

Early childhood care and education in India: contexts, costs and practices

Centre for Budget and Policy Studies-University of Cambridge

Project and Policy Workshop

29th-30th August, 2019

Although Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) has come to receive significant attention within national and international developmental thinking, policy priorities around ECCE are largely target-driven and narrow in their understanding of development. This can be seen even in the Indian context, where despite the long availability of the holistic Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), early childhood outcomes remain varied and unequal. While the ICDS started with an initial focus on improving nutrition and health indicators (such as malnutrition and infant and maternal mortality), in the present it continues to be viewed as a “feeding centre for the poor”, as much of its administrative machinery and budgets remain focused on the delivery and monitoring of supplementary nutrition, immunization and health. With monitoring and supervision mechanisms routinised, no quality evaluation mechanism for components such as preschool education available, and planning largely concerned with achieving various national and international quantitative targets, services offered remain perfunctory rather than integrated or efficacious.

Parallely, India also has a large private market of varied ECCE provisioning. The private market of ECCE services, which largely lack the integrated focus on nutrition, health and preschool education offered by the ICDS, is nevertheless preferred by parents who seek to accrue early educational advantages for their children. Preschools which offer formal literacy, numeracy and English training from the early years are seen as important to prepare children for later schooling, and remain competitive with children from the elite castes and classes. Thus, though most private provisions for ECCE adopt developmentally inappropriate practices, it has continued to grow as a result of a lack of regulation and legislation of quality ECCE as a right. In this context, there is an increasing stratification seen within the ECCE sector, as those with the economic resources opt for private ECCE provisions of varied qualities and types, while it is the most marginalised of communities, with the least bargaining powers, that rely on the ICDS (which also varies in quality and functioning by state and region).

In this context, while ECCE has come to be accepted as important to improved educational outcomes in later years and economic outcomes for individuals, communities and nations, there is a lack of attention paid within policy to the political economy of ECCE and, and the differences in developmental opportunities this affords to different communities. ECCE policies and practices focus simply on quantitative goals such as enrolment and attendance, but do not fundamentally consider the ways in which communities have to negotiate with educational structures to secure equal opportunities, access or outcomes. Thus, existing models of ECCE, while target-oriented, remain unresponsive to community needs.

Placing these discrepancies in developmental planning in the foreground, the Centre for Budget and Policy Studies, Bangalore, in collaboration with University of Cambridge, is organising a two-day policy workshop to reflect on the possibilities for the development of ‘responsive’ models for ECCE. The workshop, supported by a project fund received from the British Academy, to undertake a six-month ethnographic and costing study on responsive models of ECCE, will bring together policy makers, grass-root organisations and academics to discuss the policy implications of our study, as well as contextualise these findings, and experiences of participants and practitioners in relation to the proposed new education policy. The latest draft National Policy on Education (2019) proposes several changes that include guaranteeing ECCE as a right, extending it up to 8 years, introducing a foundational literacy/numeracy curriculum following DAP, and involving communities and families in ECCE. Although the new education policy recommends structural changes to the available early childhood education programmes in the country, several questions around provisioning, teacher capacities, marketisation, remain inadequately discussed within the draft policy report.

The workshop will adopt the following format:

Venue: Radisson Blue Atria, 1 Palace Road, Ambedkar Veedhi, Bengaluru, Karnataka, 560001	
Day 1: Thursday, 29th August, 2019	
Session 1	
10:00 A.M. – 10:30 A.M.	Tea
10:30 A.M. – 11: 15 A.M.	CBPS presentation on ethnographic study of ECCE in Bihar and Tamil Nadu
11:15 A.M. – 12: 00 P.M.	Invited Responses by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bhaskaran Ramdas, Vidyodaya Trust, Gudalur • K.Vaijayanti, Akshara Foundation • Geeta Menon, formerly with Jamila Milia, CARE USA and CARE India
12:00 P.M. – 1:00 P.M.	Open Discussion
1:00 P.M. – 2:00 P.M.	Lunch
Session 2	
2:00 P.M – 2:45 P.M.	CBPS presentation on costing of ECCE models
2:45 P.M. – 3:15 P.M.	Invited responses by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sumitra Mishra, Mobile Creches, New Delhi • Jandhyala Tilak, Council for Social Development, New Delhi

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reetika Khera, IIT Delhi and IIM Ahmedabad
3:15 P.M. – 3:30 P.M.	Tea
3:30 P.M – 4:30 P.M.	Open Discussion
Day 2: Friday, 30th August, 2019	
Session 3	
10:00 A.M. – 10:30 A.M.	Tea
10:30 A.M. – 11:00 A.M.	CBPS presentation on ECCE in the draft National Education Policy
11:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M.	Panel Discussion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uma Mahadevan, Principal Secretary, RDPR • Ambarish Rai, Convenor, Right to Education • Jandhyala Tilak, Council for Social Development, New Delhi
12:00 P.M – 1:00 P.M.	Discussion
1:00 P.M – 2:00 P.M.	Lunch

Further information and reading related to the project can be found on our [website](#) and blog posts on [responsive models](#), the [contexts](#) of ECCE in India, [Indian scholarship](#) on childhood.