Scoping Study

Curriculum, Learning, and Assessment of foundational learning in India to provide a road map to incorporate holistic skill development at foundational level

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Save the Children

Research Team

Neha Ghatak – project management, conceptualisation, development of analytical framework, tool development, training of field teams, field work, data entry, analysis and writing

Jyotsna Jha – lead role in conceptualisation of the entire study and report, field work (expert interviews) and report writing

Rajat Chaudhary – development of tools, literature review, co-ordination for field work, field work (in all sites), data entry and analysis

Shiboni Sundar – literature review, field work in Maharashtra, data entry and analysis

Shruthi Gurumoorthy - literature review, development of tools and analysis of data.

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List of Abbreviations

ADC	Anganwadi Development Committee
ASER	Annual status of Education Report
AWC	Anganwadi Centre
AWW	Anganwadi Worker
BOS	Breadth of Skills
CBPS	Centre for Budget and Policy Studies
CECED	Centre for Early Childhood Education and Development
CDPO	Child Development Project Officer
CL-AWC	Co-located Anganwadi Centre
CL-School	Co-located School
CMF	Centre for Micro Finance
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CTPD	Continuous Teacher Professional Development
DA	Dearness Allowance
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FLN	Foundational Literacy and Numeracy
IAWC	Integrated Anganwadi Centre
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Scheme
Ind AWC	Independent Anganwadi Centre
INR	Indian National Rupee
MDM	Mid-day Meals
MoWCD	Ministry of Woman and Child Development
NCERT	National Council of Educational Research & Training
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
NEGP	National Education Goals Panel
NEP 2020	National Education Policy 2020
NIPUN Bharat	National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy Bharat
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
OBC	Other Backward Class
PCG	Primary Care Givers
PIB	Press Information Bureau
POCSO	Protection of Children from Sexual Offences
PPP	Public Private Partnership
PTR	Pupil Teacher Ratio
PSE	Pre-School Education
Pvt NGO	Private Non-Government Organisation
RTE	Right to Education
SSA	Samagra Siksha Abhiyaan
SC	Scheduled Caste
ST	Scheduled Tribes
STC	Save the Children
TET	Teacher Eligibility Test
TLM	Teaching Learning Method
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

Chapter 1: Introduction

With the acceptance of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and subsequent developments such as National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN BHARAT) by the Government of India, the country has redefined the early years for education as covering children between 3–5year-olds to 3-8year-olds, which is close to a widely acceptable definition of early years internationally. However, it has also opened up a massive challenge regarding both the *conceptual understanding* of the early year education and the *systemic capacity and preparedness* to deliver the early childhood education effectively and equitably. This scoping study tries to understand these challenges from the perspective of identifying key policy messages for incorporating a 'breadth of skills' (BOS) or a holistic approach for education at foundational level. The early years education has been known as Early Childhood Education (ECE) and this report follows the same terminology. Early Childhood referring to the period from a child's birth to the age of 8 years is considered as a critical period for the development of cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and motor skills, and we start by discussing this first. Although we start from the notion of Early Childhood Development (ECD) or Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), the focus remains on ECE in this report.

1.1. The Need for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

Emotional, social, and cognitive skills emerge in the early years and are important prerequisites for success in school, employment, earnings and healthy behaviours (Heckman, Moon, Pinto, Savlyev, & Yavitz, 2010). There is also consistent and compelling evidence to support that brain development is most rapid in the early years of a child's life. According to neuroscience and behavioural research, child development - particularly from birth to five years - is a foundation for a prosperous and sustainable society (*In Brief: The Science of Early Childhood Development*, undated). Brains are built over time and the construction of the basic architecture of the brain is an on-going process that begins before birth and continues into adulthood (*In Brief: The Science of Early Childhood Development*, undated). Hence, early experiences affect the quality of that architecture by establishing either a sturdy or a fragile foundation for all of the learning, health and behaviour that follow (*In Brief: The Science of Early Childhood Development*, undated).

Therefore, any learning delays due to the socio-economic context of a child or a psycho-socially deficit environment or emotional neglect at any early age can have a negative impact on a child's development which is often irreversible. It has also been widely recognized that the emotional and physical health, social skills, and cognitive-linguistic capacities that emerge in the early years are all important prerequisites for success in school and later in the workplace and community (*In Brief: The Science of Early Childhood Development*, undated). Moreover, scientific research has long established that the brain is most flexible or "plastic" early in life and hence, it is easier and more effective to influence an infant's developing brain rather than rewiring parts of its circuitry in the adult years. Research has also shown that good quality of "early learning and childhood development

programmers" help to reduce the chances of drop out, repetition and improve outcomes at all levels of education (Kapoor, 2022) further substantiating the need for quality ECCE in India.

1.2. The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) context in India

As per census 2011, India has almost 158 million children between the age group of 0 to 6 years, out of which a significant population of children belong to disadvantaged and underprivileged backgrounds. As mentioned earlier, pre-school education is not just a significant developmental stage in the life cycle of an individual, but multiple studies have also shown the forward linkages of quality pre-school education with higher attainments, progress and socio-behavioural development which enables a child not only to have higher attainments (academic, social, physical) at the subsequent school levels, but also in other aspects of life, like labour force participation (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2011 as cited in Dialogue and Interaction in Early Childhood Education: A Systematic Review, 2016).

In India, almost 6.1 million children aged between 6-13 years are estimated to be out of school and about 20 million have never attended pre-school (UNICEF,2018). Although access to ECCE in India has substantially improved over the years, research has also shown that the access is not equitable due to two primary factors, firstly, the diversity of stakeholders (children and parents/care givers in this case) who come from varied socio-economic background with a substantial proportion of them belonging to marginalised sections by virtue of their caste and class status, and secondly, the large, varied and unregulated market for providers of ECCE in India.

It is clear that even though the government is the largest provider of ECCE in India through its various schemes, the most popular being the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), there is also a large and unregulated private market for ECCE. This is not to say that diversity in undesirable, but what has happened as a result is that these two factors have contributed to unequal access to ECCE in India where children from marginalised sections Dalits (Scheduled Caste), Adivasis (Scheduled Tribes) and other backward castes (Other Backward Class) who also form the bulk of the population below poverty line in the country (Nayar, 2007) are less likely in comparison to access ECCE in India as compared to children from top economic quintiles (Rao et al, 2021).

In addition to this, what is also worth noting is the fact that children belonging to families with higher socio-economic capital often attend private ECCE facilities as it offers them the much sought after 'English medium education' and it is the children from deprived socio-economic backgrounds who attend government provided ECCE services like Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) thus creating a clear divide between who attends what kind of ECCE provisions in India (CBPS, 2018). Private providers are perceived as 'better' by many even though the range of activities being conducted there are not necessarily developmentally appropriate, because they usually have better resources in combination with the English-

medium (CBPS, 2019 and 2020). To understand this better, we briefly delve into the various providers of ECCE in India.

1.2.0. Providers of ECCE in India

The provision of ECCE in India can be divided into three kinds of providers, the government, the Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and the for-profit private providers. They usually vary in the age group that they cater to and also in their perspective and approach to ECCE. While the government offers a more holistic lifecycle approach to ECCE provision through its Anganwadi centres, and by provision of free hot cooked mid-day meals, immunisation, regular health check-ups of children, starting from pre-natal care to when the child reaches 6 years of age, the private providers are mostly focussed towards school readiness (Rao et al, 2021). The NGOs on the other hand, largely play a supportive role to government provisioned AWCs although some NGOs also run their own low cost or free private ECCE practices, which at times act as pace-setters for the collaborative initiatives.

[1]Government Provision of ECCE

The flagship programme for provision of ECCE services by the government is the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) which was started in the 1970s with the objective of laying the foundation for holistic and integrated development of children and building the capabilities of caregivers (National ECCE Resolution, 2013). The ICDS scheme, as of March 2021, is providing services to approximately 90.6 million beneficiaries (PIB, 2021) through 13.63 lakh Anganwadi Centres (AWCs). The ICDS has been lauded by many scholars who claim that it lays down one of the best developmentally appropriate, non-formal curricula for preschool children (CBGA, 2022). But in contrast multiple studies have also pointed out several gaps at the structural, institutional and implementation level of the programme, one major gap being the lack of focus on Pre School-Education (PSE) (Rao and Kaul, 2018). Other studies have brought the difficult working conditions of Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) which is a highly feminised role and thus, they are underpaid, overworked and undertrained. We will talk more about this when we discuss the working conditions of AWWs as observed in the field, later in the report.

The AWCs till most recently have been functioning as independent centres run by the Ministry of Woman and Child Development (WCD) but in 2017, the centre also proposed co-location of AWCs with primary schools especially for those AWCs that were on rented

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[1] The Government of India under its ECCE provisions have other schemes also like the National Creche Scheme, (previously known as Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme) introduced in January 1, 2006. The scheme is a central government-run programme under the Ministry of Women and Child Development. scheme aims at providing day care facilities, health care and early childhood education to children between six months and six years of age of working mothers. In 2019, the Government of India clubbed Anganwadi Services and the National Creche Scheme along with four other related schemes, namely Poshan Abhiyan (the erstwhile National Nutrition Mission), PM Matru Vandana Yojana, Scheme for Adolescent Girls and the Child Protection Services Scheme under a consolidated Umbrella ICDS.

premises. The state government of Rajasthan (one of the sample states in this study) had already started the model of integrating AWCs with schools from 2015 onwards and had 11,000 integrated AWCs running in 2017 (Agha, 2017). The other state governments like Odisha, Telangana, Maharashtra have now followed suit, especially post the National Education Policy (NEP) of 2020 which has added grades 1 and 2 into the purview of pre-school education. The main objectives behind this were to ensure school continuity through better transition from pre-school to primary school, school readiness in children and efficient execution of the ICDS and Education Schemes like Samagra Siksha Abhiyaan (SSA). Integrated AWCs (IAWCs) are still in its nascent phases, but our observations of two IAWCs in Maharashtra and Rajasthan reveal several gaps in implementation and roadblocks in perusal of the stated objectives behind integration/co-location by the central and state governments. We will discuss these later in the report.

Non-Governmental (NGO)Providers of ECCE

The NGO programmes cater to diverse population and are majorly targeted to meet the needs of children from the economically backward and socially disadvantaged sections of society (CBAG, 2022). The govt estimates suggest that there are around 20 million children who participate in these services (Kaul and Sankar, 2009) but a systematic evaluation of these services is still missing. Despite the absence of a systematic evaluation of these services, those attending these services report positive outcomes from parents (CBPS, 2018). Several of these NGO models also cater to the diverse needs of communities and tend to demonstrate innovative and developmentally appropriate teaching-learning practices (CBPS, 2018).

Private Providers of ECCE

There is no systematic research or data available on the scale and coverage of private ECCE providers in India. But studies that have tried to estimate the coverage point to a number as high as 10 million (Kaul and Sankar, 2009). The ASER 2019 report puts the number at around 37 percent of the rural children availing services from the private sector and a report by (CECED, 2014) estimates that 43% of children in India go to private ECE centres.

As is the case with school education in India, the private providers of ECCE are diverse in terms of their operating cost, cost to parents/care givers and the services provided by them. On one hand there are high-end private pre-schools, playschools, nurseries, preparatory schools and kindergartens which mostly cater to children from well-off families, but there has also been a rapid expansion of low-budget, private pre-schools, not only in urban areas but even in rural and tribal areas (CBPS 2018). These pre-schools are often attached with elementary schools which can be exploitative as Kapoor (2006) notes, because of their myopic focus on 'school readiness' which often gets defined by non-developmentally appropriate academic performance for children. This places heavy loads on children and parents, as a result of a downward extension of the primary curriculum and pressure exerted to compete and perform from an early age. This has been defined by NCF 2005 position paper on ECCE as the problem of 'early instruction'.

The NCF position paper of 2005 also highlights some of the reason for the rapid expansion of the private sector; it argues that the parental aspirations and perception contribute the most to this rise. The focus and perception of private school imparting English education is the biggest attraction while the public services stick to learning through the mother tongue, the knowledge of English is seen as the main source of upward mobility and hence attracts many (NCERT 2005). Secondly, it argues that even within the private sector there is huge variability, *"ranging from a handful of well-established elite schools of high-quality offering excellence, to the great mass of poorly managed, overcrowded, and under-equipped 'garage' schools, which squeeze children into tiny unhygienic spaces and attempt to force-feed them with the Three Rs at an unsuitably early age. A recent entry has been the 'franchised', imported, and highly expensive model catering to the new urban upper class."* (NCF position paper on ECCE).

The unregulated nature of this sector remains one of the biggest challenges and the, *"lack of regulatory frameworks, mechanisms and the growing commercialisation of education pose serious threats to quality, curriculum, infrastructure, teacher qualifications and access."* Often, the quality of education provided at such centres may be counter-productive to a child's development, resulting in 'mis-education' (Kaul and Sankar, 2009).

Therefore, the practice and delivery of ECCE in India is varied, diverse and marred by several challenges. While unpacking these challenges, one can easily conclude that the nature of the challenges is both institutional and structural. For example, the lack of access to ECCE services can be seen as a structural issue, where caste, class, gender and other structural factors play a role in enabling or disabling access, on the other hand, the highly feminised working conditions of the AWWs and the lack of continuum between Pre-School Education (PSE) and school education are more of institutional issues. It is important to understand this context before having any clear approach towards promoting any particular approach such as BoS at foundational stage.

1.3. The Concept and Integration of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) and Breadth of Skills (BoS) in Indian ECCE Policies

The 'Breadth of skill' (BoS) approach argues for a move towards a more nuanced formulation of ECE with a focus on a skill-based education rather than a narrow focus on just reading and writing (Salzburg Global, n.d.). While the education of the 20th century was viewed from the perspective of content and knowledge accumulation, the 21st century demands a broader approach which can prepare the learners to be a part of the 'knowledge economy'. In some ways, with the fast-paced technological development which is permeable in all aspects of an individual's life has essentialised the need for a broad skill-based education that increases choices and freedoms of an individual has become essential. This approach is addressed by various terms like '21st-century skills', 'transferable skills', 'breadth of skills', etc. Among all these different conceptions, 'breadth of skills' remains of particular interest because it encompasses multiple skills ranging from physical and motor skills to collaboration and critical thinking.

The Brookings institute project on 'skills for changing world' (Care & Anderson, 2016) argues that the 'information age' or the 'knowledge economy' that we live in today requires a broader approach towards the skills which should become a foundation for holistic development of children. The attainment of literacy and numeracy skills (commonly known as the 3Rs) as the goal of foundational learning fails to recognise the other important skills required for the overall growth of the children in the critical years of early childhood (Ompok et al., 2018). The narrow focus on literacy and numeracy as propagated by the 3Rs approach doesn't make children capable to navigate through our changing societies (NCERT India, 2005). The National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2005) position paper on ECCE highlighted that due to the lack of better models the 'formal' preschool becomes the only available option which is centred around the idea of imparting 3Rs in a mechanical way (NCERT, 2005).

ECCE experts in India at various points have highlighted the need for moving away from the normative standards of the 3Rs as the desirable outcome of ECE programmes (NCERT, 2005). 'Early Years'- the Annual Status of Education Report of 2019 (ASER, 2019) assessed children on four domains of development, namely Cognitive, Early Language, Early Numeracy, and Social and emotional development. The study concluded with overall stress on the BoS and argued that in addition to language and early math skills, cognitive development and attention to social-emotional skills are crucial for early childhood development (ASER, 2019). Similarly, the position paper by the National Focus Group on Early Childhood Education, 2005 also advocated for a major overhaul in the curriculum for early childhood education and suggested that the curriculum should recognise play as the basis of learning (NCERT, 2005). A report published by Brooking Institute in 2016 suggests that though majority of the countries acknowledge the importance of BoS and list it in their public documents, only a few countries consistently identified the need across various national documents (Care et al., 2016).

The concepts of BoS and FLN are complementary and the BoS includes FLN but in absence of a clear understanding, they run the risk of being contradictory. Despite the clear recognition of the need for a holistic approach in early year education in the policy environment, coupled with a the largely prevalent community perception of 'childhood' extended to at least to 8-10 years of age (CBPS, 2020), the current Indian policy environment seems a little blurred and sometimes even contradictory on this count.

The NEP 2020 in its vision lays out that the '*overall aim of ECCE will be to attain optimal outcomes in the domains of physical and motor development, cognitive development, socio-emotional-ethical development, cultural/artistic development, and the development of communication and early language, literacy, and numeracy*' (Govt of India, 2020, p.7) while also stating that '*attaining foundational literacy and numeracy for all children will thus become an urgent national mission, with immediate measures to be taken on many fronts and with clear goals that will be attained in the short term*'(Govt of India, 2020, p.8). The subsequent policy measures, like the NIPUN BHARAT' (National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy) document stresses majorly on FLN. NIPUN Bharat breaks down the desired

level of learning outcomes in multiple competencies in four key domains namely oral language, literacy, writing and numeracy[2] for three different age groups, 5-6 years old children who are in Balvatika[3], 6–7-year-old children studying in Class 1 and 7-8-years old children studying in class 2. The NEP 2020 also mentioned *that 'The highest priority of the education system will be to achieve universal foundational literacy and numeracy in primary school by 2025. The rest of this Policy will become relevant for our students only if this most basic learning requirement (i.e., reading, writing, and arithmetic at the foundational level) is first achieved* (Govt of India, 2020, p.8).' The challenge of implementing a holistic and consistent approach throughout the country becomes evident in the New Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage, which has just been released by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT 2022) in India. A perusal of the document reflects that while this promotes a holistic approach, the focus on FLN rather than on foundational learning is also evident.

Although the focus on FLN in itself is not undesirable but critics fear the importance which the NEP attaches to educational outcomes and argue that a system which is centred on delivering outcomes fails to understand the process which is crucial for such delivery (Suresh, 2019). Despite recommending a flexible, multifaceted, multilevel, play-based, activity-based, and discovery-based education during the foundational stage, the policy still ends up defining foundational learning in a very narrowed fashion and limited itself to 'alphabets' and 'numbers' (Suresh, 2019). The myopic conception of foundational learning has long-term effects, the need to ensure these skills is more important than ever so because not only they would make the children ready for rapidly changing societies and job-markets but would also potentially end up inculcating skills in them which are required to build healthier, democratic and more peaceful societies (Salzburg Global, n.d.) and also strengthen FLN in the long run. Taking these perspectives and arguments forward, we now discuss the details of this study.

1.4. About the Study

Objectives

The study focuses on the education and not the nutrition aspect of ECCE. The objectives of this study are:

- To understand the conceptualization of breadth of skills in the foundational stage (FLN,) which includes 3 years of pre-school and 2 years (Grade 1 and Grade 2) of primary schooling for upwards curricular continuity.

- To assess the process of operationalization of the skills in foundational grades and upwards in two select states of Maharashtra and Rajasthan in the different models of the foundational education system.

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[2] For detailed targets refer to NIPUN Bharat, page 266-286
[3] Balvatika as per NEP and NIPUN Bharat is a preparatory grade where children after completion of early childhood education in AWC and before joining grade 1 should be enrolled into.

- To highlight the breadth of skills in the existing curriculum, learning, and assessment methods to advocate for effective implementation mechanisms and tools designed for the same.

- To understand the nature of training and qualification and additional needs of the teachers, AWWs, school leaders, and inspectors in delivering and assessing the skills of children.

- To identify issues and explore approaches and strategies for advocating and influencing policy (NEP and others) for integrating the breadth of skills in the education of children.

- To identify policy recommendations to inform policy (NEP and others) and its implementation.

Definition

In order to understand the practice of BoS, we first tried to have a working definition. BoS in simple words is exposing children to a variety of skills that enable and facilitate socio-emotional, cognitive, creative and physical development in addition to foundational literacy and numeracy. Our review of literature and consultations with several experts on ECCE strongly suggested that 'Breadth of Skills' is not a new concept but has been practiced in varying degrees by various providers of ECCE in India, but the policy push towards BoS or '21st century skills' is relatively new and therefore demands deeper enquiry.

The NCF position paper, 2005, on ECCE can help in deriving the concept of BoS even though the position paper doesn't refer to the term 'breadth of skills' but the approach to ECCE related to learning capacities in the framework is identical to the NEGP framework (National Education Goals Panel's five dimensions of readiness). This is one of the most widely-agreed upon framework when it comes to describing dimensions of school readiness in the field of early childhood care and education (Scott-Little et al., 2005) and in combination can be seen as a good working framework for BoS.

The NEGP framework defines school readiness in five dimensions namely, Physical Well-Being and Motor Development, Social and Emotional Development, Approaches Toward Learning, Language & Communication and Cognition & General Knowledge (Scott-Little et al., 2005). In addition, the NCF position paper also looks at social, personal and emotional, and aesthetics as crucial skills for early childhood care and education. Borrowing from the NEGP framework the BoS imparted in an early childhood learning centre can be understood through examination of these dimensions and the use of appropriate participatory and inclusive pedagogies for the same. The NCF defines eight interrelated domains of development: a) fine motor, b) physical gross motor, c) sensory, d) cognitive, e) language and communication, f) emotional and aesthetics, g) social and h) the personal domain, which can be associated with BoS that children need to be exposed to through developmentally appropriate pedagogies and curricula (NCERT India, 2005). Therefore, in combination, the NEGP framework and the NCF, 2005 paper on ECCE adds to the already existing 5C approach to ECCE which consists of skills like communication, collaboration,

creativity, critical thinking and connectedness. Although BoS encompasses FLN, these two concepts run the risk of being contradictory if those are not defined consciously and overtly as being complementary and inter-dependent.

Derived from these frameworks and, for the purpose of this study, we have defined BoS as inclusive of seven critical skills – 1) critical thinking, 2) fine and gross motor development, 3) awareness of self, 4) collaboration and socio-emotional skills, 5) communication, 6) FLN and 7) technological skills.

Approach and Methods

We mainly followed the following approach and mix of methods (with greater emphasis on the field-based component), especially in view of the short period of four months in which it had to be completed:

Methods	*Literature Review*	*Primary field-based study of 4 different ECCE models in two states (Maharashtra and Rajasthan)*	*Consultation with experts*
Rationale	A rich body of literature exists both at the level of concept and functioning of ECE in India.	A first-hand field-based study of a few models would help in generating fresh evidence / illustrating what we already know from existing literature	Accessing their knowledge and experience to have their reflections on both the concept and functioning of the ECE in India

The Field-Based Study

Table 1.1 provides the details of the four ECE models studied in in the two states. In selection of these models, we ensured that at least one centre was present in an urban area to understand the typicality and challenges of urban ECCE practices. We studied their approach and delivery of BoS and FLN through multiple tools like, in-depth centre and classroom observations, interviews of AWWs and teachers, interview with project personnel for the NGO intervention-based models and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with parents/primary care givers. In addition to this, we also conducted interviews with state functionaries like Child Development Project Officers (CDPOs) in both the states, Deputy Director, WCD in Rajasthan and the head of ECCE in-State Council of Educational Research and Training Rajasthan to get their perspectives on implementation of FLN and BoS in their states and the forward linkages with key policies like the NEP, 2020.

Table 1. 1: Description of the 4 models of ECCE

States	Independent Anganwadi centres (AWC) with no external intervention	Integrated/co-located AWC with schools	NGO intervention based AWCs based on the public private partnership model (PPP)	NGO run independent ECCE centre
Rajasthan	Independent AWC 1 This Anganwadi centre is not supported by any civil society organisation or NGO. This was done to enable comparison between AWC that function with support from private /civil society and those that can function independently.	CL AWC 1 CL School 1- Rajasthan This Anganwadi centre is integrated with primary school and was mainly studied to understand school readiness and continuity.	Intervention AWC (PPP1) Currently running 101 Model Anganwadis in two blocks of one district in Rajasthan. The AWC was studied to understand the delivery of FLN and BoS through this model. Apart from that, we also interviewed project personnel who are involved directly with this intervention.	NGO centre Currently running 160 full day Balwadis for children between the age group of 1-5 years. A combination of day-care as well as preschool, directly in line with the prescriptions of NEP 2020.
Maharashtra	Independent AWC 2- Maharashtra This AWC is not supported by any civil society organisation or NGO. This was done to enable comparison between AWC that function with support from private /civil society and those that can function independently.	*CL AWC 2- Maharashtra CL School 1- Maharashtra This AWC is integrated with primary school and was mainly studied to understand school readiness and continuity.	*Intervention AWC (PPP2)- Maharashtra Working with 140 AWC and 42 primary schools of one block of one district. The Anganwadi centre was studied to understand the delivery of FLN and BoS through this model.	None

Source: Primary Data, CBPS Fieldwork, 2022
*Note: CL-AWC-2 and PPP2 are the same

The two PPP models have a varied approach to ECCE; while one is focused on training and capacity building of AWW, the other stresses on implementation of its curriculum in the AWCs. The infrastructural development and provisions for additional TLM are common features of these two PPP models. The private model on the other hand also integrates care, health and nutrition into its purview of ECCE. Annexure 1 provides the details of the three NGO models that we studied: two collaborative ones that act on a PPP mode with the AWCs and one private non-profit one.

Caveats to the Study

Since this is not a sampling-based study, the findings cannot be generalised for the model's performance, impact or effectiveness. We could not include a for-profit model of ECCE due to several factors like time constraint, difficulty in access, and lack of publicly available data on private ECCE providers. Since the term BoS is not widely in India and there is no clear definition of BoS that exists either in policy or in practice, it required several levels of

unpacking for multiple stakeholders and respondents in order to understand their perspective on this.

Structure of the Report

This report is divided into 4 chapters. Chapter 1 is the introduction, Chapter 2 sets the context of implementation of BoS based teaching-learning processes in ECCE centres through three focal points, the profile of the centres in which these practices are on-going, the perspectives of parents and the context of communities and lastly, the working conditions of Anganwadi workers. The third chapter focuses on the approach, integration and application of BoS across the four models of ECCE. And chapter 4 talks about the key policy advocacy issues and provides pointers for policy advocacy.

Chapter 2: Examining the Contexts of Early Childhood Education

It is important to understand the context in which early childhood education is being delivered to be able to examine whether BOS approach is integrated or not, or how is that integrated if it is. We tried to understand three dimensions of the context: the context of the learning institution (AWC/ School/Centre), the context of home and the community, and the Context of the facilitator (Anganwadi worker – AWW/teacher) including their working conditions along with their interlinkages (Diagram 1).
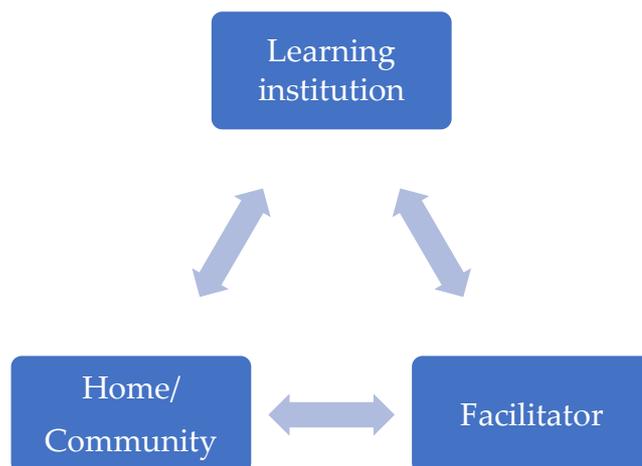
Diagram 1: The context of the early childhood education

We first examine these three dimensions through the analysis of relevant information collected for the seven ECCE centres that we studied in detail: two independent AWCs, two integrated or co-located AWCs with primary schools, two AWCs with external interventions (PPP with NGOs)[4] and one NGO run centre.[5] The following key is used throughout the report to make reference to the studied centres

- Independent AWC 1 – Rajasthan
- Independent AWC 2 – Maharashtra
- Integrated/co-located CL -AWC 1 – Rajasthan
- Integrated/co-located CL-AWC 2 – Maharashtra / Intervention AWC (PPP- 2) – Maharashtra (Note: The same AWC was also the PPP-2 intervention that we studied, this AWC was co-located with a primary school)
- Integrated/co-located CL -school -1 – Rajasthan

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[4] One by Centre in Rajasthan was running with the intervention of Centre for Micro Finance (CMF), the independent NGO centre was run by SEWA Mandir in Rajasthan. The centre in Maharashtra was running with the intervention from Save the children (STC) India.

[5] The data collected for this section was primarily through centre observations and partly through interviews with the AWWs, centre personnel and school teachers (grade 1 and 2).

- Integrated/co-located CL-school -2 – Maharashtra
- Intervention AWC (PPP1)- Rajasthan
- Private NGO centre

2.1. Learning Institution

Infrastructure

Adequate and quality infrastructural facilities are critical for both inclusion and appropriate pedagogy. It enables a safe environment for children to learn and grow, it is also crucial for play based learning and skill development. Infrastructural facilities that are child friendly and supportive towards children with different needs can also foster an inclusive ECCE environment (Jamaluddin et al 2021).

There is no clearly defined policy norm for the ECE infrastructure in India except for an office order that somewhat describes what an AWC should have: an AWC should have a space for sitting of children/women, separate kitchen, store for storing food items, child friendly toilets, space for playing (indoor and outdoor) and clean drinking water facilities (Government Order, the Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD), dated 10th March 2011). There are no norms that govern or prescribe infrastructural requirements for private/NGO run ECCE centres in India. Based on the literature review, we defined the essential infrastructural provisions at the ECCE models through seven parameters, listed in Table 2.1.

All ECCE centres and schools had an all-weather pucca building, which were well maintained, except for one: the independent AWC 1 in Maharashtra. This was located at the Community Centre and shared the space with other government run schemes and facilities like Aadhar data centre and a Buddhist temple. This AWC was also an urban AWC with no allocated building to itself. The community centre had pillars and an asbestos roof, which by no means could be all weather, as the absence of walls would make it very difficult for the AWC to function during rains. The AWW told us that they had to rely on such temporary arrangement since they do not own a building and the rent allocated to them (which is just INR 750 per month) was insufficient to afford rented pucca building for the AWC. The AWW also mentioned that the rent amount is not sent on time and therefore, landlords were not keen to rent out spaces to them. They had recently been evacuated since they could not pay rent for a year. Other studies looking at urban AWCs corroborate this fact that space-availability and low rent are major issues (CBPS, 2018 and 2020)

Table 2. 1: Learning Institutions: Infrastructure Facilities

Enabling infrastructure	Ind AWC 1	Ind AWC 2	CL-AWC 1	CL-School 1	PPP1	PPP2/CL-AWC- 2	CL-school-2	Pvt NGO
Pucca, all weather building	√		√	√	√	√	√	√
Boundary wall	√	√	√	√				
Ramp	√		√	√		√	√	
Child friendly toilets								√
Clean & safe drinking water	√		√	√	√	√	√	√
Play ground	√		√	√				
Space to move around for children	√		√		√	√		√

Source: Primary Data, CBPS Fieldwork, 2022

Unlike the building, the presence of a boundary wall was not ensured at all sites. We found that except for the Independent AWC-1 and the CL AWC -1 and school-1, no other centre had a boundary wall. The AWWs of both the intervention based AWCs of PPP 1 and 2 cited the lack of boundary wall as an important factor of safety since these centres were located close to the road which had constant traffic of fast-moving vehicles. As boundary walls are central to the safety of children, ramps are essential for access to the ECCE centres for differently abled children. It was interesting to see that even through there existed no government norms for the presence of ramp, all except again for the PPP 1, Independent AWC-2 and the private ECCE centre, did have a ramp.

Except for the private NGO centre, none of the centres had functional and child friendly toilets. Although some centres had a toilet but they were unusable due to the lack of water. During our field work we saw children practicing open defecation and relieving themselves in the open. It was surprising to see that even in case of PPP 1, where the NGO had invested a lot in creating learning corners for children, painted the walls with various TLM, did not have a toilet for the children or the AWW and helper. The AWW from this centre spoke in great detail about how she had to suffer through her pregnancy due to lack of toilet facility at the Centre. Unlike toilets, drinking water was not difficult to access at the centres with each centre having some provision like borewell, taps, water filter for supply of drinking water to children. It was only the urban Independent AWC-2 that did not have any arrangement for water and children had to carry their own water.

In terms of the presence of a playground it was noted that the co-located /integrated CL-AWC-1 and the independent AWC-1, which was also co-located with a school, had a functional playground for children. This could possibly mean that co-location with school with all the normative facilities mandated by the Right to Education (RTE) could benefit the AWCs also if the school allows the access. However, co-location needs to be seriously examined from diverse perspectives. One area where a stark difference was visible between the ECCE centres, especially AWCs and schools was the arrangement of classroom spaces. While most ECCE centres, except for the urban independent AWC-2 (due to restricted and

shared space) had a flexible arrangement and enough space for play based activities to take place, the classrooms of classes 1 and 2 were restrictive with fixed chairs and tables, which also had implications for the classroom processes. We will discuss this more in the next section where we talk about application of FLN and BoS.

Learning corners were an essential part of the PPP-1, where almost all corners of the AWC were dedicated for a specific activity. The corners were divided thematically, and these themes ranged from library, to dressing corner to a kitchen. The learning corners played a critical role in enabling BOS conducive environment, as we would see in the next chapter. The NGO had invested in learning corners as these were independent buildings owned by the AWC, which would have been otherwise difficult in centres located in rented/other temporary places. However, same centres did not necessarily have boundary walls or functional toilets.

Food, Nutrition and Learning Materials

Entitlements like food and immunisation play a critical role in both early childhood education and also for the element of care that ECCE centres are supposed to provide. This is specifically relevant in the case of AWCs because of two aspects, firstly, the AWCs perform multiple functions related to care and nutrition for children as guided by the objectives of the ICDS programme and secondly, the children who enrol into the AWCs are often from disadvantaged sections both socially and economically, therefore, entitlements serve as a critical element for enrolment and retention of children at AWCs (Government of India, 2011).

We found that Independent AWC-1, CL- AWC-1 and Intervention based AWC, PPP-1, were not offering cooked Mid-Day Meals (MDM) to children, as those services had not resumed after Covid. In lieu of cooked meals, dry ration of rice, pulses and wheat were provided to the children. This was supposed to be done on a monthly basis, but due to delays in delivery, at some of the centres, the ration was distributed once in three months. Interestingly, the co-located/integrated CL-AWC-1 did not serve any cooked meals, but the same school (CL school -1) provided regular MDM to children. While the school education department in the state under SSA had resumed meals, the WCD was yet to act on it, therefore creating an unequal atmosphere related to basic entitlements of food within the same premises. This again pointed to the fact that continuum cannot be ensured if departmental convergence is not guaranteed. All other ECCE centres that were visited during the course of the study provided free MDM to children. All ECCE centres (AWCs), except the private ECCE centre provided free and regular immunization to children.

In general, though all centres offered learning materials like toys, puzzles, workbooks to children, the PPP I and II had more learning resources. But even these did not necessarily have critical and safe infrastructure like toilets, playgrounds and boundary walls.

2.2. Home and Communities

It is well established that Anganwadi centres cater to children from marginalized socio-economic backgrounds. This is also true for NGO run centres which are generally low-cost centres and therefore more affordable compared to private free charging ECCE centres. Similar was the case with the children at all the four ECCE models in this study. As seen in Table 2.2, in our FGDs, almost half of the parents and PCGs belonged to SC and ST communities, except for the private NGO ECCE centre where all parents/PCG belonged to ST and ST communities. Only a few parents/PCGs had passed class 10, in fact, none of them whose children were in the independent AWCs, or the private ECCE centre had a matriculation. Most parents were employed in the unorganised sector, thus indicating not just social marginalization but also economic marginalization by virtue of their caste, educational background and employment status.

Table 2. 2: Profile of parents/primary caregivers (in FGDs)

Name of AWC/centre/schools visited	Number of parents in the FGD	Number of women in the FGD	Number of men in the FGD	Number of SC/ST parents in the FGD	Number of parents who were class 10 pass	Number of parents working in the unorganised sector
Ind AWC-1	6	6	0	2	0	3
Ind AWC-2	5	5	0	4	0	1
CL-AWC-1	5	5	0	0	3	3
CL- School – 1	5	2	3	3	2	1
PPP-1	6	6	0	3	2	0
PPP-2/CL AWC -2	8	6	2	4	5	8
CL school - 2	4	1	3	2	3	3
Private ECCE centre	6	6	0	6	0	3

Source: Primary Data, CBPS Fieldwork, 2022

Note: (i) The PPP-2 AWC was also co-located with a primary school, and therefore PPP-2 and Co-located/Integrated CLAWC-2 are the same

(ii) We conducted Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) at all the sites for the four models. All FGDs were conducted in the local language of the parents/care givers. Both female and male respondents who were primary care givers of the children currently enrolled in the centres participated in these FGDs. In order to ensure quality data enumeration, we ensured not to have more than 6 to 7 participants at each site.

Distance

The ICDS does not specify any distance-based norm for AWCs, but does provide a population criterion, where one AWC needs to be present for a population of 400-800, and two AWCs for a population of 800-1600 and so forth. Mini AWC are to be present for a population of 150-400. This norm is uniform for both rural and urban areas. Distance is an important marker of access, and the convenient location of an ECCE centre could be a strong motivator for parents to send their children to avail ECCE services (Azuma et al, 2020) this is especially relevant in the context of India where ECCE services have unequitable access. We

found that most children, irrespective of the ECCE model, had to cover a distance of 1 km or less to reach the centre, thus demonstrating that the centres were conveniently located for the children and distance for the children enrolled in the centre was not a barrier.

Aspirations

When asked the parents and Primary Care Givers (PCGs) about their aspirations regarding their children, irrespective of the gender of the child, the parents named a variety of professions, like teachers, police services, doctor and engineers. This showed that they wanted their children to be in secured job profiles, that ensured higher upward mobility for them. Some of the parents stated that they did not want their children to do what they were presently doing and they wanted their children's lives to be very different from theirs. The parents/PCGs also mentioned that they would want their children to be educated and were willing to support as much as their children wanted to study.

Gender

The responses of the parents and PCGs not only reflected high aspirations but also a positive gender outlook, as they did not view gender of their child to be a constraining factor in their future trajectories. These also reflected in their responses related to the activities that the parents engaged with their children at home and their expectations from the ECCE centres.

Resources and Activities at Home

Most parents provided their children with various learning and play materials like slates, pens, colours, story books to name a few, in order to have a literate environment at home. In terms of the activities that were done with children at home, we found that parents/PCGs mainly engaged with learning and FLN based activities like writing on slates, reading picture and story books. Some parents had also provided their children with English story books to facilitate their 'English language skills'.

Many parents also relied on technology like YouTube channels for children and education-based apps to enable learning at home. Almost all the parents/PCG mentioned how children spent a substantial time at home watching educational videos on their phones, especially YouTube to learn the English language, which they were unable to provide. They did not seem aware of the risks involved and also whether this was desirable at this age. What was obvious was that the desire for English based education was strong amongst the parents and not completely unfounded given their socio-economic backgrounds. It was clear that the parents/PCGs stressed on FLN and higher learning competencies at home, and therefore provided their children with whatever learning materials they considered important and affordable, internet-based phone being one of them. Many parents also sent their children for private tuitions. The main reasons for this were that they wanted their children to gain higher competencies and be trained in English which they found was not currently taking place in the AWCs or the private ECCE centre.

In addition to these, parents/PCGs also mentioned that their children spent substantial time playing with their friends or siblings, reading or listening to religious text/stories and

conversations with other members of the family. However, their opinion was split when it came to playing as some considered it not as important. This is not to say that parents did not want their children to play, but what comes out significantly is the fact that parents wanted their children to 'learn' and did not view 'playing' as a process of learning.

Expectations from the Early Year Education

The expectations of parents/PCGs related to what activities and skill development should take place at the centres also showed that while they considered FLN based skills to be primary, they also expected the centres to provide food, nutrition and immunization. Therefore, the entitlements in addition to ECE were both considered essential and desirable by parents. This was also stated as one of the primary reasons for which the parents decided to send their children to the AWCs. Here again, while some parents/PCGs wanted the centres to provide play materials, other said that it was not very important.

This focus on early instruction and FLN was also clear in their responses on what are the aspects that they considered important and not so important when it came to ECCE, where most parents unanimously agreed that reading was the most important skill, followed by writing, listening to stories and eating.

The parents/PCGs by and large were satisfied with their respective ECCE centres, but some of the areas for improvement as mentioned by them were – better infrastructural facilities like functional toilets, regular electricity and ceiling fans. Some parents also said that they wanted the centres to have better qualified teachers and English medium education to be introduced. The demand for English medium education came more strongly from parents of children in class 1 and 2 of the CL schools 1 and 2.

Therefore, the FGDs with parents helped establish that though parents have high aspirations for children, including girls, and are ready to enable that, they are far more committed to FLN. Though the parents valued the focus on health and nutrition, there was ambiguity towards the role of play. The literature also clearly establishes that parents have been very keen on the role of educational institution in providing literacy and numeracy in early years (Voorhis et al, 2013) even though the notion of childhood and 'age for play' extends up to ten years among many communities (CBPS, 2020). In this context, it becomes essential to see how the centres mediate these aspirations through their approach to a more holistic or BoS based approach to ECCE. The role of the AWW becomes central in this. Therefore, the next section looks at the context of work for the AWW and teachers by closely examining their working conditions and training.

2.3. Facilitators

The AWW continues to be central to early childhood education even in the new context of redefining the early years. A community based front line worker of the ICDS programme, she is supposed to a local woman, with minimum qualification of matriculation and the age limit of 18-35 years for eligibility at entry levels (as per WCD guidelines). The literature is full of references to a wide range of responsibilities covering aspects of education and

nutrition for children, and pregnant and lactating mother, community orientation and support for various schemes, and above all record keeping (Jain et al, 2020, Sankangoudar and Akshatha, 2019, Sinha et al, 2021, CBPS 2018 and 2020) Our fieldwork confirmed that this continues to be true.

At present, there are 21 roles and responsibilities laid out for the Anganwadi workers (as per WCD) and bulk of these roles and responsibilities are administrative in nature and range from providing non-formal preschool education to various care giving activities like providing, supplementary nutrition to children and women. ,

There are no guidelines or norms that exist that detail the working hours for AWWs. From our interviews with AWW, it was clear that even though the centres remained open for about 4 to 5 hours a day for 6 days a week, the working hours for AWW stretched beyond that and this was irrespective of any model. At the centres, the AWW spent 4-5 hours in ECE like teaching children, preparing TLM, care giving activities like feeding children, pregnant and lactating women and taking care of their nutritional requirements. Post that the AWWs were also expected to conduct daily home visits. The purpose of these visits varied and stretched beyond ECCE work, as most of these visits were conducted to get health updates from pregnant and lactating women and provide them with information related to schemes. A substantial amount of their time at home went in doing administrative and paper work, related to updating various registers, record keeping and uploading data online. As suggested in literature (Saikia and Borgohain, 2020; Jain et al, 2020) and also evident from our data, the double burden of work on AWW was evident as almost all AWW spent around 1 to 2 hours daily at night after finishing their household chores to do paper and data related work. In sum, a usual work day for the AWW was about 7-8 hours a day.

The workers said that there was hardly any time for leisure or self-training. One of the workers in the PPP AWC-1 (intervention based) said that she wanted to qualify for the Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) conducted by the state government, but due to lack of time, she was unable to do this which had left her highly unmotivated as there was no upward mobility or career trajectory for AWWs.

In addition to this, the AWW also performed multiple non-ECCE related activities like election duties, surveys, updating Aadhar details and various other tasks connected to other ICDS schemes on feeding and health programme of pregnant and lactating women. Although the frequency of these non-ECCE based work differed, for example, care of pregnant and lactating women was a daily activity which consumed approximately 1 hour, while the other activities like surveys or election duties were more staggered, and the frequency of this work ranged from 4-5 times a year.

The work that AWW performed is considered voluntary in nature and they are considered 'honorary workers'. This has a direct impact on their compensation, which is to say the least, meagre. As per WCD (PIB, 2021) an AWW is supposed to get a 'honorarium' of INR 4,500 by the central government. In addition to this, there is also a provision for the state governments to add to this amount. Our data showed that the honorarium paid to AWWs in

Rajasthan were INR 7,800 (this was inclusive of the INR 4,500 by central government and INR 3,300 by the state government). The range of the honorarium for AWW in different states varies between INR 11,811 to INR 7,000 with most states like Bihar, Odisha, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh paying the least (Gulankar, 2022) which is not even equal to respective skilled wage work rates (CBPS, 2019). The AWWs interviewed for this fieldwork clearly termed this as inadequate and also added that often the salary was paid in parts and as a result, there are months when they get only the central government share or the state government share. It was therefore clear AWW workforce is a feminised workforce.

Teachers, on the other hand, are 'state government employees' and therefore have relatively high salaries[6] along with the security of regular pay hikes, Dearness Allowances (DA) and pension upon retirement. This when compared to AWWs brings out the stark disparity in their working conditions. This leads one to ask how the objectives of integration would be achieved on the face of such institutionalised disparity. The eligibility criteria for teachers are higher and they come with professional qualification but a good number AWW are also 12th pass or undergraduate but currently there is no internal process for them to graduate into 'teachers' as an 'employee' other than being part of the open competitive process. The interviews with the AWWs suggested that given their high and varied responsibilities, it was not easy for them to be part of the competitive process. The teachers interviewed for this study had very different concerns related working conditions, while on teacher pointed out the need for human resources and the burden of non-academic duties, the other in the same school spoke about the need for more technology in the school.

Training and Support Opportunities

Interviews with AWW on their trainings revealed that almost all of them had received some training over the past two years either by the state governments or by the intervening NGOs on child development and ECE based pedagogies but the period of exposure varied widely. The state government trainings that the AWWs could recall were their induction trainings. In contrast, the PPP 1 and private NGO facilitators had received frequent training on child friendly pedagogies, play-based education and developmentally appropriate skills, and the workers also found these trainings useful in understanding these concepts. The AWWs in PPP2 had received only a one-time training of two days on the modules that they had to use. Others in independent or integrated AWCs also did not receive any additional training. However, the government of Rajasthan has initiated the practice of 'mentor teachers' for the sake of continuity between AWC and schools, and this predates the adoption of NEP 2020.

Mentor teachers are school teachers responsible for mentoring the Anganwadi workers for better ECE at the AWC. The mentor teachers were earlier mandated to take around 7 periods in school and then mentor the Anganwadi workers in the remaining one period, which has now changed to only four periods after the NEP 2020. Under the Continuous Teacher Professional Development (CTPD), the mentor teachers are trained periodically. But

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[6] Our interviews suggested that the salaries of teachers in class 1 and 2 in Maharashtra was close to INR 70,000, and in Rajasthan, it was close to INR 45,000.

our field visits and consultations with experts revealed multiple gaps in this process. Interviews with the AWW and NGO personnels revealed that the mentor teachers, even though established as a definite designation by the government of Rajasthan, are yet to assume full responsibility of their role as mentors to AWW

School teachers on the other hand had hardly received any training on ECE. Their training in both the states ranged from subject based competencies and pedagogies like teaching of mathematics or language to various rights and laws related to children like Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POSCO) and RTE. Therefore, there was no continuity even in the trainings that were provided to the school teachers, and the subject of ECE was relatively alien for them. In such a situation, to assume that the school teachers can take up mentorship roles for AWW seems disjointed. It is well established that schools and AWCs function differently and are controlled by two different departments. The continuity in curriculum, pedagogy and learning environment cannot be established by mere co-location and 'mentoring'.

Centre or school visit is viewed as an important form of support to either AWW or teachers. We found that officials like Child Development Project Officers (CDPO) visited the AWCs at least twice a year and communicated scheme related messages to the community. The workers saw these visits as motivating for them and also mentioned that it enabled the process of legitimisation between the communities and AWCs. The AWC supervisors played a critical supporting role by visiting all the centres at least once or twice a month. These visits helped AWWs in getting feedback on their work and strengthening their position among the community.

Interestingly, we found that the panchayat members visit to the AWCs were restricted to only events like Independence Day celebrations. Even though community participation was one of the main points of intervention in PPP 2, panchayats seemed to be excluded from this process. This is despite the fact that the Government of Maharashtra has initiated GP led child friendly panchayat initiative, and that most panchayat Adhayaksha were women. Neither of these so far seemed to have change the status of a visible lack of convergence between the AWW and GPs.

The visits by NGOs and CSOs (civil society organisations) were more visible and frequent in the PPPs, but the nature of their visits differed in PPP1 and PPP2 AWCs. In PPP1, the support offered during these visits were in the form of demonstration of activities that the NGO had trained the AWW on so these also formed a part of the follow visits from regular trainings. In PPP2, the visits were independent of any support to the AWW, but were more in the nature of distribution of kits and facilitating Anganwadi Development Committee (ADC) meetings.

What emerges clearly here is that AWW function in difficult working conditions without much support and resources. The PPP models or the NGO running their own centres provide greater training and support but that is not a systemic solution. The duality of structures of AWC and school is even a more serious issue with huge differences in

remuneration and training between AWW and teacher but that does not necessarily mean that teachers are more trained and therefore better prepared for applying concepts like BoS.

Overall, the context of early year education is characterised by parents with high aspirations but with little education towards a holistic or BoS based early childhood education, learning institutions that are diverse in terms of resources but widely uneven working conditions coupled with inadequate or irrelevant training for the facilitators. The PPP models or NGO run initiative could be different but those themselves vary widely. The next chapter discusses the presence or absence of the features that mark BoS approach in relation to the focus on FLN in these centres.

Chapter 3: Integration and Application of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) and Breadth of Skills (BoS)

As mentioned in chapter 1, we categorised BoS into seven skills namely critical thinking, fine and gross motor development, awareness of self, collaboration and socio-emotional skills, communication, FLN and technological skills but these seven categories are not watertight and there are skills which can be placed across different categories. Nevertheless, we tried to map our observations using the classification shown in Table 3.1 and used the same for our analysis.

Table 3. 1: Mapping of Breadth of Skills (BoS)

Critical thinking and Creative Expression	Understanding of context – what to say and what not to say in certain situations, how to express and to whom to express what, Ability to engage in self-directed learning – shows interest in particular activities, knows what they like and dislike, Imagination and creativity, Curiosity and interest, Asking Questions, Storytelling, Make believe play, Free play, Singing, Dancing, Painting, Classification, Sorting, Reasoning.
Fine motor & Gross motor development	Beading, Exercise, Play (indoor and outdoor), Colouring, Threading, Independent play with blocks, puzzles etc.
Awareness of Self	Understanding of their own body/prevention from self-harm, Ability to feed by oneself and follow an eating schedule, sitting tolerance, Toilet control, Personal Health and Hygiene and being able to take care of oneself, understanding of mine and ours – personal property and shared property, learning to separate from mother and home environment – being able to be in the centre.
Collaboration	Ability to share, understanding of reciprocity and turn taking, Ability to work/play in groups/communication and cooperation with peers, Ability to follow a routine, Ability to build new relationships with strangers outside of family, Greeting.
Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN)	Basic/Pre Reading-Skills, Basic/Pre-Writing Skills, Oral Language (Usage of Poems, Rhymes and Stories, Shapes and colours, Alphabets and numbers, Storytelling through Picture books, Reading Skills in the Case of Grade 1 and 2 – reading words and sentences, Writing Skills in the case of Grade 1 and Grade 2, Numeracy Skills in the case of Grade 1 and Grade 2.
Communication	Listening and responding – like paying attention in class, answering to peers and teachers, Ability to follow instructions and respond accordingly, speaking – being able to express oneself (verbal), Non-verbal expression – like emotions, talking to peers, Asking Questions, Responding to the Questions
Technology	exposure to technology, comfort with technology

Source: Developed by the CBPS research team drawing from NCF 2005, Position paper on ECCE and NEGP Framework

For the analysis, we used an approach where we gauged the presence of or potential for the application of the BoS based early childhood education and the use of diverse tools/techniques: (i) the perspectives and insights of AWWs, teachers, supervisors and other personnel on FLN and BoS through interviews, (ii) the workers or teachers' opinion about

the presence of focus on particular skills through interviews, and (iii) presence of desired activities for promoting these seven skills through observation.

The analysis presented here is in three sections: one, two, discussing the two co-located AWWS and schools, and the PPP models (CL AWW2 and PPP 2 are the same), and three, the private NGO model. One of the first question asked to all AWWs and teachers was regarding what they understood by the term BoS and FLN. While no one had heard the term BoS, they had varying degree of familiarity with FLN. However, when explained what BoS means, most of them could describe how they practice this in their centre or class – again the depth of understanding varied. Similarly, there were divergences between what the facilitators thought they were integrating in their classes and what was observed, to varying degree. The following analyses presents these findings in detail.

3.1. Independent Anganwadi Centres (AWCs)

These two AWCs were similar in terms of resources but the AWC-2 demonstrated better understanding and practice of the BoS approach. The AWW of the AWC -1 did not find any resonance with the term FLN and BoS, but post explanation, she said that she followed a play-based pedagogy for skills like letter identification. She also added that apart from purely FLN based skills, she also tried to incorporate social values and context appropriate behaviour skills in children, like 'how to talk to elders'.

Box 3.1: Practising holistic (BoS) approach in AWC-2

'I use the prop of vegetables and fruits to make children understand not just the names of the vegetables and fruits but also the nutritional values attached to them. I show them fruits and vegetables, and ask them if they had eaten them or seen them before, thus evoking their experiences and building familiarity. Then I ask them if they could name the vegetables and fruits, and I explain to them about what was the nutritional value of these items and how they benefitted the health of the children. I do all this through a group discussion to facilitate participation of all children and peer learning.'

Source: Statement by AWW-2 (translated and paraphrased)

The AWW of the independent AWC-2 described FLN in greater detail as the foundation (building blocks) for a child's education and used the analogy of 'roti, kapda aur makaan' (bread, clothes and house) to explain the indispensable importance that should be placed to FLN. She also elaborated as to how she used BoS (once explained to her what it was) in her teaching processes (Box 3.1).

Children at both these centres could play together in groups, spoke to each other and the AWW freely, responded to questions posed by the workers and had basic pre-literacy and numeracy skills like being able to repeat a poem narrated by the workers, ability to hold conversations and responding to questions like 'what did you eat today' in addition to understanding concepts like shapes, big, small etc. However, the AWC-2 was more vibrant and the AWW-2's clarity regarding the rationale of why she was doing particular activities also meant that she could link the activities to learning much better, and therefore there was no variance in what she thought she was doing and what was observed (Table 3.2).

Table 3. 2: BoS Approach Implemented in Independent Anganwadi Centres

Skills	Independent Anganwadi centres (without any external/NGO based intervention)			
	AWWs' Belief		Researchers' Observations	
Critical thinking and Creative Expression	Yes	Yes	**No**	Yes
Fine motor and Gross motor development	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Awareness of Self	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Collaboration	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
FLN	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Communication	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Technology	Yes	Yes	No observation	No observation

Source: Primary Data, CBPS Fieldwork, 2022

The children at the AWC 2 could were busy not only in singing songs and poems, reading pictures and discussing body parts, but were also participated actively and asked questions such as 'why does a particular event happen, or what happens next'. Despite the fact that this AWC was located in a shared space, and had limited resources, the AWC was able to conduct a variety of activities across the seven skills; she would make children stand at their own place and exercise, in providing instructions to children while doing the exercises, she would also include some words of English purposefully, in order to build familiarity of the language, and it was observed that almost all children understood and followed the English based instructions easily. One of the possible reasons for this could be the fact that the AWW was exposed to a comprehensive and continuous training of an NGO which was centred around play-based pedagogy and developmentally appropriate skills. Therefore, it was clear that it is not just availability of TLM and related resources, but the capacity of workers to use those for specific learning is equally or perhaps more critical, and training plays a critical role in that process.

3.2. Co-located/Integrated Anganwadi Centres (AWCs), Schools and PPP models

A similar pattern was visible in the analysis of integrated and PPP models where training, both in terms of its frequency and nature, seemed to make a difference. The worker of the CL-AWC-1 had not attended any direct training on FLN, but she had been trained on group and activity-based teaching by the government, and therefore, even though she was unaware of the terms FLN and BoS, but applied the concept of FLN in her AWC by teaching children number and alphabet identification. The observations there also showed that the children at this centre were being exposed to all the skills except for technology which was not observed, even though the worker said that the children at the centre were well versed with technology.

The nature of training seemed to make a difference, as the AWW in CL-AWC-2/PPP2 had attended only a one-time 2-day training on play-based pedagogy and therefore, even though

she was aware of the term FLN, and said that she applied BoS in her classroom, she struggled to explain it. From her responses it was clear that she had a basic understanding of FLN, which she also practiced in her AWC, but the conceptual understanding and integration of BoS was clearly weak. She explained FLN as a concept that integrated both numeracy and creativity. When asked how, she added that numeracy was understanding of concepts like big and small, although she could not explain how creativity was a part of FLN. In terms of integration, she extensively spoke about how shapes can be taught by using everyday objects like plates, bowls, bangles, and also explained how she used the blackboard at the centre to write alphabets and numbers which the children copied in their notebooks. Children were not observed to be asking questions.

Table 3. 3: BoS Approach Implemented in Integrated Anganwadi Centres and PPP Models

Skills	Integrated/co-located AWC with government schools, and PPP models									
	AWWs' / teacher's Belief					Researchers' Observations				
	CL – AWC 1	School 1	CL-AWC 2/ PPP 2	School 2	PPP 1	CL – AWC 1	School 1	CL-AWC 2/ PPP 2	School 2	PPP 1
Critical thinking & Creative Expression	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	**No**	**No**	Yes
Fine & Gross motor development	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	**No**	Yes	Yes	Yes
Awareness of Self	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Collaboration	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	**No**	**No**	Yes
FLN	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Communication	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	**No**	Yes	Yes
Technology	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No observation	No observations	No observation	No observation	No observations

Source: Primary Data, CBPS Fieldwork, 2022

There was greater focus on FLN in AWC 2/PPP2. The walls of the AWC, as described earlier, were painted with numbers and alphabets, which the AWW used extensively to ask a child to read the numbers and alphabets using a ruler to point out the number/alphabet and the rest of the children were supposed to follow. The AWW reported that this activity was repeated every day. We observed that children who were a bit older than the rest, were partially able to follow and repeat what the child was reading, but the younger children had completely lost interest and looked seemingly puzzled. This activity was followed by the AWW writing numbers and alphabets on the Board which the children had to copy, and here again, only one or two children who were older than the rest could perform this activity. The worker paid no attention to the rest who could not. It was clear that the AWW was not adept in handling multi-age group of children despite the presence of a variety of TLM like blocks, colouring books, puzzles, play dough, Legos, etc. This points to the fact that the presence of a variety of TLM in itself does not guarantee its effective use.

Both these AWCs were co-located with schools. In school-1, one teacher handled both class 1 and 2. In school-2, there were two teachers for grade 1 and 2 respectively, although they took multigrade classes, as class 1 was combined with class 3 and class 2 was combined with class 4; this arrangement was not made on any pedagogical consideration but to keep the Pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) balanced for both the classes.

Despite co-location, no clear sign of the AWC and grade 1 and 2 teachers working together were visible in either of the two schools. The classroom processes in schools were focussed mostly on FLN and the pedagogy was mostly blackboard-based though some use of other Teaching Learning Materials (TLMs) like charts, flashcards, pictures, money, stones, etc. were also observed. All the teachers explained FLN and opined that it was basic numeracy and literacy that should be taught through enhancing reading and writing skills in children. The BoS was a new term for them as well and that they had never heard before though some BoS skills were observed being practiced through exercises, communication between teachers and students through questions and answers, and use of TLM. However, this did not seem to be a result of co-location. The teachers in School 2 complained that though children should be familiar with the use of TLM/activities such as flashcards or picture reading when they enter school, that was not the case.

The principle of inclusion is foundational to the BoS approach, especially when focussing on skills like critical thinking, cognitive abilities, collaboration, and socio-emotional skills. Even though there were no overt signs of discrimination, signs of exclusion were apparent in both school 2 and CL-AWC 2, which were co-located. While a differently abled child was observed to be completely excluded from the classroom processes by the grade 1 teacher, the AWW in her responses on the issue of hygiene and cleanliness, responded by saying that children from Scheduled Caste (SC) communities lacked these skills because of their home environments and parents who themselves were themselves unaware of cleanliness. Considering that the CL-AWC 2 is also a PPP model, this reflects a gap in training and internalisation of the inclusive philosophy by the AWC. Such signs were not visible in PPP 1, where the training was continuous and more rigorous, and which demonstrated a better understanding and implementation of the BoS concepts.

PPP 1 Model

The PPP1 deserves a detailed and separate discussions as it stood out as closest to integrating the BoS skills through a variety of activities using diverse pedagogical experiences while also being inclusive and the AWW being able to understand and explain the rationale of what she was doing. The focus on a number of pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills meant a good preparedness for the FLN without being over-zealous about it and also without sacrificing the focus holistic development. The activities were composite and allowed for diversity in the age group of children to actively participate while building a number of skills simultaneously (Box 3.2).

What also emerged clearly that the AWW was familiar with the concept of FLN, and could also explain how she incorporated BoS in her classroom processes, even though she did not

know the term. She gave several examples of combining skills and multi-age children: one example was where that she hides two-three stones in the sand pit and asks the children to look for them. Once they find it, she asks them how many stones did they find. She also gives them a couple of boxes with varied shapes and asks them to fit it all in one box. This enables the children to see and estimate which box can be fitted inside which. She explained how she also facilitated development of skills such as collaboration, communication and fine motor skills in addition to mathematical concepts of counting, estimation and size. An important feature was that a number of activities were taken to higher order creative and critical thinking skills through discussions with ease (Box 3.2).

Box 3.2: A few examples of the activities at PPP 1

The Concept of Circle: The AWW in the local language started with the basics of touch and feel, what felt hard, what felt circular, and so on. Once the children had experienced this, they are asked what other objects in their homes felt the same. After the children understood the basic concept of a round shape, they were asked to work with their workbooks. The state government's ECCE workbooks were used for this purpose: activities like putting cotton on a circle, colouring circles, differentiating bigger and smaller circles were encouraged. Post that, other higher-level activities like match the shapes were done. Children who were a bit older were also encouraged to make cut outs of rounds, or draw circles by themselves.

Independent use of language using the child's context: Three basic thematic activities that are done every day – soap, napkin and news. The children are given these responsibilities turn wise; their names are displayed on the board with the designated activities of the day. For instance, if a child has the responsibility for news on that particular day, they then need to wear that card on themselves, and once they come to the centre, the AWW groups all children and asks the designated child to say 'what did they see on their way to the AWC today', based on what the child says, others are encouraged to ask questions of what, why, how. For example, if the child says that he saw a goat, then others are encouraged to ask, 'where did he see the goat', 'how did it look', 'what was it doing' and so on.

Role Plays: It is a common activity used for a number of ideas. One such example was the local grocery shop where the children had to set up shop, role play as shop keeper and customers. The learning corners played a central role and children were at ease using these for their make-belief plays and role play activities.

Pre-numeracy and mathematical concepts: A number of activities using easily available resources were conducted. This included making paper balls through tiny shreds of paper, blowing paper to see how far it travels, measuring the table or any other object with the size of their hand, and using wooden blocks or sticks to measure things in order to develop the concepts of distance, measurement and estimations

Pre-literacy skills and other activities: Story-telling and listening, songs, making collages in the worksheets, making toys with mud, etc, were common activities. Another activity observed was that children were asked to hold a book and see what is the front, back and how to open a book. Then they are asked to move their fingers from left to write and follow the structure of a sentence through their fingers. The AWW read the story and showed them pictures. She also asked the children to place their fingers on that word she was reading. After the session, she asked children to draw their interpretation of the story.

The use of learning corners, mentioned in the infrastructure section in the last chapter, was important for actualising a number of activities. The use of free play as a pedagogical tool by the worker to facilitate group work, collaboration, cognition and creative thinking by the worker was impressive. In addition to this, the worker actively engaged with children to make them think critically and question prevalent gender or social norms. For example, the worker encouraged both boys and girls from playing with kitchen utensils at the learning corner setup of a kitchen, or with the dressing room setup at another learning corner.

Another example came from her teaching the concept of circle and round shape. She asked children 'who wears bangles at home' and while most children responded with *maa, didi* or *chachi, Bhabhi* (female relatives), one child also said 'father'. The worker engaged with that response and said that in many cultures, men also wore bangles. The discussion on training revealed that social aspects like gender were an integral part in addition to AWWs training on developmentally appropriate and holistic approach. The manner in which the worker put this training to use by seamlessly engaging with multiple concepts and using discussions, play and activities with children showed how the training had been internalised. Frequent visits and on-site support by trainers had played an important role in this internalisation process.

Since both alphabets and numbers are abstract concepts, it helps for children to have prior experiences that help them connect to these abstractions, and also skills that help them see the application. These skills include skills of critical thinking or creative expression. That is why BoS is inclusive of, and has the potential for strengthening the FLN. For instance, when children are asked to observe what they are seeing and report orally in response to the question (see 3.2), they are learning observation (as against seeing), reflecting on that and expressing it coherently. If the discussion continues, children are also being made to think and think critically depending on the nature of the questions. Although there is no reading and writing in this activity, this is an important exercise encompassing skills of connecting experience with expression and thinking, which are essential for effective literacy skills. Similarly, when children are asked to draw their own interpretation of stories that they listen to, they are also being asked to think critically and express – any interpretation involves the exercise of critical thinking – even though there is no writing or reading is involved. When children are locating stones of various shapes, sorting them and trying to guess how many would fit in a box, they are being exposed to not only counting (though experience of touching a solid object and therefore understanding the concept of one-to-one) and shape but also the higher order skills of size and estimation, as these experiences strengthen the concept of number. Needless to add that these are also enjoyable and connected, and therefore attractive, activities for children.

3.3. The Private NGO Intervention

The project personnel as well as the centre facilitators interviewed to understand the integration of FLN and BoS in this private ECCE NGO run model were largely unfamiliar with both FLN and BoS. However, when asked how the seven skills are integrated into their

model, they did speak about play based pedagogy where concepts like collaboration, socio-emotional skills and FLN could be developed. The observations affirmed the implementation of such a pedagogy in the centre.

Table 3. 4: BoS Approach Implemented in the Private (Non-Profit) NGO Centre

Skills	Not for profit ECCE centres run by NGO	
	AWWs' Belief	Researchers' Observations
Critical thinking and Creative Expression	Yes	Yes
Fine motor and Gross motor development	Yes	Yes
Awareness of Self	Yes	Yes
Collaboration	Yes	Yes
FLN	Yes	Yes
Communication	Yes	Yes
Technology	Yes	Not observed

Source: Primary Data, CBPS Fieldwork, 2022

They conduct story telling sessions through use of masks, to trigger imagination in children in addition to language skills, and activities for pattern recognition, identification of shapes and related pre-mathematical concepts could also be observed (Table 3.4). In all, as seen in Table 3.4, even though the personnel couldn't define FLN and BoS, their model did integrate the key skills through a play-based pedagogy. The children at this centre were well trained on skills like both verbal and non-verbal communications, and the use of local songs and building various objects through blocks were common activities. As in the case of all other models, no evidence of incorporation of technological skills was observed.

Since this was their own centre, unlike AWC or school, which are parts of larger systems, the NGO had greater control over the training, approach and functioning of the centre. The challenges faced by NGOs in the PPP models, where they engaged with the systemic issues and deal with respective state government officials were very different in nature. It was also a time consuming and lengthy process to engage with AWWs, to convince them about their model, and enable them to deliver their models; in this process, trust building was as essential as capacity building. The nature of engagement also varied in different PPPs. The PPP 1 invested major resources in research to calibrate age-appropriate activities in multi-age situations and in continuous training of the AWWs while the PPP2 invested more in providing TLM for the centre, school as well as for the children. PPP 2 did not invest much on training either in the AWC or the co-located school to facilitate continuum in ECCE practices and greater convergence.

Assessment

The difference in in approach was also reflected in the way assessments were conceptualised and conducted at the centres. In the two Independent AWCs (AWC-1 and 2) the workers relied on asking questions to the children and assessed their level of learning based on the responses. The worker at AWC-2 further explained this by saying that she assessed the response pattern of children, not just in terms of who could respond or who couldn't, but

also saw the pace at which a child could respond. In addition to this, the AWC-1 worker said that she observed if children could repeat particular activities by themselves. Repetition as a marker and process of learning is well documented in ECE (Klem et al., 2014) and therefore this approach seemed a more comprehensive than a mere question answer-based approach. Similar to the AWC-2, the Integrated AWC-1, School-1 and Integrated AWC/PPP-2, Integrated School-2 followed the same question and answer pattern of assessment, and the assessments were recorded in the progress cards of children. Here again, a noted difference in approach to assessment was seen in the PPP-2/integrated AWC-2 and the PPP-1. While the PPP-2 AWC followed a method of written test-based assessment where she gave writing assignments to children and assessed them on the basis of how they performed the given tasks. The younger children were asked to write on slates and the older children were asked to write using paper and pencil.

On the other hand, the AWW in PPP-1 followed a more gradual observation-based method of assessment on various parameters/skills. She observed markers such as who is able to play which game, what games are they fond of, who is able to draw and who is not, how do they answer particular questions, to name a few. The worker also paid attention to the conversations that children had with each other and with her, in order to gauge their language competencies, for example, if the children could express herself in multiple languages or in her home language. These observations were recorded on a regular basis in the *prapatra* mandated by the state government. In sum, the assessment methods followed at PPP-1 seemed to be more rooted in the BoS approach and allowed for multiple skill-based assessment. It also seemed to be the closest in comparison to all other models to the NCF 2005 and NCF 2022 on ECCE which argue for a formative and continuous assessment based on the daily experiences of the child.

The next chapter where we conclude combines this analysis with the discussion on the context in the previous chapter to arrive at inferences regarding the strengths and gaps vis-à-vis the BoS and FLN approaches, and draw lessons for promoting the BoS-based or holistic ECE approach while also addressing the FLN related concerns. In that, we also engage with issues of resources, training, infrastructure, parental education, co-location and the systemic change.

Chapter 4: Conclusions and Emerging Policy Messages for Foundational Learning

This chapter draws upon the discussions from the previous sections to arrive at conclusions and cull out their key policy messages for the BoS based ECE while also including feedback and suggestions emerging form the consultation with ECE experts.

4.1. Concept and Branding

One of the first and major conclusions that emerged from the study is that though the term BoS is new to almost all stakeholders in the early childhood education scenario in India, it is conceptually not new. All the ECE experts consulted for the study agreed that the concept is very similar to the holistic and developmentally appropriate approach that has widely been an accepted frame for early childhood education both in India and internationally. This commitment to this can be clearly traced in India through policies and framework documents like NCF 2005, National Policy on ECCE 2013 and the NEGP framework (Expert Interview 1, dated 11 Oct, 2022).

Box 4.1: How the BoS at foundational stage is inclusive of and critical for FLN
There is hardly any one and uniform definition of FLN, however it can be derived from the definitions of literacy and numeracy. While literacy and numeracy refer to the ability to deal with text and numbers respectively, they definitely go beyond basic skills of just reading and writing, or just the knowledge of numbers and basic arithmetical operations. The focus on FLN alone in early years can lead to a narrow focus on 'learning to read' while focus on a range of skills, or BoS, can enable the goal of 'reading to learn' even if it may appear in the beginning that FLN is not the focus there. In this context, five critical points emerge from this study:

1. Literacy refers to speaking and listening in addition to reading and writing. It also includes competencies that enable individuals to think critically, reflect, communicate effectively and express creatively in diverse ways.
2. Similarly, numeracy refers to the abilities to think and communicate quantitatively, to make meaning of numbers, to have an understanding of space, to understand patterns and sequences, and to be able to solve problems using mathematical reasoning.
3. A number of these competencies can be initiated prior to formal learning of reading, writing and number or arithmetic skills, and if learnt well, can strengthen reading, writing, numbers and arithmetic competencies, leading to realisation of the goal of moving from 'learning to read' to 'reading to learn'. This is because some of these skills are innate to children, e.g., listening, speaking, thinking, creating, arguing and if directed well, these can lead to effective literacy and numeracy skills in later years.
4. Children view the world in an integrated and connected manner, and the most enjoyable and natural process for them is playing.
5. The knowledge of alphabets and numbers, and ability to read either a text or numbers, may follow or be simultaneous to, and might not always precede development of other skills such as creativity, critical thinking and communication.

The experts also agreed, which was also clear from the field visits, that the BoS was a broader and holistic concept for ECCE than just FLN; the BoS was inclusive of FLN and a focus on a wide range of skill could strengthen FLN while the opposite was not true (see Box 4.2). In other words, FLN is an important but narrow concept and focusing only on FLN alone cannot strengthen other critical skills (Expert Interview 1,2,3 and 4, dated from 11 Oct to 18 Oct, 2022). The NEP 2020 and Nipun Bharat documents do not necessarily outline these clearly and unambiguously (Expert Interview 5, dated 20 Oct, 2022). The risk of FLN out-shadowing BoS seemed real especially in the context of high focus on low literacy and numeracy outcomes reported in the media (Expert Interview 4, dated 18 Oct, 2022), high political priority as evidenced from the Nipun Bharat document as well as vocal and overt parental demands and aspirations towards that goal (FGD parents, AWC1,2, CL AWC1,2, CL school 1,2 and PPP-1). It also emerged that reaching out to private players, even if they cater mainly only to the high- and middle-income groups alone, is important as they act as pace setters (Expert Interview 1, dated 11 Oct, 2022).

Key Policy Messages

(i)   Advocacy with policy makers / opinion makers / media / private providers on the importance of the BoS – based or holistic ECE, which is inclusive of FLN, rather than on promoting FLN alone.
(ii)   Development of a clear curricular continuum for 3-8 year children could be developed with focus on holistic, BoS based approach that is inclusive of FLN (rather than vice versa).
(iii)   Rebranding of the holistic, developmentally-appropriate ECE into BoS-based could be seriously dwelled upon before deciding; it can be adopted if would help in gaining a broader acceptance of the approach (Expert Interview 1, dated 11 Oct, 2022) but can also be counter-productive if it gives the message to stakeholders that is 'just an old wine in a new bottle' (Expert Interview 2, dated 13 Oct, 2022).
(iv)   Resources for research to create/collect evidence that FLN gets strengthened if a holistic ECE approach is adopted and implemented well.
(v)   Parental education to be part of the interventions on the importance of the BoS – based or holistic ECE, which is inclusive of FLN, rather than on promoting FLN alone.

4.2. Capacity Building of Key Stakeholders

The literature is full of references to the need for capacity building of AWWs, and it was clear from our field experiences also that training made a difference. All those AWW and other facilitators who had received some sort of extended and intensive training (e.g., Independent AWC 2, PPP 1 and private NGO) were definitely better in conducting diverse activities using appropriate pedagogies with children. In addition, the analysis of the literature as well as our study of these models lead to certain nuanced aspects of comprehensive capacity building, which are critical for making the exercise much more-result-focused with long term implications for the system. These are also the pointers for advocacy for designing and implementing the capacity building programme:

Key Policy Messages

(i) Capacity building to be conceptualised and implemented as a continuous activity with elements of training and on-site support built-in. While supervision and on-site support can be at times combined, it is necessary to separate the two activities,

(ii) The training needs to combine knowledge and skills so that the facilitators and other key stakeholder (e.g., supervisors) are aware of the rationale of the activities that they are taught to perform, and can also develop other activities on their own following the same principles and philosophy of BoS,

(iii) Capacity building to include aspects of inclusion (gender, caste, community, special needs) explicitly with both the rationale for the same (why is it important) and skills to handle those in eh classroom/centre (what to do and how to do),

(iv) Teachers teaching classes 1 & 2, and AWWs need to be trained together for early year education on holistic, BoS based approach to understand the progression and develop the ability to grade sub-activities within one activity for various levels/grades/age, and to clearly understand the links between BoS and FLN.

4.3. Enabling Physical Environment for Implementation of the BoS-Based Approach

Another major conclusion that emerged from the study and validated the findings from the literature is that though the holistic approach for ECE has been well-acknowledged and reflected in policy documents, the implementation has been varied and remained largely week. While capacity building of key stakeholders is essential to improve the implementation and its quality, that alone is not sufficient; the discussion in previous chapters make it obvious the context matters – facilitators, home and learning institution – all play a role. The enabling environment at learning institution is highly dependent on presence of appropriate infrastructure and learning resources in addition to the capacity of the facilitator to use those in combination of the local context meaningfully. For instance, the presence of learning corners in the PPP 1 model helped in carrying out BoS focused activities much better. Similarly, the presence of learning resources in PPP 2 made the atmosphere more child friendly, even though the AWW could not use them to their full potential. The paucity of space and restrictive norms has been a major issue of AWCs in urban areas. In that context it is important to have certain minimum infrastructural and resources norms for early years education institutions, including AWCs and schools.

Key Policy Messages

(i) Defining the per child space requirement for early year education taking the holistic and BoS based approach into account. This can be done based on international standards and be mandated for adoption by all kinds of providers including public, private and for-profit organisations.

(ii) Defining the essential learning resources for early years education and making provisions for the same. This can be also done based on international standards and be mandated for adoption by all kinds of providers including public, private and for-profit organisations.

4.4. The Issue of Language

It is important to discuss the issue of language given that parents are keen that their children learn English while the need for the use of home language in early years for better learning experiences is well-established. The newly released NCF as well as NEP 2020 also emphasise the importance of mother tongue. What is important here to realise is that these two: use of mother tongue or home language, and ability to learn English, are not contradictory goals. Just like the well-designed and well-implemented BoS based approach can strengthen FLN, a well-designed and well-implemented home-language based early education can also include introduction to some English at that stage itself (e.g., PPP 1), and pave way for better English learning in later years (Expert Interview 1, dated 11 Oct, 2022). This, however, translates itself into the need for the centre and their facilitator for better training and preparedness for multilingual environment and ability to negotiate that with ease, and when this is done, parents also see the rationale (Expert Interview 2, dated 13 Oct, 2022). This is because there is rarely any place, especially in urban and semi-urban areas, where all children have the same mother tongue. They need to be encouraged to express in their own languages while slowly can also be exposed to other languages including English.

Key Policy Messages

(i) Promoting acceptance of a 'multilingual environment' in education institutions and preparing teachers for the same for effective BoS based ECE; this should be made mandatory for all kinds of institutions, including public and private.
(ii) This is different from mother tongue education and advocacy for the policy emphasis to acknowledge that would also be helpful. While the main language of the area could be the medium of instruction, the institutional environment could be such that children speaking any language feel confident of expressing themselves.
(iii) Parental education to include this aspect of complementarity of languages, and the importance of home language with clear demonstration of how it works

4.5. Systemic and Institutional Issues

Considering that India has very large-scale systems of early childhood and schools, it is important to include these aspects as well in the discussions. The redefinition of early years education as covering 3-8 years of children and the educational institutions for the same being divided across AWCs and school, which are controlled by two different departments, has made the institutional issues especially relevant in the context of adoption of the BoS based approach. One measure that is being promoted in varying degrees by different Indian states in this respect is co-location or integration of the AWCs and primary schools, and the study delved into that issue.

What emerged was that while co-location can be useful in terms of (i) shared resources like infrastructural facilities such as activity-space and playground, and (ii) creating children's familiarity with school, this does not necessarily translate into curricular and pedagogical continuum. Considering that the number of AWCs is much more than that of schools, and that AWCs serve a number of other duties than ECE, the choice of co-location and integration to be left to the local level (expert Interview 5, dated 20 Oct, 2022). These two institutions have had very different histories and focus, where teachers are regular employees and AWWs are volunteers, the power relationship remains unequal, which also impacts the potential of this continuum adversely. In that context, interventions such as the school teacher being a 'mentor teacher' for AWWs is based on the presumption that she/he is definitely better capacitated in early year education/ holistic approach, which may not be universally true (as observed in the field) and create further divides. The teachers teaching classes 1 and 2 seem much more committed to FLN with ambiguous attitude towards the BoS being desirable for the same. In order to address this, some systemic shifts are necessary, in addition to capacity building efforts as mentioned earlier.

Key Policy Messages

(i) Co-location of AWW and schools to be coupled with promotion of the curricular/pedagogical continuum where AWWs and class 1 and 2 teachers are treated equally with joint capacity building initiatives. This will help in recognising that AWCs work is as critical as that of teachers and there need not be a hierarchy.
(ii) Plan to change the status of AWWs with at least creating career pathways for those who are better educated to reduce the gap in working condition of teachers and AWWs;
(iii) Better and more clear coordination between the Department of Women and Child Development (WCD) and Department of Education with clear guidelines and delineation of roles and responsibilities.

4.6. Technology

Exposure to technology is an important aspect of BoS. However, we did not observe any example of the same in our fieldwork except in one case (PPP 1) where the facilitator shared how the uninhibited access to smartphone by parents to some children acts as a constraint. While it is important to expose children to technology, it is also important not to overexpose, as it could cause alienation, and prevent the child from learning a number of essential social skills. Based on the review of literature, expert consultation and ideation, following pointers for advocacy emerged.

Key Policy Messages

(i) The orientation on the use of technology to be integrated in the capacity building of facilitators and teachers with a focus on its judicious use while preventing uninhibited access.
(ii) Exploring the potential for combining initiation of English language skills and technology for early years through research.

(iii) Including the aspects of potentials and risks of technology in parental education programme

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Annexure 1: The NGO and Collaborative Models

This annexure describes the details of the two collaborative model (PPP) and the private NGO model that were studied.

A.1. Intervention AWC 1

Started in July 2019, this collaborative model covers two blocks of a single district and has 433 AWCs under its cover out of which 101 are Model Anganwadi Centres (MAWC) and 332 are Extensive Support Anganwadi Centres (ESAWC). The MAWC and ESAWC differ on the level of intervention which they receive, while MAWCs receive infrastructural support with learning corners, TLMs supply and extensive training of AWW, the intervention at the ESAWCs is limited to training of AWWs. Designated personnel called Block Anchors (BA) have about 13 to 14 such MAWC under them and they visit these AWCs regularly not just to monitor but also to provide support by demonstration of particular activities. The BAs also visit the ESAWCs but the visits to these centres are not regular and around 60-65 ESAWCs are under one BA.

We studied the MAWC in depth. The MAWCs are selected based on certain set parameters like the AWC should have its own building, the AWW should be educated and the AWC should be well connected to roads for easy access. By having a fixed inclusion criterion for intervention, the models ensure that the AWCs that they intervene in are already at a threshold which is higher than other AWCs in that area. The main reason behind this inclusion criterion as per the project personnel is that their model of intervention is focused on capacity building and therefore, it is a requirement for them to have AWW who have received at least some level of formal education. The criterion for the AWC to have its own building was based on the fact that the model made investments to improve the interiors of the AWC by making learning corners, painting of walls with TLM and therefore to ensure sustainability of this work, they needed the AWC to have their own buildings. The implicit assumption here seems to be that if an AWC has its own and adequate infrastructure and qualified worker, capacity building interventions can make it a 'model'.

The model works on the motivation of ensuring the implementation of the core 5 areas of ECCE (language, cognitive skills, reading, socio-emotional capacities, physical and motor development of children) in AWCs. Their training of AWWs is also based on these 5 elements. Training is a central aspect of this model as the training is not restricted to just the AWWs but their own field workers are trained extensively on the various concepts of developmentally appropriate skills and pedagogies. One of the purposes of the visits by the BAs to the MAWCs is also to follow up on the trainings given to the AWWs and see what is working and what are the potential gaps to be filled. The model intends to work on a sustainable mode by training their AWWs to a level where they themselves can work independently in the delivery of good ECCE practices.

The content of the trainings is derived from two key factors, firstly, to build the basic understanding of ECCE amongst the AWC and then extend this to content and pedagogies based on the five core areas of intervention, secondly, calibrating trainings to suit the

objectives of the state government's curricular focus on ECCE. Another level of calibration is done on the basis of the internalisation and delivery of training by AWC, the follow up visits play a key role in determining what should be the next training topic and how it should be delivered.

The model also ensures that they build a rapport with the community by tagging along with the AWWs during the home visits and make them aware about the ECCE practices followed at the centre. The field staff also encourage the parents to join the 'Amavasya' Parents Teacher Meeting (PTM) at the centres which are fortnightly PTM mandated by the state government. Even though the model doesn't maintain any separate assessment cards of children but it does maintain a monthly report filed by BAs which are then used to design the future trainings.

The model works closely with the state government and has collaborated in multiple training sessions. They also work with the State Council for Education Research and Training (SCERT) to develop a play-based curriculum for the state based on NEP.

A.2. Intervention AWC 2

Started in 2020, this model covers one block of one district. In the 1st phase it had 30 AWCs and 10 primary schools in its coverage but in the second phase the coverage has expanded to 140 AWCs and 42 primary schools. Each AWC is visited twice every week by the field staff and one field-worker is assigned multiple AWCs.

The motivation behind this model is to provide hand-held support to the government by building capacity of different stakeholders, ensuring play-based learning, and building community spaces for play-based learning. In terms of training, even though the respondents mentioned that their model stresses a lot on it and their AWWs are trained on FLN and TLM but if we corroborate this with the data gathered by other tools, we find that the AWWs are provided only one training which in comparison to other models fall short.

The model stresses a lot on its curriculum and content approach as it uses two unique modules developed by the NGO who is involved in this intervention. The modules are modelled around play-based learning and included activities like picture learning through recognition, song activities, and puzzle activities. These modules are developed at the national level and then later translated for the local usage; the state teams are trained on the same.

The model focuses on community participation through innovative ways like they build play infrastructure (like swings, merry-go-round and see-saw) in open community spaces where children can go and play after their time at the AWCs. Another way through which the model ensures community participation is through the concept of 'reading buddies', where they train the elder siblings or parents of the children to assist them in reading and other activities. Similarly, the model also has a concept of 'Play mentors' where the parents of the children are provided with training to ensure play-based learning at home and they are provided with scribbling boards which they can use to teach the children at home. In

terms of assessment, the assessment framework still lies in the draft phase and hence much information on it was not available. The model also provides 'ECCE kits' to all children in the AWCs which comprise of colouring books, puzzles, toys, picture cards etc. One set of this 'kit' is also given to the AWW in order to facilitate play based learning at the centre.

The model converges with the government and reports them about any work or meetings that are planned based on the intervention. Anganwadi Development Committee (ADC) and School Monitoring Committee (SMC) are facilitated for increased community participation in addition to working with the Gram Panchayats to organise various drives for donation of books, television etc. to the AWC.

A.3. Private NGO ECCE Centre

Started in 1986-88, the model was the oldest amongst the studied models. It has 160 full day Balwadis under its gambit in five different blocks. These centres provide both care and education services for the children of age-group 1-6 years, whereas the preschool services in AWCs are for the children of age group 3-6 years. The model works on primary motivation of creating a sense of ownership towards the centre among the parents, improving health and nutritional status of children of age group of 1-6 and providing support in preschool education to ensure school readiness.

The model focuses on activities-based learning and focuses on teaching through local context. The focus is on to ensure 1) children health and safety, 2) smooth school transition, 3) identification of centres with in community. The demand of a new centre is made after a community meeting and hence the model ensures community engagement right from the inception.

The students are evaluated using an assessment tool (question papers) and another centre executive come to the centre and observes the activities. In terms of engagement with the state departments there are quarterly meeting with the WCD where progress and challenges are shared with the government. Some of the centres are located in government buildings.

Therefore, these models have a varied approach to ECCE, while one is focused on training and capacity building of AWW, the other stresses on implementation of its curriculum in the AWCs. Although infrastructural development and provision of TLM are common across these two PPP models. The private model on the other hand also integrates care, health and nutrition into its purview of ECCE.