

NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020 AND TRANSFORMATION IN SCHOOL CULTURE WITH SCHOOL READINESS IN EARLY YEARS

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ABSTRACT

Early experiences help in developing school readiness skills among the children and promote each child's success in school and beyond. Therefore, NEP 2020 recommended quality ECCE programs for the smooth transition of children entering into grade 1. The present study was conducted to explore the present scenario of Anganwadis in the Khordha district with regard to the attainment of school readiness skills of children entering grade I. The objective of the study was to assess the quality of Anganwadis in imparting school readiness in Balvatika in accordance with NEP 2020 for transformation in school culture and to explore the realities and challenges faced by Anganwadis in imparting school readiness in Balvatika in accordance with NEP 2020 for the smooth transition to school education. For this, the descriptive survey method was used. The samples were taken from 2 blocks of the Khordha district. 60 Anganwadi children and 20 Anganwadi workers were selected randomly for data collection. The assessment scale was administered to know the level of achievement of school readiness skills by the Anganwadi children. The views of the Anganwadi workers were recorded and analysed to find out the challenges faced by the Anganwadi workers and areas that need to be revisited for ensuring the attainment of school readiness skills for a smooth transition to school education. It was found that child development in a holistic approach needs to be nurtured in a joyful learning environment for a smooth transition to school education. The evidence of this is that students were good at performing cognitive activities and physical activities but the language, creativity, and socio-emotional aspect need to be taken care of from early years because the learning outcomes define from preschool to school education are arranged in a progressive manner. The innovative pedagogy recommended in NEP-2020 is to be practically used in preschool years by nurturing their experience. The smooth transition from preschool to grade I will lead to sustainable development. So, school readiness in the early years of children is the concern of the present day for the holistic development of each child.

Key Words: Anganwadis, Preschool children, School readiness, Holistic development, Sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

The NEP 2020 aims at producing engaged, productive, and contributing citizens for building an equitable, inclusive, and plural society as envisaged by our Constitution. Also aligns with Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 2030) of the United Nations, which makes it clear that equal access to education is the cornerstone of sustainable development. So, NEP 2020 also focused that research says 85% cumulative brain development occurs during first six years of a child which is known as early childhood phase. Early childhood is a critical developmental period because the most vigorous and intensive development occurs in the first six years of life. At

the age of six, the students are entering into grade 1 to continue their education in a formal setting and these early years of learning are very important for smooth transition of children to grade 1. In this context, NEP 2020 recommended restructuring of school education and Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) is highlighted to be revisited to ensure school readiness to bring transformation in school culture.

School readiness is foundational across early childhood years. It divides the construct into three interrelated but conceptually distinct aspects. Child school readiness is the child's level of development across multiple domains needed for optimal performance in school. This incorporates physical well-being, motor development, social and emotional development, language and speech development, cognition, and creativity. A second aspect, the school's institutional readiness refers to school policies and practices to welcome and educate children at various stages of development in multiple domains. Finally, familial and community school readiness refers to the ability of the family and community to support optimal early child development starting prenatally until the child enters school education (Halle, *et.al.* 2012). School readiness divide the construct into three interrelated but conceptually distinct aspects. Child school readiness is the child's level of development across multiple domains needed for optimal performance in school. This incorporates physical well-being, motor development, social and emotional development, language and speech development, general knowledge and cognition, and other related subdomains. A second aspect, the school's institutional readiness refers to school policies and practices to welcome and educate children at various stages of development in multiple domains. Finally, familial and community school readiness school readiness divide the construct into three interrelated but conceptually distinct aspects. Child school readiness is the child's level of development across multiple domains needed for optimal performance in school. This incorporates physical well-being, motor development, social and emotional development, language and speech development, general knowledge and cognition, and other related subdomains. A second aspect, the school's institutional readiness refers to school policies and practices to welcome and educate children at various stages of development in multiple domains. Finally, familial and community school readiness

RATIONALE

NEP 2020 emphasised on School readiness of children and for this recommended "Balvatika" which is Preschool III. Beside this three month play based "Vidya Pravesh" program has been also recommended for preparing children enrolled for grade 1. The skills to be achieved during these programs are age and developmentally

appropriate and are well defined with its learning outcome. All the domains are given importance to develop the child holistically. Many research studies also supported that holistic development is possible when all the domains will be given importance in early years. It is also revealed that there are two main factors influencing children's school readiness, namely cognitive factors which involve reading, writing, and calculating skills, and non-cognitive factors which include socio-emotional skills. Both the cognitive and non-cognitive factors are interrelated and highly required for children's school readiness (Rahmawati et.al., 2018). Academic performance increased for children provided with high-quality early learning which is considered as evidence for high-quality preschool education creating improved life outcomes (Bakken et.al. 2017). Academic, social communication skills, maturity, communication with parents and the developmental areas have an effect on children's school readiness (Pekdogan & Akgul, 2017). Preschool teachers also emphasized that children should reach a certain maturity level for being ready to school (Canbulat & Yıldızbaş, 2014). Phonetics, communication skills and cognitive activities such as sequential thinking and classification are areas needing attention (CECED, 2013). The level of school readiness for children whose parents spent more time with their children is higher than those children whose parents are involved at a low and medium level (Mazjub and Rashid, 2012).

The above studies conducted says that the readiness program does not shows a visible impact in early years which implies that it does not have any remarkable influence on smooth transition of early grade children to grade 1. As per the recommendation of NEP 2020 our state has designed action plans for effective implementation of the recommendations. So, beforehand it is needed to study the present scenario of the Anganwadis and mark the necessary changes required in the light of recommendations. Beside this the challenges faced by the Anganwadi workers are to be identified and prospective plans must be done to address the challenges for effective school readiness program.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To assess the quality of Anganwadis in imparting school readiness in Balvatika in accordance with NEP 2020 for transformation in school culture.
- To explore the realities and challenges faced by Anganwadis in imparting school readiness in Balvatika in accordance with NEP 2020 for the smooth transition to school education.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The descriptive survey method was used for the present study. The data collected were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Sample: 60 students and 20 Anganwadi workers from 2 blocks (Khordha and Banpur) of Khordha district were selected randomly.

Tools for Data Collection:

- Assessment scale for school readiness
- Interview Schedule for Anganwadi workers

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

The data collected regarding school readiness using assessment scale is analysed different domain wise.

DEVELOPMENTAL DOMAINS: COMPARATIVE FINDINGS

a) Physical and Motor Development: Physical and motor development in early years refers to specific movement of body muscles for the purpose of performing certain action. Motor skills are of two types namely fine motor skills and gross motor skills. While fine motor skills refer to small movements or activities like holding an object that are done with the help of small muscles like fingers, toes, wrists etc., gross motor skills are big movements or activities like sitting, running, hiding, jumping, crawling etc. that require use of arms, legs, torso and feet. The skills representing physical and motor development like Gross motor skills; Fine motor skills and Eye hand Coordination are measured by using assessment scale. The results are tabulated as below.

Physical and Motor Development Skills	% of children achieved completely	% of children achieved partially	% of children not achieved
Gross Motor Skills	63 %	20 %	16 %
Fine Motor Skills	74%	20%	6%
Eye hand Coordination	57%	33%	10%

The above table revealed that 60-75% of students has been developed both gross motor and fine motor skills. They need to practice it on regular basis to be skilled in it. Proper care is required to develop the skill of eye hand coordination as many are lacking in this skill. Attainment of Eye hand coordination skill is not only necessary in early years rather it will help the child in future to perform the actions in daily life.

b) Cognitive Development: The focus of this developmental domain is to capture the ability of children in early numeracy and problem solving, which not only equips them for formal schooling but also future employment and life as an adult. The children were asked to perform different sets of activities in order to test their early numeracy or problem-solving skill. The activities include comparison of objects by length and size, sorting and classification of picture cards, identification of numbers, number sense-one to one correspondence, pre number concept, counting and sequential thinking which are then measured by using assessment scale. The results are tabulated as below.

Cognitive Development Skills	% Of children achieved completely	% Of children achieved partially	% Of children not achieved
Pre-Number concept	90%	4%	6%
Counting	43%	33%	24%
Classification	84%	6%	10%
Sequential Thinking	64%	13%	23%

From the above table it was found that 90% of children performed best in identifying big and small object (comparison in size), more and small number of things (comparison in quantity) and 84% of children classified objects on basis of its shape and size. 64% of children could be able to think and arrange the objects sequentially. But, less than 50% of children could be able to count the objects correctly. It could be concluded that the children have attended the pre number concepts skills but they need to develop the skill of counting and pattern by using locally available material resources which will help them in attainment of grade 1 skills.

c) Language Development: Language development refers to the process of learning during early years prior to commencement of formal reading and writing. This learning is linked to the things children play with and observe at home and in places they visit, including the surrounding they live in. The parameters used in assessment scale for assessing skills representing language development are oral language development, pre reading, and pre-writing. The results are tabulated as below and also represented graphically.

Language Development Skills	% of children achieved completely	% of children achieved partially	% of children not achieved
Oral Language Development	6%	14%	80%
Pre-Reading	40%	24%	36%
Pre-Writing	50%	24%	26%

Oral language development is the important part of language skill development. Here it was found that only 6% of children communicated in their own language and 80% of children have not responded, they remain silent while they were asked about something. It could be overcome by using their home language for discussion and by going beyond prescribed texts for mutual dialoguing. It was also found that average no of children could be able to read the pictures and pronounce the word perfectly. Rest children could identify the object in picture but need help in phonic part. Tracing line while joining dots was performed by 50 % of students which revealed that they had developed pre writing skill whereas, other children need improvement.

e) **Creativity Development:** The skills representing creativity development are creative thinking and performing with action etc. and are measured by using Rubrics. The results are tabulated and analysed as below.

Creativity Development Skills	% of children achieved completely	% of children achieved partially	% of children not achieved
Drawing	24%	36%	40%
Expressing with action	10%	16%	74%

The above table revealed that students tried to draw the picture given to them and only 24% of children could be able to draw it perfectly whereas others need practice. On the other hand, very less children i.e., 10% expressed rhymes/song with action whereas 74% of children have not responded which means they have not achieved it. So, it was concluded that to develop creativity among the children they need open space and ample scope.

DEVELOPMENTAL DOMAINS: OBSERVATION

a) **Socio-Emotional Development:** The skills representing Social-Emotional development are Cleanliness, Respect to elders, wait for own turn, independent worker, shows emotions as per the situation and were observed informally to assess them. The results are tabulated below.

Social- Emotional Development Skills	% of children didn't do it	% of children can do with others help	% of children can do with ease
Cleanliness	34%	50%	16%
Respect to elders	6%	14%	80%
wait for own turn	10%	16%	74%
Independent worker	10%	64 %	36%
shows emotions as per the situation	36%	24%	40%

The above table revealed that 16% of children has been maintained cleanliness by their own whereas others were guided by teachers and also by parents to maintain cleanliness. All most all shown respect to elders while entered to classroom and left

the room. During the group work 36 of % children participated actively and easily but 64% children were confused about their role. 74% children learnt that they have to wait for their turn during the group activity but 10% children still dominating on others to perform the activity. During the activities it was also observed that less than 50 % students were able to control their emotion. In early years the children must learn what emotions to show and in which situation.

IEWS OF ANGANWADI WORKERS: GROUND REALITIES AND CHALLENGES

The open-ended questions were asked to know about the views of AWW specifically with focus to success and challenges of ECCE program. The AWW were asked 10 questions based on the activities conducted in the Anganwadi centre, focus of ECCE program, activities conducted for school readiness program, pedagogical process followed, material resource used, continuous assessment of the progress and involvement of the communities. They were asked about the challenges faced by them during the ECCE activities and support required for their professional development.

Dimensions	Responses	No of AWWs
What kind of activities is performed by the AWWs in the Anganwadi centres?	Health and Nutrition	20
	Immunisation	16
	Early Education	18
What is the focus of ECCE program?	Health and Nutrition	2
	Nutrition, hygiene and immunisation	2
	Nutrition and Education	14
What kind of activities is conducted in AWCs for school readiness?	Free Play and Guided play	14
	Action Song and Dance	20
	Role Play	3
	Conversation and Free talk	6
	Nature walks	5
	Clay work	8
What Pedagogical Process is being followed?	Play based	12
	Theme based	16
	Group activity	3
What type of material resources are used for conducting school readiness activities?	Play equipment	12
	Fruits/vegetables/animals etc. model	20
	Letter card/ Number card	3
	Picture card and picture charts	8
	Indigenous Toys	4
	Materials collected from nature	18
How the learning progress of the individual child is being assessed?	Observation	20
	Test	1
	Portfolio	2
How the community is involved in school readiness activities?	Meeting with parents (mothers)	18
	ECCE Day	20
What training program has been	Anganwadi Activity	20

conducted for your professional development?	Learning activities	3
	School readiness	1
	How to involve mothers	3
What challenges did you faced while conducting school readiness activities?	Less time for engagement in learning activity	8
	Overburden with other work	18
	Less acceptance by parents/community for education in AWCs in comparison to private schools	16
	Lack of own building	08
	Lack of free space for play	14
Give your suggestion for effective ECCE program for smooth transition to Grade 1.	Lack of play equipment	8
	Linkage between AWCs and Primary school	6
	Availability of adequate material resources	14
	Training on use of appropriate pedagogical process	3

From the above views of the AWW it can be concluded that the Anganwadi program was not recognised as important as it is recommended now. The focus was mostly given to health and nutrition. The education is the neglected part of ECCE. However as per the daily schedule they are aware of conducting activities for development of different domains. The pedagogical approach should be play based. But it was found that they mostly focused on action song based on themes given in New Aruniuma. They are not aware of the need of school readiness skills for smooth transition to Grade -1 which is now focused in NEP 2020. The student's activity in work book is regularly monitored and progress was tracked by observing their activity in the class and completion of wok book. The ECCE day was observed in 19th of every month to recognise the importance of the day. On that day mothers were actively engaged in conducting different activities. However, involving community is the biggest challenge with them. For strengthening ECCE program and creating a learning enabled climate in AWCs the professional development program needs to focus on pedagogical approach for development of school readiness skill.

CONCLUSION

As per NEP 2020, schooling begins with the inclusion of ECCE from age 3. The policy states "Universal provisioning of quality early childhood development, care, and education must thus be achieved as soon as possible, and no later than 2030, to ensure that all students entering Grade I are school ready." The three years of ECCE and early primary grades are proposed as a continuum of learning and referred to as the foundational stage of school. In this regard the attainment of school readiness is an important aspect. In this study it is observed that the skills assessed in all the domain has its relationship with the skills to be attained in school education. The learning outcomes define in early years are in continuum with school years. So, to

transform school culture with attainment of learning outcome we must need to focus in early years. The ECCE centres must be developed with adequate infrastructural facility, the AWWs must be equipped with skills of school readiness and school culture must be transformed to adopt ECCE centres to strengthen the linkage.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

The present study gives a clear picture of present scenario of Anganwadi centres with regards to school readiness program. This will definitely help the state to plan effectively for implementation for the recommendation. The early years of learning will be given due importance and the developmental progress will be taken care in early days of the child. The role and responsibility of the AWWs will be cleared and utmost importance will be given for preparing for smooth transition to school education.

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