



An evaluation study of Early Childhood Education programmes in Tribal areas of Kerala

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ABSTRACT

Tribes in India lag much behind the mainstream population in all developmental aspects including education. Many tribal areas are having less access to educational institutions. Early Childhood Education which is considered as a foundation for the holistic development of a child. The present study tries to analyse the physical accessibility of tribal areas in Kerala to pre-schooling centres. It also highlights the major challenges faced by the existing anganwadi centres. The study is descriptive and uses the data published by Scheduled Tribe Department of Kerala for the analysis.

KEYWORDS : Pre-schooling, Anganwadi, Tribe, Education

In India, Early Childhood Care and Education got its importance through development of National Policy on Children in 1974. Subsequently, in 1975, the central government initiated with Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme one of the world's largest programmes intended to lay the foundation for holistic and integrated development of the child between the ages of 0 to 6 years. ICDS projects are functioning through Anganwadi Centres (AWC) which mainly cover rural and tribal areas compared to urban areas where many of these centres are located in slums and underdeveloped areas. In Kerala, the ICDS programmes implemented in 32,922 AWCs across the State. The percentage of tribal students attending AWC is impressive in Kerala and it is even on par with other the castes, indicates the effectiveness of these centres in tribal areas (World Bank, 2005).

A look into India's past cultural heritage indicates that traditionally, the early childhood years (from prenatal to five years) were considered to lay foundation for inculcation of basic values and social skills in children (Kaul and Sankar, 2009). Pre schooling is generally carried out through anganwadis, balwadis, crèches, kindergardens etc. ECCE programme is covered under Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and Early Childhood Education (ECE) covered by crèches and balwadis on a voluntary basis. Apart from government involvement in preschool education, private sector also prominent in providing pre-schooling but concentrated in urban areas. Unlike non-formal education which is usually followed in anganwadis, the private sector aims formal school like education which is mostly attracted by urban population. Preschool education has positive impacts in promoting enrolment and retention in reducing dropout at primary education (Khullar, 1998). The study found that children with preschool education has more probability in retaining/ continuing their studies compared to those who are joining primary school without preschooling.

Background of the Study

Preschool education has positive impacts in promoting enrolment and retention of students at schools, and thereby helps in reducing the dropout of children at primary education. In Kerala, the school dropout rate of Scheduled Tribe students is much higher than that of the other social groups. In this context, it is important to study the extent of early childhood education offered to tribal areas. This paper tries to point out the least importance given by the government for pre-schooling and the extent of physical inaccessibility faced by the students in accessing basic education.

Methodology

The present study does an evaluation of Early Childhood Education programmes implemented in tribal areas of Kerala. Tribal survey data and Tribal Sub-Plan estimates published by Scheduled Tribe Development Department, Government of Kerala is used for critical evaluation of the programme.

Nursery Schools/Anganwadi Centers in Tribal Areas

Apart from AWC under ICDS scheme, Scheduled Tribe Development Department of Kerala runs 40 Nursery Schools to promote early childhood education and 29 Single Teacher Schools for enhancing primary education (Table 1). The students are given financial aid and other incentives for promoting pre-school education among them. The children studying in Nursery Schools are given free mid-day meals and dress in addition to a lump-sum grant of `100 per annum for each student. Admission is being given to children of 3 to 5 years old. Wayanad district has the maximum number of nursery schools run by the department. Idukki has 7 nursery schools followed by Palakkad with 6 nursery schools (Table 1).

Table 1 List of Nursery schools and Single Teacher schools run by ST department

District	Nursery Schools	Single Teacher Schools
Thiruvananthapuram	4	-
Kollam	2	-
Pathanamthitta	1	-
Alappuzha	-	-
Kottayam	-	-
Idukki	7	27
Ernakulam	-	2
Thrissur	-	-
Palakkad	6	-
Malappuram	2	-
Kozhikode	1	-
Wayanad	16	-
Kannur	1	-
Kasaragod	-	-
Total	40	29

Source: Scheduled Category Development Guide and ST Department, (2011)

In all, there are 4644 tribal hamlets in Kerala and out of these; only 31 percent has an anganwadi centre within the area (Table 2). About 58 percent of the tribal hamlets have easy access to anganwadi even though it is not located within the habitation. But still, there are 11 percent of total tribal settlements without any anganwadi centre near to or within the hamlet. This indicates that 511 tribal hamlets are facing the physical inaccessibility to preschool education. Among this, the highest number of settlements without any pre-schooling centres

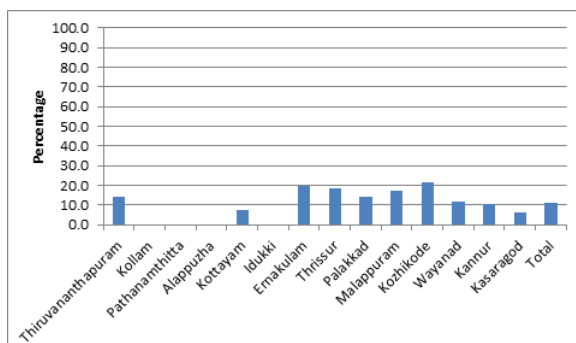
within or near to hamlets are located in tribal populated districts such as Wayanad (253 settlements) and Palakkad (62 settlements). This reflects the lack of sufficient efforts from the authorities concerned in identifying inaccessible tribal areas to preschool education.

Table 2 Anganwadi Centres in Tribal Hamlets

District	Within Habitations	Near to Habitations	No Anganwadis within or near to Habitations	Total Habitations
Thiruvananthapuram	46	102	25	173
Kollam	18	8	0	26
Pathanamthitta	21	22	0	43
Alappuzha	9	25	0	34
Kottayam	30	43	6	79
Idukki	166	90	0	256
Ernakulam	28	21	12	61
Thrissur	27	21	11	59
Palakkad	213	151	62	426
Malappuram	54	136	39	229
Kozhikode	52	47	27	126
Wayanad	443	1471	253	2167
Kannur	123	193	37	353
Kasaragod	198	375	39	612
Total	1428	2705	511	4644
Percent	31	58	11	100

Source: Scheduled Tribes Development Department, (2013)

Figure 1 Percentage of tribal hamlets not having anganwadi within the access



Source: Scheduled Tribes Development Department, (2013)

From Figure1, it is evident that many tribal hamlets are not having any anganwadi centres within the access of the families. In tribal populated districts such as Palakkad, Wayanad and Kasaragod, many hamlets are facing the same issue. For Palakkad and Wayanad, more than 10 percentage of hamlets do not have any pre-schooling centres within the reach. This indicates that still many tribal areas face physical inaccessibility to anganwadi centres.

Besides, the anganwadis functioning in tribal areas lack basic infrastructure facilities. In a study on anganwadis by 'Rights', an NGO based in Trivandrum found that most of the anganwadi centres in tribal areas lack infrastructure facilities such as drinking water, toilet and own buildings. An important fact to be noted in the study is that the budget allocation for anganwadis from plan fund of local bodies is showing a declining trend. The budget allocation for anganwadis had shown a decline from 0.57 percent in 2009-10 to 0.40 percent in 2010-11 (The New Indian Express, 2012). The important problems they face with regard to pre-schooling are physical access and infrastructure. Proper pre-schooling in tribal areas will certainly help in bringing down the dropout rate at school levels

Projects aimed at the Development of Early Childhood Education

In all, there are 40 pre-schooling centres which are run by the Scheduled Tribe Department of Kerala. Considering whole tribal settlements in Kerala i.e. 4762 settlements, about 1236 of them have an Anganwadi centre within the settlement and 2980 settlements have an anganwadi centre located near to their settlements i.e. within a radius of 2.5 km (STDD, 2013). For 244 settlements, they have such facility within a distance of 2.5 km to 5 km radius and for 117 settlements; the nearest anganwadi centre is located at a distance more than 5 km. This indicates that still many tribal settlements are not having easy access to pre-schooling centres which is essential for setting a foundation in the overall development of a child. The TSP State Plan budget estimates for the past ten years shows that the government has not allocated any kind of funds for the improvement of anganwadi centres under the Plan estimates. Besides, the government has not taken initiative for starting anganwadi centres in those settlements which are facing severe physical inaccessibility to these centres. But, the government is providing lump-sum grant and cash allowance for buying one set of uniform for those tribal students

studying at the pre-schooling centres which are run by the department, included in Non-Plan estimates. For the year 2012-13, a sum of ` 80.46 lakh is set aside under Non-Plan budget provision for nursery schools. From the analysis it is clear that the department is not giving much focus for Early Childhood Education of tribes. Considering the physical inaccessibility to anganwadi centres, it is vital to give due importance to pre-schooling and require an early action from the part of the government.

Conclusion

The present study analysed the accessibility to pre-schooling in tribal areas and found that many tribal areas do not have any kind of pre-schooling centres. In the areas where they have such facility, lacks infrastructure facilities such as drinking water, toilet and own buildings. When we examined the Tribal Sub-Plan estimates, it is found that government is not adopting any new projects to enhance the early childhood education in tribal areas. The government need to focus on pre-schooling in tribal areas and should give due consideration to resolve physical inaccessibility problem by starting new anganwadi centres in these areas. Moreover, allocate sufficient funds for improving the infrastructure facilities of the existing anganwadi centres.

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