

Assessing the Impact of NEP (2020) on Anganwadi Workers: Awareness, Roles, and ECCE Services in Delhi

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Abstract

21st century has instilled innumerable challenges in the world. These challenges include, but are not limited to, the rampant advancement of technology and its impact, rapid change in the job market, ensuring sustainable development, etc. As a result, the childhood years have become extremely important to prepare and develop children for this fast-growing multidimensional world as this period not only plays a crucial role in the physical and mental growth and development of children but also has a lifelong impact on their learning. Consequently, providing quality Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) services becomes crucial for the development of young children. The same can be seen in the new National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 of India and the National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage (NCFFS) 2023. As per the guidelines given by NEP (2020), Anganwadi workers are about to be trained in the ECCE pedagogical framework designed by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). As these trainings will play a noteworthy role in the skill enhancement of Anganwadi workers, this study aims to explore Anganwadi workers' awareness concerning this training and other significant developments as per NEP 2020.

Keywords: Anganwadi, Childhood, Development, ECCE, NEP

Introduction

The world has entered an expeditious development in the 21st century with significant enhancement in technology related to multidimensional aspects of life. This, also, has led to the dawn of a number of challenges in front of the world. These challenges are crucial and concerning for the everyday life events of the individuals as these challenges include, but are not limited to, the rampant advancement of technology changing the core nature of tasks; change in the job market scenarios with respect to the kind of work being required and skills that are expected from the workers; other needs of the hour such as the necessity of sustainable development essential for the future of the Earth, etc. All of these, collectively, have made the skills and techniques required in the development of current and future-generation learners extremely pivotal and substantial not just for mere survival but also for ensuring that they keep developing with the change or modification of the needs of the world. One such step has been taken by the visionary document, i.e. National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 that emphasises the need to develop skills among children from their young childhood years as the childhood years are vital for preparing and developing

children for a rapidly evolving, multidimensional world since this age significantly influences their physical and mental growth and has a lasting effect on their learning.

A crucial organisation that works in the formal setup to ensure Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is Anganwadi. According to the directives established by NEP (2020), Anganwadi personnel are set to get training in the ECCE pedagogical framework developed by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). These trainings would significantly contribute to the skill development of Anganwadi staff. The NEP (2020) requires training for Anganwadi personnel in ECCE to improve the quality of early childhood education in Anganwadis. Anganwadi workers with a minimum of 10+2 education qualify for a 6-month certificate course in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), whilst those with lesser educational credentials may enroll in a 1-year degree program. These employees may also use digital technologies to get training remotely. The execution of this instruction may influence pedagogical approaches and enhance educational results for young children. Considering the fundamental significance of early childhood for lifetime development, it is essential to comprehend how Anganwadi personnel execute ECCE rules and procedures. This is essential for a number of reasons. For instance, the quality of education in Anganwadis is often questioned, with many parents believing that their children cannot learn effectively in these centres. One reason for this is the lack of well-educated and trained Anganwadi workers, which affects the overall learning experience of children (Kulkarni, 2005).

There are plenty of other challenges associated with this as well. ECCE is vital for the development of children aimed at addressing the health, nutrition, and developmental needs of children and mothers. However, there is a need for better implementation and more support for Anganwadi workers to ensure the quality of education (Thakur et al., 2015). Also, evaluations of The Integrated Child Development Services ICDS highlight gaps in infrastructure and service delivery that need attention to improve outcomes for children (Evaluation of ICDS in Gujarat, 2015). Furthermore, issues such as inadequate facilities, absenteeism of workers, and poor quality of food have been identified as major concerns in Anganwadi centres (Narayan, 2008). Moreover, there are concerns about the inadequate pay and delayed salaries, which can affect the quality of services provided (Sinha, D. 2006). Nevertheless, this paper tries to explore Anganwadi employees' understanding on this training and other pertinent advancements in accordance with NEP 2020.

Purpose of the Study

This research aims to explore Anganwadi workers' understanding of the ECCE training offered by NCERT, as specified in NEP 2020 along with the services provided by Anganwadis to disadvantaged groups to understand the effect of the NEP 2020 on Anganwadi personnel.

Significance of the Study

This study is crucial since Anganwadi centres cater to the most vulnerable children, offering important early childhood care and education. Comprehending the functions of Anganwadi personnel and assessing the quality of services they provide is essential for enhancing ECCE practices in these centres. Moreover, This is directly linked to their level of awareness, skills, and development.

Research Methodology

This research used a qualitative methodology, using semi-structured interviews with five Anganwadi workers from various locations in Delhi, namely Janakpuri and Seelampur. Semi-structured interviews

allow for in-depth exploration of the participants' perspectives and experiences (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Interviews were done after the acquisition of consent from the Anganwadi supervisor. The interviews were held in a discreet environment to ensure anonymity, allowing all participants to comfortably express their opinions. The study had five participants. Participant 1 is 34 years old, has finished graduate studies, and has seven years of professional experience. Participant 2 is a 38-year-old graduate with seven years of professional experience. Participant 3 is a 28-year-old who has passed 12th grade and has two years of relevant experience. Participant 4 is 36 years old, with a graduation degree and six years of work experience. Participant 5, a 42-year-old widow, has five years of professional experience.

Analysis and Findings:

An exploratory research methodology has been used to analyse and find diverse patterns arising from the respondents' experiences. Multiple themes were discerned from their experiences, and based on these, a select few themes were also extracted. Consequently, the data analysis are conducted to identify and link many common themes inherent in the respondents' lived experiences. The main themes identified are *Roles and Responsibilities*, *The Inherent Services of ECCE*, *The Implemented Training*, and *Parent and Community Interaction*.

Roles and Responsibilities:

Anganwadi personnel are responsible for providing informal preschool education to children. This is undertaken with the aim of enhancing children's readiness for formal education. Furthermore, they are responsible for overseeing the implementation of programs aimed at improving health and nutrition, along with community outreach efforts that assist pregnant mothers and underprivileged children.

The Inherent Services of ECCE:

ECCE training utilises tools like charts, flashcards, and puzzles. The emphasis is on developing skills that may enable Anganwadi workers to facilitate learners with Play based learning, Hands on Learning, and similar teaching-learning strategies required for effective implementation and ensuring development of young children. Notably, the number of days for which they were being trained were significantly less than the mentioned and recommended numbers.

The Implemented Training:

Administering the ECCE curriculum effectively is difficult due to a number of significant reasons. One is the limited availability of suitable teaching materials and required infrastructure that can enhance their efficiency. Conversely, employees have indicated that they are getting reduced training periods, despite the National Education Policy 2020 stipulating a six-month training time for early children care and education essential for ensuring its effectiveness. Collectively, limited exposure, lack of training, underwhelming infrastructure, etc. contribute to the significant challenges that come in front of the successful implementation of ECCE curriculum.

Parent and Community Interaction

Different stakeholders are extremely significant for the effective implementation and achievement of the development goals of ECCE and Anganwadis. Such stakeholders, apart from workers and other staff members of Anganwadis, also include parents. The personnel at the Anganwadi program foster a constructive rapport with the parents, who provide insights into their children's development throughout their involvement in the program. This may be accomplished by regular house visits and discussions with parents to strengthen the community's relational ties.

Notably, as the participants were found to be aware of required training irrespective of the fact that which

document suggests it, they were less aware of the duration and significance of any such training. Moreover, a number of other challenges have also been identified in the course of the research, revealing the ground-level challenges of Anganwadi workers and providing significant glimpses of areas concerning w.r.t. ensuring the development of children in Anganwadi and providing them early childhood care and education.

Conclusion

The study tries to highlight the critical role of Anganwadi workers in delivering Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) as outlined in India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The research underscores the necessity of enhancing the skills and awareness of Anganwadi personnel through structured training programs developed by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). Despite the potential benefits of these training initiatives, the findings reveal significant challenges, including inadequate training duration, limited resources, and infrastructural deficiencies that hinder effective curriculum implementation. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of community and parental involvement in fostering a supportive environment for children's development. Addressing these challenges is essential for improving the quality of ECCE services, thereby ensuring that vulnerable children receive the foundational support necessary for their lifelong learning and development. The insights gained from this research can inform policy adjustments and resource allocation to strengthen the ECCE framework in India, ultimately benefiting the most disadvantaged populations.

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