



Study on the Functioning of Anganwadi Centers in Karnataka in Imparting Non-Formal Pre-School Education Under ICDS (Integrated Child Development Scheme)

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ABSTRACT

Anganwadis¹, established in 1975 as a part of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)² The program is envisioned to combat child hunger, malnutrition, and child care in rural India. Out of its multidimensional purview of services, observably, preschool education seems to have taken backstage. Even though PSE³ As a part of ICDS, Anganwadi's capacity to offer education that it is devoted to when questioned can direct us to pathways that might probably help us to understand their current framework and, in many cases, to improvise their service delivery, identify the loopholes and throw light upon probable solutions. Properly observing and analyzing Anganwadi's functioning is essential to understand this. Here, it is how the findings of my study conducted in six villages of Karnataka in three districts would cater to reform existing loopholes and domain improvements or re-establishments/ redesign wherever required. The study picked up severe flaws in the policy and its implementations at regional levels from the stakeholder and beneficiary perspectives and has thrived in suggesting efficient measures to mitigate the problem.

Keywords: Anganwadi, caste, ICDS, education, governance.

METHODOLOGY

(Sampling Framework/Data Collection tools/ Methods of analysis)

- The present study aims at understanding the functioning of anganwadis in imparting preschool non-formal education under ICDS (Integrated Child Development Scheme)
- The study is being made to throw light on preschool education in Anganwadi Centres.
- The study is proposed to be carried out in six villages of Mandya (2), Chikkamagaluru (2), and Hassan (2) districts in the State of Karnataka.
- The primary data must be collected from the functionaries of the Gram Panchayats (Anganwadi Centres) through questionnaires and interviews.
- Since the present study aims to understand how Anganwadis impart preschool education, it is not limited to a specific period. The 'primary data/information' would be 'collected/gathered' from staff (teachers), children, and parents regarding preschool education at respective Anganwadi Centres.
- Sample design includes canvassing the questionnaire on the beneficiaries' teachers, children, and parents and collecting information through interviews (Qualitative Approach).

Text

¹ Anganwadis are rural child care centers in India that are part of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) program launched in 1975 by the Government of India.

² Launched on 2nd October 1975, the ICDS Scheme represents one of the world's largest and most unique programmes for early childhood development. ICDS is the foremost symbol of India's commitment to her children—India's response to the challenge of providing preschool education on the one hand and breaking the vicious cycle of malnutrition, morbidity, reduced learning capacity, and mortality on the other.

³ Pre-School Education.

The study dwells upon the primary data collected by canvassing questionnaires to Anganwadi teachers and observations made at each Anganwadi. Hence, it is best to brief the observations and findings in the due process and then discuss them in depth.

Overall Findings and Observations:

- No National Creche Scheme⁴
- No preschool nonformal education for children between 0-3 years of age.
- Less absenteeism of children.
- No regular workshops for teachers.
- Low-quality toys.
- No measure to check and maintain the child's educational development
- Four activity corners⁵ Absent.
- No trips, visits, or excursions.
- The School Development Monitoring Committee (SDMC) 's opening of Makkala Mane (a children's home) (LKG, UKG) has affected Anganwadi's functioning.
- NGO and community intervention are almost absent.
- Reach out to children for educational purposes. During the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers were almost absent.
- Only 49.35 % of prescribed items constitute the PSE (Pre-School Education) kits. Items like mats, blunt scissors, glue, markers, glitter pens, clay, balance, magnets, magnifying glasses, etc., were not provided.
- Less salary⁶ For Anganwadi workers and helpers.
- All areas of development- physical, motion, language, social, emotional, personal, aesthetic, and sensory are being achieved most appropriately.
- Used locally available teaching items- pulses, vegetables, stones, and fruits.
- Use of digital media (YouTube) for rhymes.
- Regular supply of PSE kits every year.
- No preschool certificate with grades, unlike in LKG/UKG of private institutions.
- Attitude of parents- more preference given to the suggestions of private institutions.
- Children demand new types of toys.
- Activity books have replaced cards.
- No meeting with parents held for the child's education.
- Syllabus divided for slow learning- 4 topics per month- 1 topic per week.
- Parents demand that workers teach standard English rhymes.

Specific findings and observation

Hassan district

Javagal⁷

⁴ A crèche is a facility that enables parents to leave their children while they are at work and where children are provided with a stimulating environment for their holistic development. Crèches are designed to provide group care to children, usually up to 6 years of age, who need care, guidance, and supervision away from their homes during the day.

⁵ Construction/manipulative play corner, picture book corner, art and craft corner, pretend/imaginative play corner.

⁶ The current salary of Anganwadi workers is 11,500 INR, and the salary of workers at Mini Anganwadis is 7,400 INR.

⁷ Javagal is a town in the southern state of Karnataka, India. It is located in the Arasikere taluk of Hassan district in Karnataka.

- Toys made with ice-cream sticks, sea shells, pistachio shells, and Tamarind seeds-pattern arrangements.
- Somashekhar, a local, donated pencils, bags, books, and boxes.
- Children activity profile- Bags have the children's names and must drop all their work.

Nerlige⁸

- Observation- worker's mobile was given to operate independently without supervision- watching age-inappropriate content on YouTube (reels).

Chikkamagaluru district

Gandhinagara⁹

- Mini Anganwadi¹⁰.
- No helper, only one worker, both helper and worker (teacher).
- Anganwadi Strength- 32.
- Cannot give individual attention.
- During COVID-19- mothers were added to WhatsApp groups and shared daily teaching topics to teach their children at home.
- Salary- 7,400.

Nidaghatta¹¹

- Has a mini campus.
- Own building.
- Community efforts- Chinnaraloka- an organization from Chikkamagaluru, installed slides and swings.
- Classes during the COVID phase were conducted in temples subject to physical distancing norms.
- 72- different registers to maintain- house visits, food, pregnant women, vaccine, attendance- hence less priority to PSE.

Mandya district

Basaralu¹²

- The government's new Makkala Mane has diverted Anganwadi children to it.
- NGO- Azim Premji Organization- trains teachers to learn poems and make toys and puppets.
- Worker provided with phone, charger, and power bank. (The government of Karnataka allocated 14,276 lakhs out of the central fund to this in 2021).
- Under Poshan Abhiyan- smart phones procured through e-market- for efficient service delivery- digitize physical registers.

Mayannana Koppalu

- No toys; all toys are broken- worker said some were in her home.
- Toys kept out of reach from children- bagged.

Discussion

Proceeding to discussion with the quote of Jess Lair- "Children are not things to be modeled, but are people to be unfolded." The observations are critically alarming, and the government's intent and commitment to nurturing young minds seem to have taken a step back regarding the educational aspect of the ICDS scheme. Even though the scheme is an umbrella for many other welfare initiatives, the state must ensure that all these initiatives are

⁸ Nerlige village is located in Arsikere taluka of Hassan district in Karnataka, India

⁹ Gandhinagara is a small Village/hamlet in Kadur Taluk, Chikmagalur District, Karnataka State, India. It is part of Yemmedoddi Panchayath.

¹⁰ Mini Anganwadis are set up in small hamlets/villages in tribal blocks with a population between 150-300 in the country's far-flung areas.

¹¹ Nidaghatta village is located in Kadur taluka of Chikmagalur district in Karnataka, India. It is situated 25km away from sub-district headquarter Kadur

¹² Basaralu village is located in Mandya district, Karnataka, India.

equally essential and implemented in parallel. Based on this study, the inference paved the way for multidimensional abnormalities and inefficiencies. Let's discuss them accordingly. The findings and observations are categorized below.

TABLE 1: CATEGORIES
<i>SOCIAL</i>
<i>INFRASTRUCTURAL</i>
<i>POLICY</i>
<i>PARENTAL</i>
<i>FUNCTIONING AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT</i>
<i>EDUCATION</i>
<i>EXPOSURE</i>

Social

In Basaralu taluk of Mandya district, a few villagers advised the researcher (me) to cover one Anganwadi at the end of the village boundary. When the researcher asked them what was so special about it, one of the villagers replied – *“The Anganwadis inside the village are for Hindus, and the one that is at the end of the village is for Scheduled castes and Scheduled Tribes; maybe you will get different answers to your questions.”* This statement means a million truths regarding the caste system prevalence in rural India and how it directly harnesses young minds negatively. It builds up a sense of alienation among young children. It is even more disturbing that this discrimination happens in Anganwadis, where children from age groups 0-6 years study. Surprisingly, all six villages visited had the same system of devoting the Anganwadi to SC and ST communities at the town's border¹³. However, students of other castes are also a part of these discriminated Anganwadis, but the numbers are minimal. On the other hand, there is no instruction or policy framework from the government of Karnataka or the ICDS to dedicate Anganwadis exclusively to SCs and STs. One more observation was that the teachers of the “OUTCASTED” Anganwadis also belonged to the SC and ST communities. Hence, it is inferable that the gram panchayats and zilla panchayats are disregarding caste discrimination that, in turn, are thriving hard to build up caste prejudices even after 75 years of independence. This inference by observation and interaction reminds me of a quote by Dr. B.R.Ambedkar *“What is a village but a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism?”* (Ambedkar, 1979) which seems to stand relevant even today.

Infrastructural

Regarding infrastructural aspects, the toys of the Anganwadis are outdated and do not meet the current requirement for children to develop holistically and multi-dimensionally. For example- Anganwadi of Mayannana Koppalu of Mandya district had no toys at all, and the worker claimed she had taken a few dolls and balls to her home because the children at the Anganwadi would spoil them; if that is so, what is the purpose of distributing PSE (Pre-School Education) kits to Anganwadis? Only the Anganwadi in Nidaghatta village of Chikkamagaluru district had its mini campus with garden slides and swings; other Anganwadis are either rented or attached to government schools. The worker in the Anganwadi of Basaralu taluk of Mandya district was the only one among six Anganwadi workers to get a mobile phone, power bank, and charger, which enables her to digitize the records maintenance system and accounting including attendance, vaccination records, etc., workers of other Anganwadis were not even aware of the initiative of digitizing records by the government of Karnataka instead they complained that they had to take care of at least 74 registers and maintain them manually. This shows a need for more policy audits from state and central governments through local administration.

Policy

The School Development Monitoring Committee (SDMC) developed the Makkala mane (Children's home) in 2015-16, a private kindergarten concept that tends to counter Anganwadis functioning in various aspects. Makkala Mane has many computers to teach children basic computer operations and games. Also, the teachers (degree/Undergraduate) of Makkala Mane are more qualified than Anganwadi workers (second PUC). Makkala mane has uniforms, unlike the Anganwadis. However, the Anganwadis continue to receive PSE regularly without a miss, but Only 49.35 % of prescribed items constitute the PSE kits. Items like mats, blunt scissors, glue, markers, glitter pens, clay, balance, magnets, magnifying glasses, etc., were not provided.

Parental

It was also noted that the parents of children valued the education of Makkala Mane more than that of Anganwadis. For example, an Anganwadi worker in Nidaghatta of Chikkamagaluru district said that if she asked the parents to buy some toys or age-appropriate books, the parents would neglect their suggestions if the same advice were given by a Makkala Mane or a private kindergarten teacher, the parents would do as they say with utmost sincerity. Parents also have the urge to teach their children English poems and rhymes and also want their Anganwadi-going children to speak, converse, and understand basic English like the ones in kindergarten. Hence, they ask the Anganwadi workers to teach standard English sentences and poems. Still, the workers claimed they could not do so because they all had studied in Kannada medium and seriously needed to improve their English communication skills.

¹³ The Constitution of India defines Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in Articles 341 and 342, respectively.

Functioning and resource management

The functioning of Anganwadis has taken a hit and seems cumbersome for various and obvious reasons. It is primarily the workload. One distinct Anganwadi was the one in Gandhinagara of Chikkamagaluru district, a mini Anganwadi dedicated to the population of the Lambani¹⁴ Community. This Anganwadi has around 35-40 children, but the government provides only one worker to mini Anganwadis and no helper. How can one worker manage cooking twice daily for 35 children, maintaining physical records, distributing food and nutrition powder to pregnant women, and Thayandira sabha (Mothers sabha/meeting) every Thursday? With all these duties, she is also expected to teach the children the prescribed curriculum according to the timetable, which seems hectic and inhumane. It is better that the government allocates human resources according to the strength of the Anganwadi and not by the designation of the Anganwadi, be it regular or mini Anganwadi.

On the other hand, the concept of Makkala Mane has pushed conventional Anganwadis backstage. The reason is the concept of private kindergartens, computer education, and uniforms. These aspects bring a sense of discipline in what parents think, and they also believe it to be systematic. Hence, the students discontinued their Anganwadis education and joined Makkala Mane. One more fact to be noted is that the Anganwadis do not provide any certificate, and the children leave Anganwadis at the age of 6 to join the first standard at government or private schools. Anganwadis also fails to note, record, and track a child's development and progress by maintaining dedicated registers for children and noting their daily activities and developments. This, in turn, brings in unregulated imparting education. This makes teachers fail to understand the capacities and capabilities of children individually and track their growth.

One distinct case is that of Anganwadi in Javagal of Hassan district. The worker has ensured that she records all the children's activities. She has created cloth bags hanging in line with each bag, each with the respective child's name. Whatever activity the child performs, they must drop it in the bag with the respective name. These bags act as academic records and progress cards, which was not done in any other Anganwadi except Javagal.

One Anganwadi that stands out is that of Basaralu village of Mandya district. Azim Premji Foundation, an NGO, has volunteered to teach the teachers of this Anganwadi to make cloth toys and new poems, as well as sustainable, effective teaching to children and aid them in imparting effective education with capacity building.

Education

Concerning education, the curriculum is imparted to children in a very well-planned and based on a slow learning process. The timetable is designed in such a way that, in a month, there are four topics covered. For example, colors for the first week, shapes for the second week, health and hygiene for the third week, and so on. The topics are also subdivided into one topic per day, for example – personal hygiene on the first day, public hygiene on the second day, and so on. The PSE kits would aid children through the learning process in play-learning mode.

But the makkala mane has an edge over Anganwadis. The former has computer systems for children to impart basic computer knowledge and well-qualified teachers, whereas the Anganwadi workers have the upper hand in English.

Also, the non-digitization of records in most Anganwadis and work pressure and responsibilities under ICDS leave almost no time for Anganwadi workers to teach children what they aspire to teach because under ICDS, the Anganwadi workers and helpers also have to implement other women's and children's welfare schemes, and education is given hindsight. Despite all these hurdles and barriers, every Anganwadi worker had motivation and zeal to teach the children new things and concepts, except the Anganwadi workers in Mayannana Koppalu of Mandya district.

Exposure

The overall study and observation provided infer that the exposure of the Anganwadi that it gives to its students is minimal, the reasons being:

- Workers/teachers have more workloads imparting other schemes under ICDS, so they visibly give less importance to education.
- The below table further aids in evaluating the reasons:

ANGANWADIS	KINDERGARTENS OF CITY
No computers	Children with facilities computer for age-appropriate games and activities using software like MS paint
Qualification of teachers/workers is 12th standard.	Teachers have a graduate degree and additional qualifications like diplomas and bachelor's in education.
No activity corners (4 in no.) as prescribed under ICDS	There would be activity corners and dedicated rooms or areas for physical and cognitive activities.

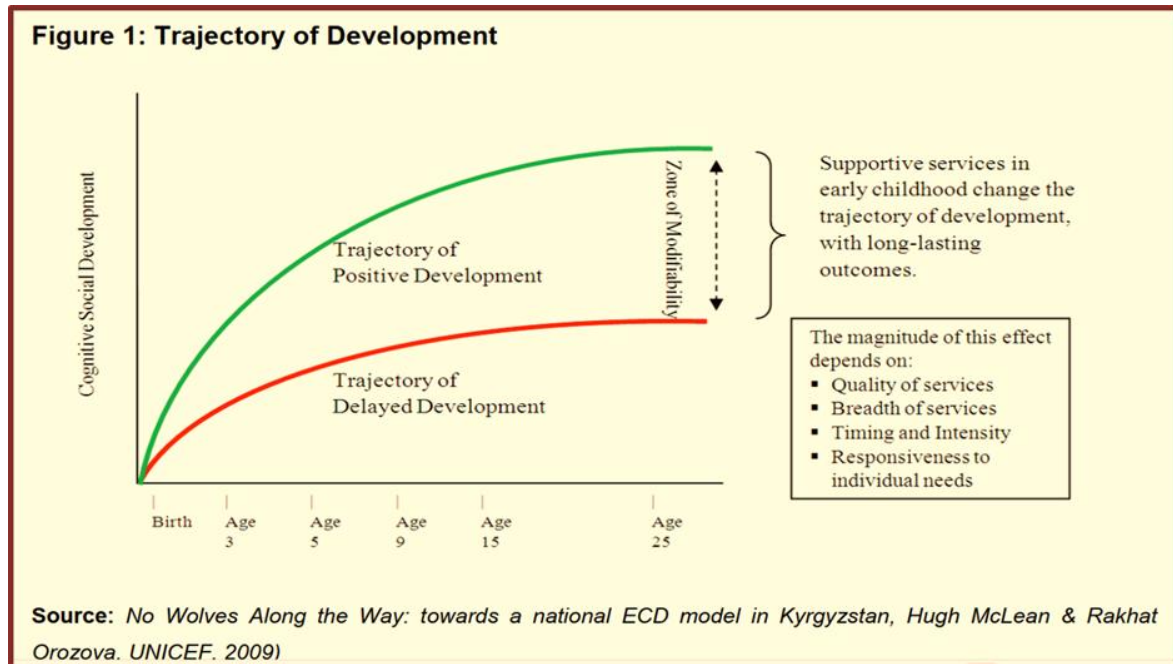
¹⁴ The Lambani, also known as Banjaras, are a nomadic tribe that originated in Afghanistan and migrated to Rajasthan before spreading to other states, including Karnataka.

Digital media is hardly used to impart education to children. YouTube is used sometimes.

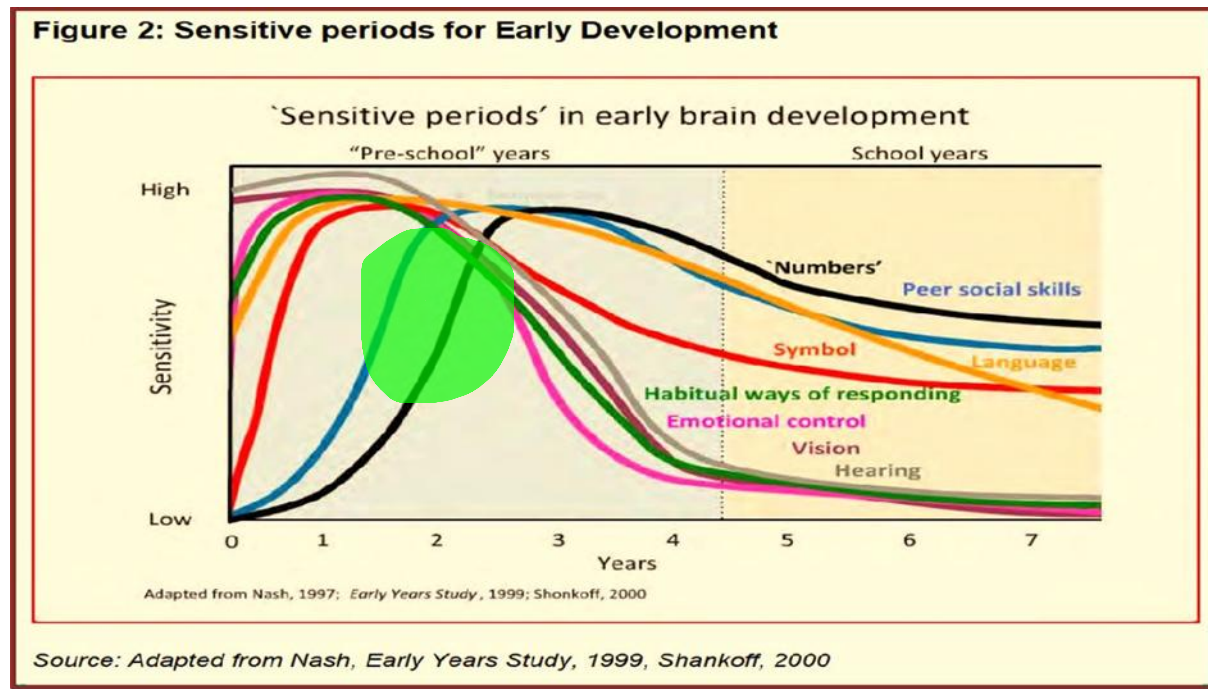
Children are shown age-appropriate movies, and the kindergartens have a collection of CDs of movies like Ice Age, Madagascar, and The Lion King.

- Children are not taken out on field trips or educational trips even though there is a specification for it to be done under ICDS. None of the Anganwadi workers claimed to have taken children on educational trips since they joined the service. On the other hand, children in kindergarten are at least taken on one-day picnics, zoos, or children-friendly resorts with fun activities and age-appropriate adventures.

Two graphs, the Trajectory of Development and the Sensitive periods for Early Development help connect, link, and infer the observations made.



This graph shows that any compromise in the quality of education for a child in its initial years would lead to the underdevelopment of cognitive skills and abilities. It is irreversible beyond the age of 25, and chances of irreversibility start getting high as the gap widens, beginning from the birth of the child. When we connect this to the study of Anganwadis, we can summarise that though the quality of Anganwadis isn't that poor to take a trajectory of delayed development, they indeed are on the verge of taking this trajectory sooner or later. This is because there are wide gaps between the teaching methods of Anganwadi workers and kindergarten teachers; their qualifications, communication, children's exposure to the external environment, and parents' attitudes play a pivotal role in minimizing or maximizing the gap between the trajectory of positive and delayed development.



This graph shows that even though children can learn things throughout their lives, there is a particular age threshold in which their cognitive capacity is the highest, enabling them to grasp teachings and instructions quickly from teachers and parents. According to this graph, such an age is highlighted in green above. The age between 2-3 years, or 2.5 years to be precise, is the most vital checkpoint to cross, and if neglected, it would compromise the quality of their future. A child's capacity to learn language, signs, symbols, etc., would be high between 2-3 years of age. Further, as age passes, it shall decrease accordingly.

They are now coming to the absence of activity corners in Anganwadis, as ICDS prescribes. Even though there are activities taking place in all Anganwadis to impart both formal and informal education, most Anganwadis do not make the kids paint with brushes or patterns with thumb and hand impressions, and this was only found to be done in Anganwadi of Basaralu district of Mandya district. Almost all students were absent in the Anganwadi of Mayannana Koppalu of Mandya district, even though it was already lunchtime. The teacher there had taken a few toys to her home, and hardly any were visible to the naked eye. It was also observed that two children were playing with toys that they bought from home. Now, acts like these from Anganwadis pose a threat to a child's development in the coming ages. Maybe children of Anganwadis are less exposed to society as a whole and confined to their village only; this makes them underconfident in the future and forces them to restrict themselves to their villages even when they are graduates or search for a job; this also develops inferiority complex among children. Peer social skills, habitual ways of responding, and language skills would be compromised and confined to their village only with less exposure.

Recommendations/suggestions

- Community interventions are necessary, such as book and toy donations from village residents and the dedication of a permanent building rather than a rented one to an Anganwadi.
- Capacity-building activities, like the Azim Premji Foundation (NGO) intervention in Anganwadi of Basaralu of Madya district, must happen regularly. Such organizations can intervene in all Anganwadis in Karnataka to assist and encourage them with new, effective, and sustainable education methods.
- Though the present qualification for Anganwadi workers is 12th standard, they must be further educated by government or private institutions that offer courses and diplomas in sustainable teaching and capacity building. For example, Azim Premji University offers such courses. The government must also ensure that quality capacity building occurs through a policy of mandatory diplomas in such contexts funded by the state's government. This further enhances the quality and effectiveness of Anganwadis.
- Coming to dealing with physically challenged children, there are no students with ailments of such a nature. However, to deal with the worst scenarios, the workers must also be offered training by institutions to deal with such children and educate them appropriately.
- A policy reform is necessary. Children's and women's welfare schemes under ICDS must be disintegrated; separate offices must be created under gram panchayats to administer these schemes. This would leave the educational aspect with the workers alone and divert unnecessary policy burdens on them. The workers would then be designated as teachers and given a significant salary hike that motivates them mentally and provides them with a sense of occupational dignity.

- There must be a system of marks cards and certificates for children who have passed out of Anganwadis. This system records their grades in multidimensional aspects, such as cognitive, mental, physical, verbal, and social interactions. These grades would help parents and teachers analyze and support their children accordingly, improve them, and motivate them for a better future.
- Redesign the timetable, including daily revision sessions and a weekly nutritional food day.
- Interaction/exchange workshops for children and teachers from Anganwadis (rural) and kindergartens (urban). This would open up horizons by interacting with contrasting lifestyles, attitudes, and backgrounds.
- Design software that consists of the list of links to songs and stories that are to be taught to children, timetable, circulars from the department or higher authorities, attendance, and child development analysis with individual dashboards in various fields i.e., physical, motor, language, cognitive, social, emotional, personal, aesthetic, sensory developments and analyzes every child's progress through grades and graphical representations pointing out strengths and weaknesses of each individual, a digital report card- that can be linked to a database.

Conclusion

In totality, it is inferable from this study that the institution (Anganwadi), with the utmost responsibility to build a concrete intellectual and educational base, is failing to do justice for the sole reason that it has been set up and the government is diverting itself to new programs without giving heed to the need of the hour. The takeaways are primarily negative and serve as a critique of the present policy framework. This study, though done on a small scale, has shown and upheld fallacies and loopholes in the policy, system, and third parties (parents). Anganwadi institutions are one of a kind. Their aim and functions are robust and service-oriented. However, through this particular study, though the institution is faring exceedingly well in other domains like vaccination, nutrition, etc., education has taken a step back and entered the backstage. Hence, the government must note it and restructure its functions and responsibilities, including significant reforms.

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