

# An Integrated Evaluation of Preschool Education in Rural Area: Assessing The Impact on Early Childhood Development

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**Abstract:** Early childhood education plays a crucial role in fostering the cognitive, social and emotional development of children. This study presents an integrated evaluation of preschool education in rural areas, assessing its impact on early childhood development. A random sample of 80 preschools were selected from rural area (40 Anganwadis) from total 7 villages and remaining 40 preschools were selected from local Parbhani city Maharashtra. Data were collected through personal interviews with Anganwadi worker, Preschool teacher, Principal from selected preschools, using a prepared checklist and observation. The study revealed that, all rural preschools (100%) were located at ground floor. Similarly, rural as well as urban area, only 42.50 and 37.50 percent of the selected preschools were seen to be adjacent, attached or in the vicinity of the primary schools. In rural preschools, almost all available equipment and materials were found to be safe, durable, colorful, attractive, lightweight and of good quality. Significant differences were noted between rural and urban preschool teachers in teacher-child ratios, qualifications, salaries, and teaching experience.

Regarding nutrition, 100% of rural preschools provided snacks to children, whereas in urban preschools, children brought snacks or meals from home. Highly significant differences were also recorded in the maintenance of records and registers between rural and urban preschools. Irrespective of area, rural preschool teachers expressed that lot of time is spared in writing various reports & maintaining records and other activities like home visits, distribution of supplementary food, survey of pregnant women etc which is effect their involvement in conducting childrens activities. The findings indicate disparities in infrastructure, teacher qualifications, activity provision and record-keeping between rural and urban preschools. Strengthening rural preschool facilities, improving teacher support and enhancing integration with primary schools are essential steps toward ensuring equitable early childhood development opportunities.

**Keywords:** Preschool education, Rural education, Integrated evaluation, Qualitative parameters, Early childhood development

## INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education is a special branch of education that relates to the teaching of children from birth to six years of age (Mathur, 2018). In terms of child's life, Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is the period from birth to eight years of age (Malvankar, 2018). It aims at the holistic development of a child's social, emotional, cognitive and physical needs in order to build a social and broad foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing. A study by

Gibbs (2012) showed low level of readiness in children for primary schools due to low quality of early childhood education.

Public programs sponsored by government were dedicated to a large extent towards the communities within the rural and other backward areas. The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) program has the main objective to lead to advancement in ECE in an integrated manner. This program aimed at meeting the needs and requirements of young children on a continuous basis. There has also been a proper consideration of kind of services to be provided which included, health, nutrition, nourishment, diet supplement and provision of basic necessities. (WCD, 2007).

WCD (2007) also stressed on the timings of the primary schools have to be organized in such a manner, which may prove to be suitable to the girls. ICDS service providers must be trained and should possess complete information regarding those, who need to be involved with ECE and should make provisions of play materials to the students for their wholesome development. The private programs that were involved in ECE were charging fee and recognized by names, such as, kindergartens, day care, nurseries, play schools, preparatory schools and pre-primary classes in private, primary, elementary and secondary schools. It has been assumed approximately that 10 million children are enrolled in these initiatives.

The child and the families have to adjust to new environment, new expectations, new interactions and relationships when a child is enrolled in a ECCE center. In this context, it becomes imperative that all children, including those with special needs, are supported in the transition process from home to preschool and preschool to primary school. Therefore, linkages between preschool and primary school should be established. In our country, there exists a wide variety of preschool services anganwadies, balwadies, private

preschools, etc., which have a wide disparity in infrastructural facilities, teachers qualification, curriculum and pedagogies etc. The age at which children begin their pre-schooling also varies.

## **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

A stratified random sample of 80 preschools were selected from rural area (40 Anganwadis) from total 7 villages, namely Pandhri, Nandapur, Takali, Daithna, Zari, Pingli and Bori. The remaining 40 preschools were selected from local Parbhani city of Marathwada region Maharashtra state. Prior to the study, the permission was obtained from the concerned organizer/ head/ teacher of the preschool, for collecting information regarding their preschool. The data pertaining to the study was collected by personally interviewing urban and rural preschool teachers, staff or Principal of the selected preschool, based on prepared checklist and observation. The data collected was pooled, tabulated and discussed. 'Z' test was applied to compare the percentages of the various responses to the different parameters with regard to the urban and rural preschools, as per the standard procedure given by Sharma, 2005.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Details on Selected Preschools' Location in Rural and Urban Area**

Table 1 indicates that details on selected preschools' location in rural and urban area. With regard to rural preschools, it was found that almost all preschools (100%) were located at ground floor, away from railway station, bus stand, factories, market, heavy traffic roads, ponds, water tank, well, electrical double pole (DP) and even unhygienic surroundings indicating safety of children from all these hazards. Similarly all rural preschools (100%) were having natural resources like plants, trees, farms in their surroundings and these preschools were easily accessible for children

**Table 1: Details of selected preschools' location from rural and urban area**

Details of preschool location	Percentages of preschools based on area (n=80)		Z values
	Rural (40)	Urban(40)	
Surroundings of preschool			
Away from ponds / water tank/ well	40 (100.00)	40 (100.00)	NS
Away from electrical double pole (DP)	40 (100.00)	40 (100.00)	NS
Away from unhygienic surroundings	40 (100.00)	39 (97.50)	1.11 <sup>NS</sup>
Away from heavy traffic roads	40 (100.00)	38 (95.00)	1.45 <sup>NS</sup>
Away from drainage / canal / uncovered drains / stagnant water etc	08 (20.00)	40 (100.00)	12.64 <sup>**</sup>
Away from bus stand	40 (100.00)	40 (100.00)	NS
Away from bus stand	40 (100.00)	40 (100.00)	NS
Away from factories	40 (100.00)	40 (100.00)	NS
Having natural resources	40 (100.00)	40 (100.00)	NS
Easily accessible for children	40 (100.00)	40 (100.00)	NS
Walkable distance	40 (100.00)	40 (100.00)	NS
Have direct approach road	40 (100.00)	40 (100.00)	NS
Away from burial grounds	08 (20.00)	40 (100.00)	12.64 <sup>**</sup>
Away from market	40 (100.00)	39 (97.50)	1.11 <sup>NS</sup>
Located at ground floor	40 (100.00)	33 (82.50)	2.96 <sup>**</sup>
Building in good condition	34 (85.00)	39 (97.50)	1.91 <sup>NS</sup>
Safe, secure and comfortable environment for child	85.00 (34)	39 (97.50)	1.91 <sup>NS</sup>
Building surrounded by fencing / compound wall/ boundary wall	17 (42.50)	39 (97.50)	6.66 <sup>**</sup>
Adjacent / attached to primary school or in the vicinity	17 (42.50)	15 (37.50)	0.45 <sup>NS</sup>

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages <sup>\*\*</sup>P<0.01level NS-Non-Significant

within ½ km to 8 kms distance or within 1km walkable distance and were having direct approach road for the easy transport and conveyance of the children to the preschool. While similar scenario was seen for the urban preschools too and even all these preschools (100%) were noted to be away from drainage / canal / uncovered drains or stagnant water and also from burial grounds.

In rural as well as urban area, only 42.50 and 37.50 percent of the selected preschools were seen to be adjacent, attached or in the vicinity of the primary schools. It was noted that only 20 percent of the rural preschools were away from drainage / canal / stagnant water indicating majority of these preschools need to take vigilant care for the safety of the preschoolers. Eighty five percent of the rural preschools and 97.50 percent of the urban preschools were having good condition of the building. Similar percentages were noted with regard to safe, secured and comfortable

environment of the preschools in both the areas. Majority of the urban preschools (97.50%) were found to have fencing/compound wall or either boundary wall for the preschool building while less than half of rural preschools (42.50%) were noted to have compound wall for the safety of the children. Ninety five percent of the urban preschools were observed to be away from heavy traffic roads, 97.50 percent from unhygienic surroundings and away from market place. Majority of the urban preschools i.e. 82.50 percent were located at ground floor.

Overall, it can be said that from both the area, rural and urban preschools were away from the hazards for young children like railway station, bus stand, factories, ponds / water tank / well, electrical double pole (DP) and were having natural resources in the preschool surroundings. Preschools were easily accessible for children and within walkable distance from their homes or connected with a direct approach road for the easy conveyance

of the children. However only 20 percent of the preschools were noted to be away from burial grounds and drainage or uncovered drains and stagnant water, which was unsafe from childrens' point of view. Nearly more than 60 percent of the urban preschools were not found adjacent or attached to primary school or in the vicinity, as these selected preschools were private one, run by an individual or NGO. While some of the urban preschools were found to be located on first floor, having heavy traffic roads next to preschool, having garbage accumulation in surroundings and without compound wall.

Highly significant differences were seen between the rural and urban preschools in terms of location of preschool at ground floor, preschools away from burial grounds, away from drainage / canal / uncovered drains / stagnant water and preschool building having fencing.

These results are found in line with the findings of Mwoma, Begi and Murungi (2018).

### Qualitative Parameters of Available Outdoor Play Equipments & Material in Selected Rural and Urban Preschools

Table 2 reveals qualitative parameters of available outdoor play equipments and materials in selected rural and urban preschools. It was found that very few

outdoor equipments and materials were available in rural preschools but the almost all available equipments and material were safe, durable, colourful, attractive, light in weight and having good quality. But it was found that majority of the rural preschools placed swings and slides in classroom itself, being it was portable. Although it was not properly installed from childrens' point of view for their easy movements and there were chances for collision of children. But it was observed that children were enjoying it. While in urban preschools it was noticed that, majority of the criteria for good quality of outdoor equipments and materials were fulfilled as safe, durable, attractive, light in weight, cost effective, proper installation of equipment, appropriate size and appropriate in number for childrens availability and proper maintenance.

The highly significant differences were noted in majority of qualitative parameters of available outdoor play equipments & material in rural and urban preschools with regard to cost effectiveness, proper installation, appropriate size, number, multipurpose & its proper maintenance.

### Employment Profile in Selected Rural and Urban Preschools

Table 3 indicates the eligibility criteria of staff include educational qualification, ECCE

**Table 2: Qualitative parameters of available outdoor play equipments & material in selected rural and urban preschools**

Qualitative parameters of available outdoor play equipments & material	Percentages of preschools based on area (n=80)		Z values
	Rural (40)	Urban (40)	
Safe	40 (100.00)	37 (92.50)	1.86 <sup>NS</sup>
Durable	40 (100.00)	37 (92.50)	1.86 <sup>NS</sup>
Colourful	40 (100.00)	36 (90.00)	2.10*
Attractive	40 (100.00)	37 (92.50)	1.86 <sup>NS</sup>
Light in weight	40 (100.00)	37 (92.50)	1.86 <sup>NS</sup>
Good quality	40 (100.00)	37 (92.50)	1.86 <sup>NS</sup>
Cost effective	--	37 (92.50)	21.44**
Proper installation	--	37 (92.50)	21.44**
Appropriate size & number	--	37 (92.50)	21.44**
Multipurpose	--	25 (62.50)	8.07**
Proper maintenance	--	37 (92.50)	21.44**

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages \*P<0.05level \*\*P<0.01level NS -Non-Significant

**Table 3: Employment profile in selected rural and urban preschools**

Employment profile	Percentages of preschools based on area (n=80)		Z values
	Rural (40)	Urban (40)	
<b>Teacher child ratio</b>			
2-3 yrs (1:25 with helper)	--	39 (97.50)	35.96**
3-4 yrs ( 1:25 with helper)	--	40 (100.00)	NS
4-5 yrs ( 1:25 with helper)	--	40 (100.00)	NS
5-6 yrs ( 1:25 with helper)	--	39 (97.50)	35.96**
<b>Eligibility criteria of staff</b>			
Teachers qualification (XII Std pass with 2 years diploma)	14 (35.00)	40 (100.00)	8.61**
Teachers training	40 (100.00)	34 (85.00)	2.65*
Teachers salary (Rs / month)	-	31 (77.50)	11.57**
3500 - 6000	40 (100.00)	09 (22.50)	11.09**
6000 - 9500			
Teachers experience (yrs)	20 (50.00)	27 (67.50)	1.56 <sup>NS</sup>
1- 10	07 (17.50)	13 (32.50)	1.58 <sup>NS</sup>
10 - 20	13 (32.50)	-	4.33**
20 - 27			
Teachers age (yrs)	14 (35.00)	19 (47.50)	1.09 <sup>NS</sup>
20 - 30	26 (65.00)	21 (52.50)	1.19 <sup>NS</sup>
36 - 50			
Helpers qualification (X Std pass)	34 (85.00)	40 (100.00)	2.65*
Helpers training	40 (100.00)	13 (33.50)	9.01**
Helpers salary (Rs / month)	-	7 (17.50)	2.86**
2000 - 3500	40 (100.00)	23 (54.50)	5.83**
3500 - 5000			
Helpers experience (yrs)	13 (32.50)	26 (65.50)	3.12**
1 - 10	24 (60.00)	04 (10.00)	5.50**
10 - 20	3 (07.50)	-	9.66**
20 - 30			
Helpers age (yrs)	23 (57.50)	34 (85.00)	2.90**
25 - 40	17 (42.50)	06 (15.00)	2.80**
40 - 55			

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages \*P<0.05level \*\*P<0.01level NS -Non-Significant

trainings attended, experience and age of staff. It was seen that all urban preschool teachers were having the required teachers qualification 12<sup>th</sup> standard pass and some of them were postgraduate qualified. While the teachers training were attended by all the rural preschool teachers while only 85 percent urban preschool teachers had attended short term trainings or D.Ed or B.Ed. With regard to teachers income, almost all rural preschool teachers were having income range Rs 6000 - 9500 per month. On the contrary majority

(77%) of the urban preschool teachers were having income between Rs 3500 - 6000/ month. Irrespective of area in rural and urban preschools, majority (50% & 67%) of teachers were having experience ranging between 1- 10 years. The age ranges for the majority of the teachers were found 36% & 50%.

Now in connection with helpers qualification all urban preschools (40%) were having better helpers with even graduation degree. But the inservice programmes were attended by all rural preschool helpers only.

The salary of all the rural preschool helpers was in the range of Rs 3500 – Rs 5000/ month. Irrespectively of area, majority of the rural as well as urban preschool teachers were having age range of helpers between 25 – 40 yrs. It needs to be noted that teacher child ratio was found to be maintained in majority of the urban preschools. However in rural area, in some preschools, nearly 40-80 children were enrolled. But all children were not attending the preschool regularly and only 20-30 children attend the preschool. In gist, it can be said that the urban preschools were better in terms of teachers and helpers qualification, helpers experience and age. All the rural preschool teachers and helpers attended ECCE had trainings and better salaries than their counterparts.

The significant differences were noted between rural and urban preschool teachers for teacher: child ratio, teachers qualification, salary, experience. Similarly helpers from rural and urban preschools were also noted to have significant differences in the above said parameters.

### **Various Aspects of Curriculum Followed in Selected Rural and Urban Preschools**

Table 4 exhibit various aspects of curriculum followed in selected rural and urban preschools. It was seen that irrespective of area, both rural as well as urban preschools (100%) were following balance in individual and group activities as well as guided and free activities. While urban preschools surpassed the counterparts in following the balance between indoor and outdoor activities, vigorous & quiet activities. Similarly all urban preschools were proceeding their programme from simple to complex, familiar to unfamiliar activities and easy to difficult tasks (100%).

It is obvious from the table that, almost all preschools followed the guidelines of EYE (2018), for the hours of preschool, staff spending their time for preparation of

activities, organizing parents meeting, use of mother tongue in preschool, activities promoting social, emotional, speech & language development of children. However rural preschools were found conducting relatively less activities, for fostering large and fine muscle development (52.50%), intellectual development (55.00%), moral development (30.00%), creativity (67.50%) as well as activities as per developmental level of children, age, interest and need of children (35.00%). In addition, for the parameters like activities to be conducted in a day was observed to be comparatively less in rural than urban preschools (40%).

It is clear that hundred percent rural children work with freedom under supervision and flexibility in programme. However urban preschools were providing variety of experiences to children through various activities, the children work with freedom under teachers supervision with multi sensorial learning experiences, teachers give first hand or manipulative experiences to children, conduct child centered programme taking into consideration their age & developmental

level, followed flexibility in programme and almost all programme were found to imbibe cleanliness, independence, discipline, confidence among preschoolers. The corresponding percentages for the rural preschools were 72.50, 100, 42.50, 45, 47.50 percent respectively. Relatively a higher percentage of urban preschools were following play oriented programme (87.50%), informal teaching of 3R's (80.00%), use of teaching aids for various activities (85.00%), teachers change the place as per activity (85.00%). The corresponding values for rural preschools were 47.50, 62.50 and 62.50 percent respectively.

The highly significant differences were noted in rural and urban preschools with regard to various aspects of curriculum followed in selected preschools. It can be inferred that overall urban preschools were following

Table 4: Various aspects of curriculum followed in selected rural and urban preschools

Aspects of curriculum	Percentages of preschools based on area (n=80)		Z values
	Rural (40)	Urban (40)	
<b>Balance in activities</b>			
Individual & group	40 (100.00)	40 (100.00)	NS
Guided & free	40 (100.00)	40 (100.00)	NS
Vigorous & quite	--	24 (60.00)	7.74**
Indoor & outdoor	20 (50.00)	40 (100.00)	6.26**
<b>Proceed from</b>			
Simple to complex	--	40 (100.00)	NS
Familiar to unfamiliar	--	40 (100.00)	NS
Concrete to abstract	--	29 (72.50)	10.14**
Easy to difficult	17 (42.50)	40 (100.00)	7.43**
Known to unknown	--	29 (72.50)	10.14**
Hours of the preschool	40 (100.00)	40 (100.00)	NS
Staff hours	40 (100.00)	40 (100.00)	NS
Promote social & emotional development	40 (100.00)	40 (100.00)	NS
Promote speech & language development	40 (100.00)	40 (100.00)	NS
Activity time	--	40 (100.00)	NS
Organization of parents meetings	40 (100.00)	40 (100.00)	NS
Medium of instruction- Mother tongue	40 (100.00)	36 (90.00)	2.10*
Provision of snacks	40 (100.00)	01 (02.50)	12.64**
Activities as per developmental interest, age& need of children	14 (35.00)	40 (100.00)	8.61**
Promote large & fine muscle development	21 (52.50)	40 (100.00)	5.39**
Promote intellectual development	22 (55.00)	40 (100.00)	5.72**
Promote moral development	12 (30.00)	40 (100.00)	9.66**
Fosters creativity	27 (67.50)	40 (100.00)	4.43**
Comprehensive evaluation	19 (47.50)	40 (100.00)	4.01**
Maximum activities conducted	16 (40.00)	40 (100.00)	3.30**
Link between medium of instruction & dominant language of region	40 (100.00)	29 (72.50)	3.94**
Promote physical development	21 (52.50)	39 (97.50)	5.39**
Working days / week	--	29 (72.50)	10.14**
Daily general health check up is conducted	19 (47.50)	18 (45.00)	0.17 <sup>NS</sup>
Field trip or nature walk	--	35 (87.50)	16.36**
Children work with freedom under supervision	40 (100.00)	40 (100.00)	NS
Flexibility in programme	40 (100.00)	40 (100.00)	NS
Activities provide variety of experiences	29 (72.50)	40 (100.00)	3.94**
Child centered programme	19 (47.50)	40 (100.00)	6.71**
First hand experiences	18 (45.00)	40 (100.00)	6.99**
Activity based programme	16 (40.00)	40 (100.00)	7.74**
Multisensorial learning experiences	17 (42.50)	40 (100.00)	7.43**
Programme imbibe cleanliness, independence, discipline, confidence etc in children	--	40 (100.00)	NS
Manage activities by keeping things ready before conducting it	--	40 (100.00)	NS
Informal stress on 3 R's	25 (62.50)	32 (80.00)	1.80 <sup>NS</sup>
Play oriented programme	19 (47.50)	35 (87.50)	4.20 <sup>NS</sup>
Change place as per activity	--	34 (85.00)	15.05 <sup>NS</sup>
Use of teaching aids for every activity	25 (62.50)	34 (85.00)	2.41*
<b>Method of evaluation - Formal</b>	15 (37.50)	08 (20.00)	1.71 <sup>NS</sup>
Informal	25 (62.50)	32 (80.00)	1.80 <sup>NS</sup>

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages \*P<0.05level \*\*P<0.01level NS –Non Significant

most of the aspects of curriculum programme when compared to rural preschools. Majority of the preschools from rural as well as urban area were found to adopt informal method of evaluation like daily observation of children while performing various activities, reading, writing and through games.

Various records and registers maintained in selected rural & urban preschools

Table 5 denote the various records and registers maintained in selected rural & urban preschools. It was seen that irrespective of area, preschool teachers from both the groups were maintaining records and registers like registration form, record of staff and children, dead stock and consumable

registers, teachers dairy, outward / inward register, parent teacher meeting register, staff salary register, preschool time table register. All rural preschools were keeping records of personal data sheet of children as well as their background information, in addition, health check up record, home visit record, growth monitoring record, leave record of staff very scrupulously. Other than preschool activities record they maintain various types of other records related to ICDS objectives at large.

On the other hand, a large percentage of urban preschools have shown records of fees (100%), teachers diary (100%), health check up record (80%), growth monitoring of children (70%) and leave record of staff (87.50%). The

**Table 5: Maintenance of records and registers in selected rural & urban preschools**

Records & registers	Percentages of preschools based on area (n=80)		Z values
	Rural (40)	Urban (40)	
<b>Admission record</b>			
Registration form	40 (100.00)	40 (100.00)	NS
Personal data sheet of the child	40 (100.00)	15 (37.50)	8.25**
Detail background information of the child	40 (100.00)	08 (20.00)	12.64**
<b>Progress record</b>			
Childrens work	--	12 (30.00)	4.14**
Teachers observation record	--	02 (05.00)	6.32**
<b>Other records</b>			
Teachers diary	40 (100.00)	40 (100.00)	NS
Health check up record	40 (100.00)	32 (80.00)	3.16 <sup>NS</sup>
Home visits record	40 (100.00)	01 (02.50)	12.64**
Growth monitoring record	40 (100.00)	28 (70.00)	4.14**
Fees record	--	40 (100.00)	NS
Leave record	40 (100.00)	35 (87.50)	2.44*
Childrens activity record	--	12 (30.00)	4.41**
Cashbook record	--	08 (20.00)	3.16**
Academic programme record	--	07 (17.50)	2.86**
<b>Stock register</b>			
Dead stock	40 (100.00)	40 (100.00)	NS
Consumable register	40 (100.00)	40 (100.00)	NS
<b>Other registers</b>			
Outward / Inward register	40 (100.00)	40 (100.00)	NS
Parents teacher meeting register	40 (100.00)	40 (100.00)	NS
Staff salary register	40 (100.00)	40 (100.00)	NS
Time table register	40 (100.00)	40 (100.00)	NS
Accounts register	--	40 (100.00)	NS
Issue register	--	21 (52.50)	6.58**
Celebration register	--	14 (35.00)	4.64**
Library books register	--	01 (02.50)	3.16**

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages \*P<0.05level \*\*P<0.01level Non Significant

records like account registers, celebration registers, childrens activity record, childrens work were found maintained in 10 - 30 percent of the urban preschools.

The highly significant differences were noted down with regard to the maintenance of records and registers in rural and urban preschools like personal & background information of children, childrens work & teachers observation record, childrens activity record, cashbook record, academic programme record, home visit record, growth monitoring record, celebrations registers, library book register & issue register etc.

Some of the results coincide with research findings of Parmar et al. (2015).

## CONCLUSION

An integrated evaluation of preschool education in rural area as done for assessing the impact on early childhood development. According to the results, it can be concluded that in almost all rural preschools, available equipment and materials were found to be safe, durable, colorful, attractive, lightweight and of good quality. However, Significant differences were noted between rural and urban preschool teachers with regard to teacher-child ratio, qualification, salary and teaching experience. The findings indicate disparities in infrastructure, teachers qualification, activity provision and record-keeping between rural and urban preschools. Strengthening of rural preschool facilities, improving teacher support and enhancing integration with primary schools, teachers salary, in service training in teacher are essential steps toward ensuring equitable early childhood development opportunities for rural children.

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