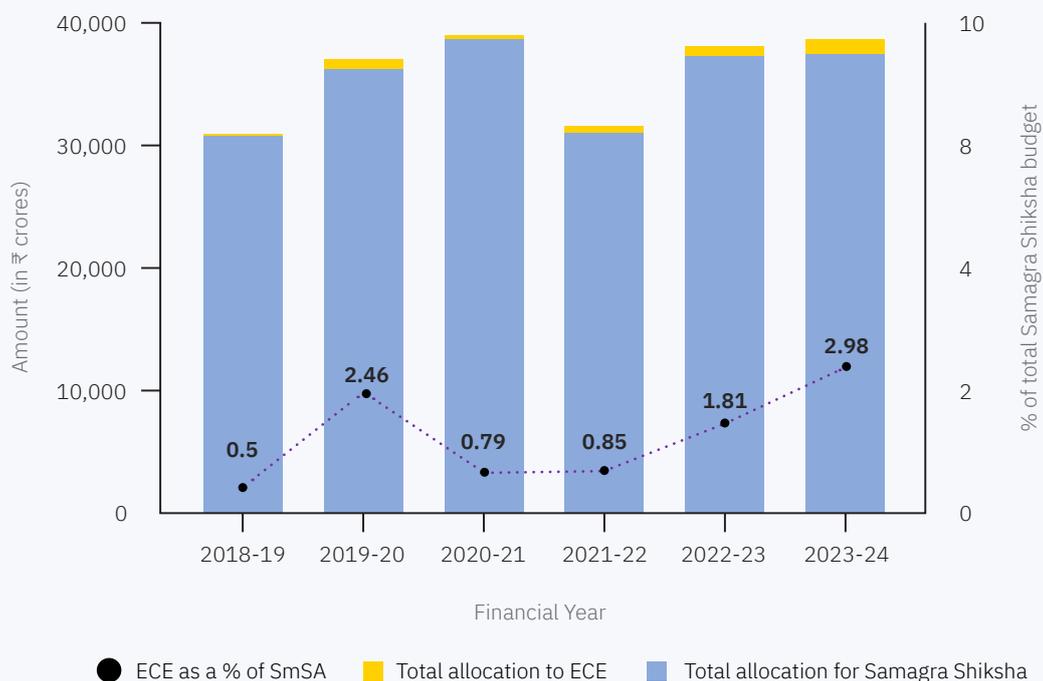


Fig: Budget allocated to ECE has remained a minor percentage of the total budget allocated to Samagra Shiksha Scheme, reaching its highest at 2.98% in 2023-24.

In the PAB allocation for the financial year 2023-24, the Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education allocated ₹1,117.04 crores of funds for Balvatikas and co-located Anganwadis. Of this, ₹281 crore is towards non-recurring, and ₹835 crore is towards recurring budget heads.³³

The Programmatic and Financial Norms of Samagra Shiksha state that ECCE funds, among other goals, should enable every child to acquire all cognitive/ transversal/ affective/ psychomotor skills required for being school-ready/grade-1 ready.³⁴ A closer look at the budget reveals that a major share of the

allocation, at ~50% (₹534 crores) of the total ECE budget goes towards supporting existing pre-primary schools, which broadly includes, inter alia, the provision of teaching-learning materials for children, the designing of state-specific curriculum, and revision of pre-primary textbooks in alignment with NCERT curriculum and training of pre-primary teachers. This is followed by the share of recurring allocation of similar support for new pre-primary schools at about 14% (₹153 crores) and recurring provision of teaching-learning materials (TLMs) at about 13% (₹147 crores) of the total ECE allocation.

Breakup of 2023-24 ECE budget across non-recurring and recurring budget heads			
Recurring		Non-Recurring	
Support to Pre-primary (existing) ₹534 Cr	Support to Pre-primary (new) ₹152,85 Cr	Child-Friendly Furniture ₹131.84 Cr	
	TLM for children ₹147.99 Cr	Outdoor Play Materials ₹109.78 Cr	BALA Feature ₹40.18 Cr

Fig: Under recurring heads, the most amount of ECE budget is allocated to supporting existing pre-primary and under non-recurring, the most amount of budget is allocated to procuring furniture.

A great degree of variability comes across in how states allocate and utilise education budgets for their early childhood programmes. Our analysis of the PAB allocation³⁵ shows that at least eleven states have allocated new funds in the 2023-24 academic year for less than 25% of ECE classrooms (Balvatikas and co-located Anganwadis) as per the PAB 2023 and UDISE 2021-22 data. For instance, six states sought no new allocation for any schools. Other states such as Karnataka sought 7% and Jharkhand sought 4% of all ECE classrooms. On the other hand, some states asked for funds for almost all PPS and co-located Anganwadis. For instance, Punjab, West Bengal, and Delhi sought funds for 99% of all classrooms. Some states asked for funds for more classrooms

than currently existing. For instance, Nagaland asked for 103% and Arunachal Pradesh asked for 135% of total ECE classrooms. This irregularity indicates that states do not always seek this funding for Balvatikas but also for infrastructural upgrades or some material distribution in co-located Anganwadis.

The general trend for recurring budgets is that smaller states seek large funds (₹>1 lakh per school) for a large percentage of ECE classrooms. However, most states have allocated money for standard TLM kit costs and training, which may not be utilised without a dedicated/allocated ECE teacher. The budget may also be utilised for material distribution to co-located Anganwadis.

2023-24 Statewise PAB recurring budgets approved per school vs % of total ECE classrooms for which funds were approved

Bubble size represents total recurring funds approved

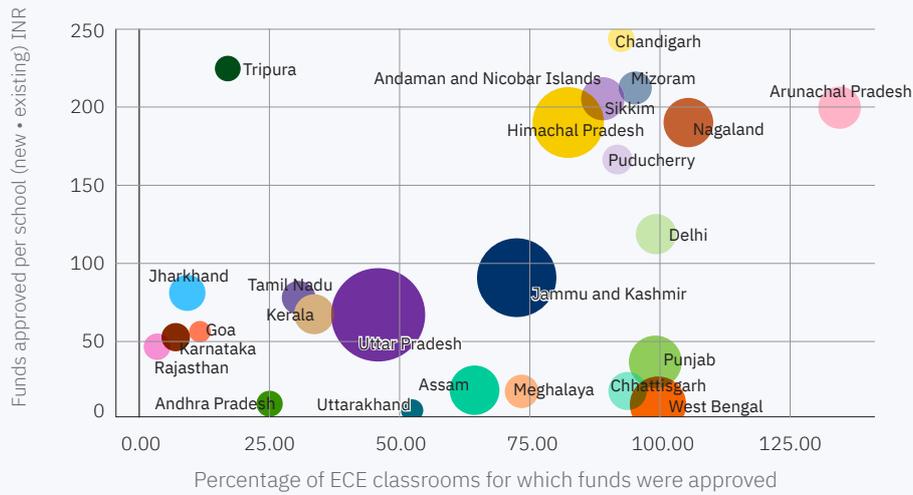


Fig: Analysis of PAB allocations shows a stark difference in how states procure funding under ECE, where states either procure a small amount of funding per school for a large number of schools or a large amount of funding per school for a small number of schools

The percentage of utilisation hovered between 50%-60% till 2021; however, 2021-22 saw an increase in utilisation to 82.39%.

Total Allocation to ECE including Spillovers and Utilisation

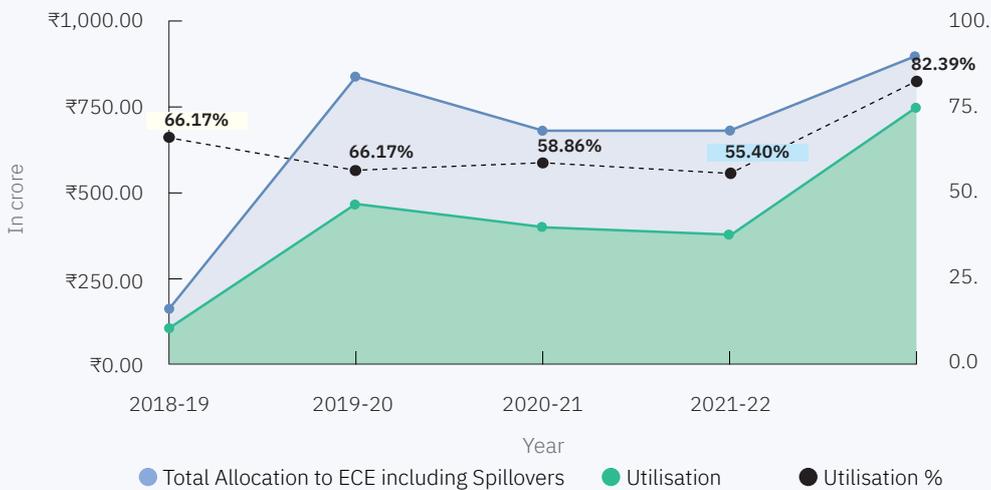


Fig: Fig: The utilisation of funds made available through PAB have hovered between 50%-60% since 2018 to 2022, and stood around 80% in 2022-23

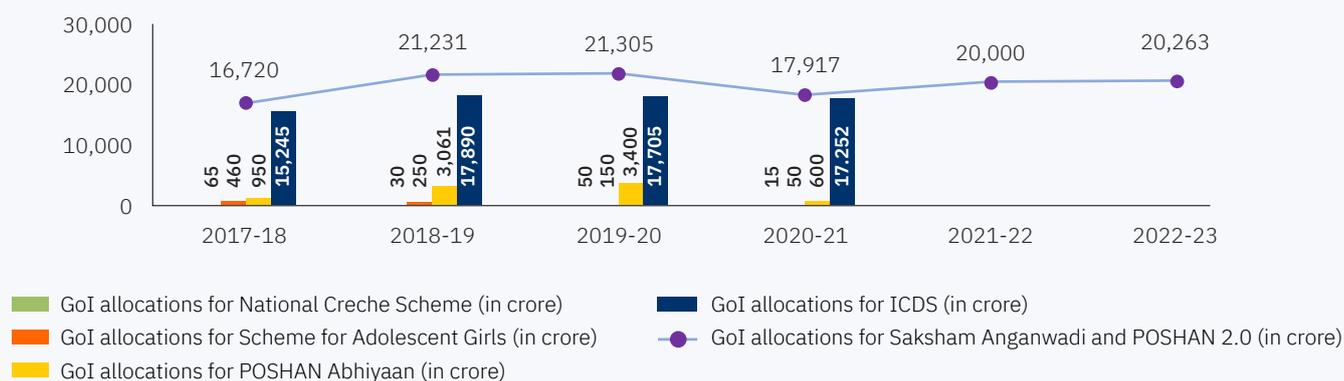


Budget Allocation under Saksham Anganwadi and POSHAN 2.0 Schemes³⁶

In 2022-23, allocation for Saksham Anganwadi and POSHAN 2.0 stood at ₹20,263 crore. This is 1% higher than the previous year's estimates

which stood at ₹20,000 crore. However, the allocation remained lower than the pre-COVID allocation from three years ago. For instance, in FY 2019-20, combined allocations for the sub-schemes stood at ₹21,305 crore – ₹1,050 crores more than the allocation for Saksham Anganwadi and POSHAN 2.0 in FY 2022-23.³⁷

Allocation to Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0 across years



Source: Union Expenditure Budget, Volume 2, MWCD, FY 2018-19 to FY 2022-23. Available online at: <https://www.indiabudget.gov.in>. Last accessed on 1 February 2022.

Note: Figures are in crores of Rupees and are Revised Estimates (RES), except for FY 2022-23 which are Budget Estimates (BEs).

Fig: The budget allocations for Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0 increased by 1% in 2022-23

The budget includes the central and state government's share, which is split between two schemes - Supplemental Nutrition Programme (SNP) for cooked meals or take-home rations, and ICDS (General) encompassing all other costs including salaries for AWTs, helpers, and middle management; rent, medical and preschool education expenses for 3-6-year-olds, uniforms, administrative costs, transport costs, etc. Specifically, uniforms for AWTs, preschool education and medical kits constitute 3-4% of the budget. The exact allocation to preschool education is unknown. The MWCD's annual budget (2021) shows that each state is allocated Rs. 5,000 per Anganwadi for PSE (Preschool Education) kits (including training) per year, which includes the cost of the PSE Kit, activity book, and other materials. On an average, PSE receives 2-4% of the total ICDS budget.

Taking into account both ECE budgets allocated by the MWCD and MoE, the estimated per pupil allocation per year for ECE by both ministries combined is Rs. 1,263³⁸, a mere 11% of the per-pupil expenditure in elementary grades.³⁹ The ECE budget allocation across both ministries is scant and insufficient to deliver quality ECE programmes.

Availability of ECE Teachers in Balvatikas (Pre-Primary) Classrooms

The need for greater emphasis on ECE is also evidenced in the relative shortage of budget allocation which impacts the availability of dedicated teachers for ECE classrooms, especially in government primary schools. Teachers are allocated pre-primary sections in addition to grades 1 or 2, leading to multi-grade classroom set-ups.

There are 9.18 lakh government primary schools in India, of which only about 2 lakh government schools have a pre-primary section or a Balvatika. The variations between states reporting the presence of a Balvatika in primary schools are significant. On one end, states such as Punjab, West Bengal, Nagaland, Jammu and Kashmir record nearly 100% presence of pre-primary sections, while other states such as Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Bihar, and Uttarakhand record almost no presence of pre-primary sections in primary schools.

Percentage of Primary Schools with Balvatikas Across States

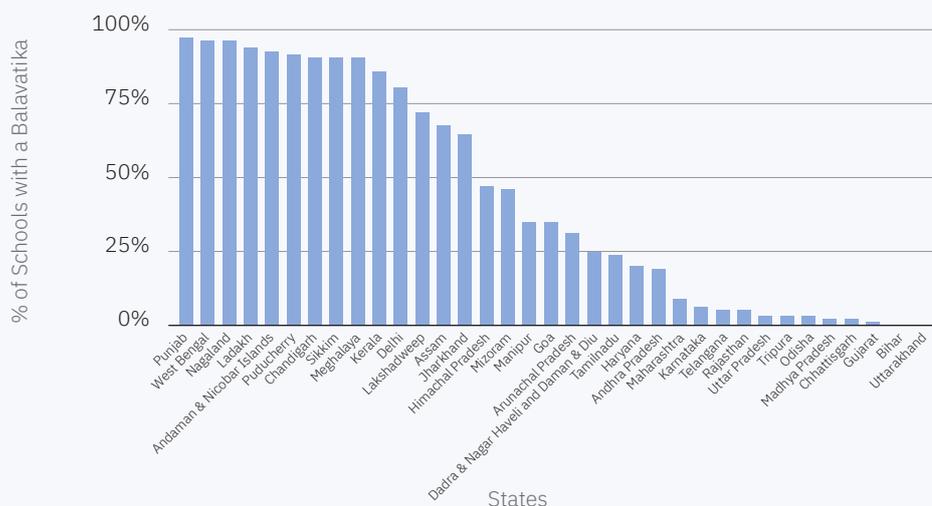


Fig: Schools in Punjab have the highest percentage of primary schools with Balvatikas, while Uttarakhand has the least percentage of primary schools with Balvatika

Out of ~2 lakh government schools with a pre-primary section, there are only ~76,000 schools with a teacher ‘allocated’⁴⁰ for ECE and only ~18,000 schools with a teacher ‘dedicated’⁴¹ for ECE.⁴² In other words, only 8.9% of schools with a Balvatika have a dedicated teacher for the pre-primary class and 38.2% have any teacher allotted to teach the pre-primary class. For the latter, a primary school teacher is typically responsible for teaching grades 1-5, who is additionally allocated pre-primary sections to teach. As such, the teachers do not have any additional incentive to teach the Balvatikas.

The lack of dedicated teachers and classrooms leaves little choice to the teacher or the school but to have a multi-grade classroom, wherein children from the pre-primary sections sit in the same room alongside students from grades 1 or 2. In such a setup, children at the pre-primary level scarcely receive dedicated attention or differentiated instruction from the teacher, who, even with the best intentions, is unable to meet age-appropriate instruction. This, in turn, has a direct impact on comprehension outcomes. In mixed-aged classrooms, a play-based pedagogical approach could be a practical solution; however, an inadequate understanding of such pedagogy exists and no such training is imparted to teachers.

Availability of Teachers for Pre-Primary Sections in Government Schools

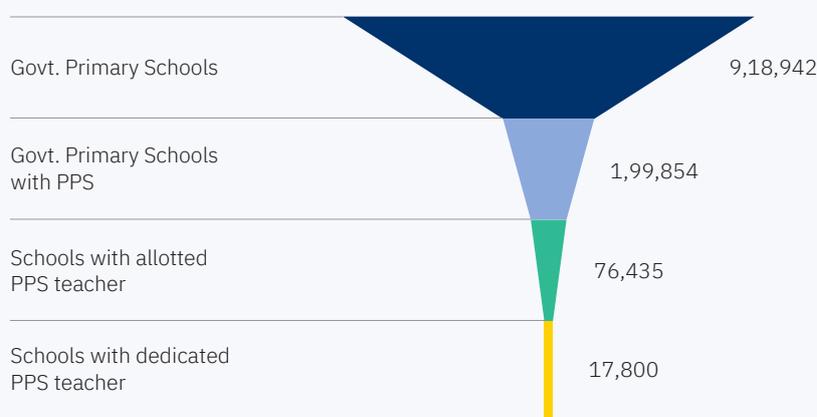
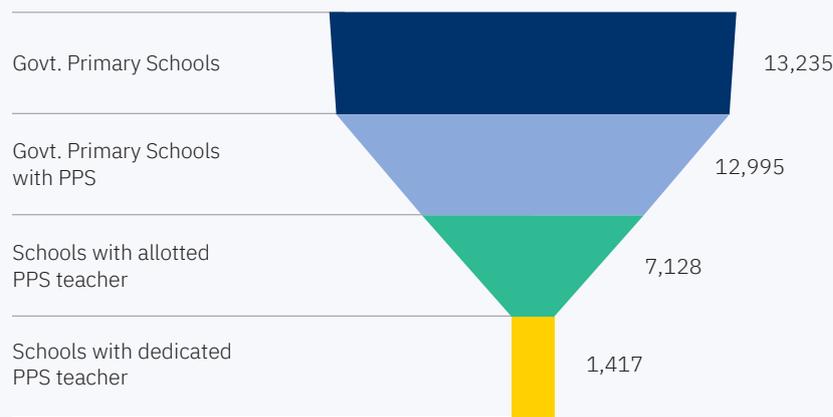
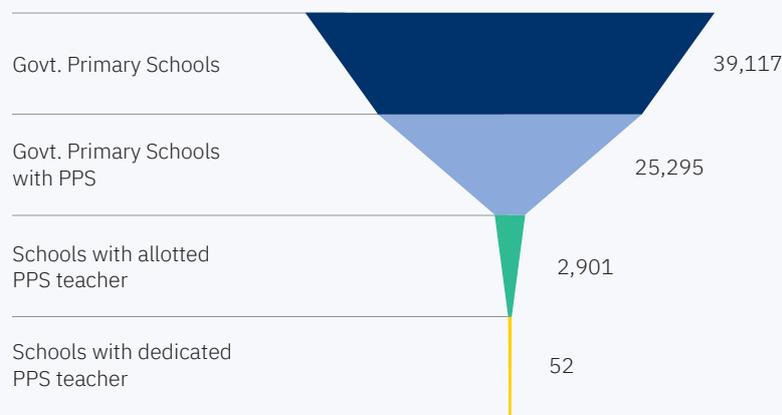


Fig: As per UDISE, of all schools that report the presence of a Balvatikas, only 8.9% have a dedicated teacher for the pre-primary class and 38.2% have an allocated teacher



Primary schools with allocated and dedicated teachers in Punjab



Primary schools with allocated and dedicated teachers in Assam

Fig: Even in states with a significant number of pre-primary sections, the number of dedicated teachers for pre-primary sections is low.

It is worth noting that states that have a significant percentage of Balvatikas in government primary schools are also hindered by the unavailability of teachers for the pre-primary section. For instance, in Punjab, 97.9% of primary schools have Balvatikas, but only 55.45% of schools have a teacher allocated for the pre-primary section, and merely 10.9% of schools have a dedicated teacher in the pre-primary section. Similarly, for Assam, while 64.7% of primary schools report having a Kashreni (Balvatikas), only 11.5% of these have an allocated teacher and less than 1% have a dedicated teacher for pre-primary sections.

As state governments resolutely choose to maintain the enrolment age for grade 1 at 6 years, a higher percentage of 5-year-olds will be likely to enrol in Balvatikas. A dual challenge is then set to emerge for the provision of Balvatikas for the 5-6 year cohort, ensuring that they are adequately staffed with trained teachers.

This also indicates that a staggering 1.1 lakh schools⁴³ report having a Balvatika, but no teacher - dedicated or allocated - to teach the section.



While research and data illuminate the structural gaps, there is limited evidence on how these challenges must be resolved with effective teaching-learning practices in the classroom. There is a gap in high-quality and public research on the programmatic factors that hamper quality ECE, exploring aspects such as the curriculum design, availability of time to teach, the effectiveness of learning time available, teacher training, and quality of support provided to teachers. As we begin to

understand the complexities from a structural lens, the finer programmatic aspects, too, require more evidence-based understanding. Our study attempts to understand many of these issues directly affecting our nation's youngest learners.



Chapter 2:

Study Overview and Methodology

Overview of the Study

This study, commissioned by Central Square Foundation (CSF), is a situational analysis of Early Childhood Education in India. It involved conducting an in-depth curriculum analysis, primary classroom observations, and interviews with key stakeholders to gain a comprehensive understanding of the country's current public ECE provision models. The study aims to identify service delivery gaps and challenges and explore best practices across different themes

Objectives of the Study

1. To understand the current models of public provisioning of ECE in India
2. To study different aspects of delivery that affect learning in the classrooms
3. To outline the way forward for other stakeholders within the ECE ecosystem

Research Design

A mixed-methods approach (quantitative and qualitative) was taken for the study. For primary data, semi-structured interview schedules incorporating quantitative and qualitative questions were carried out.

1. A semi-structured classroom observation tool, which had both quantitative and qualitative questions, was administered
2. Semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with key stakeholders - parents, teachers, and monitoring officials

The secondary data analysis focussed on an in-depth ECE curriculum analysis in select states. The objective was to understand the alignment with key national documents, such as the National Education Policy, National Curriculum Framework, and alignment of ECE pedagogy.

Sample for the Study

Purposive sampling was employed to ensure a diverse and appropriate representation of Anganwadis (co-located and standalone) and Pre-Primary Sections (1-year and 2-year Balvatika programmes).

Other reasons for employing purposive sampling:

- Individual permissions for the study were taken from each state, and respective state Education and Women and Child Development departments provided school lists. The UDISE dataset did not provide school names and used pseudocodes, making sampling from the dataset not possible

Selection of ECE classrooms: The study team requested a list of 30 Anganwadis per state and fewer for conditions where there were government-established pre-primary sections in government schools. The study was conducted in all the ECE classrooms from this.

The study was conducted across seven states and 13 districts in India, covering a total of 212 ECE classrooms. These encompassed standalone Anganwadis, co-located Anganwadis, and Pre-Primary Sections in government primary schools (either as 1-year or 2-year pre-primary programme). **After accounting for the shortfall for various reasons, the final sample size equalled 200 classrooms across the seven states.**

Study locations:

Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Punjab, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh

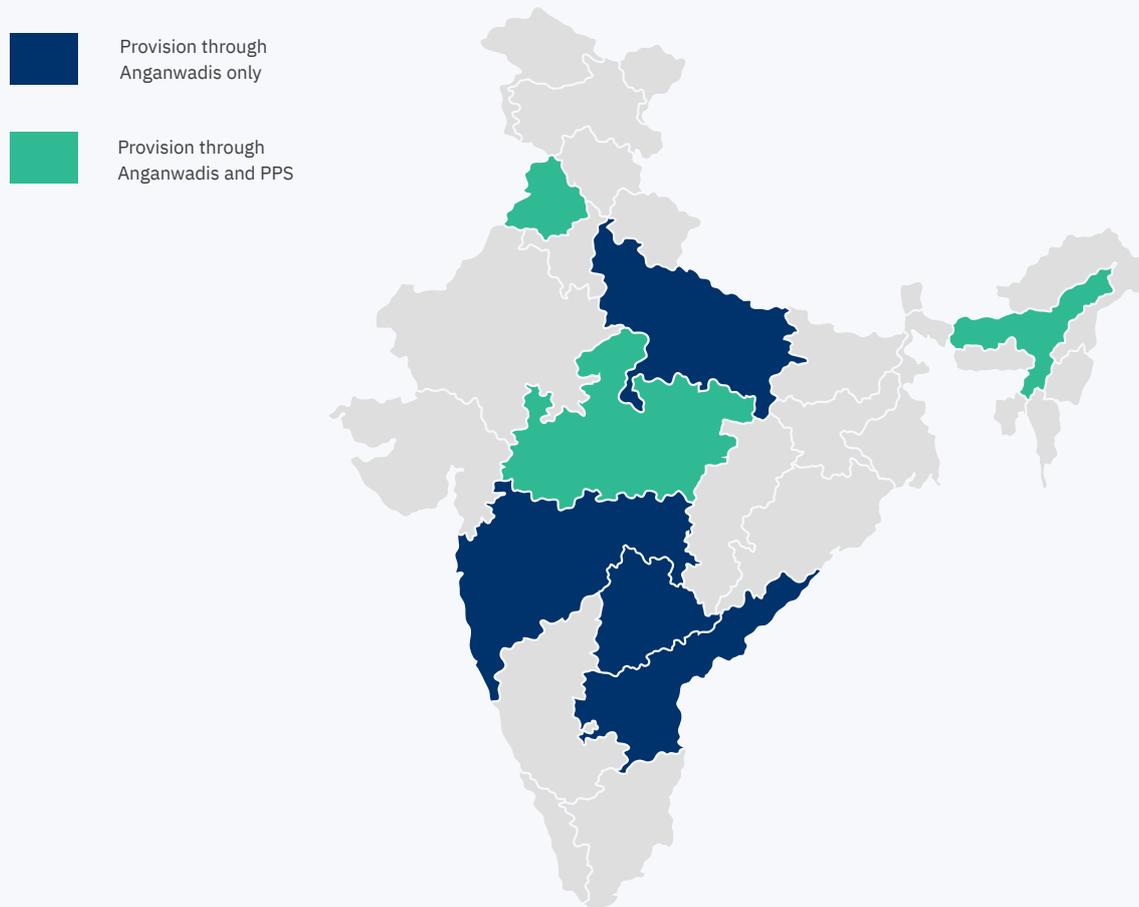


Fig: Map of states under study with Anganwadi only and with both Anganwadi and PPS

Given that the provisioning of early childhood education in India is primarily through the Anganwadi system, the majority of the sample selected for the study are Anganwadis, which reflects the national provisioning type in

India where Anganwadis outnumber PPS. Moreover, in three states, ECE is exclusively provided through Anganwadis, as PPS has no government provision.

	Anganwadi		Pre-primary sections		Total
	Standalone	Co-located	One year PPS	Two year PPS	
Number of classrooms	76	96	14	25	211

Table: Distribution of Anganwadi and PPS classrooms in the study

	Co-located AWC	1 Year Pre-primary	2 Year Pre-primary	Standalone Anganwadi	Total PPS	Total Anganwadi	Total ECE Classroom
Andhra Pradesh	18	0	0	12	0	30	30
Assam	11	14	0	7	14	18	32
Madhya Pradesh	8	0	17	7	17	15	32
Maharashtra	9	0	0	19	0	28	28
Punjab	14	0	8	7	8	21	29
Telangana	18	0	0	12	0	30	30
Uttar Pradesh	18	0	0	12	0	30	30

Table: Distribution of types of Classrooms across states

Each key stakeholder interviewed was associated with the same classrooms that were observed. The interviews with parents and teachers took place in the classroom that was visited, and monitoring officials were also

responsible for the same set of classrooms in a particular block. This allowed for a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of the ECE ecosystem.

	Andhra Pradesh	Assam	Madhya Pradesh	Maharashtra	Punjab	Telangana	Uttar Pradesh	Total
Teachers	30	32	32	28	30	30	30	212
Parents	30	23	5	23	16	20	24	141
Monitoring officials	19	1	5	4	13	4	2	48

Table: Target Respondents across states

After accounting for the shortfall in sample size due to various reasons⁴⁴, the final sample size stood at 192 for teachers and 140 for parents across the seven states

Development of the Study Tools

The following overarching questions guided the primary research:

What is being taught in the ECE classrooms? Which activities are prioritised?	What is the teacher's knowledge and skill level to effectively transact the curriculum, carry out other teaching-learning processes, and manage classrooms?	What are parents' awareness levels of quality ECE? What is their interest and inclination to undertake at-home learning?	How is ECE prioritised at various levels – from State ECE nodal officers to middle management monitoring officials to classrooms?
---	---	--	---

A total of four data collection tools were used for the study - **classroom observation, teacher interview, parent interview, and monitoring officials' interview**. The study team prepared a detailed indicator matrix corresponding to the objectives of the situational analysis study. This matrix was also aligned with the critical research questions proposed. While the classroom observation tool has an almost equal number of quantitative and qualitative questions, the other tools were more qualitative in nature.

Classroom observation (CO) tool: The tool for classroom observation was formulated after reviewing and incorporating relevant themes from pre-existing tools - such as the Program to Improve Private Early Education (PIPE) study, Early Childhood Education Quality Assessment Scale (ECEQAS), World Bank Teach Primary Classroom Observation tool, and International

Development and Early Learning Assessment (IDELA) - and contextualising them. The study team aligned the already existing tools with the proposed research questions of the study. This contextualised the observation tools to the study and the Indian ECE context. The critical areas covered in the classroom observation tool are specified in the table below.

Other qualitative tools: Qualitative tools were administered to parents, teachers, and government monitoring officials.⁴⁵ These qualitative tools aimed to provide further depth on the 'how' and 'why' of the research areas explored through the quantitative questions. The key research questions of focus for the qualitative tools have been provided below.

The table below provides details of the themes/topics covered in each tool.

Tool	Themes/Topics
Classroom observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classroom arrangement Classroom activities and teaching-learning processes Classroom environment and management Teaching-learning material availability and usage Non-ECE activities
ECE teacher interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demographic details ECE training Informal assessment Community engagement Awareness of quality ECE Understanding of TLMs Planned vs actual activities in the classroom
Parent interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demographic details Awareness of quality ECE Engagement with ECE teachers Home-learning activities (types and resources available) Aspirations for the child
Monitoring officials and ECE nodal officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring process and protocols Roles and responsibilities Feedback and review of ECE related indicators Community engagement ECE training

Table: Themes covered in each tool

Finalisation of the Study Tools through Pilots

To ascertain the suitability of the study tools in field conditions, a pilot test of the classroom observation tool, parent interview tool and teacher interview tool was conducted by the Sambodhi team. The pilot for the monitoring officials' tool was not conducted as the stakeholders were unavailable for the pilot. The pilot was conducted in two districts, Gorakhpur (Uttar Pradesh) and Medchal (Telangana), covering six schools (three per district) in March 2023. The study tool was finalised after incorporating the inputs from the pilot exercise. The learnings of the pilot testing were also used to give field investigators instructions about how to administer specific questions correctly.

Training of the Enumerators

A three-day training session was conducted for the selected field enumerators at the Sambodhi Research & Communication office, Noida. The training was conducted by the Sambodhi team with support from the CSF team. The training schedule was designed such that the first day was devoted to classroom training to provide a conceptual understanding of the ECE landscape in India and the states that were a part of the study. The second and third days of the training were dedicated to the study tools' discussion, practice, and role-play sessions. Enumerators from each state were also provided with separate training to orient them to the curriculum and teaching-learning materials available in that state to make their teacher interviews more effective. This specifically included identifying the curriculum for a particular month from the teacher guide and recognising the lesson plan for the day where available.

Since the surveys were phased, the enumerators were also provided with a one-day refresher training before the data collection.

After completing the training exercise, a field practice session of two days was organised to ensure a practice of ECE classroom observations for the enumerators before starting the field data collection. During the field practice, the supervisors, Sambodhi, and CSF teams checked for inter-rater reliability. They ensured that the researchers had a conceptual and practical understanding of the area of study and the study tool. A total of 18 trained enumerators collected data across seven states.



Data Analysis



Quantitative Data Analysis

We conducted a descriptive study of indicators relevant to the critical research questions to examine the data distribution. In the CO tool analysis, we actively examined several vital indicators, including the average time allocated to ECE activities, the nature of these activities, utilisation of lesson plans, application of teaching and learning materials (TLMs), and the implementation of effective instruction and comprehension assessments during classroom sessions. The qualitative tools were also used to analyse the knowledge and awareness of the teachers, parents, and monitoring officials. After completing the fundamental descriptive analysis, the team performed disaggregated and comparative studies on the aforementioned key areas of interest and indicators. In addition, cross-tabulation was performed to establish links and associations between indicators which gave sharper and more granular insights into the ECE landscape in India.



Qualitative Data Analysis

We analysed qualitative interviews by deriving themes and codes that pertained to the key areas of interest. Themes were formulated through information extracted from the study's transcripts, focusing on each area of interest. Within each theme, we established codes and sub-themes at various levels. Initially, the qualitative interviews were transcribed into English, and subsequent to transcription, each transcript underwent coding to facilitate the process of thematic analysis.



Ethical Considerations and Key Limitations

Ethical Considerations

With the aim of upholding social and moral values while safeguarding the well-being of both children and other respondents, two critical measures were consistently adhered to throughout all stages of this study:

Informed Consent: We provided respondents with a consent form and verbally explained the study objectives. Respondents who agreed to participate were asked to sign the written consent form. Following consent from the end user, the interviewer administered the interview schedule.

Confidentiality: The data collection agency anonymized the data and shared it with CSF, ensuring that individual respondents are not identified. Throughout every stage of the research process, including data collection, capture, management, and reporting outputs, all data were treated as confidential.

Key Limitations of the Study

1. Generalisability of the findings:

The principal objective of the study was to gain an understanding of the ECE landscape of the country. With this in mind, the study was conducted with small sample sizes of 30 ECE classrooms per state. **While this was achieved through the study, the small sample size does not ensure that these findings are generalisable to a wider population.**

2. Time spent in the classroom:

An enumerator spent approximately two hours in an ECE classroom for classroom observation on a single day. For ease of operation and logistics, the enumerators were instructed to observe the first two hours of the ECE classrooms as this is part of the mandated time of instruction. However, there is a probability that the ECE instruction also took place after the observation time was over and that it was not captured by enumerators on record.





Chapter 3:

Curriculum Analysis

This chapter is written by Key Education Foundation

Highlights

» Instructional Time

In most states, the recommended daily instructional time for ECE (across Anganwadis and Balvatikas) averages at around 3-4 hours which is in alignment with the NCF. Recommended instructional time does not account for essential non-teaching activities, such as meal time and bathroom breaks.

» Pedagogy and Learning Outcomes

Overall, the state curriculums encompass all significant learning outcomes relevant to the five domains of development: cognitive development, language development, physical and motor development, social and emotional development, and aesthetic appreciation. However, play-based learning, while recommended, is limited. Furthermore, informal assessments and community engagement areas are not accorded high priority across most of the curricula.

» Teaching and Learning Resources

The curriculum handbooks given to teachers include limited instructions on how to use reference materials. This means significant effort is required on the part of the teacher to set up activities, and the materials may not be leveraged to drive engagement.

» Ease of Use

Support and structures for effective daily planning and differentiated instruction are often not provided to teachers. Furthermore, the teacher has to engage in the process of cross-referencing daily resources, which can pose some challenges when it comes to utilising the materials for effective teaching.

Overview

Early years' curriculum attempts to operationalise a collective vision for the youngest learners in society. It answers key questions such as:

- What is it we want for our children?
- What do we want them to know and be able to do?
- How do we want them to be?

An ideal early years curriculum recognises the learning needs of a young child between the ages of 3-8 and takes into account the importance of 'play' in the learning process. The curriculum then unpacks this into a modular plan to enable effective implementation at the classroom level.

Play is more than just fun: it is the key to unlocking a child's potential to learn and grow, in a manner that can subsequently build curiosity, creativity and confidence which will help them thrive in long-term academic and life outcomes.

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF)⁴⁶, and various other early years frameworks in India, define the essentials of early learning across five main areas of development⁴⁷. These include:

- 1. Cognitive development**
- 2. Language development**
- 3. Physical and motor development**
- 4. Social and emotional development**
- 5. Aesthetic appreciation**

A quality curriculum is one that is designed to build competency across all of these five areas and provides children learning experiences where:

- Children explore their environment and learn about their world through play and relationships with their peers, teachers, family and community members
- Teachers act as partners and guides who facilitate children's exploration and learning by creating quality experiences
- The learning environment is designed to nurture curiosity, creativity and confidence

With this criteria as guidance, an in-depth analysis of nine curricula in seven states (curriculum for both Anganwadi and Balvatikas) was carried out. The analysis covered three main aspects of an ECE curriculum: **pedagogy, ease of use and teaching-learning resources**. Further, a framework was designed to capture a qualitative snapshot across these aspects and drawing from various national policies for ECE.⁴⁸

Pedagogy What is taught and how?	Ease of Use Is it easy for teachers to implement the prescribed curriculum?	Teaching and Learning Resources Are high quality learning materials available to support curriculum implementation?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holistic learning outcomes • Play-based activities • Well-balanced routine • Child-friendly informal assessments • Organised early learning space • Community involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All resources are well mapped to each other • Routine is do-able • Structures for planning are well-defined 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preschool learning materials for play are available • Practice worksheets for children • DIY materials are aligned to local context • Resources for parents are available

National Trends and Insights

Upon comparison of the framework across states, some common trends in terms of gaps and best practices were identified alongside some best practices unique to specific states.

In most states, the recommended daily instructional time for ECE averages around 3-4 hours which is in alignment with the NCF recommendation

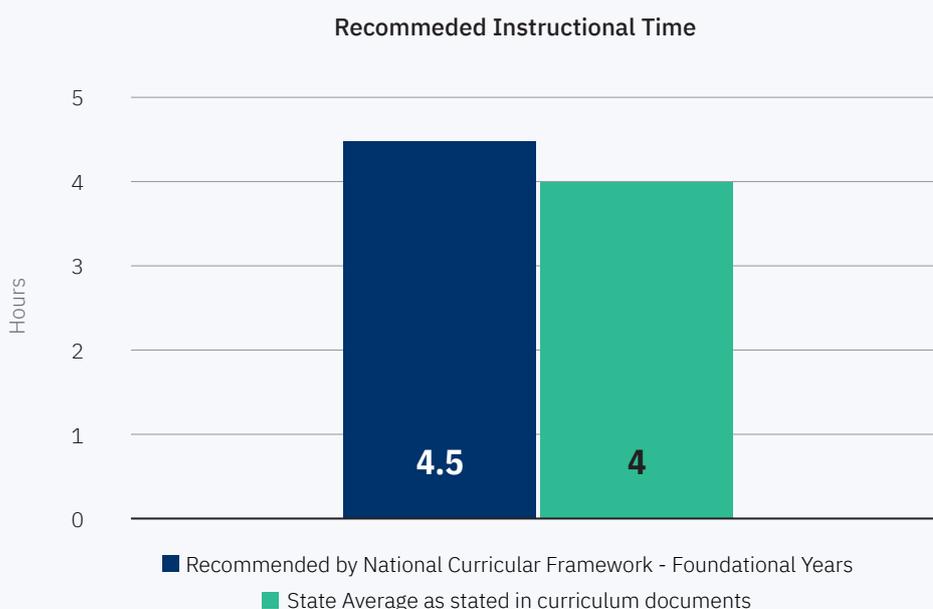


Fig: Recommended instructional time by the NCF and State curriculum documents

The sections below provide more insight into the quality of the curriculum as per the three pillars which then determine the quality of this instructional time



Insights on pedagogy and learning outcomes

#1 Most of the curricula include holistic learning outcomes

When the learning outcomes listed in the curriculum were compared to those recommended in the NCF, it was found that almost all curricula included outcomes⁴⁹ for the five major domains of development and an average of 75% of the learning outcomes were covered in most. However, **only about 70% of**

these outcomes had associated activities that were built into the routine⁵⁰. The curriculum activities and suggested approach for teachers to integrate the outcomes into the daily routine were examined.

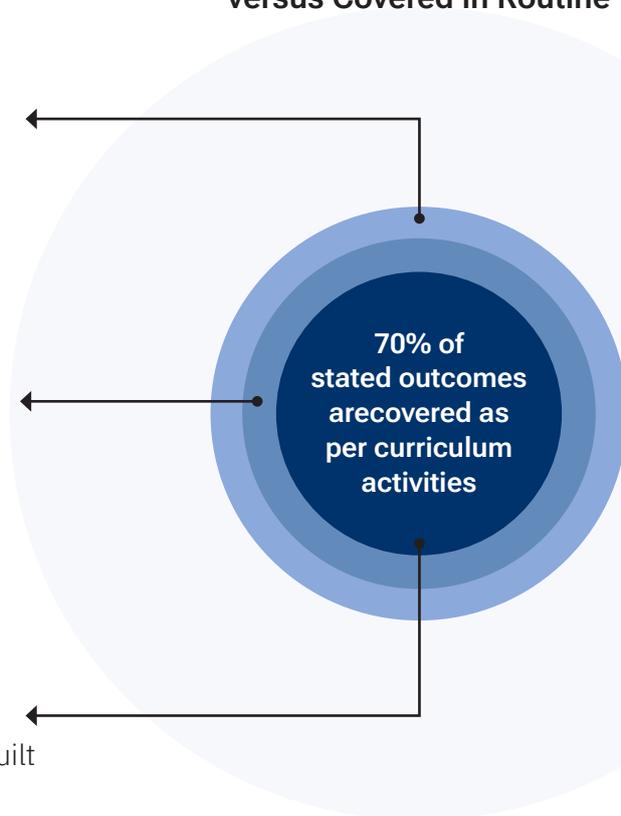
Outcomes related to literacy and numeracy are often clearly mapped to activities. However, for outcomes from social & emotional, or physical domains like “identifying & naming emotions”, for example, there is no guidance provided to the teacher on how she can integrate this in her daily activities like during stories, conversation or play. Hence, the likelihood of this integration happening effectively is low.

Learning Outcomes: Stated in Curriculum versus Covered in Routine

NCF-defined Learning Outcomes

75% of learning outcomes are stated in the curricula

70% of these outcomes are built into the routine



Some common trends:

- Cognitive development outcomes - spatial orientation, working with numbers, etc. are mentioned in outcomes but often not built into the routine and activities
- Social and emotional learning outcomes are mentioned but there are no activities mentioned for them
- Spoken language outcomes for Language 2 [English], even when mentioned, do not have a space in the routine
- Note: Many state workbooks have letter writing and tracing activities for L1 and L2 in the routine but this has not been mentioned as a learning outcome

Fig: Percentage of learning outcomes that align with NCF and those that are built into the routine

#2 Approach to teaching and learning is appropriate for most areas. Stronger approach needed for pre-literacy and language development

- **Cognitive Development** : Pre-mathematical concepts like sorting, sequencing, working with patterns are included across curricula with well-defined, age-appropriate activities.

Best Practices: Cognitive Development

The Aakar Curriculum in Maharashtra has a very well-defined approach to cognitive development in the early years

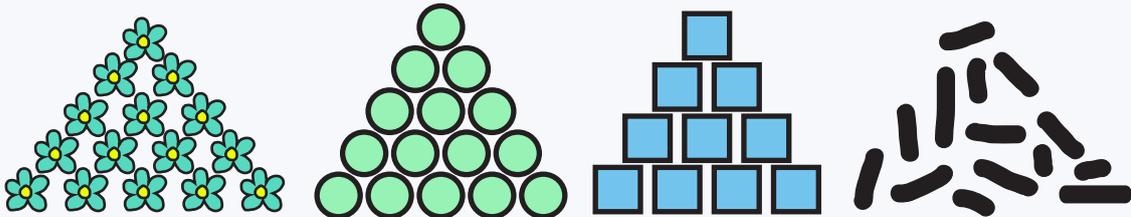
- The learning outcomes are clearly defined for all major concepts ranging from shapes, colours, sizes, textures and spatial orientation
- There is a strong focus on pre-numeracy skills like matching, sorting, sequencing and patterns
- Activities recommend the use of concrete, locally available materials (flowers, seeds, sticks, stones) that are to be provided to every child during the activity
- The activities are provided in increasing order of rigour for three levels so that the teacher can support her lessons and choose to increase the difficulty for different age groups or levels

Activity - Classifying Objects

Age - 3-4 years

- काठिण्य - पातळी 1 : दोन प्रकारच्या वस्तू मिसळून ठेवल्या असताना दोन गट करू शकणे.
पातळी 2 : तीन ते चार प्रकारच्या वस्तूंचे वर्गीकरण करू शकणे.
पातळी 3 : पाच ते आठ प्रकारच्या वस्तूंचे वर्गीकरण करू शकणे.

- Difficulty Level - Level 1 : Able to group two types of objects when they are mixed.
Level 2 : Able to classify three to four types of objects.
Level 3 : Able to classify five to eight types of objects.



- **Early Numeracy:** All curricula introduced number sense using well-defined activities based on play and recommended the use of concrete materials to teach numbers. We must, however, take note that there is a high emphasis on writing numbers up to 10 as a priority skill in more than 60% of the curricula. Including writing as a priority must be discouraged as children are not developmentally ready for it, and this will take away time from focusing on crucial skills necessary to build 'number sense' - like counting quantities and one-to-one correspondence. A singular focus on writing numbers can be counterproductive in the long run.
- **Language Development:** The pedagogy for language development is of immediate concern in terms of choice of language⁵⁰ as well as the approach to teaching. Most of the states introduce two languages - a Home Language and English. While children can be introduced to multiple languages in their early years, it is not advisable to introduce them to multiple scripts so early in their learning journey. They require adequate exposure to listening and speaking followed by immersion in an environment that is rich in that particular language.⁵¹ Although most curricula have rich oral language activities and stories in the Home Language, for English, such activities were missing or limited. The script is introduced for both the Home Language and English, with little to no focus on exposure to print and building pre-reading skills.



Observed trends in approach to teaching language in the early years	
Language 1 [Home Language]	Language 2 [English in most cases]
Listening, Speaking and Comprehension	
Learning Outcomes Exist	Very few learning outcomes focus on listening and speaking No outcomes for comprehension defined
Pedagogy to teach L1 exists	No defined pedagogy to teach L2 - while some repetitive activities are mentioned, there is no evidence of using a tested method for introducing English as a second language
TLM/Stories exist	TLM/Stories exists
All curriculum concepts are taught in L1	--
A defined approach to use the home language [L1] to introduce English [L2] does not exist	
Reading and Writing	
Reading and Writing Specific learning outcomes for script identification exist	Specific learning outcomes for script identification exist
Activities for phonological awareness [introducing sounds] exist	Activities for phonological awareness [introducing sounds] do not exist
Exposure to pre-reading activities via a guided approach is missing [evidence of rote reading practice for L1 is present]	
Pre-writing/tracing activities available for the L1 script	Pre-writing/tracing activities available for the L2 script
Child is expected to write the script by the age of 5	Child is expected to write the script by the age of 5
<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="width: 15px; height: 10px; background-color: #4a7ebb; margin-right: 5px;"></div> Area of immediate concern </div>	

States must prioritise revision of their approach to teaching language and ensure that the first language/home language of the child is used as the primary language of instruction. **In cases where English is introduced, a mindful approach focussed on oral skills i.e., speaking, listening, and comprehension, vocabulary - instead of direct exposure to script for reading - must be considered.** Children engaging in the current curriculum content in most states are at risk of falling behind in both the Home Language and English at the end of their foundational years. **Recent studies⁵² on ‘literacy transfer’ and readiness to learn a new language indicate that children need to achieve a threshold level in decoding L1 with comprehension before we can introduce L2. If this is done too soon, they are unlikely to achieve learning outcomes in both L1 and L2.**

#3 Play as a powerful medium for children to learn is recognised in curricula. However, its implementation could be strengthened further

All curricula encourage play and emphasise its importance for young children. There are prescribed activities for indoor and outdoor play. However, the application of this is not

clearly evident, especially in the Balvatika curriculum. The daily recommended playtime is approximately 30 minutes on average. While the 30-minute slot is indicative of a space for free play, there is little evidence to clarify what is supposed to happen during this time. The importance of balancing free and guided play is not explicitly stated in any curriculum and should be encouraged. As a result of this, it is possible that the quality of play will rely heavily on the teacher's interpretation, where she may resort to only focusing on guided, teacher-led play activities.

#4 Informal assessments could be added to most curriculums

While a few curricula briefly mention informal assessments, most do not outline a process with methods and frequency of assessments. As a result, teachers are unlikely to actively tailor their methods to the learning needs of their children. This is especially necessary for children above the age of 4.5 years as they prepare to transition to school. Some curricula do include assessment cards with well-defined learning outcomes, but there is little guidance on how to use them.

Best Practices: Informal Assessments in Madhya Pradesh's Balvatika Curriculum

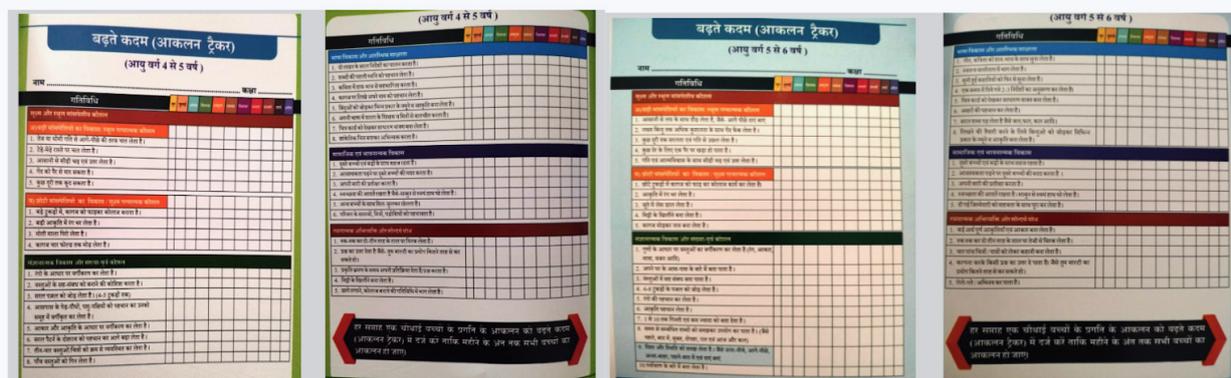


Fig: MP Balvatika Curriculum Assessment Tracker - 4-6 years.

1. The curriculum includes a physical assessment card for each child. This card outlines age-wise outcomes that a child needs to achieve for each area of development. A single card has different pages for the two years that a child will spend in the Balvatika (The Anganwadi Curriculum in MP also has a similar card for a three-year period)
2. This card allows the teacher to observe these outcomes and mark the progress of the child every quarter
3. It also acts as a simple tool to communicate progress to parents and check for progress in outcomes over the two-year period
4. If used properly, these cards can serve as a great tool to inform instructional practice and also to encourage parental involvement

#5 Community involvement could be further leveraged and prioritized

Parent and community involvement has three components:

1. Parental education: Orientation on quality ECE and parental practices
2. At-home resources and support: Worksheets, activities, etc. to enable parents in engaging children through enriching activities and quality parent-child interactions at home
3. Parent collaboration: Involving parents in Anganwadi/school activities by inviting them as a resource to share their skills/cultures, taking children on outings, etc.

Most curricula do make occasional suggestions for parental collaboration such as inviting them to partake in Anganwadi activities, such as storytelling, as well as arts and crafts. There are also some recommendations that suggest including the communities in celebrating local festivals. These practices are welcome actions towards ensuring investment from the community.

In some cases we do see suggestions for topics or areas to cover in parent education but there is little guidance on content or strategies for teachers to conduct these sessions. Only two out of the nine curricula analysed show an intentional approach to community involvement by including parent-facing inputs for parent education (Madhya Pradesh) and at-home resources (Punjab).

Best Practices: Parental Knowledge in Madhya Pradesh and Punjab

Two states stood out in the adoption of methods to engage parents in the early learning journey.

The Madhya Pradesh Anganwadi curriculum recommends a **monthly Bal Choupal** (parents' meeting) and gives a list of suggested topics for discussion. The AWT is able to use these talking points to create a space where important information is shared and discussed with the community at the Anganwadi each month.

Recommended Structure:

1. Bal Choupal - Monthly parent-teacher meeting organised on the 25th of every month

Topics:

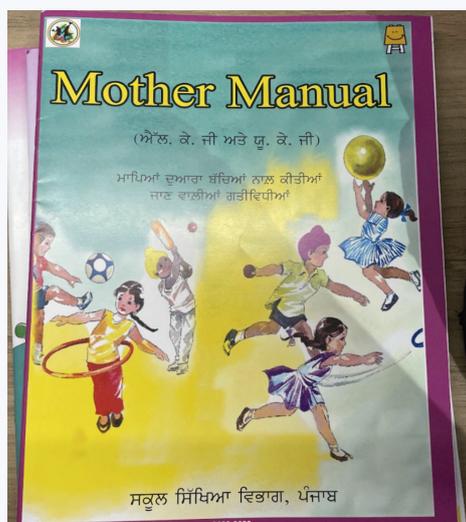
- Need of childcare and importance of pre primary education
- Growth in the early years, stages of development (milestones),
- Developmental delay and early signs of special needs
- Early encouragement and motivation (early stimulation) to children
- During home care
- Importance of play, Developing good habits, Preparation for going to school
- Role of parents and community in child education and care

Recommended flow of a Bal Choupal:

1. Time allocated: 2-3 hours
2. Proposed Timings: 12-3 pm
3. Proposed plan: Half hour each for
 - A. Children's activities
 - B. For parents
 - C. For discussion
 - D. Personal counseling



Best Practices: At-home Resources and Support



Punjab curriculum includes a Mothers' Manual, which is a collection of do-at-home worksheets with simple instructions for parents to engage in learning activities at home with their children. This is a great step towards community involvement in preschool activities. The worksheets are a great way to encourage parents to spend time with children while also improving their awareness of what children learn in the early years.

Pedagogy and Learning Outcomes: The Ideal Curriculum

Learning outcomes must be well aligned to age-appropriate expectations⁵³ of the 3-6-year-old child. The NCF - Foundational Stage clearly outlines an age-wise progression of outcomes for each area of development. The curriculum should provide flexibility to gradually move across a number of concepts, enabling teachers to introduce them when the children are prepared.

Activities outlined for the learning objectives must be centred around play and take into consideration how children learn in the early years. For example, the recommended activity to teach sorting must include tangible materials and provide children with multiple

opportunities to practice it themselves through the course of the week.

A well-balanced routine must exist to ensure that there is a focus on all five areas of development. A predictable routine with 20–30-minute slots for cognitive activities, free play, story, rhymes, conversation, and outdoor play is beneficial to children who inherently seek a sense of order. The routine must be arranged in a way that balances physical activity and movement with periods of rest to ensure children are engaged and active. When there is a transition to a new activity or concept, a short-guided instruction of not more than 10 minutes with the remaining time for exploration facilitated by the teacher is ideal. This may differ for literacy activities like rhymes and stories which are more teacher-dependent in nature.

The curriculum must include guidelines on organising the learning space which

is fundamental to creating an inspiring ECE environment. For example, guidelines should encompass details such as arranging learning stations, strategically placing charts and visuals to foster a print-rich classroom, and maintaining a designated book corner. This comprehensive guidance empowers educators by providing them with a tangible vision, enabling them to shape their classrooms in a manner that optimises student interaction with the curriculum and effectively facilitates both small and large group activities.

The curriculum should distinctly delineate a procedure for consistent, informal assessment of every child. This process must include observation techniques, expected outcomes, assessment frequency, recording protocols, and follow-up support plans which are imperative to guarantee that every child progresses along a constructive learning trajectory.

The curriculum must include approaches and strategies to involve the community.

Given that early learning is a fluid experience between the school and the home⁵⁵, approaches to early learning must consider the role played by caregivers in early development. A curriculum can integrate uncomplicated methods to engage caregivers in their child's learning journey. This entails enhancing their understanding of ECE and aiding them in enhancing the quality of time spent with their child. For example, include a workshop or session for parents in the monthly calendar with topics that are relevant to parents in the given context. Teachers can be supported by providing them with activities, guides, posters, and talking points in the curriculum to enable them in facilitating the sessions.



Sl No	Questions	Options	Name: Ashika	Name: Arya	Name: Ram	Name: Airya	Name: Gopal	Name: Harsha	Name: Geetha	Name: Divya	Name: Surya	Name: Durga
	Which bird is farthest from the tree?	Child is able to respond to either one of the question correctly	✓						✓			
		Child is confused or is unable to respond to both the questions		✓			✓			✓		
		Child does not understand the question or does not attempt			✓						✓	
14	Show the picture to the child. Ask - Can you identify the object in the picture? Now, Ask - Count how many trees are there?	Child is able to count and answer correctly	✓			✓	✓	✓				✓
		Child is able to count only up to first few numbers and misses the rest		✓			✓				✓	
		Child is not able to count correctly			✓				✓			
		Child does not understand the question or does not attempt								✓		
15	Show the objects - leaf and stone to the child and Ask - Can you pick the object that is heaviest?	Child is able to correctly pick the object that is heaviest		✓		✓				✓		✓
		Child is unsure about the object that is heavy	✓					✓				

Fig: The first image represents an informal assessment being conducted where the teacher is seen showing an image and asking open-ended and closed-ended questions to the child. The image on the right is an observation tracker with questions and four types of responses for each⁵⁴

A Note on Inclusion⁵⁶

Ensuring that a curriculum designed for scale can cater to the diverse learning needs of children can be quite a difficult challenge to address. However, every curriculum can make a start by acknowledging and appreciating diversity to ensure every child feels seen. Towards this:

1. The curriculum must offer teachers options to extend activities so it can cater to different learning styles and ensure the inclusion of children with additional learning needs. Notes to teachers on alternate ways to conduct an activity, levelled activities with increasing rigour for each age and alternating activities in the curriculum to ensure visual, auditory and kinesthetic learning styles are accommodated via five-sense exploration activities are all examples of accommodating this in a curriculum
2. The curriculum must provide opportunities for children to see themselves reflected in the curriculum. For example, visuals in the curriculum must be representative of the children in that state, the curriculum must recommend the use of the child's home language, and so on
3. The curriculum must address societal barriers to inclusion. For example, stories and visuals in the curriculum must represent fair gender roles (for example, women as doctors and train drivers), or include children with physical disabilities in visuals to allow room for conversation



Insights on Teaching and Learning Resources

In this section, we will explore the quality of the recommended teaching-learning materials prescribed by the curriculum. Most of the curricula include a Preschool Education Kit and Student Workbooks, while a few include some additional resources such as Child Assessment Cards

#1 Preschool Education Kit: The curriculum handbooks provided to teachers necessitate guidance regarding the prescribed materials, specifically on conducting activities or preparing them for free play



The list of materials recommended in the curriculum includes materials that focus on fine motor skills (threading and stringing beads, clay), cognitive development (blocks, puzzles, clay), and language development (flashcards, charts). The materials are age-appropriate and definitely add value to an ECE classroom. These lists often include items such as paint, crayons and glue.

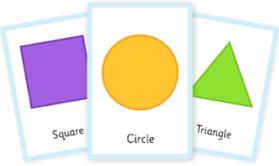
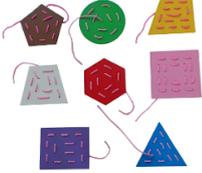
			
Flash Cards	Clay / Playdough	Safe scissors	Threading/Lacking boards
			
Stringing beads	Blocks	Paints & colours	Puzzles

Fig: Material commonly recommended for the Preschool Educational Kit

However, instruction manuals for teaching-learning materials that outline the activities and the use of these materials in the PSE Kit were missing across curricula. Due to this, the use of the PSE Kit by the teacher may be limited as they have no clarity on how to use the materials effectively.

#2 Usage of classroom resources could be promoted through a focus on user-friendliness:

The curriculum handbooks highlight the inclusion of do-it-yourself (DIY) teaching-learning materials, accompanied by numerous activities. These materials offer teachers an excellent avenue to incorporate local context and resources. Nonetheless, it is crucial to designate specific time slots for these activities, factoring in the overall teaching duration and schedule. For instance, there's an instance where a single day's curriculum incorporates over 15 DIY materials.



Fig: Toys woven out of *sabai* and other types of grass used as traditional toys in Assam

**Images for representative purposes only*

Total number of domains to be covered daily

5

Average number of TLMs to be prepared for one activity

3

Total number of TLMs to be prepared

15

#3 Teaching materials could benefit from further linkages, customisation and contextualisation as per the curriculum

Storybooks are crucial teaching and learning material in the early years. Big books, wordless picture books, and picture storybooks aligned to the curriculum themes and concepts are a great way for teachers to introduce and reinforce new ideas and vocabulary. **While**

some kits recommended storybooks, the list of books is not customised for the early years nor are they the same as the stories in the curriculum content.

In cases where student workbooks exist, the content is often not clearly linked to the curriculum activities and handbook. Additionally, visuals in most workbooks are not uniform and consistent in terms of size, style, and more importantly in terms of representation of the context.

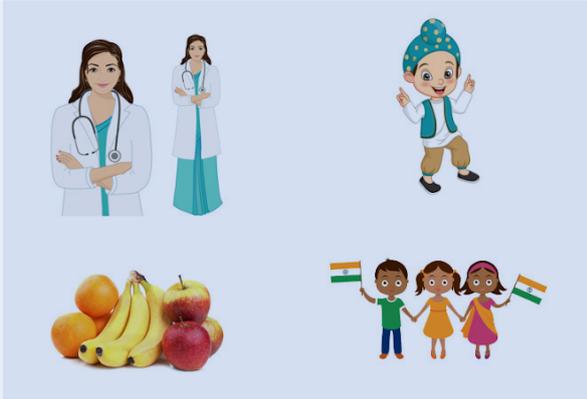
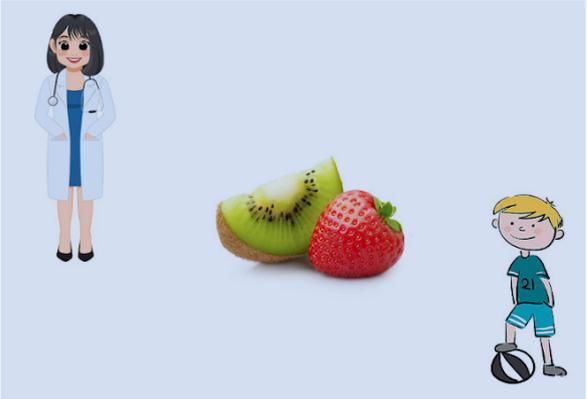
Visuals relevant to context	Visuals not relevant to context
	
<p>Images that are relatable based on the experiences of the children, represent evolving gender norms and other social constructs and pictures of children in which they can see themselves</p>	<p>Images drawn from external contexts - children who are going to use the curriculum cannot connect or relate to their own experiences</p>

Fig: Representation of visuals in student curriculum

Teaching and Learning Resources: The Ideal Curriculum

The use of concrete manipulatives and materials in the teaching and learning process is critical in the early years. These materials cater to the children's inherent need to learn by touch and play. It further facilitates the development of language as children have limited vocabulary and visual aids have proven their impact in accelerating the development of language. Teachers also express that the classrooms become more joyful for children when adequate teaching-learning materials are available. **It is critical to keep in mind that all TLMs must be completely aligned with the pedagogy.** Below is a brief note on these components to ensure they are suitable for development in the early years:

- Preschool Education Kit:** Materials in this kit must cater to development across all domains, be safe⁵⁷, contextually relevant, and easy to access. For example, flashcards are a resource that caters specifically to language development and for them to be contextually relevant, we must make sure the children of a given state can connect with the images and script.

While curating the list of materials, it is important to add those materials that are age-appropriate as well as contextual.⁵⁸

- **Storybooks:** Picture books with contextually relevant stories in the appropriate vernacular language is essential for children’s language development and key to building important pre-reading skills. The curriculum should recommend a collection of stories that align with the topics and themes being taught and ensure that these books are available to children in the classroom via structures like learning stations/library pockets/shelves at a height where they can easily access them.
- A successful curriculum finds a **balance between locally-sourced, do-it-yourself materials and prescribed materials**

from a **Preschool Education Kit**. This ensures that there is less pressure on the teacher to create all the resources, but also leaves room for them to ensure innovative, contextual TLMs are present.

- **Resources for parents and caregivers:** Including resources and structures that enable the teachers in building parent awareness and involving them in learning is highly recommended⁶⁰. For example, including do-at-home worksheets or ideas for activities aligned to the early learning outcomes can enhance the quality of the home environment and also build positive parent-teacher relationships.

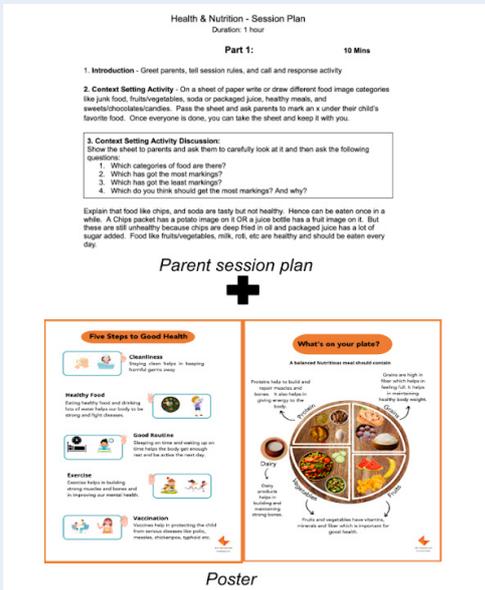
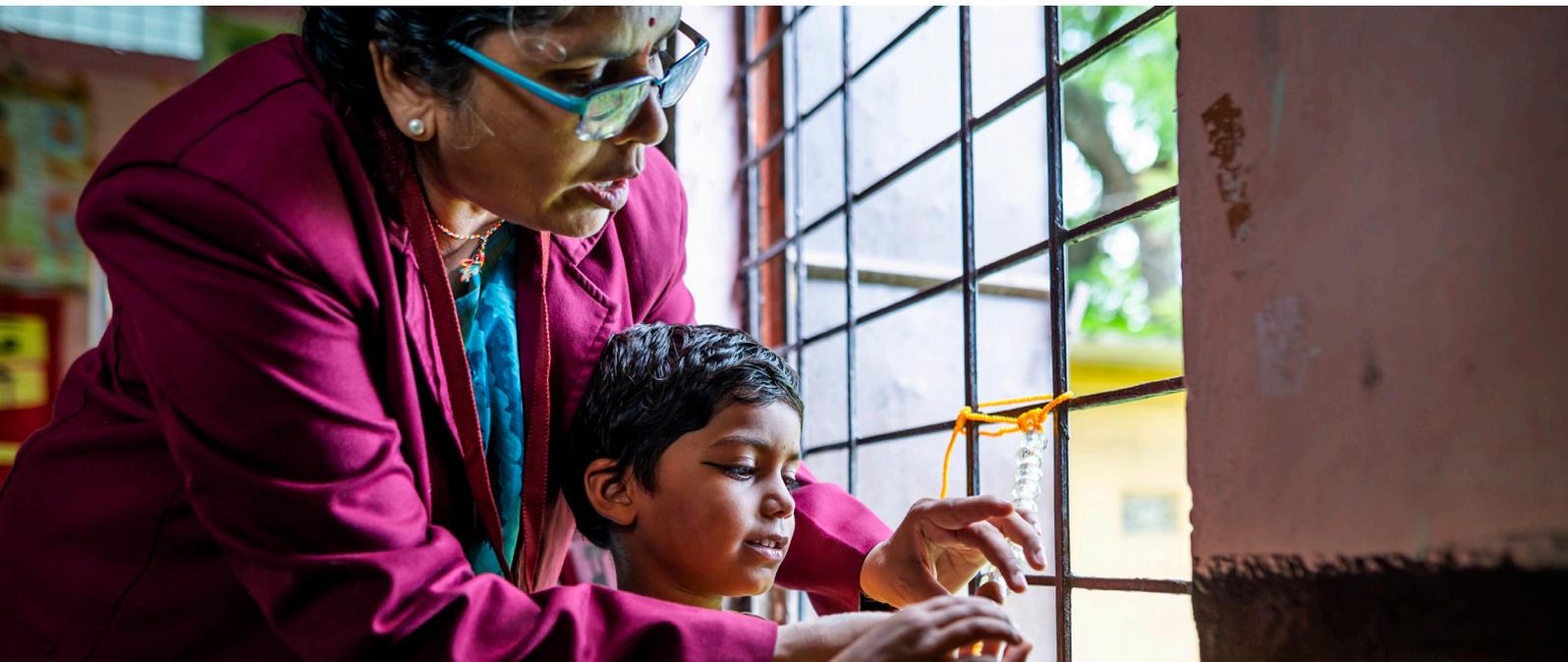
Sample Parent Engagement Resources	
In Anganwadi or School	At Home
 <p>Session plan and poster for teacher to conduct session plan at school</p>	 <p>Do-at-home resources like practice worksheets in the home language</p>

Fig: Sample parent engagement resources of an ideal curriculum



Insights on Ease of Use

In this section, we will explore how effectively a curriculum guides the teacher to apply the pedagogy and use the teaching and learning resources provided. Every curriculum that was analysed included a guidebook or teacher handbook that outlined the pedagogy, a plan for teachers to follow and relevant activities. Some common trends observed in the guidebooks that were evaluated are:



#1 Non-teaching activities should be taken into consideration while calculating recommended daily instructional time

Eight out of nine curricula provided a weekly or daily routine which is essential for effective classroom execution. However, the **duration recommended did not account for essential breaks like water, meals, nap-time and bathroom breaks**. Due to this, the likelihood that a teacher manages to execute the expected routine is low. For example, a daily routine adds up to a total of 3.5 hours of instructional time which includes playtime, learning activities, storytime, etc. Other than a slot for lunch, time for transition between classes and bathroom breaks are not taken into account. These non-teaching activities often add up to more than 60-80 minutes and therefore the teacher is unable to complete the routine unless children are in the Anganwadi for over five hours a day.

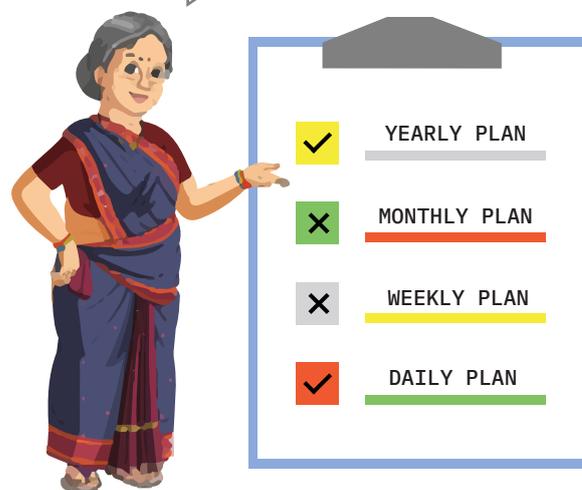
#2 Teachers could be provided with more support and structures for effective daily planning and differentiated instruction

Most curricula include some structure for planning at a daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly level, but a clear progression in planning with assigned learning outcomes and topics to cover at these levels was found to be missing in most of these curriculum designs. Without detailed sequencing and specificity, teachers could find it confusing to decide what to teach on a given day, keep track of how much they have covered and what was remaining to cover in any given academic year. As a result, some learning objectives are likely to not receive adequate class time or be totally missed.

In most cases where additional teaching and learning resources like student workbooks, assessment cards or parental materials are provided, the teacher guide does not provide any additional instructions or references on how and when to use these; with the exception of two states which mapped worksheet page numbers to the activities mentioned in the

guide. **There is little guidance provided on differentiated instruction for mixed-age groups in the Anganwadi context.** Even in cases where scaffolded activities are mentioned, there is no guidance on when and how a teacher can execute instruction for different age groups. For example, no curriculum mentions when an Anganwadi helper can be involved in working with a defined age group to enable differentiated activities.

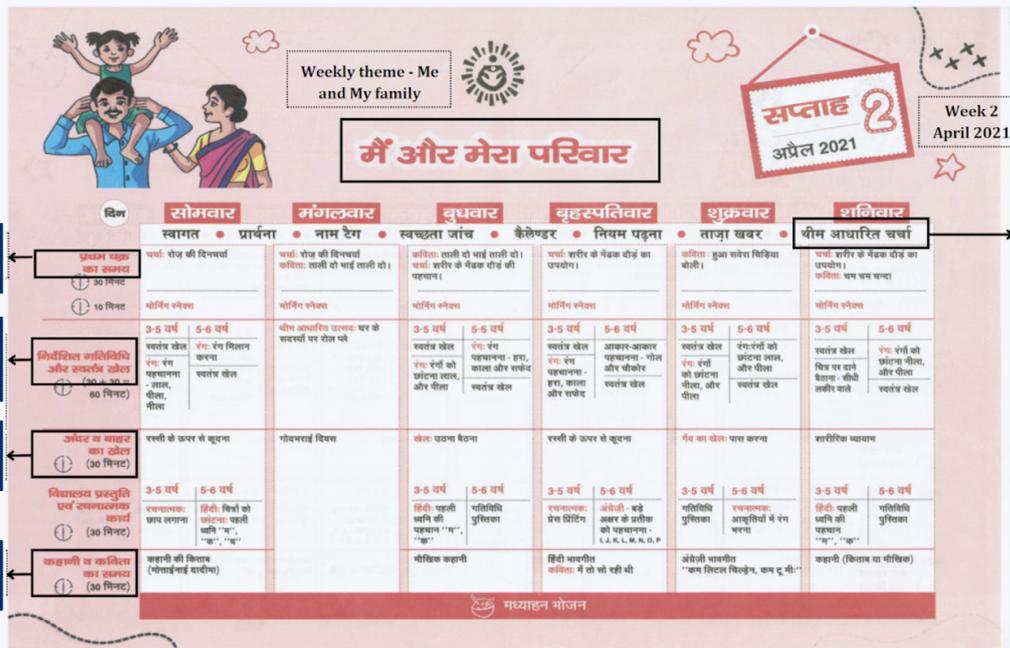
How do I break down all the yearly objectives and activities and put it in my daily plan?



Best Practices: Lesson Planning

Here is an example from the curriculum in Uttar Pradesh which breaks down activities at a weekly level which makes planning and implementation easy for teachers:

- Day-wise slots with activities are outlined to help plan the routine
- A repetitive sequence of activities makes it easy for teachers and children to follow a predictable schedule
- Age-wise grouping for select activities is clearly outlined where necessary, keeping in mind one group that works independently to ensure it is easy for a single teacher to implement
- While the teacher still needs to reference her handbook for details of the activities, this template serves as a guide in the classroom to ensure implementation of the set routine



#3 Reduction in cross-referencing for ease of use

Most curriculum activity plans included detailed instructions and cross-referenced repository of materials to support classroom delivery. However, we typically observe that this is not the case. Rather, the teacher is

expected to go through a tedious and multiple-step process of cross-referencing instructions, related materials, and workbooks or selected stories. This tends to overburden teachers. The image below demonstrates the steps a teacher has to follow to plan for one day from a particular curriculum.

Map of the Cross-Referencing Required by Teachers in One Day		
Activity 1 has no page number mentioned in the teacher manual	Activities 2 and 5 have to be located on page number 17	Activity 3 has to be located on page number 75
Activity 4 has to be located on page number 41	Creation of teaching-learning material for Activities 3 and 4 is given on page number 23	Activity 6 has to be located on page number 98
Activity 7 has to be located on page number 102	Activity 8 has to be located on page number 62	Activity 9 has to be located on page number 80

- To plan for **nine activities** recommended in the calendar
- She refers to **eight different page numbers** in the curriculum handbook
- She **cannot find the page for Activity 1** as it is not given
- She will need to **note all this down** again if she needs to refer it in class

It is difficult for the teacher to refer to the lesson plan from 2 different resources on a daily basis without any help. There is no mention of time given for the preparation of daily teaching-learning material. The 52-week calendar and teacher manual can be better linked so the teacher does not have to flip through so many pages to plan for a single day.

The more recent **Balvatika curricula shows evidence of applying simple structured pedagogy, such as codes (icons and symbols) to help teachers cross-reference across resources more easily.** This is definitely a positive step in improving the readability of the curriculum. None of the other curriculums have taken additional steps to improve comprehension by applying technology like using QR codes to link relevant audio-visual resources, etc. and there is a lot of scope for improvement in this area.

Best Practice: Material Linkage

The Punjab curriculum provides a simple daily guide for teachers to support implementation:

- Clear daily chronological sequence of activities with time slots
- Activities categorised by areas of development, such as cognitive, linguistic, SEL, etc.
- Nudges teachers on important vocabulary to use
- Provides an outline on learning corners to set up in the classroom
- The daily guide includes clear mapping to additional reference pages in the handbook to make it easy to use

Daily activities (30 minutes):

1. Welcoming students
2. Prayer recitation (if possible)
3. Four Corners: Doll house, library, drawing/painting (creative), cognitive (Material required is also mentioned)
4. Attendance

Weekly Theme - Me and My Family

Routine-Day 1

- **Linguistic Development (10 min)**
 - ◇ Teacher-student introduction (Learning Ladder pp-1)

- **Cognitive Development (30 min)**
 - ◇ Big-small
- Linguistic Development (15 min)
 - ◇ This is me (Story Book)
- **Physical and SEL Development (20 min)**
 - ◇ Jumping (see next page)
- **Creative Development (20 min)**
 - ◇ Model clay to form balls
- **Dancing and Singing**
 - ◇ Lullaby (Learning Ladder pp-3)

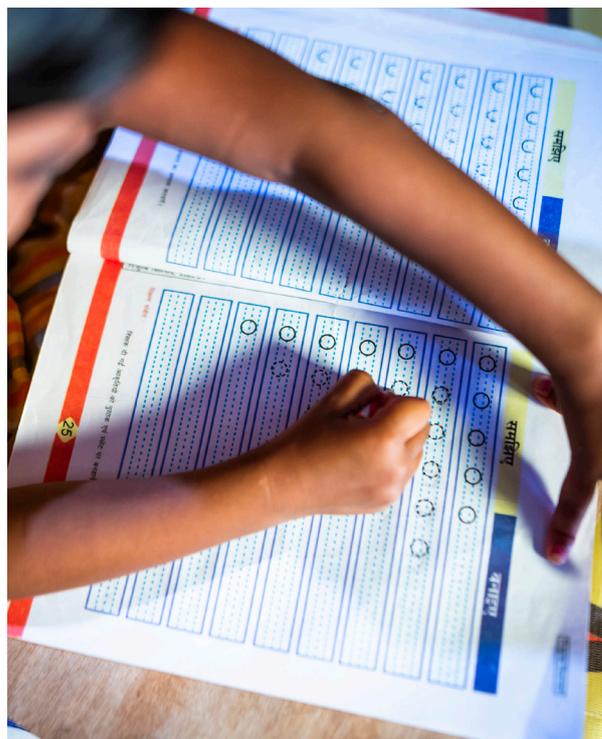
Note: Teacher should start all activities herself. Words/Sentences (to be used wherever possible throughout the week) - Good Morning, Bye-Bye, Nose, Ear, Lip, Tongue. What is your name?

Ease of Use: The Ideal Curriculum

The success of any curriculum lies in achieving the implementation mandate.

India faces a shortage of early educators who can meet the learning needs of children in Anganwadis⁶¹. As they embark on a journey towards bridging this gap and training teachers, the scale at which this needs to be addressed poses significant challenges to ensuring quality implementation of developmentally appropriate practices in the classroom.

To ensure that the classroom quality is maintained and children get the optimal learning experiences, a structured guide/handbook for teachers that outlines the pedagogy and activities in a clear and step-wise manner forms the cornerstone of a good state curriculum. There is ample evidence⁶² that providing teachers with detailed and well-structured learning plans which include cross-



referenced and easily accessible learning resources and materials improves the quality of implementation in the classroom. An ideal teacher guide should have:

From	To	Duration	Activity
Morning Routine/Free Play/Corners Time			
09:30	10:15	45 minutes	Circle time/Conversation
10:15	10:30	15 minutes	Snack Break
10:30	10:45	15 minutes	Rhyme/Song/Music/Movement
11:45	11:45	1 hour	Concept Time/Pre-numeracy
11:45	12:15	30 minutes	Arts/Craft/Free Play
12:15	13:00	45 minutes	Corners Time
13:00	13:45	45 minutes	Lunch Break (ages 3-4 go home)
13:45	14:30	45 minutes	Emergent Literacy/Story Time
14:30	15:00	30 minutes	Outdoor Play and Wind Up

- **A detailed hourly and day-wise routine:** All learning outcomes and activities outlined in the handbook- must be mapped on an hourly basis to ensure its effective implementation in the classroom. It is often the case that a curriculum outlines a large number of holistic activities in its approach but the daily time table only makes space for less than half of this. This routine should also be formulated, taking into account the actual instructional time feasible within the specific setting for which the curriculum is designed. In the absence of a granular time-based plan, the teacher could be

overwhelmed by the pressure to complete too much in too little time and as a result miss focusing on key learning outcomes. **The success or failure in the implementation of a curriculum at the classroom level heavily relies on the effectiveness of the daily routine. The image above is a routine recommendation from National Curriculum Framework, 2022 and is appropriate for classrooms with children aged between 3-6 years. The routine is carefully planned to ensure all domains of development have an equal split of time and attention**

COOKING SET ★

Various steel and plastic materials used in the kitchen







Learn About

- Language through role play
- Counting
- Playing and sharing in groups

Group Size
1-2 children

Play Activities

- Free Play: Let children pretend-play in groups using the kitchen set.
- Object names: Children can take turns saying what the object is called in their house to develop an appreciation for different languages and cultures.
- Vocabulary: Children can also learn the word used for each object and count them etc.

Conversation

What do you do with this? Where have you seen it being used? Who uses this? What is it called in your house?



7 

- Clear mapping to all curricular resources: The handbook must bring together all the available curriculum resources like TLMs, workbooks, and assessment cards, and guide the teacher on how and when to use them. Innovative pictographic codes, index pages, and more can be used to **cross-link the resources in a way that requires minimal cross-referencing**
- In cases where community involvement is recommended in the curriculum approach, the teacher guide must equip the teacher with the necessary knowledge (information and topics) and structures (when to conduct these spaces) for them to be able to effectively engage parents
- **Lesson plans and activity plans:** With stepwise instructions to help a teacher prepare for an activity and visualise the teacher-child interaction during that lesson

The TLM Manual offers precise instructions for teachers on material usage. Each page features a descriptive image, learning objectives for children, recommended group size, additional activity suggestions using the same material, and conversation prompts for effective engagement with children. Additionally, each material is mapped to its corresponding area of development.

Date: ___/___/___

Morning Meeting: **Time: 20 minutes**
Do attendance activity along with activity number 5 - Name card activity

NOTE: Refer to Morning meeting ideas in the annexure for the activity
EVS **Time: 30 minutes**

Objective	Materials Required	Worksheet Page Number
Children will be able to understand that they are special and that each of them has a different fingerprint.	For the worksheet: Safe water paints or natural paints from turmeric paste or beetroot paste Rhymes and Stories book	Student Workbook V1: Page 10

- Steps:**
1. Sing the rhyme from the Rhymes and Stories book.
 2. Tell children that each of them is special.
 3. Now tell children that we will do a fun activity to show how each of us has a different fingerprint.
 4. Complete the worksheet.

English **Time: 40 minutes**

Objective	Materials Required	Worksheet Page Number
Children will be able to develop pre-writing skills by tracing and colouring.	Crayons	Student Workbook V1: Page 11

- Steps:**
1. Complete the worksheet.
 2. Ask children to describe the pictures in the worksheet.

Play Time **Time: 30 minutes**

Activity : Activity : Aakar parivar

Refer to the TLM Manual for the activity

Circle Time **Time: 30 minutes**

Teacher is free to decide what she wants to conduct. You can complete any missed periods/activities.

Feel free to come up with activities on your own.

Math **Time: 30 - 40 minutes**

Objective	Materials Required	Worksheet Page Number	Video of Classroom Activity
Children will be able to match shapes - circle and squares.	Aakar parivar or playful shapes Rangometry pieces	Student Workbook V1: Page 12	Square Sorting Activity 

- Steps:**
1. Keep all the Aakar parivar pieces or playful shapes together. Call each child to pick a circle shape.
 2. Now ask children to open their worksheets and colour only the circle shapes.
 3. Divide the class into groups, give each group some Rangometry pieces. Ask children to pick only the Rangometry pieces that are squares in the video - squares sorting activity.
 4. Now ask children to open their worksheets and colour only the square shapes.

Stories and Rhymes **Time: 20 minutes**
Pick the rhyme "Lam special" from the stories and rhymes book. Teacher and children to sing the rhyme together with actions.

Homework	Practice Book
Math	Page 8
English	Page 7
EVS	Page 9

ACTIVITY	YES	NO
Morning Meeting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
EVS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
English	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Play Time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Circle Time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Math	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stories and Rhymes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The daily lesson plan offers comprehensive instructions for teachers to conduct various activities. It includes clear steps, allocated time, objectives, required materials, worksheet mapping, and videos of classroom activities. Additionally, the plan incorporates circle time, playtime, stories, and rhymes. At the end of each day, there is a designated section for teachers to mark completed tasks with a tick and indicate what remains unfinished.

Recommendations and Way Forward

The majority of states have crafted curricula founded on understanding the child as a whole. Given below are recommendations and resources to enhance these curricula, grounded in the identified trends.

At a broad level, we recommend that states contemplating curriculum revisions embark on a targeted review process. Rather than undertaking a complete revision, this approach prioritises targeted enhancements, which preserve the core essence of the current curriculum while focussing on

targeted improvements in specific areas. A reference checklist for this review process is available in the Annexure. The same can be contextualised for states/regions for reviews. Once the priority areas are defined, some suggestions for undertaking the curriculum design process are also provided in the section below.

Recommendation	Suggested Actions	Reference Resource
Pedagogy		
Review and revise the approach to language development in the early years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider NCF outcomes and grade 1 expectations to redefine curriculum outcomes for language Focus on listening and speaking activities for L1 and L2 Only introduce one script [L1] Adopt tested methods for introducing English as a second language 	Total Physical Response is a method that has been applied effectively ⁶³ to introduce English in non-English speaking countries. Some curricula include weekly TPR activities for English
Early numeracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revise approach to fit in pre-math activities and focus more on understanding numbers through counting and quantities Ensure major focus is on counting quantities and working with numbers in terms of time and number of activities 	Refer NCF: Chapter 4 [Pg 117-122] for understanding in detail how to teach mathematics
Ensure adequate time for play everyday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure the daily routine has a minimum of 60 minutes per day for play Incorporate learning corners/stations as a part of routine to ensure access to play materials Include a variety of play as recommended in NCF - Foundational Stage [Chapter 1] 	Refer NCF: Chapter 1 [Pg 38-44] for types of play
Include ongoing informal assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define a structure for informal, observation-based assessments and include it in the teacher guide/handbook Include physical record or progress card to ensure assessments are done and progress is communicated Ensure that outcomes that are assessed are the same as those defined in the curriculum approach and activities 	Refer NCF: Chapter 6 [Pg 169-184] for more information on assessments
Ensure outcomes for social and emotional development	<p>Social and Emotional Development - Learning Outcomes specific to social and emotional learning [SEL] have not been outlined in most curricula. There is also no defined slot in the routine like circle time, etc. to conduct SEL-specific activities. However, the curricula do make multiple references to teacher-child interaction in the stories and language development activities. For example, many curricula reference the importance of teachers speaking with kindness, language activities emphasise sharing and naming feelings, sharing likes and dislikes, talking about good behaviour and sharing with others. It can be inferred that the necessary SEL skills will be developed if the activities are conducted as per these recommendations⁶⁴ in the curriculum.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure curriculum activities cover SEL outcomes Ensure that the curriculum activities and TLMs have equitable representations of society in terms of gender and other criteria Include module or daily slot in routine to focus on positive learning habits for children ages 5+ to enable the transition to school 	Refer to NCF: Chapter 2 [Pg 60 and 63] for a list of outcomes for SEL and Positive Learning Habits For instance, see the Quality Circle Time approach by Jenny Mosley

Recommendation	Suggested Actions	Reference Resource
Define an approach for differentiated instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define a scaffolded teaching approach for children below age 4 [3 hours per day] and above [4.5 hours per day] Include responsibilities for additional resource persons [example: Anganwadi Helper] towards this Define classroom arrangement and make a recommendation on TPR [Teacher-Pupil Ratio] to accommodate group-wise instruction 	-
Include community engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curriculum can provide a guide on structures and topics for parental sessions An additional set of resources/posters using local context can be made available in print format to enable the teacher in facilitating these sessions A list of weekly activities, worksheets or even digital video resources can be made available for teachers to share with parents 	-
Teaching-Learning Materials and Ease of Use		
Define a Preschool Education Kit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the existing list of materials to ensure they are age-appropriate and cover all areas of development A balance must be maintained between materials used to guide learning and materials used for free play Ensure the Kit has a corresponding manual for the teacher 	For PSE Kit List refer to section 5.5 of the UNICEF Guidelines
Revise Student workbooks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Verify that the learning outcomes in the book are progressing in the same order as the recommended curriculum activities Make sure that the curriculum maps out which worksheets to complete and when so that it aids children in the practice of a given concept Repeated letter/number tracing and writing in notebooks is not recommended in the early years 	For instance, see student workbooks from Akshara Foundation and NIMHANS
Digitise all resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organise all curriculum resources [books, assessments, videos, list of PSE Kit materials, etc.] age-wise to ensure ease of access for the teacher Create additional interactive video content on a digital platform as references for teachers 	It is now possible for your state to create a Jaadui Pitaara (repository) on the Diksha Platform to ensure all your curriculum resources are available in digital format too

Recommendation	Suggested Actions	Reference Resource
Ensure a practical daily routine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake an internal survey to clearly arrive at what ECE instructional time is possible to achieve in the Anganwadi daily, and compare it with the NCF and curriculum recommendations Target an instructional time of at least 50 hours per month. Ensure that the routine is revised accordingly and also recommend the Anganwadi timings clearly for the whole year (for instance, in case there are any seasonal changes in timings) 	-
Provide calendars for easy planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review if a curriculum break-up is available on a yearly, monthly, weekly and daily levels. Ensure that the gaps are filled and a printable format is available for these Linking all resources such as the workbook page numbers, TLM manual pages, and assessment frequencies into the monthly/weekly calendars will also help minimise cross-referencing for teachers 	-
Minimise cross-referencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include icons and symbols to make it easy for teachers to cross-reference Digital repositories can be used where one section can be easily linked to another so teachers can refer to different sections with the click of a button 	<p>You can Energise your curriculum guidebooks and monthly calendars by putting them up on the Diksha Platform. This way you can link different sections to each other easily so teachers can access linked sections with just a click</p>



Chapter 4:

Insights from Primary Research

Highlights

- » In line with national trends, ECE classrooms have experienced a higher enrolment of children in the age group of 3-4 years compared to the older age brackets. The attendance rate for children in age groups 3-4, 4-5 and 5-6 years is 50% among the enrolled children.
- » More than half of the classrooms have displayed relevant print-rich materials at the child's eye level. The classrooms are spacious and allow mobility and interaction. However, outdoor play areas are less commonly available, especially in standalone Anganwadis.
- » In addition to physical infrastructure, government-provided teaching-learning materials, including play materials, posters, charts, and student workbooks are commonly found in ECE classrooms, particularly in schools with Pre-Primary Sections.
- » Classroom teaching based on daily or weekly planning is often not put into practice by teachers, despite it being prescribed in state curriculums.
- » Although the state curricula recommend a daily teaching time for ECE ranging from 3-4 hours, this allocated time is not adhered to. During our two-hour classroom observations, we noted an average instructional time of 35 minutes, with an average time of 13 minutes per activity. Consequently, most classroom practices did not give sufficient time to ECE for students to learn effectively.
- » The most commonly observed activities during classroom ECE sessions are pre-literacy, pre-numeracy, and cognitive activities. The findings emphasise the critical need for integrating sound pedagogy, including teaching in small groups and using play, and strengthening the planning and classroom execution of activities to foster holistic and age-appropriate development.
- » Monitoring efforts typically focus on tracking attendance and providing mid-day meals. Teachers' classroom practices and student learning are neither monitored nor discussed in review meetings. Additionally, teachers report that they typically do not receive ECE-centric feedback from their supervisors.

The enumerators actively observed classrooms for a duration of two hours, diligently recording detailed notes encompassing various aspects such as physical space, teaching-learning processes, classroom management, availability of materials, and any non-ECE activities. Subsequently, they also conducted interviews with the teachers



Student Enrollment and Attendance

In line with the national trends, ECE classrooms saw a greater enrolment of children in the age group of 3-4 years than compared to the higher age brackets. Half of the enrolled children were present in the classrooms, and no differences in attendance trends were seen across the different age groups

On an average, **only 50% of the enrolled students⁶⁵ were present during the classroom observation.**

Classroom

This section focuses on three critical aspects of an ECE classroom: student attendance, physical space and arrangement, and the availability of materials.

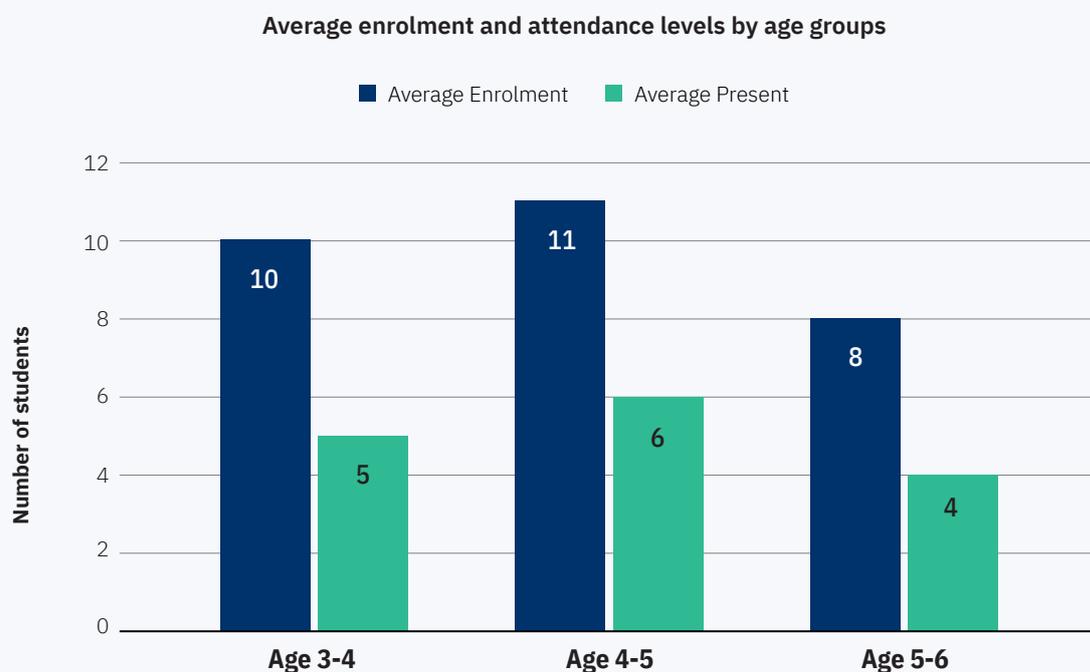


Table: Average enrolment and attendance by age groups during observation.

There were more 3-4-year-olds (32%) than 5-6-year-olds enrolled, with the latter representing only 25% of the total students observed. The ASER Centre's Annual Status of Education Report 2022 report shows that a significant proportion of 5-6-year-olds (32.3%) are enrolled in primary schools instead of pre-primary schools; this is earlier than the recommended age of 6 years for school enrollment.

In Chapter 1, we discussed that enrolment trends show that while parents are willing to send their 3 and 4-year-olds to Anganwadi centres, the preference changes as children turn 5. The findings from classroom observation reassert that delivering ECE through two different ministries leads to confusion in enrolment patterns, and parents choose to either enrol their 5-year-olds in private pre-primary or grade 1 in a primary school.



Physical Space and Arrangement

ECE classrooms generally had sufficient 'hardware' for learning, including ample space for mobility and interaction. More than half of these classrooms displayed relevant print-rich materials at a child's eye level. However, the presence of outdoor play areas was less common, especially in standalone and co-located Anganwadis

Classroom space

Observations found that 80% of the classrooms had a dedicated space for early childhood education, ensuring students' and teachers' comfort and mobility. Notably, government schools with pre-primary sections were likely to share classroom space with other classes than Anganwadis. This situation could be

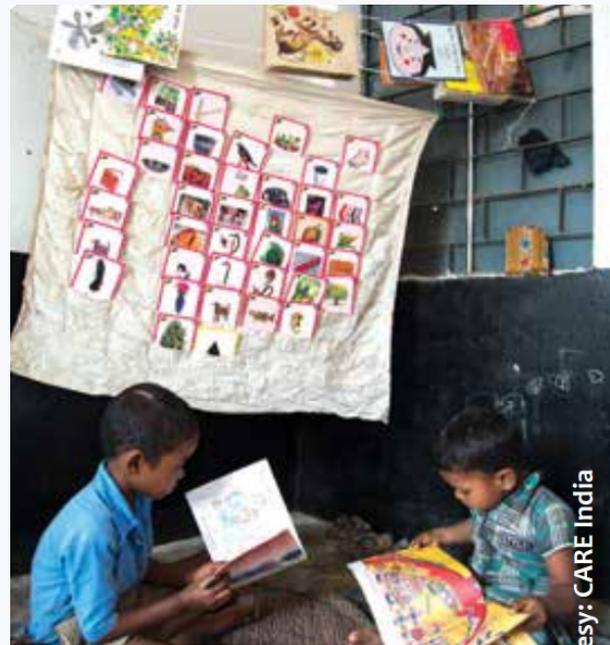
attributed to a need for dedicated teachers for Balvatika sections and the tendency of teachers to allocate pre-primary sections in addition to other grades and teach all age groups together. Only a tiny percentage (around 13%) of co-located Anganwadis had to share a classroom with a different grade. Observers noted that a few of the shared-space classrooms had insufficient TLMs. In such cases, observers noticed that teacher-student interactions became more sporadic and inconsistent in shared classrooms than in dedicated classrooms.



Print-rich environment

In a print-rich classroom, diverse materials actively aid students in developing early literacy skills. An effective print-rich environment therefore depends not just on the quantity of print materials but also on the teacher's capacity to foster quality interactions and activities using these materials. Displayed print materials can engage children in enhancing their oral language skills, improving listening comprehension, making connections to personal experiences and the world around them, practising reading aloud, and inspiring drawing and writing.⁶⁶

A good print-rich environment can look like the one below:



Pic: Print-rich classroom with letter cards, picture cards, and age-appropriate story books being used by students, arranged at eye level for ease of use. Reference: Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education, UNICEF

The table below summarises the findings from these observations about the availability of print-rich materials.

Print-Rich Material in Classrooms	
Category	% of classrooms ⁶⁷
There is no textual or print material available in the classroom except student workbooks	13.68%
Textual and print material is available but not meaningful or not such that students can engage actively	14.62%
Textual. The print material which is relevant and of interest to students' learning is available. Still, it is not accessible either because it is placed too high for students to see or engage with or, material is worn out/torn, or colour has faded.	14.15%
Textual and print material is available at the child's eye level, which is meaningful and of interest to students and is used to initiate them into learning and reading	55.19%
Total	97.64%

Table: Quality of textual and print material observed in classrooms

In 55% of classrooms, meaningful textual and print materials were within the child's reach. Conversely, 28% of the observed classrooms lacked appropriate print materials, including charts, health-

related posters, and government posters. Interestingly, no notable difference was observed between Anganwadis and PPS in this regard.

Outdoor play area

Outdoor play areas offer children essential physical activity and exploration opportunities, both critical elements in early childhood development. State curricula, in our analysis, outline indoor and outdoor play activities.

Surprisingly, only 69% of observed classrooms featured an outdoor play area. Among the pre-primary sections associated with schools, approximately 90% had access to an outdoor play area, while only 66% of Anganwadis possessed such a facility. Notably, 45% of standalone Anganwadis didn't have an outdoor play area. This was likely due to their location within rented rooms or panchayat offices.



Outdoor play area availability in classrooms

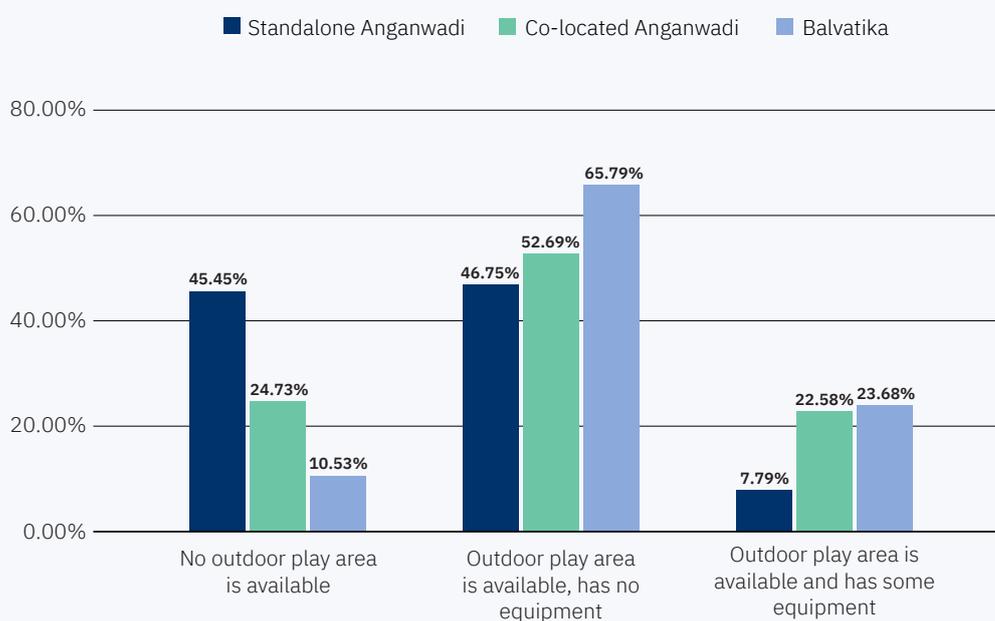


Fig: Outdoor Play is available across classroom types, but less so in standalone Anganwadis.



Availability of Teaching-Learning Materials

ECE classrooms, particularly in schools with pre-primary sections, commonly have government-provided teaching-learning materials, including play materials, posters, charts and student workbooks, in addition to physical infrastructure

The availability of relevant and coherent TLMs is crucial to delivering a practical lesson. TLMs ensure that teachers and students have the correct tools to progress on their learning journey. Teacher materials typically include a teacher guide, lesson plans, activity calendars, assessment cards and collateral to be shared with students such as story books, posters, picture/letter/number cards,

charts, etc. Student materials typically include workbooks/worksheets, play materials like blocks, wooden/plastic alphabet, stackable ring towers, beads, puzzles, and materials for imaginative play like gardening tools, doctor's sets, etc. It is necessary to have adequate TLMs in the classroom that support growth in all five developmental domains and ensure a balance of free and guided play activities, which is essential for a good quality ECE programme.

As discussed earlier, the analysis of state curricula found that most states' curriculum package includes a government-provided PSE kit with a set of curated materials and toys, worksheets or a workbook for children, and some storybooks as part of their TLMs. The classroom observations explored whether the provisioned teacher and student materials were indeed available in the classrooms⁶⁸. The table below summarises the findings.

TLM Available in Classrooms			
	TLM	Definition/Examples	% of classrooms
Student Materials	ECE Material, including preschool kit (provided in many Anganwadis)	Play materials available for children in the classroom include materials that can be used by the teacher with the whole group, such as story books or picture cards	81.80%
	Student Workbook	An individual student workbook includes activities for pre-literacy, pre-numeracy, colouring, tracing objects, etc.	61.60%
	Learning Stations	Dedicated spaces where young students can engage in focused, practical learning as outlined in NCF and state-specific teacher guides	45.40%
	Individual Play Materials	For example, stacking ring towers, puzzles, building blocks, and beads	32.80%

TLM Available in Classrooms			
TLM	Definition/Examples	% of classrooms	
Teacher Materials	Posters on the wall	Relevant and meaningful posters or charts, including alphabet/fruit/vegetable/numbers charts and student work being displayed	76.30%
	Teacher Guide	A teacher manual outlining the process of conducting an activity. Sometimes, it may also have a rationale for conducting a particular training and children's learning outcomes and objectives.	55.60%
	Activity Calendar	A calendar outlining the lesson plan to be followed on a particular day/week/month, age-appropriate activities, and highlighting the materials to be used	42.40%
	Informal Assessment Cards	A guide to assess the children's developmental progress in all ECE domains. These are mainly implemented and marked through teacher observation at varying frequencies.	14.10%

Table: TLMs available in classrooms during the observation

The most commonly found materials in classrooms included ECE play materials, posters to create a print-rich environment and student workbooks. However, it was noted that only a limited number of classrooms provided individual play materials (32.8%) and learning stations for children (45.4%), which are crucial for fostering free play and exploration. Additionally, informal assessment cards, facilitating the tracking of a child's developmental progress, appeared to be the least available (14.1%).

Further analysis showed that on average, pre-primary sections in government primary schools had more materials available than in Anganwadis. 97% of PPS classrooms had at least one or more materials available; the corresponding figure for Anganwadis was 76% for co-located Anganwadis and 73.5% for standalone Anganwadis.⁶⁹

In classrooms where teachers expressed concerns about inadequate materials, a standard approach to address this issue was to utilise the available materials primarily in whole-group settings through activities such as show-and-tell. Consequently, the instruction became predominantly teacher-led, reducing opportunities for students to engage with and practice using the materials actively.

Teachers

This section presents insights gathered from interviews with teachers, monitoring officials and ECE nodal officers, and sheds light on ECE teachers' responsibilities, training experiences and knowledge levels

Every ECE teacher is responsible for laying the foundation for a child's holistic development. The Anganwadi becomes the child's first structured learning experience, and an ECE teacher plays a vital role in building cognitive, physical, motor, social-emotional, creative, pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills. They also act as community mobilisers, collaborating with families to ensure the child's overall development across several aspects such as health, nutrition and sanitation.⁷⁰



Expectations from the teacher

AWTs bear a substantial workload within ICDS categories, encompassing both teaching and non-teaching responsibilities. They play a vital role in primary health, nutrition and prenatal care, all the while delivering engaging classroom instruction to children of varying ages and learning levels

The interviews conducted with monitoring cadres and ECE nodal officers across states reaffirmed our desk review findings that ECE teachers are expected to fulfill various

responsibilities. The expectations are categorised as being either ECE-related or non-ECE-related:

ECE activities

The ECE teacher has a challenging classroom composition, with children of multiple age groups- 3-4, 4-5 and 5-6 years - entrusted in her care. Apart from the general classroom management skills that teachers must possess, they must also transact the curriculum based on her students' differing age groups/levels. Their roles and responsibilities include delivering the curriculum according to the ongoing programme (which could consist of following a particular academic calendar and lesson plans) and conducting specific activities and assessments.

Nodal ECE officers and other monitoring officials (such as the Supervisor, CDPO, Academic Resource Person, ARP/Block Resource Coordinator, BRC cadre) highlighted the primary responsibility of the ECE teacher as the creation of a favourable learning environment through the effective use of TLMs and engaging activities. Nodal officers and supervisors also emphasised the importance of following the latest curriculum guidelines. However, findings from curriculum analysis indicate that teachers may struggle to fulfil these as the curriculum package in most states is not designed for ease of usage. The curricula offer limited guidance on differentiated instruction for mixed-age groups. Tasks such as creating materials, using workbooks, and reading stories often require extensive cross-referencing (of materials such as teacher guides, play materials, storybooks, and usage of learning stations), which may be difficult. Furthermore, the duration recommended for the class does not consider essential breaks (such as meals and nap-time), making it difficult for teachers to follow the expected routine.

Non-ECE activities

In addition to their ECE responsibilities, teachers are also entrusted with non-ECE responsibilities that include maintaining records, conducting home visits and keeping track of the health and nutrition of children. They have a pivotal role in ensuring that essential support, such as mid-day meals and rations for children and pregnant women, reaches those who need it the most.

In an interview, a teacher highlighted:

Next week, we have elections. Again, the list of AWTs is sent, and we have duties at several polling booths. What are we supposed to do? What if I meet with some casualty? Who will pay for my medical expenses? The government has given us no insurance.

Many other teachers also highlighted their frustrations with engaging in non-ECE-related activities, taking away from their time in the classroom.

Community engagement

Pre-primary teachers are expected to engage with the community by conducting parent-teacher meetings and enrolment drives. In addition, through home visits, AWTs participate in community engagement activities with pregnant women and adolescent girls.

Through interviews with monitoring officials, it was found that parent-teacher meetings (PTMs) and Bal Mela activities are primary avenues for communication and interaction between teachers and parents. The interviews revealed



varying levels of community engagement among ECE teachers. Over 57%⁷¹ teachers reported engaging in community activities every month. Additionally, 19% of teachers reported conducting these activities every week, indicating a higher level of engagement. However, it was found that 10% of teachers engage in community activities once every three months.

During an interview, a teacher highlighted the nature of home visits:

We do home visits almost every day. We tell the parents about their child's progress, and if the child is below three years, we ask them to give him milk; for 3-5 years, we discuss what should be given in the meals and how they should care about their child's hygiene. We also tell the parents about their child's learning and grasping abilities and how they should send them to school. We also educate them about vaccines and how the child should get two hours of daily rest.



Teacher Training

Even with the majority of teachers having received prior training in curriculum execution and the incorporation of play and teaching-learning materials (TLMs) in their classrooms, there is an opportunity for improving the regularity of ECE training.

The teacher interviews revealed that a significant proportion of teachers (97%) had received ECE-related training at some point.

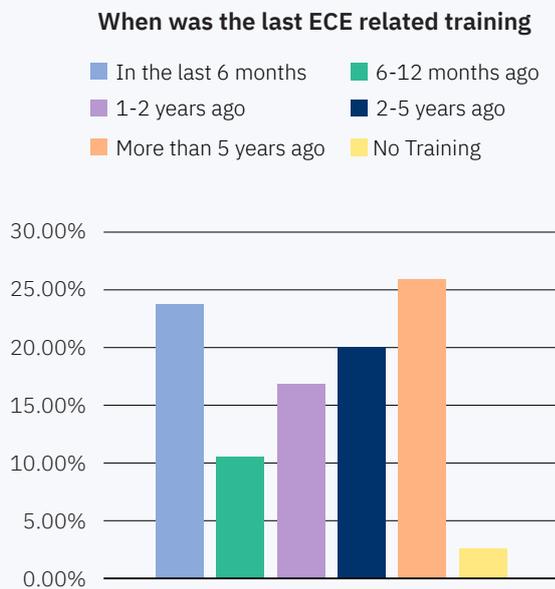


Fig: Most teachers reported receiving a training in the last six months

However, the recency of training was a concern, as only 34% had undergone training within the past year. A considerable proportion (46%) reported that their most recent ECE training was over two years ago. This highlights the need for more frequent and up-to-date training opportunities to equip teachers with the latest early childhood education knowledge and practices.

As reported by them in the interviews, the training provided to teachers primarily focused on ECE-related topics, including conducting activities, incorporating play-based methods, utilising TLMs and implementing the curriculum. **However, there was some ambiguity regarding what teachers considered ECE-related training. Some teachers mentioned receiving training on topics like using the poshan tracker, hygiene, and nutrition, which they viewed as part of their ECE-related training, indicating that there may not be a precise categorisation of responsibilities between ECE and non-ECE tasks by the AWTs.**

The presence of mixed-age groups in an Anganwadi classroom brings attention to the need for differentiated instruction. However, it was found that there is a **lack of training explicitly provided for addressing the challenges posed by mixed-age groups in the Anganwadi classrooms.** However, this may be by design, as the activity may be based on curriculum, and most curricula do not address or include differentiated instruction for multi-age classrooms.

Teachers rarely mentioned classroom management skills when asked what they learned in training. Despite the reported lack of formal training on these aspects, it is noteworthy that most teachers are still able to effectively manage their classrooms on parameters of positive teacher-student interaction (82%), good classroom discipline practices (88%), and maintaining a positive environment (75%). Teachers may need **additional support and training in classroom management topics such as time management, classroom organisation, responsive instruction and lesson planning.**



ECE Knowledge and Lesson Planning

This section highlights insights from teacher interviews on their awareness of quality ECE, their knowledge of the curriculum, their ability to navigate through the TLMs present in the classrooms, and their skill of lesson planning and carrying out activities as planned

Curriculum transaction and lesson planning

Despite the state curricula specifying daily or weekly plans, teachers generally did not implement classroom teaching accordingly. Only half of the teachers employed a daily schedule. Those who used a daily activity plan were able to effectively manage their classrooms, potentially indicating the benefits of activity planning in classroom management

An effective transaction of any curriculum is facilitated through specific structures and tools. First, an annual plan is broken into units, weeks and daily lesson plans. To implement the plan, a teacher must be aware of this learning progression and have access to relevant tools, such as lesson plans, worksheets and TLMs, to effectively implement the curriculum in their classrooms.

The curriculum analysis showed that eight out of nine ECE curricula provided a weekly or daily routine. Teachers, however, demonstrated varying levels of knowledge and planning in ECE. **Only 65.7% of teachers could show the curriculum for the month and just 50% had a concrete daily plan for activities.** For

the activities observed in the classroom, it was found that teachers may start their day with a lesson plan, although as the activities progressed, their usage of the lesson plan reduced. This data suggests that while teachers may initially refer to the lesson plan, they may not consistently follow it throughout the day, raising concerns about instructional continuity and effectiveness.

Activities such as drawing and colouring (with 87% not following a lesson plan), **physical development activities** (close to 70%), and **poem recital** (50%) were preferred by the teacher when there was no structured plan in place.

The ability to plan and deliver a scheduled

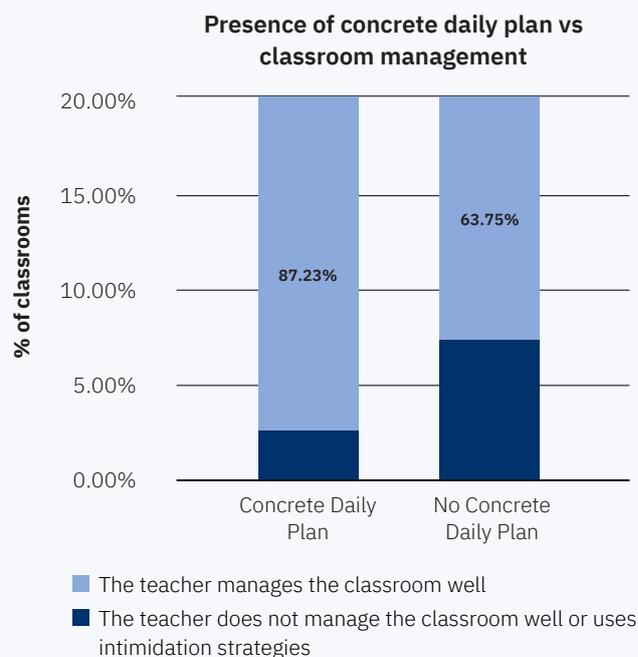


Fig: Teachers who had a concrete lesson plan for the day were observed to be better at managing their classrooms

lesson was also observed to affect the teacher's ability to manage classrooms in terms of a positive environment. **87% of the teachers who reported having a concrete plan for the day were observed to effectively manage their classrooms, as opposed to just 64% of teachers who did not plan for the day.**

Best Practices: Lesson Planning

To streamline classroom startup and reduce time, ECE teachers in Punjab receive a daily slide on their phones outlining the day's plan based on the activity calendar. As reported by teachers, this has significantly reduced the requirement for classroom startup, allowing teachers to commence their instructional activities swiftly. By receiving a daily slide on their phones, teachers have immediate access to a comprehensive plan for the day, including separate slides for Lower Kindergarten (LKG) and Upper Kindergarten (UKG).

Teachers can quickly familiarise themselves with the planned activities, ensuring smooth transitions between lessons and minimising disruptions. Moreover, clear and readily available lesson plans empowers teachers to confidently deliver the curriculum, as they possess a comprehensive understanding of the objectives, content, and sequencing of activities.



Notably, it was found that a higher percentage of teachers in Punjab (70%) knew the lesson plan and activities to be done in the day versus 51% on an average across the seven states.

Perception of 'good' early learning

Observers noted that most teachers considered play to be the most valuable mode of teaching and learning. These teacher perceptions were closely linked to positive classroom practices, including the utilisation of play-based methods and materials, as well as the incorporation of extended ECE activities.

72% of teachers reported that play is one of the most effective ways for students to learn. Other popular responses included learning through reciting/writing alphabets and through books.

Teacher perception on effective methods to deliver ECE

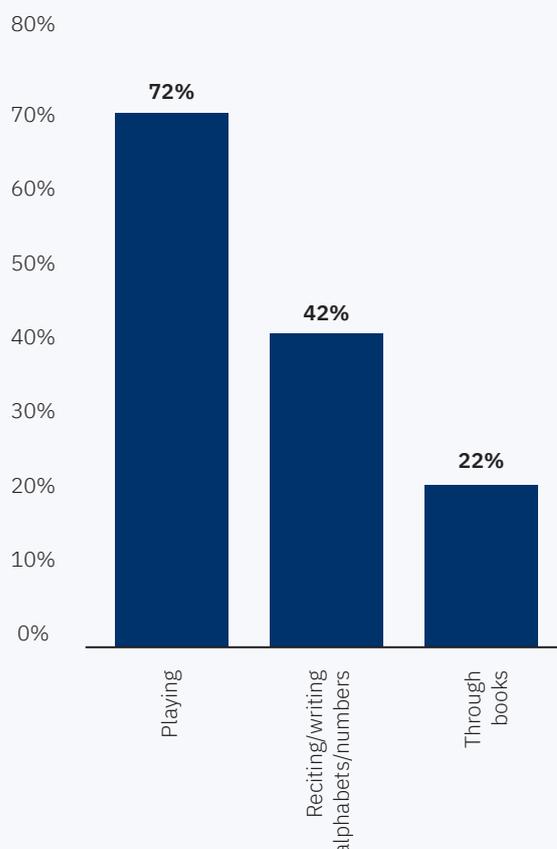


Fig: Majority of teachers believed play to be an effective way for children to learn



In classrooms where teachers prioritise play as a learning method, play materials were incorporated into a relatively higher percentage of activities (44%) compared to classrooms where play was not prioritised (33%). Teachers who reported believing in play-based pedagogy also used more play materials such as ring towers, puzzles, building blocks, and beads, and repurposed everyday objects like seeds and ropes as TLMs.

A teacher highlighted the importance of play-based learning during the qualitative interview in the following manner:

 I feel that the best method is the teacher doing actions and teaching. If we roar like a tiger, they do the same. If we show some expressions, they do the same. So, I believe action activities are the best for children to learn. Children should get involved in the teaching-learning activity. Only then will they have rapid development.

Almost half of the teachers (42%) believed that the best way for students to learn is through recitation or writing of alphabets and numbers. Interestingly, out of those teachers, a large majority (83.5%) also thought that playing is an excellent way for students to learn. This suggests that these teachers believe that children's pre-linguistic and pre-numeracy skills are most effectively developed when taught playfully. While teachers share that play is essential for learning, their definition of play needs more exploration. For example, in the above example, the teacher finds rote-based repetition as a great activity involving kids and probably includes this as 'play'.

Classroom Transactions

This section examines three key categories of classroom transactions based on a two-hour classroom observation: the activity time inside an ECE classroom and the quality and effectiveness of teaching-learning processes within that time.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the NCF identifies five developmental domains for holistic early childhood learning and growth - Physical Development, Socio-Emotional and Ethical Development, Cognitive Development, Language and Literacy Development, Aesthetic and Cultural Development, and Positive Learning Habits. Each of these gets further categorised into curricular goals and learning outcomes intended to be transacted at the classroom level. A holistic and practical transaction in an ECE classroom should include activities that target children's development in

all five domains - with adequate time spent on each, along with explicit instruction and practice time for students in all activities.



Learning time within classrooms

In practice, the recommended daily teaching time for ECE, which typically ranges from 3 to 4 hours according to state curricula, often falls significantly short. Our two-hour classroom observations revealed an average instructional time of just 35 minutes, with the average time allocated to each activity being only 13 minutes. Consequently, it is evident that many teachers are not dedicating adequate time to ECE, which hinders students' learning opportunities

Non-ECE Activity:

During the observation period, we noted that **approximately one-fourth of the classrooms visited (23%) did not engage in any ECE activity.** Several factors contributed to the lack of activities, including the unavailability of AWTs due to training, teacher interactions with supervisory cadre or non-governmental organisation (NGO) officials, low student attendance, and delayed opening of the Anganwadi centre. In some cases, the classrooms were repurposed for non-ECE use, like conducting exams for higher grades.

The average time spent on non-ECE activities (out of an average of 2 hours of observation) was 25 minutes. The top three non-ECE activities were meal distribution, attendance taking, and register filling.

Activity Time in ECE Classroom

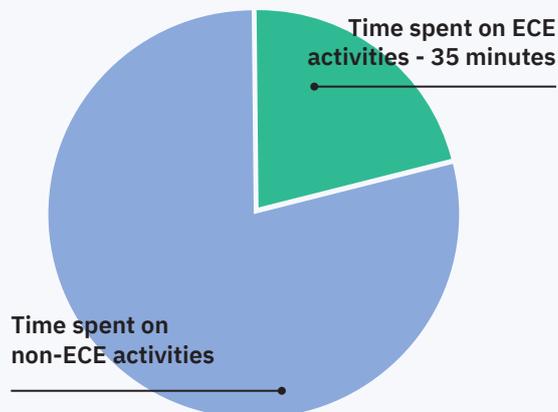


Fig: ECE activities were given 35 minutes on average out of the total observation time, 120 mins

ECE Activity:

Total and average learning time

Across most states, the recommended daily instructional time for ECE activities typically ranges from 3 to 4 hours, aligning with NCF recommendations. From a two-hour observation period, it was found that ECE activities accounted for only an average of around 35 minutes.⁷²

Number of Activities Observed in a Classroom		
Number of Activities Observed	Count	%
1 Activity	18	8.49%
2 Activities	20	9.43%
3 Activities	37	17.45%
4 Activities	55	25.94%
5 Activities	33	15.57%
No Activity	49	23.11%

Table: Number of activities observed in a classroom

A total of 555 activities were observed across 210 classrooms. **The average time spent on each activity was 13 minutes, with most (86%) lasting under 20 minutes and nearly half (45%) lasting under 10 minutes.** This indicates that most teachers did not spend an adequate or effective time per activity for learning to happen. Further, as highlighted in later sections, the time spent on student practice (following up on individual children's learning) and practical usage of available materials was insufficient.

Per activity time spent	Count of activities	%
0-10 minutes	255	45.90%
11-20 minutes	226	40.70%
21-30 minutes	53	9.50%
Above 30	21	3.80%
Total	555	100.00%

Table: Number of activities by time spent during observation

Average time per activity across developmental domains

Pre-literacy and pre-numeracy activities last, on average, 12 minutes, while creative and aesthetic activities last for 17 minutes. The difference in activity duration can be attributed to the inherent nature of the tasks; while pre-literacy and numeracy activities involve teacher-led involvement, creative and aesthetic activities, such as drawing and colouring, predominantly involve children spending time with their materials and could be longer.

Average time spent in minutes			
Category of activities	Anganwadi	PPS	Total average per category
Pre-Literacy	10.9	17.5	12.2
Pre-Numeracy + Cognitive ⁷³	11.6	19.7	12.6
Physical Development	10.7	14.6	11.3
Creative and aesthetic development	15.8	19.2	17
Unstructured activities ⁷⁴	16.7	18.4	17

Table: Average time spent on the domain during observation

Data analysis on activity time across different types of provision showed that pre-primary sections in government primary schools (PPS) spent more time on ECE activities than co-located or standalone Anganwadi centres. PPS classrooms also allocate more time per activity, especially for pre-literacy, cognitive, and pre-numeracy activities. This difference may be due to PPS classrooms being more likely to have student workbooks (92%) and learning stations (65%) available compared to co-located Anganwadi centres (60% and 43%, respectively). Furthermore, 70% of PPS teachers received training within the past year, while only 28% of Anganwadi centre teachers did.

Pre-literacy, pre-numeracy, and cognitive activities were most commonly observed during classroom ECE sessions. Observation findings highlighted a critical need for integrating sound pedagogy - including teaching in small groups and using play - and strengthening planning and classroom execution of activities to foster children's understanding.



Activities conducted

Distribution of domains		
Category of Activity	Number of activities	%
Pre-Literacy	182	32.80%
Pre-Numeracy + Cognitive	149	26.85%
Physical Development	63	11.40%
Creative and aesthetic development	17	3.10%
Unstructured activities	125	22.50%
Others ⁷⁵	19	3.40%
Total	555	100.00%

Table: Domains covered in classes during the observation

Observers found that approximately 60% of the activities conducted in ECE classrooms focused on pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills, with no significant difference observed across different classroom types.

In pre-literacy learning, alphabet-based activities were most commonly conducted, often involving choral repetition of alphabets from a chart or the blackboard, which may be classified as rote-based learning. However, there was little evidence of any underlying pedagogy in conducting these activities. For example, it needed to be clarified if a phonics approach was used by these teachers. 64% of teachers in pre-literacy activities carried out only poem recitals.

In cognitive and pre-numeracy activities, teachers primarily focused on colour and shape identification (68%) and identifying surroundings and objects (13%)—only 21% of teachers prioritised number identification and writing in pre-numeracy activities. Pre-numeracy activities mostly involved the teacher asking students to recite numbers written on the board, with limited incorporation of comparing quantities or sizes. The prevalence of other critical cognitive activities that need daily focus, such as sequencing, sorting, and pattern recognition, was minimal.

Approximately 22% of the activities were unstructured, lacking a definite learning objective or outcome. These activities were difficult to distinguish from one another because they either ended abruptly or without a clear



transition. For instance, activities that begin with reading aloud from poems might suddenly switch to counting or alphabet recitation. It was found that 41% of unstructured activities lacked a suitable conclusion or closure. This suggests that the teachers may not be carrying out activities as per the lesson plans and instructional manuals but rather according to their preferences and understanding, which may reflect a lack of planning.

These findings suggest a need for improved planning and implementation of activities in the observed classrooms. Clear transitions, task coherence and proper time allocation are crucial for effective learning experiences. Implementing well-structured lesson plans and ensuring adherence to them can help create a more purposeful and meaningful learning environment for children.



How was it taught

Groups

Learning through hands-on experiences is crucial in early education and play-based pedagogical activities - especially those involving peer collaboration, language and cognitive competencies - provide children with valuable opportunities to develop a wide range of skills.⁷⁶ However, during the observations, it was seen that a majority (86.2%) of ECE activities happened in large, teacher-led

groups, which is at odds with the pedagogical principle of child-led, small-group instruction recommended for this age group. Observers found no discernible differences between different types of classrooms.

Play-based learning

Engaging children in active play with others and providing access to real-world materials fosters their development, including learning, imagination, creativity and problem-solving skills, leading to holistic growth and a strong foundation for lifelong learning.

However, only 22% of the observed activities included some form of play-based learning. Examples of activities include solving puzzles, students participating in poem recitals using play materials, and physical development activities. This suggests that there is room for improvement in integrating play-based approaches into the teaching and learning process.

Of the play-based activities observed, 87% fell into the category of structured play, while only 8% were classified as free play, where children had greater autonomy in directing their learning. Guided play comprised 5% of the activities, indicating some level of teacher involvement during play. To promote children's holistic development and learning, it may be beneficial to promote a balanced approach that incorporates all three types of play-based activities.

Description	Free Play	Guided Play	Structured Play
Roles	Child-led Child-directed	Child-led Teacher-supported	Teacher-led, children actively participate
What do Children do?	Children decide all aspects of their play- what to play, how to play it, for how long to play, with whom to play.	Children plan and lead their own play, similarly as they do during free play	Children actively listen, follow rules, participate in activities and games planned by Teachers.
What do Teachers do?	Teachers organise a stimulating play environment in the classroom, observe children, and help when children ask for support.	Teachers offer support and actively facilitate play. Teachers guide the children in different tasks that they are involved in, ask questions, play with the children to meet specific learning objectives.	Teachers carefully plan activities and games with specific rules to promote Competencies in a learning sequence. Language and mathematics games, nature walks, songs and rhymes are planned on a daily basis.

Table: Types of Play-based Activities

Effectiveness of use of materials

Using **concrete manipulatives and materials** in teaching is critical for enhancing the learning process and outcomes in the early years. Visual aids, for instance, have been shown to expedite language development

Of the activities conducted using play-based materials, pre-literacy activities (~20%) and creative and aesthetic development activities (~24%) showed minor usage of these materials. The top three activities that involved play-based materials were colour and shape identification, pre-literacy alphabet learning, and storytelling.

Workbook usage was notably low, at just 14% across all activities, even in areas like pre-literacy, cognitive, and pre-numeracy where workbooks could be beneficial. Surprisingly, 70% of activities that didn't involve workbooks took place in classrooms where workbooks were available. This underutilisation of

workbooks is concerning, given their proven positive impact on enhancing children's pre-writing skills and cognitive competencies.⁷⁷

Observations revealed that learning time increased when materials were used. In classrooms where workbooks were employed for an activity (time spent on student practice after teacher instruction and guidance), the average activity time increased by 30%. Similarly, using any play materials extended the average activity time by 28%. It's important to note that while increased workbook usage generally correlates with extended activity time, it doesn't necessarily guarantee better instruction in all cases.

In roughly 23% of classrooms, TLMs were brand new and merely displayed to the observer from a cupboard, suggesting that teachers may not have actively integrated these materials into classroom activities.



Student Engagement & Participation

Effective learning requires active participation and student engagement, especially in early childhood education. This section examines the observations made regarding student engagement, attention, discipline, teacher instructions, student participation and the teacher's ability to engage students by checking for understanding (CFU) in ECE classrooms.

Student Participation, with Reference to Attention and Comprehension

When teachers introduced new concepts or activities, only 39.3% of them followed up by asking questions to assess comprehension. Moreover, the responses were predominantly in a chorus format (83.2%). This implies that the depth of engagement and critical thinking may be constrained in these situations. Additionally, in roughly 87% of activities, while a substantial majority of students (at least 70-80%) were able to participate, their modes of participation were primarily restricted to listening to the teacher or responding collectively in a chorus format.

With regards to pre-literacy activities (alphabetical and poetry recitals, and storytelling), even though teachers were seen giving proper instructions in 79% of observed activities, only 20% of them follow up with any questions during the lesson to check if children have actually understood the ideas and concepts being taught. Similarly, with regards to cognitive and numeracy activities, while proper instructions were provided in over 85% of cases, follow-up questions to assess student understanding were asked in only 55% of instances.

This highlights the need for teachers to develop teaching practices which combine explaining concepts and incorporating follow-up questions directed to individual students as a way to check comprehension intermittently. Furthermore, if questions are asked, they must be directed to individual students, rather than the entire class which solicits group responses that do not give any insight into an individual student's understanding. While this form of engagement demonstrates attention and participation, it may not effectively foster the development of critical thinking, independent problem-solving skills, and a deeper understanding.

So far, the findings suggest a critical gap in administering activities and lesson plans regarding the CFU component. **In approximately one-third of activities, no questions were asked, emphasising limited engagement in a lecture-style format.** The absence of a structured transition from teacher-guided learning to independent or group work deprives children of opportunities to develop critical developmental skills.

Student Discipline

Regarding attention and discipline, despite the earlier mention of a lack of formal training in classroom management, teachers were generally successful in maintaining student focus and cultivating a positive classroom atmosphere. In roughly 90.1% of observed classrooms, teachers effectively captured students' attention, fostering active listening and compliance with instructions. Moreover, positive interactions between teachers and students were witnessed in approximately 71.2% of classrooms, where teachers displayed supportive behaviour towards the entire class as well as individual students. This positive approach created an environment conducive to learning and contributed to heightened student engagement.

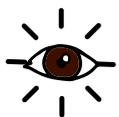
Best Practices: Classroom Transaction

One exemplary pre-primary classroom in Madhya Pradesh showcased effective teaching. The teacher implemented a play-based activity using puppets to capture students' attention and keep them engaged. The teacher encouraged active participation and group collaboration by assigning specific roles to the students, such as curtain partitions and puppeteers. Guided by the teacher, the students recited stories and poems while wearing puppets on their hands - **fostering creativity, cooperation and teamwork.** The teacher ensured equal opportunities for all students, assuring those who did not have a chance to wear puppets that they would in future activities. The activity concluded with the teacher involving the students in the clean-up process, promoting a sense of responsibility and organisation



Parents

Parents primarily focused on the fundamental aspects of early education, emphasising literacy and numeracy, including activities like reciting rhymes and counting. A notable emphasis on English language learning was also observed. Parents exhibited a strong commitment to their children's education through active involvement in at-home teaching and learning, along with consistent communication with ECE teachers



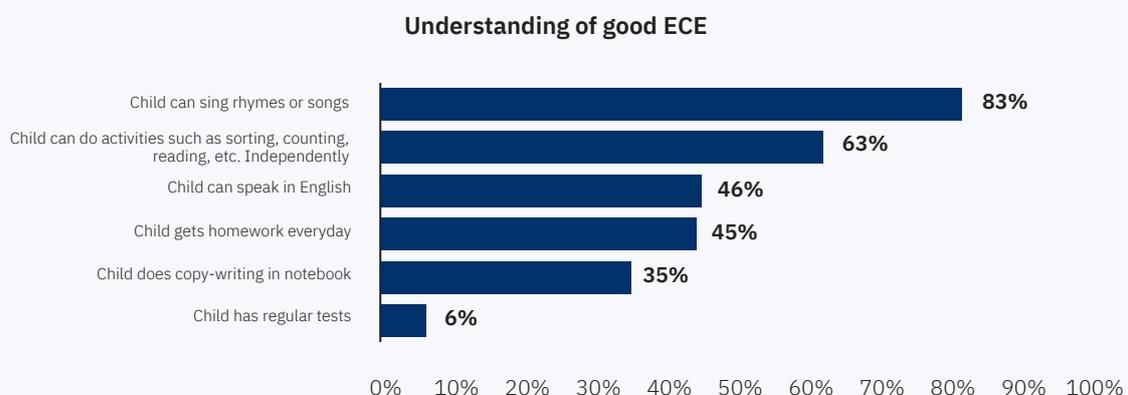
Awareness and Perception of ECE

140 parents were interviewed about their perception of what good early learning constitutes and what are the most critical skills that they believe their children should learn before Grade 1. The following section highlights their responses.

When parents were asked about their perception of 'good' ECE, the most frequent answers were centred around learning rhymes, songs and developing skills like counting and reading. Around 82% of parents consider the ability to sing rhymes and songs as indicative of quality ECE; while 63% believe that their child's capacity to engage in activities such as counting or reading independently is a vital aspect of ECE.

It is worth noting that 45% of parents strongly desire their child to speak in English. In three out of seven states, most parents wanted their children to speak in English. This demand may explain one of the reasons why teachers may prioritise alphabet recitals and other pre-literacy activities in English - this contradicts the pedagogical principle of introducing language script in the mother tongue.⁷⁸

Overall, parents emphasised that the most important things for their children to learn before entering Grade 1 are reading, speaking, maintaining discipline and being able to introduce themselves. Even though emergent writing⁷⁹ skills merit focus, skills such as writing, homework and tests were largely not regarded as key abilities - for instance, only 35%



Note: The diagram above is based on responses to a multiple-choice question - hence, the figures do not sum to 100%

Fig: Majority of parents believed that quality ECE meant that children can sing rhymes or song, followed by being able to count and recite the alphabet

believe writing is essential for ECE. Further, it is worth noting that parents did not mention pre-numeracy skills, suggesting a lack of focus on these particular abilities.

In an interview, a parent said the following when asked about how they would like their child to be taught:

“ He should learn the alphabet mainly. He does not want to study at home. He is learning through classes only, so we bring him to the school. He is afraid of the teacher, and that is why he learns here. They should be taught through some tactics. They are small, so they don't understand much. If we give him books, he refuses to study. They learn through playful activities only.



At-Home Learning

The involvement of parents in facilitating learning at home plays a crucial role in a child's educational development. Most parents (88.2%) reported engaging in teaching activities at home, demonstrating their commitment to their child's education and the importance of at-home learning as a supplement to classroom instruction. Notably, a significant portion of mothers (64.7%) and fathers (68.9%) have completed at least a high school education, indicating that they may possess the essential capabilities to assist their children's learning at home. However, despite this active interest and intention, around 70% of parents reported needing more materials to aid their child's home learning.

The activities reportedly conducted at home primarily involve teaching the alphabet and counting, drawings and completing the assigned homework. When asked how their child spends most of their time at home, most parents indicated that they either play or watch TV.

When asked what the children do at home, some parents said:



“ After coming home from the Anganwadi, she plays with the neighbour girl. She sits beside her brother, who is doing homework, and she also writes A's, B's.

“ He makes mischief, he stays active and mingles along with the neighbourhood children; he watches pictures on the phone and TV, he listens to whatever we say, he writes on the walls, he draws crazy lines, he sings songs and plays.

Additionally, almost all parents (94.4%) reported regular interactions with the ECE teacher, which suggests a strong interest and intention to support their child's education.



What Do Parents Wish for their Children?

Many parents are either satisfied with the quality of ECE or have no additional expectations. This may indicate that their awareness of high-quality ECE learning may be low, or they may need the relevant vocabulary to express their expectations from their child's early learning journey. Consequently, parents may only expect their children to be able to perform 'basic' literacy and numeracy activities; in the qualitative discussions, most parents expressed a desire for their child to learn the alphabet and read and write their name. However, this may not be appropriate from the perspective of school readiness.

This section highlights insights from conversations with the monitoring cadre: both middle management (such as supervisors, CDPOs, ARPs and master trainers) and ECE nodal officers in the respective state departments.



Roles, Reviews and Responsibilities

Monitoring officials have various responsibilities, including academic and administrative aspects. Their role involves supervising learning facilities for hygiene and cleanliness and tracking teacher and student attendance. In addition, they also track if the mid-day meals are provided to the children. However, these officials are not able to review or track classroom teaching or learning outcomes per se. Our findings also showed that this low priority accorded to learning activities and outcomes is a behaviour that is faced at all levels of the hierarchy.

Governance

Administrative cadres were unable to prioritise the delivery and quality of ECE. Monitoring efforts instead focus on student attendance and adherence to the mid-day meals scheme. Classroom practices and learning outcomes are not tracked during monitoring visits nor discussed in review meetings. In addition, teachers reported that they do not receive ECE-focused feedback from their supervisors

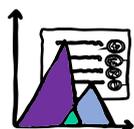
Furthermore, there needs to be established learning metrics to track classroom teaching and learning, thus leaving no incentive or accountability to deliver effective teaching practices or measure student progress. Few officials reported observing the teachers' ability to effectively conduct ECE activities, monitor student engagement, and provide constructive feedback.

Finally, aspects such as classroom practices and learning outcomes tend to receive less attention during review meetings. The focus remains on attendance, immunisation and mid-day meals.

When a supervisor was asked about their responsibilities, they said:



 We observe the Anganwadi. Do they check the child's weight, or do the beneficiaries get the allotted benefits like food and health facilities? Do they maintain a record of the same? Do they have a Poshan tracker? How do they use a Poshan tracker? Analysing if the beneficiaries are getting in the benefits or not.



Data and Metrics

Monitoring officials reported predominantly documenting the data from classroom visits in diaries or registers, which can pose challenges in terms of capturing, codifying, aggregating and taking corrective action based on it. Some officials also face difficulties in data entry due to the large number of centres under their supervision or a lack of familiarity with digital applications.

In an interview, a CDPO said the following when asked if they face any challenges related to data collection:

 There is only one challenge: that the data being recorded is exhaustive, and not all workers are fully aware of the type of data to be recorded, and there is a need for their orientation for it. We are part of orienting the workers on its use. We expect them to share the analysis of the indicators and areas in which the Anganwadi Centre is lagging and those that require work.



Training

Training plays a crucial role in building the capacity of supervisors and other monitoring cadres in the ECE system. However, most training programmes attended by these stakeholders were not specific to ECE - instead, they were a part of a larger, more general training initiative. **Despite receiving some training on ECE, the effective translation of this training into classrooms in the form of actionable feedback for teachers remains limited. This is indicated through teacher interviews, where most teachers reported receiving feedback from parents but not supervisors.**

When asked about what topics were covered in the training, a CDPO reported:

 Training was a general one which covered all the aspects and the functions, roles and responsibilities of the CDPO. It covered practical training, fieldwork, how to conduct field visits, etc. Master training is mainly concerned with administrative efficiency, whereas

NIPCCD [National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development] focuses on field training. These organisations didn't explicitly conduct training for ECE; instead, it was a component of the more extensive training.

Training programmes for different stakeholders, such as CDPOs, and supervisors from the WCD Department. Review meetings allow officials to discuss various aspects related to children's education and development. However, these meetings cover topics such as attendance, immunisation, provision of mid-day meals, and compliance with guidelines. Additionally, these meetings allow officials to receive briefings on new guidelines or recently issued notices. These indicate the lack of prioritisation of ECE-related topics during reviews and, thus, low focus during monitoring visits, BRPs, and Head Teachers, varied in content and length. While the training provided insights into pedagogy, health, and nutrition of children, holistic development, activity-based learning, and specific subjects, it was not consistently tailored to early childhood education's unique needs and challenges.





Based on rigorous analysis of secondary data, primary observations and interviews with key stakeholders, compelling opportunities emerge to streamline and elevate the quality of Early Childhood Education within government-provided classrooms. These findings underscore the urgency of addressing systemic and programmatic hurdles. By seizing these opportunities, we can proactively prioritise and fortify the foundation of ECE,

paving the way for significantly improved service delivery in the years ahead. The following suggestions represent a call to action, urging all stakeholders to optimise resources available and plan strategically for a positive transformation

#1 Clarify roles and responsibilities between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Women and Child Development

The decline in enrolment among 5-year-olds at Anganwadi centres emphasises the immediate need for innovative solutions. Taking inspiration from the successful collaboration between the Ministry of Women and Child Development and the Ministry of Health, we can propose a structured approach akin to their division of roles and responsibilities within the realm of education.

While the Ministry of Women and Child Development currently oversees health and nutrition aspects for 3-6-year-olds and services for children under 3, we advocate that the Ministry of Education assume full responsibility for the preschool education of 3-6-year-olds in Anganwadis and Balvatikas. Such a strategic realignment would not only establish clarity in ministerial roles but also enable the efficient allocation of budgets and resources.

Their respective roles could entail the following:

State Departments of Education

- **Undertake a periodic review of the curriculum package:** States should invest in a one-time review/development of all the necessary materials required in an ECE classroom. This can be reviewed from a pedagogy, ease of use, and teaching-learning resources perspective. States could undertake this exercise to create a continuum and alignment with the FLN curriculum. It is suggested that State WCD officials are also represented in the review committee. A checklist for the same can be found in the Annexure.

Ministry of Women and Child Development

- **Provide role clarity and prioritisation for AWTs, helpers, ASHA workers, and midwives:** Minimise duplication and overlap in roles and responsibilities of an AWT/teacher, helper, ASHA and midwife in health and nutrition activities to enable the availability of time for preschool education. Within a centre the role of an Anganwadi helper may be expanded to either include some of the teachers' responsibilities or formally engage with younger children in preschool activities to free up the teacher's time for engaging with older children (5 to 6-year-olds) to make them school ready.

#2 Increase funding per ECE classroom and fund more classrooms - allocate specific funding for ECE, set clear annual priorities and utilisation guidelines, and provide incentives for states to meet their ECE goals

The budget analysis presented in Chapter 1 shows that funding per classroom and total number of classrooms fall short in delivering quality ECE on a large scale.

- **Ministry of Education:** Make budgets available through Samagra Shiksha Abhiyaan Annual Project Approval Board for learning pilots and evidence generation on what works in ECE at scale for the states. Additionally, include a dedicated teacher allocation (human resources) budget in the financial and programmatic norms sent to the states for preparing proposals. In 2023-24, the budget outlay for ECCE is Rs. 1,117 Cr. A nominal increase in this

can allow states to provide an additional classroom. This could be implemented in a phased manner, starting with high-enrolment schools.

- **State Education Departments:** State governments should allocate funds to implement Pre-Primary Sections (PPS) in high enrolment government schools and strengthen co-located Anganwadis as necessary. **Most importantly, states should prioritise the allocation of teachers in ECE classrooms, particularly in cases where there is currently no dedicated teacher, or allocate an additional teacher specifically for 5 to 6-year-olds in co-located Anganwadis.** To guide the allocation of funds, states can refer to the financial norms specified by the central government. These funds could be strategically utilised to provide a comprehensive range of inputs and services to a selected number of schools in the initial years, establishing model schools or demonstration schools.

#3 Strengthen data systems and build a robust monitoring framework for co-located Anganwadis and Pre-Primary Sections in government schools

- **Improve data systems:** Increased data availability will enable review, reflection, and necessary corrective actions where needed. Central governments could provide guidelines to states and districts to create linkages and have access to the Ministry of Women and Child Development database to ensure a seamless transition of students from Anganwadis and PPS to the Education Department's schools. Additional data points such as student age,

age-wise enrolment, teacher availability, classroom availability and co-location (and number of Anganwadis co-located per school) could be made available.

- **Increase prioritisation of ECE and set up mechanisms for ensuring accountability for ECE learning outcomes:** Define tangible and measurable inputs, outputs and outcomes for monitoring, and conduct frequent reviews to identify gaps and collect data (on the quality of teaching and learning) to ensure data collected is reliable and relevant for decision making and course correction. Build systemic review mechanisms - cascaded review meetings with teachers, DIET, and block/cluster staff to be regularly conducted at the block and district level by the ARPs. The states would need to identify which cadre will provide supportive supervision/mentoring and work towards a paradigm shift to observing and providing support for teaching-learning in classrooms. In addition, carry out periodic school readiness surveys to assess the system's health. Such a large-scale assessment survey could be a significant precursor to analysing findings of existing achievement surveys conducted at the end of the foundational schooling stage, such as the National Achievement Survey (NAS) and Foundational Learning Study (FLS).

#4 Generate parent awareness and improve capabilities

State governments (in collaboration with civil society organisations)

- **Promote parent engagement and empower at-home learning:** Initiate a widespread awareness campaign aimed at parents, informing them about their

essential role in their child's education. Provide parents with the necessary tools, resources and guidance to participate in at-home learning activities actively, extending the educational experience beyond formal settings.

#5 Civil Society Organisations are encouraged to showcase ingenuity, offer capacity-building guidance and maintain vigilant oversight, while funders and researchers are urged to champion and reinforce these efforts

- **Civil Society Organisations:** Advocate for improved ECCE by securing dedicated teachers, shaping curriculum and assessments, supporting state implementation of the PPS programme, and engaging communities to promote quality at-home learning.

- **Researchers:** Generate evidence through targeted pilots, disseminate findings to inform evidence-based improvements in ECE, and develop open-access resources to drive collaborative enhancements in ECE practices.
- **Donors and Philanthropists:** Empower advocacy for increased effective learning time in ECCE, provide resources for technical support to enhance pre-primary programmes, and extend assistance to state governments for successfully implementing the PPS programme.



Endnotes

1. National Early Childhood Care and Education Policy (2013). Ministry of Women and Child Development.
2. Kaul, V. et al. (2017). "India Early Childhood Education Impact Study".
3. ASER Centre (2020). "Annual Status of Education Report (Rural): 2019 - Early Years".
4. Kaul, V. et al. (2017). "India Early Childhood Education Impact Study".
5. ASER Centre (2020). "Annual Status of Education Report (Rural): 2019 - Early Years".
6. From an independent small-scale learning survey.
7. FSG (2016). "Assessment of Child Development Outcomes (July-Sept 2016) - Program to Improve Private Early Education (PIPE)".
8. As per UDISE 2021-22, of 9,18,942 government primary schools in India, 1.76 lakh (19%) have reported having pre-primary sections. When filters for at least 1 child and at least 1 teacher are added, of these 1.76 lakh, 89% have at least 1 child enrolled and only 32% have a teacher present in the school. This effectively reduces the number of functioning Balvatikas to 87,287.
9. Ministry of Women and Child Development (2022). "Annual Report, 2021-22".
10. Data for quarter ending 30 June 2022, retrieved from MWCD Annual Report, 2022-23.
11. Unified District Information System for School Education (2021-2022).
12. Enrolment numbers from UDISE 2022-23.
13. Enrolment numbers from UDISE 2022-23.
14. As per the WCD Annual Report, total number of PSE beneficiaries till June 2022 were 3,03,17,251. Arrived at the estimated figure of children in standalone AWCs by subtracting children in co-located AWC (available in UDISE) from total PSE beneficiaries.
15. Ministry of Women and Child Development (2021). "Annual Report, 2020-21".
16. ASER Centre (2023). "Annual Status of Education Report 2022 - Provisional".
17. Ministry of Education (2021). Students' and Teachers' Holistic Advancement through Quality Education (SARTHAQ).
18. UDISE 2021-22.
19. Ministry of Women and Child Development (2022). Circular titled: "Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0: A Strategic Intervention to Address Malnutrition Concerns - Guidelines".
20. Ganimian, A. et al. (2021). "Augmenting State Capacity for Child Development: Experimental Evidence from India". Working Paper 28780. NBER Working Paper Series.
21. Ministry of Women and Child Development (2022). "Annual Report, 2021-22".
22. Kathuria, A. et al. (2014). "Institutional Arrangements for Nutrition in India: An Assessment of Capacity". World Bank.
23. For instance, see: Mathematica Policy Research and Public Health Foundation of India (2013). "Baseline Findings from the Ananya Evaluation".
24. Jain, A. et al. (2020). "AWT Time Use in Madhya Pradesh, India: A Cross-Sectional Study". BMC Health Services Research.
25. Ministry of Finance (2023). "Outcome Budget - 2023-24".
26. Integrated Child Development Services. MPR March 2022.
27. CDPO has nine responsibilities as per the guidelines. However, one of them includes two separate responsibilities - therefore, the number of total responsibilities in the graph is 10.
28. WCD Dashboard.
29. Kapur, A. and Shukla, R. (2022). "Budget Briefs: Saksham Anganwadi and POSHAN 2.0". Accountability Initiative Budget Briefs, Vol. 14, Issue 1.

30. Effective October 2019, the state of Jammu and Kashmir was reorganised into two union territories - Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh and effective January 2020, the union territories of Daman and Diu and Dadra and Nagar Haveli were merged into a single union territory - Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu. The number of states and union territories remained unchanged.
31. PAB Minutes 2018-19 to 2023-24.
32. PAB Minutes 2018-19 to 2023-24.
33. This total budget is calculated from individual state ECCE budgets allocated by the Ministry of Education, as approved during the Project Approval Board meetings conducted in February-March 2023.
34. Department of School Education and Literacy. "New Programmatic and Financial Norms of Samagra Shiksha".
35. PAB Budget data available in the Annexure.
36. Latest data retrieved from 2021-22 APIP (link) as APIP 2022-23 is not available.
37. Kapur, A. and Shukla, R. (2022). "Budget Briefs: Saksham Anganwadi and POSHAN 2.0". *Accountability Initiative Budget Briefs*, Vol. 14, Issue 1.
38. Refer to Annexure for calculations.
39. Kingdon, G. G. (2020). *The Private Schooling Phenomenon in India: A Review*. *The Journal of Development Studies*, 1–23.
40. Allocated teacher here refers to those teachers that teach both the pre-primary section and Grade 1.
41. Dedicated teachers refers to those teachers that only teach the pre-primary sections.
42. UDISE, 2021-22.
43. There was an overlap of 4,937 schools, which had both - teachers dedicated only for ECE and a teacher teaching both pre-primary and primary. Accounting for this number brings the total number of schools with no teachers at 1,10,791. Of these, a small number of 71 schools have no students enrolled in the PPE.
44. Reasons included quality of data availed.
45. Government stakeholders include: Supervisors, CDPOs, Academic / Block / Cluster resource persons, district and block leadership (District Education Officer), Master Trainers, etc.
46. NCERT (2022). "National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage".
47. Domain names may differ from one framework document to another but the five domains are broadly the same.
48. This section draws from the NCF - Foundational Stage, 2022 , National ECCE Framework, 2013 , and The Preschool Curriculum, NCERT, 2019, and NIPUN Bharat Guidelines.
49. Percentage Learning Outcomes: 26 broad learning outcomes were summarised for the five domains as per the NCF and each curriculum was scanned to confirm the presence of these outcomes.
50. For Learning Outcomes that were present, the curriculum was scanned to check for activities aligned to each outcome and marked as present or absent to calculate the percent built into the routine.
51. Hansen, Joakim E., and Martine L. Broekhuizen (2021).. "Quality of the language-learning environment and vocabulary development in early childhood". *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*.
52. Nakamura, P., et al. (2019). "Language and the learning crisis: Evidence of transfer threshold mechanisms in multilingual reading in South India". *The Journal of Development Studies*.
53. Refer Annexure for a Domain-Wise map of Outcomes and Activities.
54. Student names used in the tracker are for representational purpose only.
55. Laura, L. and Saracostti, M. (2019). "Effect of Parental Involvement on Children's Academic Achievement in Chile". *Frontiers in Psychology*.
56. Most curricula at scale do not address the needs of neurodiverse children and it is not addressed in depth in this framework.
57. Safe - Should not include offensive text, images, etc. and ensure physical safety [non-toxic, child-safe design].

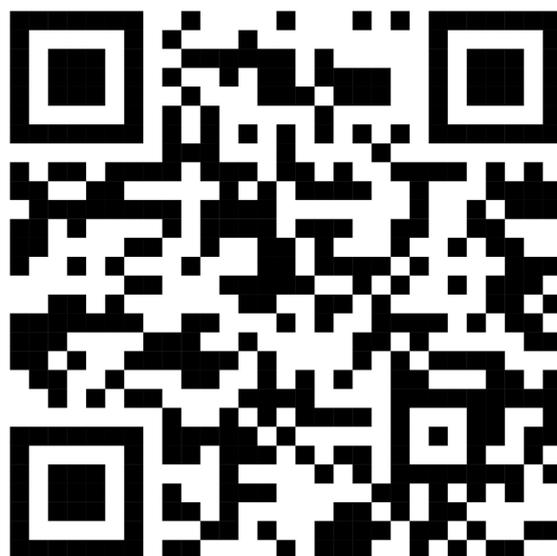
58. Refer Annexure for 'Recommended list of Teaching & Learning Materials'.
59. Taylor, M. and Boyer, W. (2020). "Play-based learning: Evidence-based research to improve children's learning experiences in the kindergarten classroom", *Early Childhood Education Journal*.
60. World Health Organization (2020). "Improving Early Childhood Development: WHO Guideline".
61. For instance, see Hindustan Times (2019). "Staff Shortage Hits Anganwadi Services: WCD Report".
62. World Bank (2021). "Successful Teachers, Successful Students: Recruiting and Supporting Society's Most Crucial Profession".
63. Mariyam, S. and Musfiroh, T. (2019). "Total Physical Response (TPR) Method in Improving English Vocabulary Acquisition of 5-6 years Old Children". *Tadris: Jurnal Keguruan dan Ilmu Tarbiyah*.
64. Recommendations made specific to the social and emotional skills.
65. Total number of students in the attendance register (reported age-wise).
66. Makin, L. (2003). "Creating positive literacy learning environments in early childhood". *Handbook of Early Childhood Literacy*.
67. 2.36% of observations were null values, which were due to closed classrooms or no students present in the class - hence, the figures do not sum to a 100%.
68. Availability here indicates whether or not the materials were present in the class.
69. A review of ECCE annual budgets for pre-primary sections in government schools show that almost all states propose and are provided a dedicated recurring grant for procuring relevant TLM. The state governments tend to place demand for TLM funds for both Balvatikas and co-located Anganwadis present in the primary government schools.
70. Ministry of Women and Child Development.
71. Responses based on multiple choice questions.
72. The average calculation includes classrooms where no activities occurred during the observation.
73. Activities coded as cognitive such as comparing sizes and quantities are also important pre-numeracy skills.
74. Unstructured activities have been further defined and discussed in the next section.
75. Includes activities that could not be classified into a developmental domain. For instance, activities such as morning prayers.
76. NCERT (2022). "National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage".
77. Taylor, M. and Boyer, W. (2020). "Play-based learning: Evidence-based research to improve children's learning experiences in the kindergarten classroom", *Early Childhood Education Journal*.
78. Cilliers, J. and Mohohlwane, N. (2023). "What Effect Does Learning in a Home Language Have on Reading Skills?".
79. Emergent writing includes 'writing for expression' (such as drawing, scribbling) and 'skill-focused writing' (such as drawing *aksharas* and *varnas*).

List of Abbreviations

APIP	Annual Programme Implementation Plan	PPS	Pre-Primary Section/Pre-Primary School
APS	Affordable Private Schools	PSE	Preschool Education
ARP	Academic Resource Person	POSHAN	Prime Minister's Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nourishment
AWP&B	Annual Workplan and Budget	RTE	Right to Education
AWT	Anganwadi Teacher	SEL	Social and Emotional Learning
BRC	Block Resource Coordinator	SNP	Supplementary Nutrition Programme
CDPO	Child Development Project Officer	SSA	Samagra Shiksha Abhiyaan
CECED	Centre for Early Childhood Education and Development	TLM	Teaching and Learning Material
CFU	Checking for Understanding	TPR	Teacher-Pupil Ratio
CS	Central Sector	UDISE	Unified District Information System for Education
CSF	Central Square Foundation	UKG	Upper Kindergarten
CSO	Civil Society Organisation	UT	Union Territory
CSS	Centrally Sponsored Scheme		
DIY	Do-It-Yourself		
ECE	Early Childhood Education		
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education		
ECEQAS	Early Childhood Education Quality Assessment Scale		
EPC	Empowered Programme Committee		
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Scheme		
IDELA	International Development and Early Learning Assessment		
IECEI	India Early Childhood Education Impact Study		
LKG	Lower Kindergarten		
MOE	Ministry of Education		
MPR	Monthly Progress Report		
MWCD	Ministry of Women and Child Development		
NCERT	National Council of Educational Research and Training		
NEP	National Education Policy		
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation		
PAB	Project Approval Board		
PIPE	Program to Improve Private Early Education		

Annexures

Scan to view Annexures





CENTRAL SQUARE
FOUNDATION

To know more about CSF

Visit our website

 www.centralsquarefoundation.org

Follow us on social media

 @CSF_India

 Central Square Foundation

 Central Square Foundation