Sattva Knowledge Institute SKI primer

BRIDGING GAPS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN INDIA

March 2023

Acknowledgements

Contributors

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Disclaimer

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive Summary

The first six years of life are the fastest period of human growth and development, as 85% of the brain development occurs by the age of six. Research cites that **investing in the early years of a child's life, brings the highest socio-economic returns on investment.** It helps to break the cycle of poverty, address inequality of opportunity, and boost productivity by ensuring academic and socio-emotional abilities.

In India, **the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS)** was created in 1975 to provide early childhood education, care for expectant and nursing mothers, and for children up to six years of age. ICDS, through the Anganwadi institution provides six different services under the holistic paradigm of health, nutrition, care and education; executed by one Anganwadi worker and a helper. Although it has had its successes, **this system is not adequate for Early Childhood Education (ECE), as its prime focus is on reducing malnutrition.** The increasing educational expectations of parents from this institution are being met by private preschools which are not governed by any regulatory mechanisms. Hence, 68% of children in India are struggling to get age-appropriate pedagogy and curriculum exposure.

Since 1968, national policies in education have been emphasising on early childhood education. However, it is **NEP 2020 that looks as ECE as part of continuum of Foundational Learning and Numeracy and compels the primary schools to provide pre-primary education by 2030.** There has been a huge gap between policies and practices in India due to the lack of clarity on goals and outcomes of ECE. The **Nipun Bharat mission** with its clearly defined goals is helping bridge the achievement gaps.

Several systemic challenges impact ECE outcomes in India:

- **Policy level challenges:** Inter-ministerial coordination is a necessity and a challenge for achieving ECE outcomes. ECE still does not come under the ambit of the Right to Education The budget allocation is a meagre 2.9% of the GDP, whereas the recommended budget allocation by NEP is 6% of the GDP.
- **Funding:** Anganwadi centres have been receiving less funding than their requirement. ECE is not a priority funding area for the CSR too, with only 3-4% of the top 77 funders in education investing in ECE.
- **Governance:** Enrollment as the only parameter for measuring quality of ECE, makes it challenging to make informed decisions. A quality assurance mechanism that covers both public and private provisions of ECE needs to be developed and implemented. No role of the community, panchayats and parents in the monitoring of ECE also acts as a bottleneck in improving governance.
- **Assessments:** Capability challenges of Anganwadi workers (AWW) hinder the portfolio creation of students after assessing them on the basis of observation, checklists and interviews. A standardised assessment framework to measure school-readiness does not exist.
- Classroom processes: Overburdening of AWW with low salary and lack of in-service capacity building opportunities lead to deprioritising of ECE in Anganwadi centres. Poor infrastructure and non-availability of academic resources also hamper the teaching-learning process.
- **Outside Classroom factors:** Parents demand the formal practising of 3Rs in preschool, with a thrust on rote learning, due to their lack of awareness of developmentally appropriate curriculum. Parents' perception of Anganwadis as nutrition centres, and their inability to participate in the child's learning leads to low school-readiness amongst students entering Grade 1.

There exist replicable solutions exhibited by organisations that have undertaken early years interventions to improve ECE outcomes. These range from catalysing best practices for improved classroom activities, to governance mechanisms to improve the quality of ECE in India.

CRITICALITY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (ECE)

With the launch of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the Government of India has shown commitment towards improving Early Childhood Education.

India is home to the largest schooling system in the world, with **98% of our children,**

250 million students  **attending 150,000 schools,**  **taught by 920,000 teachers** 

But, research has proven that enrollment has not ensured learning outcomes.

32% of students in Grade 3 cannot read basic texts with comprehension, and **43% cannot do basic math** to solve daily problems.

Studies point out that **inequalities in readiness for school** were already well-established, even before students enter Grade 1.

The opportunities for reducing these inequalities through schooling were very limited in practice (NEP 2020, World Bank 2018; UNICEF 2017, Woodhead et al. 2009).

99 million children are eligible for early childhood education in India (Census 2011).

However, **only 31.4 million students are covered** through Anganwadis (centres that provide early childhood care and education to children aged 0 to 6 years) or pre-primary sections of government primary schools.

Only 47% of the government primary schools have preschool facilities, and 28% of the 4-6 year age group are not attending any preschool (ASER 2023).

Access to early childhood education is still a challenge, and involves high out-of-pocket spending.

The **NEP has recommended**

- the inclusion of pre-primary grades for children aged four to six within government primary schools and
- the universalisation of pre-primary education by 2030.

Exposure to interventions that promote early-life stimulation (holding, playing, talking needed by children aged 0-6 years to ensure their social, emotional and cognitive development) have enormous impact on growth and development.

The NEP 2022 identifies that over 85% of a child's cumulative brain development occurs in the first six years and emphasises giving utmost importance to appropriate care and stimulation of the brain in the early years to ensure a child's holistic development.

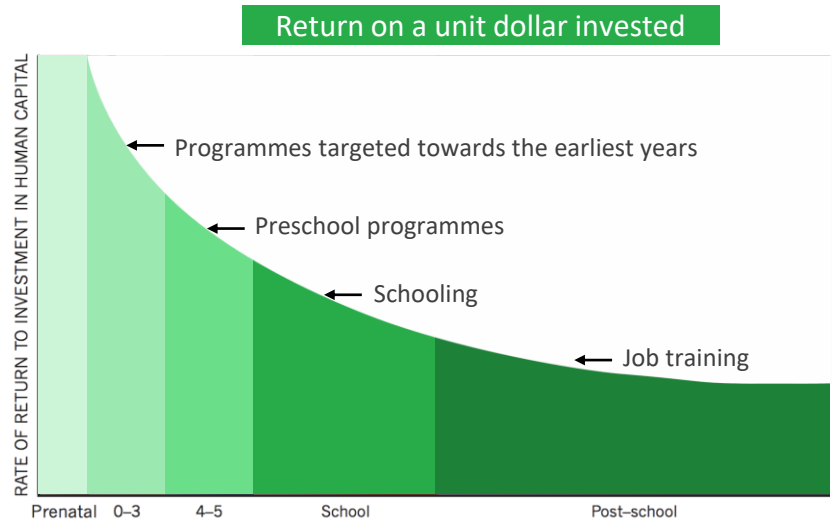
Long Term benefits of ECE

Retention in School Participation in preschool programmes can make a positive difference of about 8-20% on retention or continuation rates of children in primary grades (NCERT 2011, Kaul 1999).

Intellectual Development Preschool has a positive and long term impact on children's academic attainment, along with attentiveness, motivation and self control and overall intellectual development (Hazarika & Viren 2010).

Return on Investment Preschool enrolment in 73 countries led to long-term benefits ranging from USD 6 to USD 17 per dollar invested (Britto 2015).

Reduce Disparity and Equality of Opportunity
Young children who suffered from stunting, but received high-quality early stimulation support earned 25 per cent higher wages as adults in Jamaica (World Bank 2015).



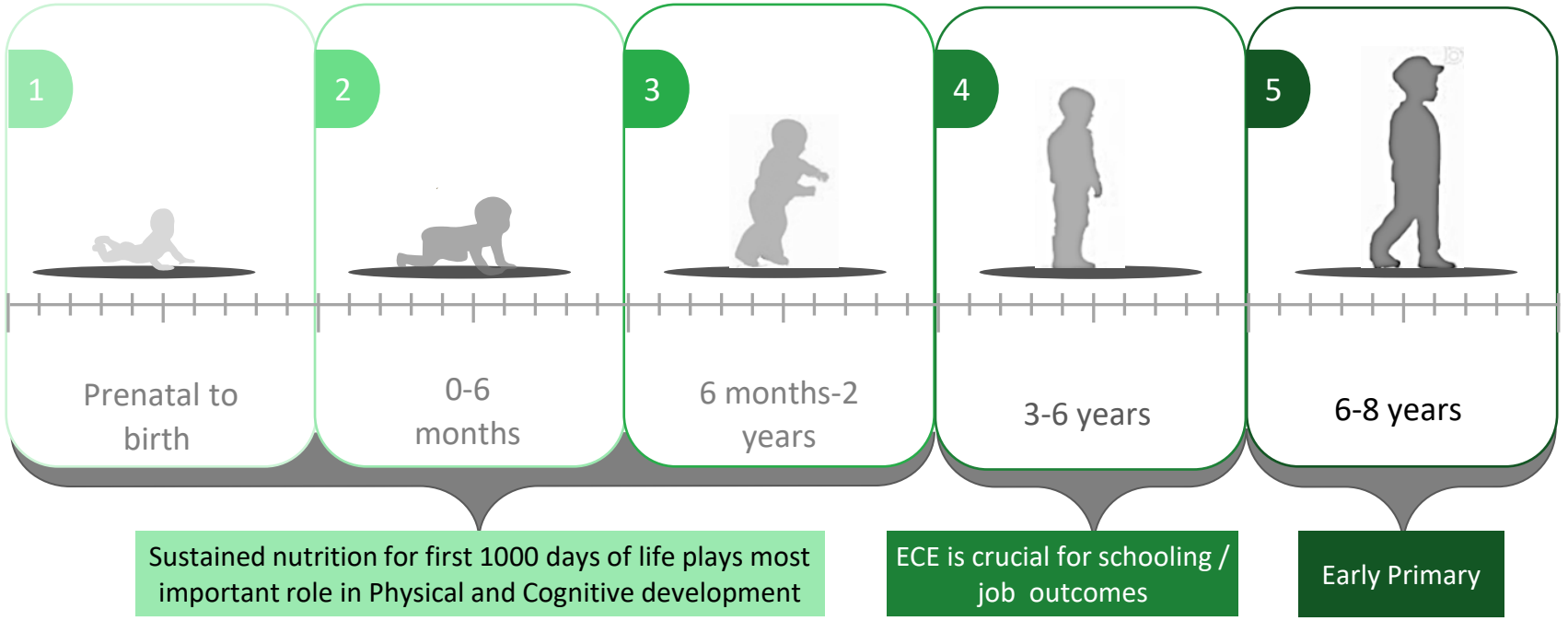
Professor Heckman's analysis of the Perry Preschool programme shows a 7% to 10% annual return on investment, based on increased school and career achievement, as well as reduced costs in remedial education, health and criminal justice system expenditures (Heckman 2008).

Adverse early environments create deficits in skills and abilities that drive down productivity and increase social costs, adding to financial deficits borne by the society.

The NEP 2020 envisages a five-year foundational stage of education, where the three years of early childhood education (ECE) i.e. 3-6 years are emphasised as a step toward children's fundamental Right to Education.

UNICEF defines early childhood as the period that spans from conception up to eight years of age. It includes the period of infancy (0-3 years) as well as pre-school (3-6 years) and early primary years (6 to 8 years).
In the Indian context, early childhood refers specifically to the age group 0-6 years.

The early childhood period is divided into five phases on the basis of the child's needs. This primer focuses on ECE for the 3-6-year age group.



ECE is intended to develop in children some of the skills needed for academic readiness, and to prepare them for entry into primary education.

Sustained nutrition for first 1000 days of life plays most important role in Physical and Cognitive development

ECE is crucial for schooling / job outcomes

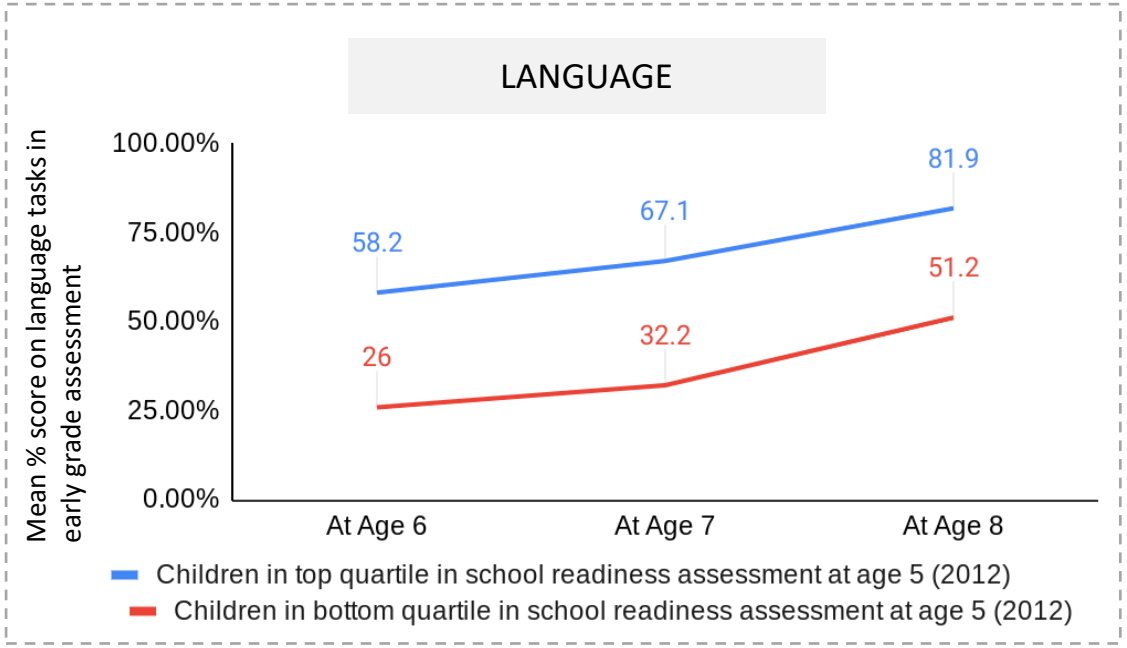
Early Primary

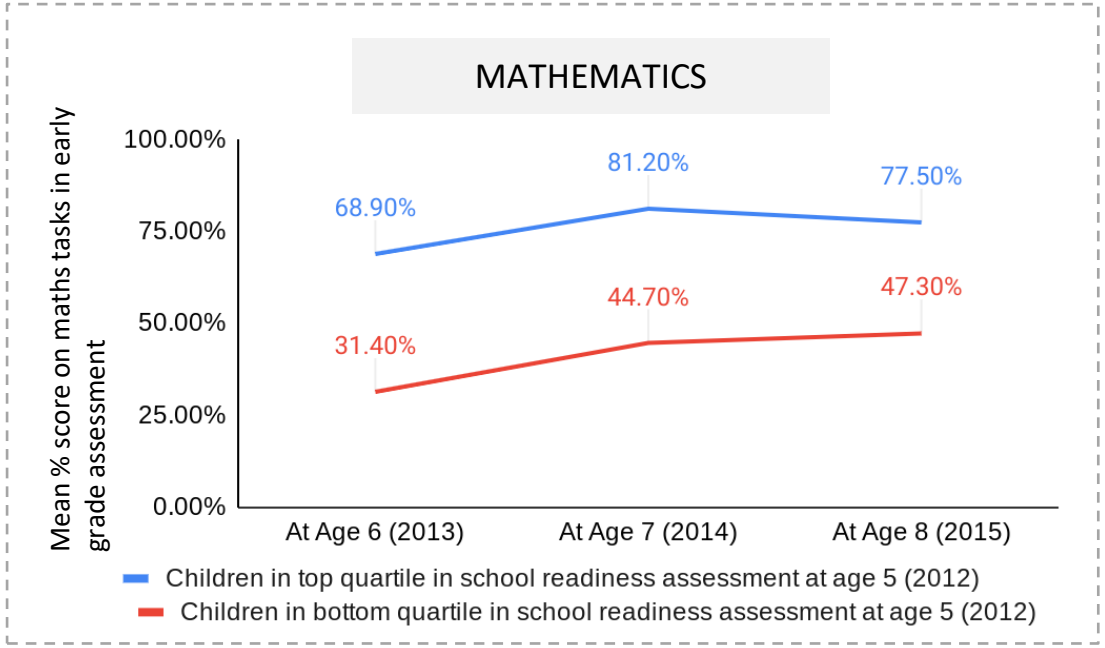
Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is an integrated and holistic paradigm, encompassing health, nutrition, care and ECE for children, provided by Anganwadi centres across the country.

Regular preschool participation from ages 4 to 5 has a significant impact on children's subsequent school-readiness levels, which in turn is associated strongly with learning outcomes in early primary grades, particularly in language and mathematics.

Quality of preschools is also a major determinant of school-readiness levels at age 5.
in India most **children are taught in subpar institutions** that fail to use age-appropriate methods, materials, and activities, leading to low school-readiness.

The **gap between what children can do and what is expected of them appears early and widens rapidly** as children progress from one grade to another.



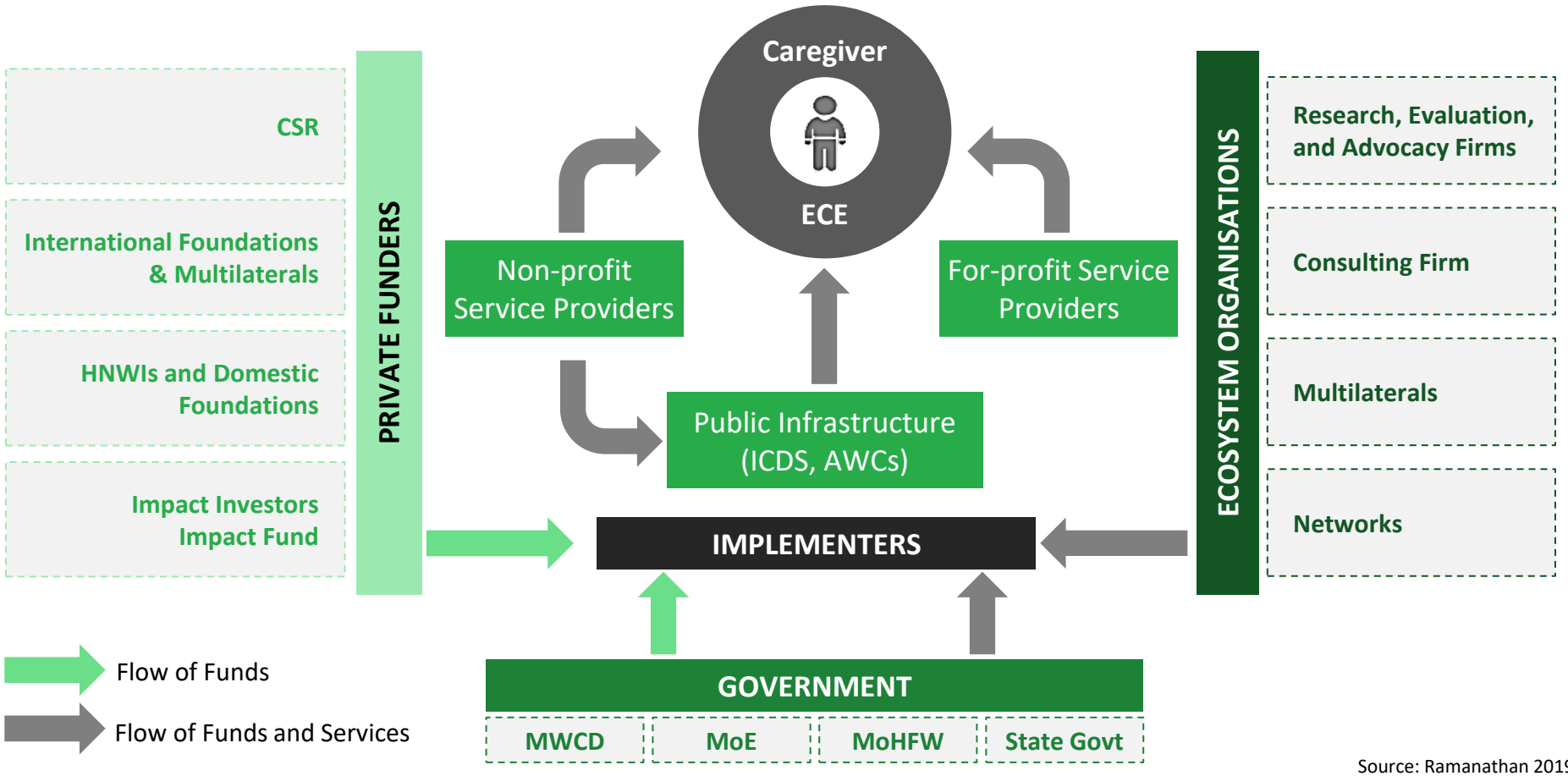


Source: Banerjee 2017; Taggart et. al 2015

THE ECE LANDSCAPE IN INDIA

World Bank's Investing in Early Years (IEY) framework highlights three pillars for intervention: nutrition, early stimulation, and protection from poverty.

Early Childhood Care and Education in India is provided through a nationwide network of 1.4 million government **Anganwadi centres** (AWCs, under the Integrated Child Development Scheme - ICDS), **NGOs, private players** and through the support of **multilateral and research organisations.**



The **government is the biggest provider of ECCE services** through the ICDS – overseen by the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD).

The **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) is responsible for programmes** that cater to the health and nutritional outcomes of pregnant and lactating women and children.

Pre-primary education is overseen by the Ministry of Education (MoE).

Source: Ramanathan 2019

Despite having a well-established Anganwadi system catering to all three early year components, India has performed low on both health and education indicators.

Since its inception, ICDS has been impeded by poor resource allocation, poor governance, and programmatic deficiencies, leading to poor health and education outcomes for 0-6-year-old children in India.

Health

Data from NFHS 5 reveals poor health outcomes, with the proportion of stunted (36%), wasted (19%), underweight (32%) and anaemic children (67%) in India still being very high.

ECE

Of the three A's – Access, Attendance and Achievement – India has performed decently on Access, however Attendance and Achievement need attention.

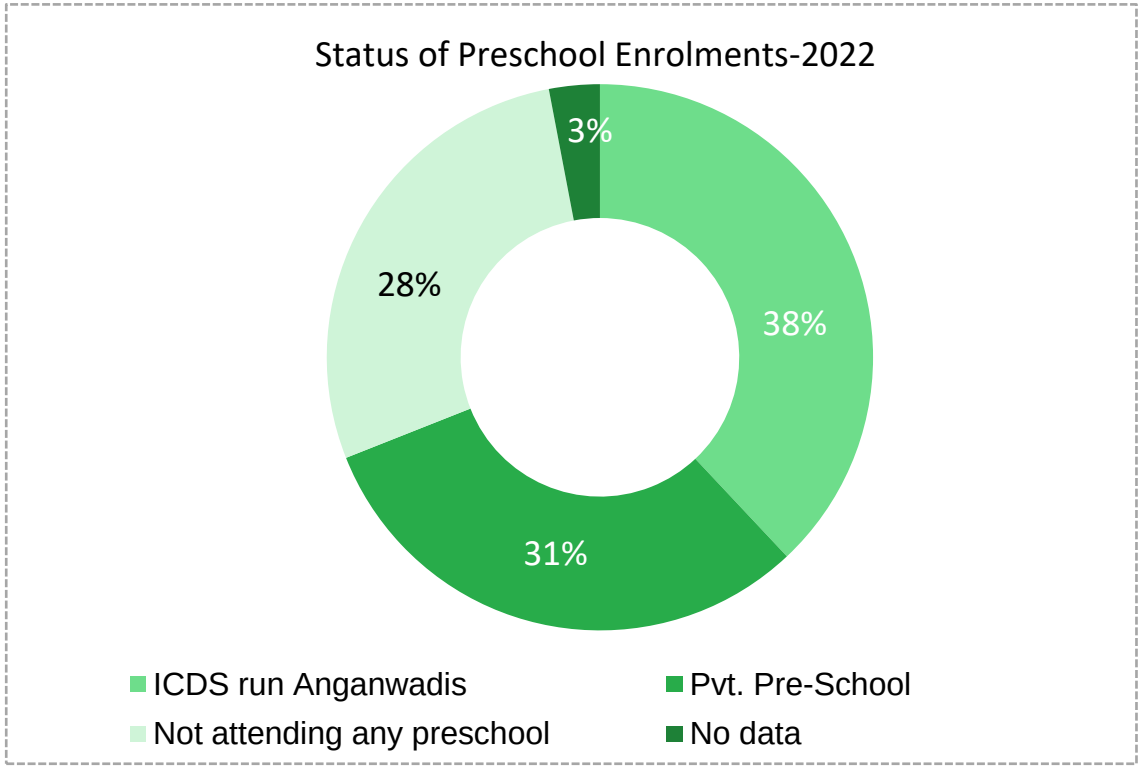
- Only about 48% of the child population between 0-6 years have access to Anganwadi Centres, the rest are enrolled in private pre-primary schools.
- 75.8% of 3-year-olds and 82% of 4-year olds are enrolled in some form of preschool in rural India (private, NGO or anganwadi), an increase of 7.7 and 6% points respectively over 2018 levels.
- On average, 4 in every 10 children in the 3-6-year age group are enrolled in an Anganwadi Centre, but the average attendance of 66.4% is too low for preschoolers to achieve school-readiness.
- Lack of school-readiness is a important challenge faced by students entering Grade 1.

"…at the time of school entry at age 5, most children's school readiness levels are far below expectations" (IECEI 2017).

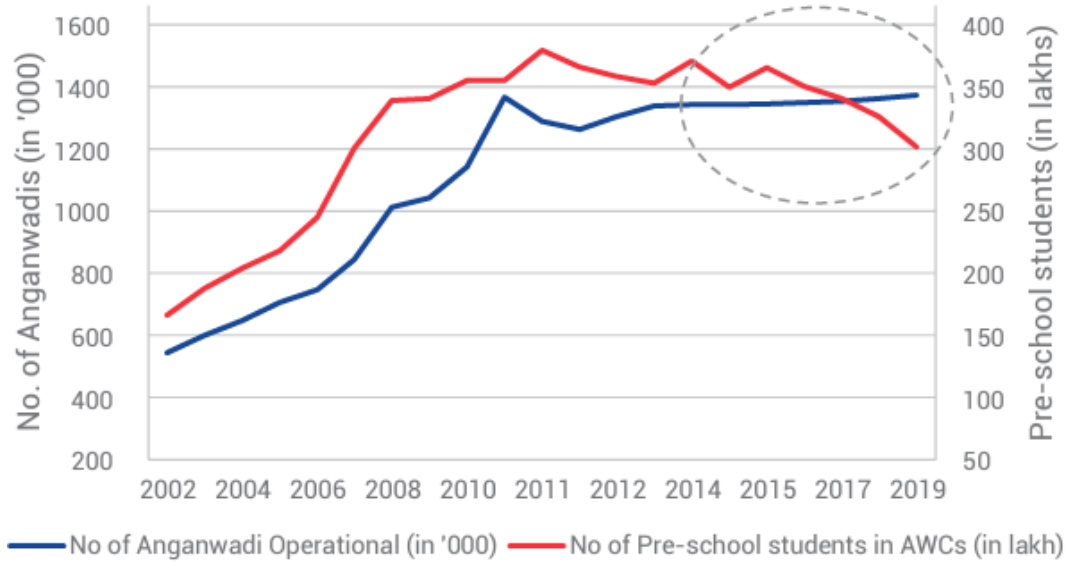
Source: ASER 2022

The mushrooming of private preschools and the dwindling number of enrollments in AWCs since 2015 indicates the lack of prioritisation of ECE in AWCs.

AWCs with poor infrastructure (12% AWCs lack drinking water and 28% lack toilet facility) and poor quality of ECE are unable to meet the expectations of parents.
This gap is quickly being filled in by private preschools, which in turn have no regulatory mechanism to abide to and hence, do not necessarily follow developmentally appropriate curriculum and pedagogy.



Source: Ramanathan 2019



Source: Ministry of Women and Child Development

The ECCE system in India is a mix of incongruous programmes implemented by the government, private and not-for-profit sectors.

THREE DIFFERENT TYPES OF PRE-SCHOOLS
exist in India, each differing in their functioning and governance mechanisms.

1 STANDALONE PRESCHOOL/ DAY CARE CENTRE/

3Rs

- Suitable for urban areas, operates for 6-8 hours.
- Infrastructure facilities include kitchen, toilet, water and computers with internet.
- Operational cost per child per year: INR 36,524-56,328.

2 STANDALONE ANGANWADI CENTRE /

Lacks ECE

- Operates for 3-4 hours.
- Infrastructure facilities include toilet, water and smartphone with internet.
- Minimum area of 500-600 square feet constructed area, along with play area.
- Operational cost per child per year: INR 32,594-45,759.

3 PRE-PRIMARY SECTION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Lacks developmentally appropriate pedagogy

- The centre operates for 4 hours.
- Located within premises of a primary school.
- Primary school infrastructure is shared with pre-primary sections.
- Operational cost per child per year: INR 46,294-49,159.

Since these institutions differ greatly in terms of access, outreach, location, component s and quality, monitoring and ensuring standards is a persistent challenge.

Sources: NIPCCD 2018; Kundu et al. 2021; NIPCCD 2006.

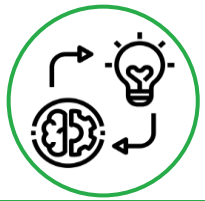
Formal teaching of the 3Rs (Reading, wRiting and aRithmetic) in preschools with an emphasis on rote learning has a negative relationship with developmentally appropriate activities.

There exist significant gaps at the achievement levels and school-readiness amongst 3- to 6-year-olds. Only 24% of 5-year-olds are able to do a simple listening comprehension task (ASER 2019).

Pre-literacy and Language Concepts

Children were asked to identify the beginning sound of words and to match two words with same beginning sound.

Only 10.7% could recognise all sounds and pictures beginning with same sound.



Cognitive and Conceptual Concepts

Children were asked to repeat and complete a pictorial pattern.

Only **17.5%** could complete the patterns.

Pre-math Number Concepts

Children were asked to point to a number (among 9,3,7,8) that was less than the number 5.

Only 29.5% could do number comparisons accurately.

NEP 2020 states that a "learning crisis" in elementary school happens even before children enter Grade 1.

- **44% of 4-5-year-olds** are already enrolled in primary school, getting exposed to pedagogy which is developmentally inappropriate for them (ASER 2022).
- **28% of children** are not attending any preschool. They enter formal schooling without exposure to ECE and are not school-ready.
- When children enter school already "behind" or begin to "fall behind" early, it is hard for them to "catch up" later.

Source: Dhawan & Krishnan 2019

KEY POLICIES, AND SCHEMES TO ACHIEVE ECE

India is a signatory to a number of international treaties and agreements, leading to initiation of several schemes and programmes that safeguard the rights of children.

There has been a recent policy shift towards more comprehensive approach to addressing Foundational Learning & Numeracy outcomes, with a particular focus on ECE.

1974 — National Policy on Children

Conceptual move to integrate early services for children in the Five Year Plans and under the decentralised Panchayati Raj System.

1975 — Integrated Childhood Development Scheme launched

ICDS provides holistic childhood services along with ECCE to over 36 million 3-to-6-year-olds. It takes a lifecycle approach and also serves pregnant and lactating mothers to 0-6-year-old children.

1986 — National Education Policy for India

Focus on universal access, enrolment, and retention of learners till age 14. First mention of ECCE.

1992 — National Plan of Action (NPA): A commitment to Child

Each state created a state NPA to handle multidimensional issues for child protection, growth and survival, with a strategy to guide the course of action, fed into the Five-year Plans of the country.

2010 — Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) launched

For universalising primary education, focus on girls, SC/ST, and other groups. ECCE still is managed by ICDS (whose prime focus has been reducing infant and maternal mortality rates.

2010 — Right to Education made a fundamental right

Article 21A was added as 86th amendment. The RTE Act was passed, which makes preschool education a fundamental right for children aged 3 to 14.

2013 — National Early Childhood Care & Education Policy (ECCE)

Laid out a comprehensive approach for survival, care and developmentally appropriate, play-based preschool education for the age group of 3 to 6 years.

2018 — Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan launched

Integrated Scheme on School Education to address school education 'holistically from preschool to Grade 12'.

2020 — National Education Policy (NEP) launched

Gave importance to early childhood education, elevated it to the status of school education, recognised ages 3-8 as a single integrated 'foundational' stage.

2022 — National Curriculum for ECE is launched

Holistic approach to education emphasising on foundational skills, joyful learning, 21st century skills, connection to vocational education and more.

The NEP 2020 is the first policy that compels schools to embrace ECE no later than 2030 to ensure that every child entering Grade 1 is school-ready.

It recommends outcome-focussed engagement with all stakeholders-parents, teachers, and inter-department coherence to ensure quality ECE for all.

NEP approach facilitating the ECE Landscape

Focus on infrastructure for ECCE

- Anganwadi infrastructure
- Availability of well-ventilated child-friendly buildings
- Availability of developmentally appropriate Teaching Learning Materials for 3-to-6-year olds

Ensuring access to holistic and joyful learning

- Restructure curriculum and pedagogy (5+3+3+4).
- NCERT curriculum and pedagogy framework for 0-8 years-with three years of preschool or Anganwadi and Grades 1 and 2 for 6-8 years
- Focus on multilingual needs

Reforming academic structure with focus on school-readiness

- Curriculum to focus on physical and motor development, cognitive development, socio-emotional-ethical development, cultural/artistic development, and communication
- Attain school-readiness through Vidya Pravesh.

Reforming teacher training and hiring for ECE

- Provide six-month certification to 10+2 Anganwadi Workers (AWW) and one-year diploma to less qualified AWW.
- Fill vacancies in backward regions and focus on continuous professional development of teachers to impart pedagogical framework developed by NCERT.

Change in Governance mechanism

- Inclusion of ECE in MoE.
- The implementation of early childhood education will be carried out jointly by the Ministries of Education, Women and Child Development (WCD), Health and Family Welfare (HFW), and Tribal Affairs.

The Early Childhood Education (ECE) described in the New Education Policy 2022

NIPUN Bharat-Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) 2.0

National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN Bharat) was launched by the Ministry of Education (MoE)

1. **Universal Access:** Access to free, safe, and high-quality ECE at preschools/Anganwadis/ Balvatikas for all children from aged 3 to 6 years
2. **Foundational Learning Curriculum:** For ages 3-8, the curriculum is divided into two parts: Foundation learning curriculum from ages 3-6 in ECE and 6-8 in Classes I and II in primary school.
3. **Multi-faceted Learning:** A strong focus on play, activity, and inquiry-based learning through a flexible learning system to develop Foundational Literacy & Numeracy (FLN) and social skills.
4. **Preparatory Class:** Before the age of 5, every child will be moved to 'Preparatory Class' or 'Balvatika' (that is, before Class 1), which has ECE-qualified teachers imparting play-based learning.

To achieve Foundational Learning and Numeracy by 2026-27, it is imperative that the ECE is prioritised, as it is the first fundamental step in a child's learning journey.

The National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN) Bharat Mission has three developmental goals at the preschool level.

	PRESCHOOL 1 (3 to 4 year olds)	PRESCHOOL 2 (4 to 5 year olds)	BALVATIKA (5 to 6 year olds)	VIDYA PRAVESH (12-week course for 6 year olds)
Health and well-being of children	Child begins to state some physical characteristics about self.	Describes self in terms of physical characteristics.	Describes self and others in terms of physical characteristics like gender, likes, and interests.	Socio-emotional, physical and motor development, nutrition, safety, hygiene and sanitation.
Become effective communicators	Sings/hums words/ lines/ parts of songs or rhymes in own language.	Identifies few rhyming words.	Enjoy and creates nonsensical rhyming words, recognises sounds of letters.	Understands oral language, print awareness, phonemic awareness, book handling, vocabulary, letter-sound correspondence, alphabet recognition, and rhyming.
Become involved learners to achieve FLN	Compares two objects based on one observation like weight or length.	Compares and classifies objects based on two factors like height and weight, shape and colour.	Arranges numbers, classifies objects by size, colour and shapes, occurrence of events in a sequence.	- Concepts related to Environment - Pre-number and number sense, spatial sense, patterns and so on.

NIPUN Bharat guidelines focus on 'school-readiness' for Grade 1 children,
through two tiers of preschool, 1 year of Balvatika (5 year olds) and 12 weeks of School Preparation Module (Vidya Pravesh), with clear **focus on involving parents into learning process and applying formative assessment measures.**

Source: MoE 2021; NCERT 2022

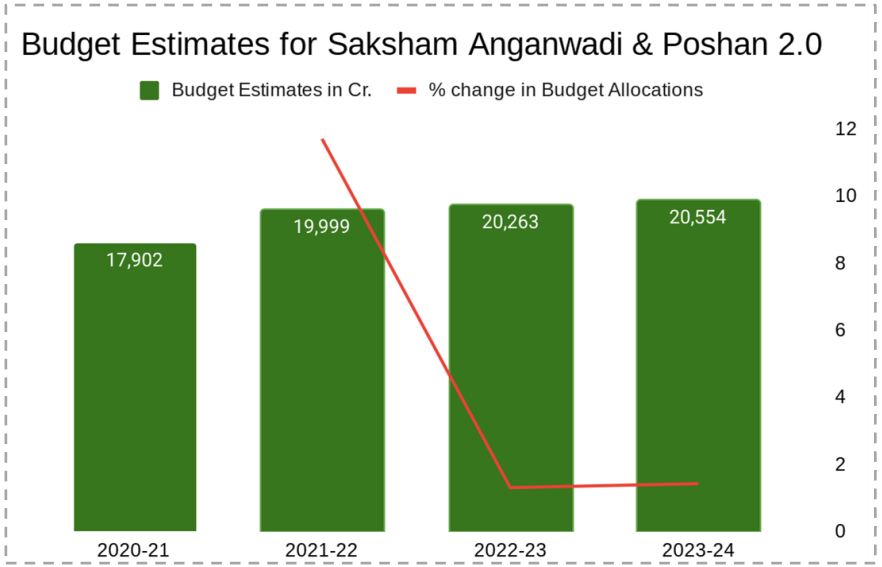
SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES IN ECE

Although NEP 2020 has emphasised on mandatory two years of preschool and 12 weeks of remedial classes for Grade 1 (Vidya Pravesh), a number of challenges hinder the implementation and attainment of quality ECE in India.

Policy	Funding	Governance	Assessments	Classroom Factors	Outside-classroom Factors
• Lack of synergies among various stakeholders • Gaps in implementation guidelines • Poor Budget allocations	• Low allocation of funds from central and state governments • Inadequate funds for factors contributing to school-readiness • Philanthropic capital challenges	• Lack of clarity on monitoring and evaluation processes and outcomes • Lack of accountability towards ECE • High vacancies, low engagement of parents and low expectations for this age group	• Absence of assessment frameworks for assessing students' readiness at preschool levels • Lack of using assessments in planning	• Lack of school-readiness in children • Using developmentally inappropriate curriculum and pedagogy • Teacher effectiveness • Irregular attendance of students and teachers	• Lack of parents' involvement in the child's learning • Demand for 3Rs • Lack of resources for parents to enable learning at home • Socio-economic constraints like parents' literacy levels

1 Policy and ICDS Despite having a national ECCE policy, gaps in guidelines for effective implementation and lack of sufficient budget allocations impact quality and delivery of ECE.

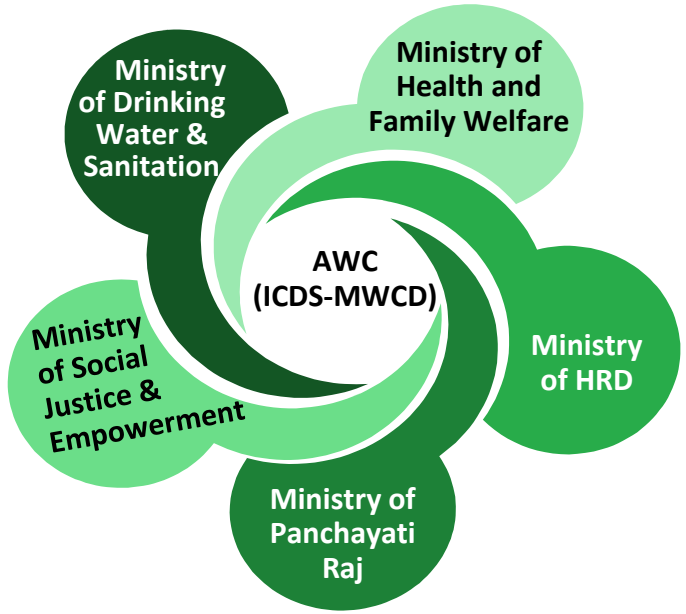
While NEP and NIPUN Bharat mission emphasise the importance of ECCE, several key points for the improvement of Anganwadi centres are missing.



Budget estimates for the Saksham Anganwadi scheme saw a nominal increase of 1.3-1.4% in last three years. The scheme not only covers ECE but also nutrition, immunisation and other developmental factors for the 0-6 years age group.

- The NEP acknowledges diversity in ECE provisioning, but fails to take a position on how to bring equality across a variety of providers. It also lacks an accreditation system for preschools.
- The policy is silent on the long-standing demand to bring ECE under the ambit of the RTE.
- It does not talk about the cost needed to make the ECE vision under the NEP a reality, and who will bear that cost.

Lack of effective coordination between several ministries leading to half-hearted efforts impacts the success of ECE.



Establishing an alignment between the MWCD and MoE, both of which focus on ECE, is a challenge as the service providers are the same for both the ministries i.e. Anganwadi workers. Efficient functioning of AWC is marred by the lack of proper coordination across ministries.

There is a mismatch in the implementation of services:

1. Too much focus on providing food security rather, than on improving child care behaviour and educating parents.
2. Need for better targeting of geographical areas, castes and communities that need the interventions the most.

(World Bank 2005)

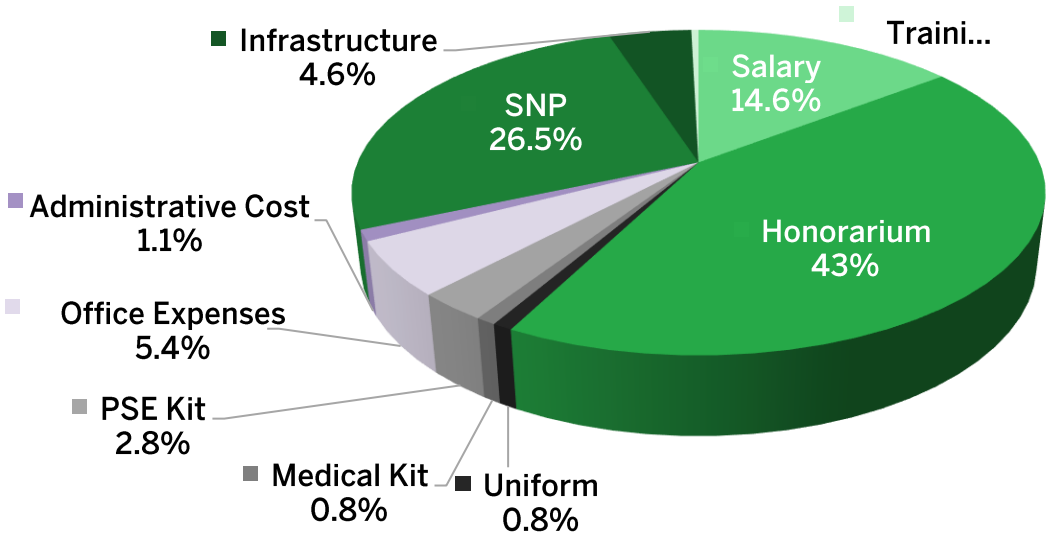
Overall, budget allocations around children's welfare have been declining over the last decade. Actual spending per child on children below 6 years of age is almost one-eighth of the per capita spending on children in the 6-14 age-group (UNESCO and NIPCCD 2006).

Source: Gragnolati et.al. 2005, NIPCCD 2006

2 Funding Historically, ECE in India has not received adequate political push, budgetary allocations and CSR/philanthropic funding it deserves; till date not a single budget head has been dedicated to ECE.

The current expenditure of the Government of India on ECE is less than 0.5% of the GDP. To achieve a universal ECE programme for all children between 3 to 6 years of age, the minimum allocation required is 1.5-2.2% of the GDP.

Component-wise distribution of allocation under ICDS-ECE-2020-21 (%)



Government-provided ECE services cover 32 per cent of children in the 3-6 years age group. The remaining 68 per cent, is serviced by NGOs and the private sector.

A nationwide analysis on the cost of universalisation of ECE by Save the Children highlights a major gap in the sector in terms of resource requirements vis-à-vis the current allocation.

The average projected cost per child, per year for quality ECE services is in the range of Rs 32,531 (feasible cost) – Rs 56,327 (optimal cost).

Approved allocation for ECE as a share of total (centre+state) government allocation has reduced from 0.44% in 2018-19 to 0.39% in 2020. The highest share is taken by honorariums and salaries.

Despite education being one of the priority areas for CSR funders, **only 17 per cent of the top education funders have financed interventions related to ECCE.** Between 2016 and 2018, of the 77 funders identified as top funders in education, only 13 had projects with an ECCE focus, and **only 3 had a focus on education programmes in ECE.**

Financing is tied to administrative processes and budget headings of access and provisions, and not with the impact on learning.
The Union Government routinely releases less funds than allocated to the states for the **Samagra Shiksha scheme.**
With just 51% of earmarked SSA funds released till December 2022**, funding is also delayed for most of the states.**

Source: Kundu et al. 2021, Ramanathan 2019, Budget Briefs, CPR 2022-23

3 Governance Monitoring systems for ECE do not exist at the national, state, district and block levels. There are no standardised quality assurance mechanisms that cover both public and private provisions of ECE in India.

According to World Bank data (2019), India's gross enrolment ratio in pre-primary schools stands at 63%, much lower than that of its neighbours Pakistan (81%) and Nepal (87%). The quality of ECCE in India also lags behind the rest of the world, ranking last among 45 countries on starting well Index (availability, affordability and quality) (Economist Intelligence Unit 2012).

AMBIGUITY ABOUT MINISTERIAL AUTHORITY	ECE service delivery is anchored by two ministries, the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Women and Child Development, through ICDS AWCs and pre-primary sections in government schools. There is a lack of well-defined parameters for coordination and collaboration between the two ministries. In the absence of a universal ECE programme in the country, no guidelines are available for programme-specific financial norms, monitoring and evaluation.
COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT	Although AWS and other pre-schools are generally located within the vicinity of households, there is no provision for ensuring the participation of parents and building feedback mechanisms for better monitoring and governance. Monitoring of AWCs is focussed on health parameters and not on ECE outcomes. The number of children enrolled is the only parameter measured for gauging the success of ECE.
GOVERNANCE RULES FOR PRIVATE PRESCHOOLS	ECE stakeholders (government, NGOs, private preschools) follow a diverse set of practices. These practices sometimes deviate from quality norms in terms of space, teacher-child ratio and curriculum. There is no information about the number of private preschools in the country or the number of children enrolled in them. A quality assurance mechanism that covers both public and private provisions of ECE needs to be developed and implemented.
PLANNING AND VACANCIES	It is recommended that one AWC be set up for every 400-800 of the population. Several AWCs were planned on the basis of the 1991 Census and new population data has not been considered. Due to this, the challenge of access to the service gets aggravated. Positions of supervisors, Child Development Project Officers (CDPO) and AWW are vacant, leading to the lack of supervisory staff, and improper monitoring of AWC.

4 Assessment Despite efforts such as the National ECCE curriculum framework by NCERT and the Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) by CECED; measuring learning outcomes of children aged 3 to 6 in India is still an evolving area.

NEP 2020 suggests Anganwadi workers to create a profile of each child, and use this to develop an individualised care plan.
However, due to the lack of trained AWW, the desired assessment format is not followed.

As per the NEP, assessments are holistic evaluations of a child's development, which help identify areas where they may need support or guidance.

Lack of an assessment framework that could enable the teacher to conduct effective assessments, and apply the concept of 'differentiation' for meeting the varying needs of the learners in different age groups, as prescribed by the curriculum framework (Pace et al. 2018).

Lack of the capacity of teachers to create standardised metrics for measuring ECE outcomes/school-readiness amongst 5-6 year olds.

ECE professionals recognise that children develop at different rates in different domains.

NEP guides that at age 5, children should be in some form of preschool, and by age 6 should be in primary school. 27 states in India give admission to 5-year-olds in Grade 1.

Research conducted across three states found that children attend school irregularly; back and forth movements between preschool and primary grades are frequently observed, and enrolments stabilise only by age 8; making it a mammoth task to evaluate using one format (Kaul et al. 2017).

Assessments act as levers to manage policy evaluation and accountability, especially planning resources, goal setting and allocation of funds.

Young children (3-7 years old) do not follow the linear trajectories that policies prescribe, or that the education system expects.
There is a **lack of standardisation in the ways the implementers assess learning outcomes in preschools.**

5 Classroom Processes While appropriate curricular guidance is available in the country for ECE; the Anganwadi workers face challenges of inappropriate delegation of work, competing priorities, irregular remuneration, inapt training and infrastructure to implement ECE in classrooms or AWC.

Private preschools and AWC adhere to the teaching of 3R's, and there is a virtual absence of any play activities.

There is a large gap between what is prescribed pedagogy and what is practised inside classrooms.

- Only about 34.9% of time in Anganwadi centres is spent on age-appropriate play-based learning activities; this share falls to just 11.7% in private preschools (Ramanathan 2019).
- Preschool education in private and public nursery schools is largely a downward extension of primary education curriculum.

80% of practitioners and teachers lack adequate training in early years learning approaches (NIPCCD 2006).

- An Anganwadi worker spends 15 minutes on average in teaching on ECE (the prescribed time is 45 minutes to two hours).
- ECE teachers are often poorly aligned with learning goals as they simultaneously pursue many goals of child health, nutrition and community interactions (Dhingra & Sharma 2011; Dixit et al. 2010; NIPCCD 2006).
- In ICDS, there is no regular and recognised ECE training and certification programme for the Anganwadi staff.

The key obstacle in professionalisation of ECCE teachers is its low social status and low remuneration.

- Due to the absence of men in the Anganwadis, there is low social acceptance of the role .
- The wages and remuneration given to ECCE professionals, including the Anganwadi workers is very low and there is an absence of a forward-looking career path for them (Rao et al. 2021).

AWCs lack teaching tools and have poor infrastructure facilities.

- Largely, the Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) operate from single rooms in rented buildings and most of them have no open space (NIPCCD 2013; Chandra 2017).
- There is a lack of adequate educational resources in the AWCs. Several studies have pointed out the inadequacy of kits and play materials including toys, charts in the AWCs (NIPCCD 2006).

6 Outside-classroom Factors

The reduced priority of overburdened AWW on ECE, and lack of parents' awareness on quality ECE has created the demand for English medium private preschools, which are a formal extension of primary schools.

Lack of the perceived benefit of preschool education, and no teaching or proper guidance to children at Anganwadi centres are the major reasons cited by parents for children not attending the AWCs, or attending private preschools.

PARENTS' ROLE IN ENABLING ECE	The national curriculum for ECE envisages parental involvement in the early stimulation for children under three, through an unstructured mode of interactions. However, parents lack awareness about their role in enabling learning at home and preparing the child for school.
PARENTS' PERCEPTION OF AWCS	Anganwadi centres are perceived to lack infrastructure and developmentally appropriate tools for play- and activity-based learning. Research highlights that poorest parents tend to put children between 4-5 years of age into primary schools, assuming that AWCs are not providing requisite education to the child, and their focus is nutrition and not education.
PARENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF QUALITY ECE	Most private schools in the state use English as the medium of instruction. This is one of the major factors attracting parents to these schools, in anticipation that their children will have better prospects for higher education and employment. Emphasis on rote learning and demand for the 3Rs in teaching is a common ask from the parents.
AWC'S ABILITY TO INVOLVE PARENTS	Anganwadi centres are operational for four hours and it becomes difficult for the AWW to fit into the parents' schedule to garner their effective participation in training and long term engagement for early stimulation. It is also difficult to convince parents that play-based learning with locally acquired materials is more developmentally appropriate, than rote learning.

Source: Vennam and Komanduri 2009

SOME EXISTING SOLUTIONS

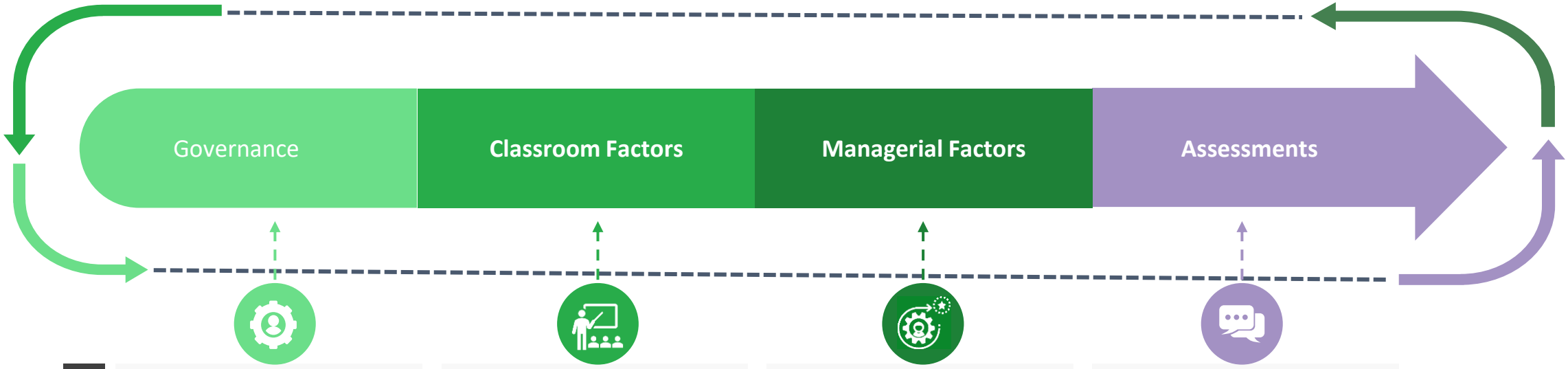
Replicable solutions, ranging from catalysing best practices for quality classroom activities to governance mechanisms, are being employed.

An interlinked chain of solutions would enable achievement of school-readiness amongst 3-6-year-olds.

Demonstrate collaborative action for strengthening inter-ministry governance through technology

Catalyse teaching at AWCs through innovative ideas

Assessment of school-readiness and involving parents in ECE



	Governance	Classroom Factors	Managerial Factors	Assessments
Application	Delhi Government's pilot project with the help of Indus Action focused on developing community involvement with Anganwadi centres to build school-readiness.	The Tamil Nadu Government and JPAL's randomised control trial to hire and train a community person to teach at AWC.	Centre Square Foundation's pilot project to train teachers, headmasters and administrators to achieve school-readiness by building clarity on goals and efficiency.	Pratham's observation and activity-based assessment initiative to involve parents in the child's learning.

Engaging parents and enhancing their capacities in building school-readiness of children.

1 Replicable solution: Parent Outreach and Engagement Programme by the Delhi Government

Intervention

The Delhi Government operationalised the **Anganwadi (AWD) Samiti Project** that involves parents and community members in the day-to-day operations of an Anganwadi Centre and its services.

COVERAGE **1100 Anganwadi centres, 7 lakh children**

GEOGRAPHY **New Delhi Anganwadi centres**

Components

- Parent-led AWC-based interventions for coaching parents on early stimulation and care-giving: Parents were coached for 100 days on four aspects of early stimulation: Look, Ask Why, Letting the Child Take Lead and Emotions (caters to building awareness among parents around emotional needs of children and social emotional readiness for school).
- Parent-led home-based intervention for early childhood education: As part of the curriculum, a parent is given a checklist of 100 to-do's, one for each day in the programme as an attractive poster to put up on their home wall. The to-do's include activities pertaining to three main developmental domains of pre-literacy and numeracy, and socio-emotional readiness.

Impact

- The pilot intervention provides evidence that children who engaged with print material/school-readiness activities at home and whose parents actively engaged in sessions of the programme, or through activities at home have a 32% more chance of being ready for school, as compared to their counterparts who do not.
- Awareness of parents on care-giving increased, in which the availability of materials to use at home played an important role.

Engaging the community in the teaching-learning processes in early years interventions improves ownership for learning outcomes, and is a sustainable solution to the paucity of trained teachers.

2 Replicable solution: Hiring community members as ECE facilitators

Intervention

The government of Tamil Nadu offered **a one-time grant to AWCs** to hire an ECCE facilitator to assist the AWW with preschool education.

COVERAGE — **320 Anganwadi Workers**

GEOGRAPHY — **4 Districts across Tamil Nadu**

Components

- The experiment was conducted across a sample of 320 Anganwadi centres in 4 districts of Tamil Nadu, representative of a population of 60 million people.
- Half of these centres were randomly sampled to receive an extra facilitator focussing on early childhood education.
- The facilitator was scheduled to work half a day and focus on preschool instruction. S/he was paid half the salary of a regular worker (i.e. Rs. 4000 per month). In remaining half no intervention was done.
- The Government of Tamil Nadu developed manuals for facilitators and provided one week of training to facilitators to implement this curriculum.

Impact

- Adding a worker doubled the net instructional time in treated centres (from 38 to 76 minutes per day).
- Improved math and language scores for children enrolled in the programme (0.29 and 0.46 standard deviation increase).
- Improved results on health parameters (children in treated schools were 3.1% less likely to be malnourished).
- Presence of a facilitator reduced the absence of anganwadi workers in treated centres by 50% (from 20% to 10%). It also ensured timely opening of AWCs at 9 am.

Source: Ganimian, Muralidharan and Walters 2021

Preparing learners for school is a critical step taken by some organisations to tackle the learning deficit from preschool, and enable a smooth transition to primary grades.

3 Replicable solutions: School-readiness Programme (Akshara, UNICEF, CSF)

Intervention

The state Departments of Education launched an accelerated 40-day School-readiness Programme (SRP) for students starting Grade 1.

COVERAGE	5000 children
GEOGRAPHY	Gujarat and Karnataka

Components

- The objective was to provide transition support to students, train the teachers and improve student scores in pre-literacy and pre-numeracy.
- Clear messaging to teachers, headmasters and administrators to help them better understand the need for the programme and their expected roles. Associated factors like classroom management and instructional hours were modified as per the need of the region.
- Peer learning groups for teachers on WhatsApp and frequent monitoring of the classroom delivery by state officials
- Regular feedback loops with teachers.

Impact

- 17.8% positive change in cognitive development in learners who underwent the intervention compared to the control group in Karnataka.
- 10% positive change in cognitive development compared to the control group in Gujarat.

Accelerated School Readiness Program has the potential to be a low-cost solution that can bridge school readiness gaps in children at the start of class 1. CSF aims to incorporate these learnings into a larger pilot study across states.

The use of simple assessment tools to initiate conversations with the parents and designing activities using local TLM has helped Pratham to create a scalable model for ECE.

4 Replicable solution: Pratham's observation- and activity-based approach to measure children's progress in communities and conduct activities.

Intervention

The core idea of the programme is to use observation-based assessments in order to track child's progress and hence, inform activities.

COVERAGE 4,92,000 students

GEOGRAPHY 15 States

Components

- Capacity building of mothers and teachers with the help of basic manuals and locally sourced TLMs. Post-Covid, WhatsApp messages and videos are also being sent to parents to guide them with simple activities that can be done with children.
- Engaging adolescents in the community for organising ECE Assessment melas, testing children and engaging with parents.
- Creating mothers' groups to anchor activities that can be done with children at home, or in groups in communities.
- There is a special focus is on gender-responsive content; so that children are exposed to various kinds of role models and are ready to navigate stereotypes early on.

Impact

- Indicators for assessment are such that they are easy to observe, measure and communicate. The findings of these periodic assessments have helped to track children's progress and create strong engagement with the parents and communities.
- 37,000 mothers' groups have been created, and are active across 15 states. Efforts have also seen engagement among fathers.

Source: Pratham -ECE Measurement

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