



FACULTY OF EDUCATION
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EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION AND CHALLENGES OF PRESCHOOL TEACHERS IN RURAL INDIA

A Qualitative Study

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Supervisor:	Martina Wyszynska Johansson
Examiner:	Marianne Dovemark

Abstract

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Aim: The Aim of this qualitative study is to contribute to the research on the preschool teacher's experiences and challenges of curriculum implementation and give the opportunity to teacher's voices to be heard. Through preschool teacher's experiences, the study intends to identify patterns of similarity in order to understand the challenges preschool teachers face in implementing curriculum for underprivileged children in rural India.

Theory: In order to understand the experiences and challenges faced by preschool teachers, the current study used the Ecological systems theory by Bronfenbrenner (1979) as it involves the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded.

Method: The current study used a qualitative research approach as this approach allowed me to interpret the 'how' and 'why' of the early childhood education system in rural India. Moreover, Qualitative research design approximately captured the experiences and perceptions of the participants involved in the study, providing me a deeper understanding of the experience and challenges faced by preschool teachers in Hamirpur district, Himachal Pradesh, India. The data for this study was collected by semi-structured interviews of 8 Preschool teachers (Anganwadi workers) from 8 different public preschools (Anganwadi Centers) in Hamirpur district, Himachal Pradesh, India. The analysis follows Conventional content analysis approach based on preschool teacher's interviews transcriptions. Analysis of data has different stages – arranging the data, coding, reduction of data into themes, categories and presenting the data as a discussion.

Results: In the current study, the main finding is that the preschool teachers on the daily basis have to combine a wide range of work tasks, acting as government servants, social workers in the area of public health and pedagogical tasks. Despite their workload and insufficient resources, all the participants unanimously described their working experience as interesting and enriching. For the preschool teachers, working in a public preschool presented a challenge to grow personally and professionally, for instance to become confident public speakers. Also the preschool teachers expressed a sense of belonging in the local community, acting as Frontline workers, which gave them a sense of pride and personal fulfillment. However, the preschool teachers were dissatisfied with

the employment conditions, specifically with the honorarium remuneration system. As for the second focal area of the study, a number of challenges were identified. These included large class size, lack of proper facilities, lack of teaching-learning materials, lack of parental involvement and lack of in-service training. The preschool teachers also complained about a heavy administrative work load, specifically the maintenance of records, which restricted the time they could devote to children.

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List Of Abbreviation

ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECE	Early Childhood Education
RTE	Right of children to free and compulsory Education
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services
MWCD	Ministry of Women and Child Development
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
NCERT	National Council of Educational Research and Training
AWC	Anganwadi Centre
AWW	Anganwadi worker
AWH	Anganwadi helper
NPE	National Policy on Education
ANC	Antenatal Care
PHC	Primary Health Care
ANM	Auxiliary Nurse Midwife
ASHA	Accredited Social Health Activists
NPAG	Nutrition Programme for Adolescent Girls
KSY	Kishori Shakti Yojana
PPI	Pulse Polio Immunization

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In India, children in the age group of 0-6 years constitute around 165 million of entire population (Chopra, 2016). Many of them are taken care of by pre-school teachers who are responsible for well-being of such a large number of children but whose experiences of daily work in often demanding surroundings and circumstances e.g. rural environments are not well known (M. Choudhry, 1992). The majority of India's population in rural as well as semi-urban areas opt for public schooling, sending their children to public preschools called 'Anganwadi centers'.

Also, the research related to early childhood education and challenges of preschool teachers in rural India, available is mostly quantitative as qualitative accounts are less frequent (Chopra, 2016). Thus, this qualitative study gives the opportunity to preschool teachers to express their views and share their work experiences. Therefore, in my research, I study the experiences and challenges that preschool teachers face in implementing early childhood curriculum in rural India. The present chapter looks at the development of Early childhood care and education (ECCE) in India. Also, it highlights the historical movements that have marked a shift in the development of Early childhood care and education (ECCE). The relevance, objective, significance, structure and limitation of the study are also mentioned in this chapter.

1.1 Historical background of early childhood care and education in India

Historically, from the development of Education in India, there was always emphasis on the importance of ECCE (Verma, 1994). Institutions providing education to children below the age of six years were started by the English missionaries in some parts of India in the late 1800s. These preschools were primarily located in the metropolitan cities and larger towns and catered exclusively for children belonging to the officer's class and the affluent urban elite.

Traditionally in India, the early childhood years from prenatal to six years were considered to lay the foundation for inculcation of basic values and social skills in children (Kaul & Sharma, 2018). It is believed that these values are imbibed from the family as 'Sanskaras'¹ as the desirable mode of child rearing at this stage, as compared to more disciplinary approach for the older child. Much of the early care and education of the child was informal, with in the family and largely through grandmother's caring practices, stories, lullabies and traditional infant games, handed down from one generation to the next. This wealth of developmentally appropriate childcare practices is gradually becoming extinct, in the humdrum of more modern provisions and changing social realities. Also due to change in the family structure, from joint to nuclear family, child care was earlier a shared family responsibility, is now solely the responsibility of the parents. In addition, the growing urbanization and increase in maternal employment outside the home has further affected the possibilities of ensuring early care and education for the small children. It was this changing social context, over the years, which laid the seeds for the introduction of the concept of ECCE in the country.

1.1.1 Diversified socio-economic background of India

The education system of India is shaped by its people, their social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The education system is part of the society and it is affected directly by any changes in the social dynamics (Mathur, 2018). The Indian state is a prime example of 'unity in diversity'. People from different religious, social, and cultural backgrounds coexist in the Indian society. While a rich cultural heritage is an outstanding characteristic of the country, social hierarchies, caste system, the widening gap between the rich and poor, and the gap between the educated 'elite' and the uneducated are also an integral part of the society. It cannot be ignored that British colonial rule in India was a huge factor in

¹ Sanskaras is a process which transforms a person into an ideal and outstanding personality by diminishing the negative mental tendencies existing in him/her and by inculcating human values and qualities to make him/her more dynamic, discrete, duty conscious and responsible towards himself/herself as well as the society.

the weakening of the social, cultural, political and economic features of the country (Verma, 1994). These challenges are a threat to the social and national integration of India. The Education Commission in 1964 recognized this problem as a huge challenge for development of education in the country. Since the country did not have one common school system, the schooling was divided between public and private schools. Public schools are the schools which are run by the government, give free education and also provide afternoon meals to the students but they are incapable in terms of teaching and facilities. On the other hand, private schools charge high fee and attracting people by offering better services. While education was thought of as a means of bridging the divide between the rich and poor and between different social classes, in reality it was doing the exact opposite. Only a handful of privileged people were able to receive good education through private schooling whereas the majority of the population went to public schools. This divide between schooling was a major cause of concern as it poses many challenges in the development of policies and their successful implementation.

The socio-economic diversity and colonial heritage in India resulted in the heterogeneity in schooling options for the masses and the introduction of English language in the country. The policy makers realized the importance of English as a necessary means for international communication. Since the early days of independence, India has seen the development of both private and public schools. As Private schools are English medium and English was considered the language of the 'civilized' and 'elite', there was a prevalent notion of better schooling in private schools. However, only the economically well-off could afford private education and others send their children to public schools, as it is cheaper and affordable.

1.1.2 Public vs Private preschools

In India, Preschools are divided between Private and Public preschools. Public preschools had the reputation of being inefficient in terms of teaching, insufficient staff as well as their infrastructural facilities. Private preschools on the other hand, were considered much more efficient, but were unaffordable for the masses due to their enormously high fee structure. According to Chopra (2016), While there is a lack of fit between parental aspirations and the services offered at the Public preschools, the private sector seems to be making the most of the situation by luring the parents through introducing early schooling. But children from low economic background prefer public preschools as they cannot afford high fee in private preschools. Children belonging to low income groups in society, particularly girls, depend on public preschools, whereas those belonging to higher socio-economic groups are more likely to attend private preschools. While public sponsored Integrated child development services (ICDS) preschools (Anganwadi centers) caters to children from disadvantaged communities, private initiatives are targeted towards children of socio-economically better off families. These impart preschool education through nurseries, kindergarten and pre-primary classes in private preschools. It is estimated that about ten million children receive early education from privately owned programs. A study by Goreau (2014) in Tamil Nadu found that even parents from low-income communities in urban areas sought private pre-schools for their children once they reached the age of four years. Regarding studies of preschool type in India, a recent longitudinal study tracking 13,000 4-year-old children in Assam, Rajasthan and Telangana since 2011, found that between the ages of 3.5 and 4.5, 43 percent of the children attended private institutions and that this proportion increased each year, with more boys enrolling in private preschools. The increase in the popularity of private preschools is largely due to the perception that they provide a better quality education since they are labelled as offering 'English-medium' teaching (V. Kaul, 2019).

Education for young children is largely confined to the better off children in urban areas as well as rural areas. The quality of the services offered also varies (Verma, 1994). In the absence of any system of regulation or even registration at ECCE stage, the education offered by these private preschools is of wide range. Some of these preschools are more of 'teaching shops' that do not respect the developmental norms of children. As described by V. Kaul (2019), in some cases, the quality offered can be inadequate

to children's development and may even be described as 'mis-education'. Unfortunately, in the entire scheme of things, the worst sufferers are the young children whose needs for holistic development are not met appropriately either through public or by the private sector provisions.

1.1.3 Anganwadi centers and Anganwadi workers

The word Anganwadi means "courtyard shelter" as in Indian languages, run by the government. A typical Anganwadi center (AWC) provides basic health care in Indian villages and early education to the children. Anganwadi is also a focal point for the delivery of ICDS (Integrated child development services) to children and mothers. An Anganwadi normally covers a population of 1000 in both rural and urban areas.

Services at Anganwadi center (AWC) are delivered by an Anganwadi worker (AWW). She is a woman of the same locality or community, having educational qualification of middle school or Matriculation or higher. She is assisted by a helper who is also a local woman and both paid honorarium only. Being the functional unit of ICDS programme which involves different groups of beneficiaries, the AWW has to conduct various types of job responsibilities. Not only she has to reach to variety of beneficiary groups, she has to provide them with different services which include nutrition and health education, Non- Formal preschool education, Supplementary nutrition, growth monitoring and family welfare services etc.

Here the term 'Public preschool' is used synonymously with 'Anganwadi center' along with 'Preschool teacher' used in exchange of 'Anganwadi worker'.

Public preschools in rural India were started in 1975 by the government of India as part of the Integrated child development services (ICDS) program to combat child hunger and malnutrition in poor families. Public preschools provide basic health facilities and preschool education to Indian villages. They are the focal point for implementation of all the health, nutrition and early learning initiatives under ICDS.

In Public preschool, Preschool teacher with helper also serve them hot cooked food as mid-day meal. The intentions behind the Mid-day meal program are noble. Most children enrolled in these preschools come from economically weaker sections of society and are unlikely to receive proper nutrition at home. Provision of nutritious meals in preschool helps children to develop physically and mentally. Consequently, it has become a huge incentive for parents to enroll their children in preschool.

In 1986, concerning the importance of early education, the National Policy of Education (NPE) introduced the concept of Early childhood care and education (ECCE) which includes nutrition, health, hygiene and early childhood education of the children. Preschool teachers use local language as children know and are comfortable with the local language. English language is used in singing some rhymes only.

1.2 Background of the study

This research study examined the experience and challenges of preschool teachers working in a public preschool in rural India. Thus It is very important to observe the education system in India. Also this chapter is structured in sections describing ECCE, ICDS, overview of the government policies, International framework of policies, Early childhood curriculum followed in India in order to provide a background to understand the function and the role of Anganwadi centers and their workers.

1.2.1 Education system in India

In responding to my research study that focused on experiences and challenges faced by preschool teachers in curriculum implementation in rural India, let us briefly observe the educational system in India.

The Indian educational system operates in three levels (Government of India, 2018). This means that child uses 3 years in preschool education or pre-primary education from 3 to 6 years of age. The child continues with primary education for 8 years from 6 to 14 years of age. The primary education also referred to as elementary education, it is divided into two parts, namely Lower primary (Class 1 – 4) and Upper Primary (Class 5 – 8). Then 4 years in secondary education from 14 to 18 years of age. It is also divided into two parts, namely Secondary (Class 9, 10) and Higher or Senior secondary (Class 11, 12). The two-halves of secondary education are each an important stage for which a pass certificate is needed, before one can pursue higher education, including college or professional courses.

After passing the higher secondary examination or class 12 examination, students may enroll in general degree programs such as bachelor's degree or graduation for 3-4 years and then master's degree or Post graduation for 2-3 years (Government of India, 2018).

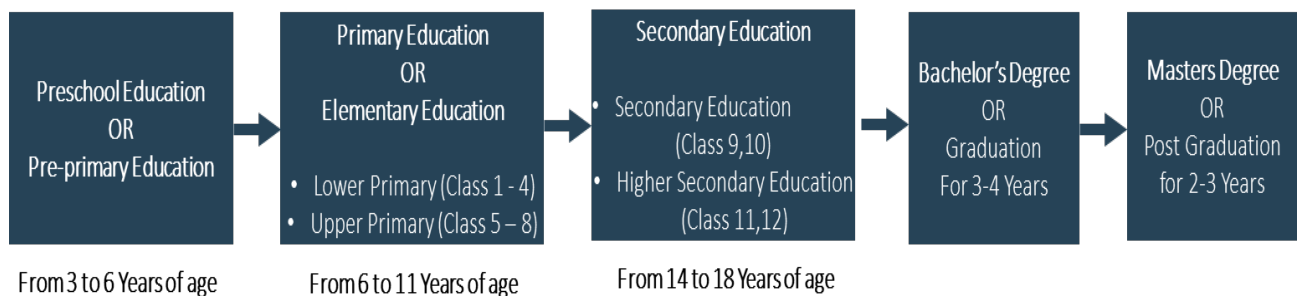


Figure 1 Education System in India

As seen above in figure 1, preschool education including Anganwadi centers lays the foundation for individuals in a life-long perspective.

1.2.2 Integrated child development services (ICDS)

ICDS is an Indian government welfare program which provides food, preschool education, and primary healthcare to children less than 6 years of age and their mothers. These services are provided from Anganwadi centers (AWCs) established mainly in rural areas and staffed with frontline workers i.e. Anganwadi Workers (AWWs). In addition to fighting malnutrition and ill health, the program is also intended to combat gender inequality by providing girls the same resources as boys.

Launched on 2nd October 1975, ICDS Scheme is one of the flagship program of the Government of India and represents one of the world's largest and unique program for early childhood care and development. Non-formal preschool education is one of its components and nomenclature Early childhood care and education (ECCE) found its place in the policy framework in India later in 1986. It

is the foremost symbol of country's commitment to its children and nursing mothers, as a response to the challenge of providing pre-school non-formal education on one hand and breaking the vicious cycle of malnutrition, morbidity, reduced learning capacity and mortality on the other. The beneficiaries under the Scheme are children in the age group of 0-6 years, pregnant women and lactating mothers.

Objectives of ICDS

The predefined objectives of ICDS are (Government of India, 2018):

- To raise the health and nutritional level of poor Indian children below 6 years of age.
- To create a base for proper mental, physical and social development of children in India.
- To reduce instances of mortality, malnutrition and school dropouts among Indian children.
- To coordinate activities of policy formulation and implementation among all departments of various ministries involved in the different government programs and schemes aimed at child development across India.
- To provide health and nutritional information and education to mothers of young children to enhance child rearing capabilities of mothers in the country of India.
- To provide nutritional food to the mothers of young children & also at the time of pregnancy period.

Scope of Services of ICDS

The following services are sponsored under ICDS to help achieve its objectives (Government of India, 2018):

- Immunization
- Supplementary nutrition
- Health check ups
- Referral services
- Nutrition and Health information.
- Pre-school non formal education

1.2.3 Early childhood care and education (ECCE)

ECCE refers to a wide range of programs, all aimed at the physical, cognitive and social development of children before they enter Primary schools theoretically from birth to about 6 years of age. It does not only include the child's education and their developmental aspects but also the prenatal years. It provides care and support to the pregnant mothers as well as the child and caters to the child's development up to 6 years of age.

The concept of ECCE is of recent origin in India. It did not find any mention in the educational literature till the formulation of the National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986. It has used the nomenclature of ECCE for the stage preceding elementary education. According to the Article 45 as amended in 2002, the constitution of India stated; "The State shall endeavor to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years" (Government of India, 2007).

It includes the education, nutrition, health and hygiene of the children within this age group. The word 'care' has been added to this concept to emphasize the importance of the pre-natal as well as the post-natal years. The importance of the early years has been stressed greatly in recent years due to the fact that the most rapid brain development takes place during the early years. The human brain develops more rapidly between birth and age five than during any other period (Verma, 1994). However, this

development can be hindered due to lack of proper nutrition and stimulation. The emphasis on care is the need to have a broader focus on Early Childhood Education (ECE). Children who are better nourished are more apt to be less sick and learn better than children who do not receive such care.

The National ECCE Policy, 2013 also reaffirms the commitment of the Government of India to provide integrated services for holistic development of all children, along the continuum, from the prenatal period to six years of age. The Policy lays down the way forward for a comprehensive approach towards ensuring a sound foundation, with focus on early learning, for every Indian child. ECCE services are delivered through public and private channels. It encompasses the inseparable elements of care, health, nutrition, play and early learning within a protective and enabling environment. It is an indispensable foundation for lifelong development and learning and has lasting impact on early childhood development.

Thus, ECCE comprises all the essential supports a young child needs to survive and thrive in life, as well as the supports the family and community need to promote children's healthy development which includes integrating health, nutrition and intellectual stimulation, providing the opportunities for exploration and active learning, as well as providing the social and emotional care and nurturing a child needs in order to realize his/her human potential and play an active role in their families and later in their communities.

Objectives of ECCE

The objectives of ECCE are more specifically defined in the following manner. As seen from the following description they put high demands on the preschool teachers to attain them. The objectives involve a complexity of a holistic development of a child to be supported in many ways (Government of India, 2018):

1. Physical and motor development:
 - To help maintain adequate physical growth.
 - To develop gross and fine motor skills.
 - To develop neuro-muscular co-ordination.
2. Cognitive development:
 - To encourage the use of five senses.
 - To develop memory and observation.
 - To develop skills of classification, sequential thinking and problem solving To help information of concept like those of shapes, color, space, size, pre-number and number concept, concept of time, temperature, home and environment.
3. Language development:
 - To develop listening skills.
 - To develop verbal expression skills.
 - To develop reading and writing readiness.
4. Social development:
 - To develop a sense of security in the child.
 - To develop desirable personal and social habits.
 - To develop positive self-concept.
 - To encourage participation in group activities.
 - To develop ability to control one's behavior or emotional expression.
 - To develop the ability to interact with other children and adult at home and in school.
5. Emotional development:

- To help control strong expression of emotions like hitting, throwing, kicking or biting.
 - To help in building emotional tolerance and socially acceptable behavior.
 - To stimulate courage for overcoming shyness and the tendency of withdrawal.
 - To provide an environment of love and affection, encouragement and guidance to allow for free communication and open expression.
 - To channelize and guide certain emotional expressions to more socially acceptable behaviors.
6. Development of creativity:
- To provide an atmosphere conducive to action, expression and variety of responses.
 - To provide adequate indoor and outdoor space, flexible and multipurpose equipment for imaginative, explorative and cognitive activities.
 - To provide expression involving motor activities, creative and adventure play, manipulating and experimenting with variety of materials.

1.2.4 Role and Responsibilities of Anganwadi workers

Preschool teachers/Anganwadi Workers are the most important person who plays an important role in achieving the objective of ECCE. They also can make a bigger difference to student's educational success. Therefore, it is important to discuss the role and responsibilities of AWWs and helpers envisioned under the ICDS scheme (Government of India, 2018).

- To organize non-formal pre-school activities in the Anganwadi center of children in the age group 3-6 years of age and to help in designing and making of toys and play equipment of indigenous origin for use in Anganwadi centers.
- To plan activities according to the need and interest of the children. Also attention span of the children should be kept in mind i.e. activity should not be planned for more than 10-15 min.
- To elicit community support and participation in running ECCE programme.
- To weigh each child every month, record the weight graphically on the growth card, use referral card for referring cases of mothers/children to the sub-centers etc., and maintain child cards for children below 6 years and produce these cards before visiting medical and para-medical personnel.
- To carry out a quick survey of all the families, especially mothers and children in those families in their respective area of work once in a year.
- To organize supplementary nutrition feeding for children (0-6 years) and expectant and nursing mothers by planning the menu based on locally available food and local recipes.
- To provide health and nutrition education and counselling on breastfeeding/ Infant & young feeding practices to mothers. Anganwadi Workers, being close to the local community, can motivate married women to adopt family planning/birth control measures.
- AWWs shall share the information relating to births that took place during the month with the Registrar/Sub Registrar of Births & Deaths in her village and maintain files and records as prescribed.
- To make home visits for educating parents to enable mothers to plan an effective role in the child's growth and development with special emphasis on new born child.
- To assist the PHC (Primary health care) staff in the implementation of health component of the programme such as immunization, health check-up, ante-natal and post-natal check etc.
- To assist ANM (Auxiliary nurse midwife) in the administration of Vitamin A by keeping stock of the medicines in the Centre.

- To bring to the notice of the Supervisors any development in the village this requires their attention and intervention, particularly in regard to the work of the coordinating arrangements with different departments.
- To guide Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) engaged under National Rural Health Mission in the delivery of health care services and maintenance of records under the ICDS Scheme.
- To assist in implementation of Kishori Shakti Yojana (KSY) and Nutrition Programme for Adolescent Girls (NPAG), to motivate and educate the adolescent girls and their parents and community in general by organizing social awareness programmes.
- To identify the disability among children during her home visits and refer the case immediately to the nearest PHC or District Disability Rehabilitation Centre.
- To support in organizing Pulse Polio Immunization (PPI) drives.
- To inform the ANM in case of emergency cases like diarrhea, cholera etc.

As described above, Anganwadi workers have many roles and responsibilities to fulfill. With the role of a government worker, they also play role of preschool teacher which is very demanding. The preschool teachers are of great importance to the development of children in underprivileged environments. Early childhood education also become more beneficial especially for the children coming from low socio-economic background. Some previous researches by Jambunathan (2012) identified that the benefit of children being exposed to early education coming from low-income families as that their cognitive growth and school readiness is highly influenced. Preschool teachers are the most important person who plays an important role in improving student's learning, they also can make a bigger difference to student's educational success.

Again, when young children are coming from low socio-economic background, and are given good quality of early childhood education with its proper implementation of the curriculum, it provides them with early reading and mathematics skills, high cognitive, positive self-image and help them to cope with the children from high and middle socio-economic status. Early childhood education cultivates children in terms of socialization rather than only purely academic enhancement such as math and reading (Scarinci, Rose, Pee, & Webb, 2015). According to Scarinci et al. (2015) again, children learn cooperation through early education they receive from child care Centre and it helps them to acquire the necessary skills in life. These skills help them to obey rules and stay safe in the society. In a study conducted by Barnett (2011), it was found that getting an early childhood education provided an increase in the IQ level of children in the short term and in the long term; it increased the child's school achievement.

Preschool teachers are the most important person who manages learning experiences and environments. As being a preschool teacher in rural area, it is not merely teaching in the classroom, working with students and school administration. Preschool teachers are required to cooperate with their colleagues, parents, social community within and outside the preschool which expand their role and responsibility. They try to make stable environment for disadvantaged and underprivileged children.

Furthermore, Many preschool teachers are not satisfied with their job due to less salary. They are protesting for their basic rights such as permanent job, proper salary and basic facilities of a government official. Therefore, it is very important to know how they experience their work and challenges they face in curriculum implementation while working in public preschools in rural areas.

1.2.5 Overview of the government policy documents regulating early childhood care and education in India

In India, Children in the age group of 0-6 years constitute around 165 million of entire population (Chopra, 2016). Recognizing the need to provide quality pre-primary program, a number of constitutional and policy provisions have been made such as the 86th Constitutional Amendment which introduced Article 21A on the Right to free and compulsory education (RTE) for 6-14 years old children and Article 45 to urge states to provide Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) for all children from 3 to 6 years (Government of India, 2010).

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) guarantees children their right to quality elementary education. ECCE is not recognized as a compulsory provision by RTE, but RTE urges states to provide free pre-school education for children above three years (Government of India, 2010).

The 12th Five Year Plan also acknowledges the importance of Early Childhood Care and Education. In 2013, the government of India also approved the National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy which also includes the National Curriculum Framework and Quality Standards for Early childhood care and education. The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) is responsible for the policy on ECCE. MWCD is in charge of a flagship program introduced by Government of India for Early Childhood care and Education (ECCE) which comprises of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) program. ICDS offers six basic services to its beneficiaries which include supplementary nutrition, nutrition and health education, health check-up, pre-school non-formal education, immunization, and referral services. This program targets children, pregnant and lactating mothers and adolescent girls from a lifecycle perspective. Non-formal preschool education has been one of its six components.

1.2.6 International framework of Policy documents

According to a report by UNICEF (2011), despite the recognition of Early childhood care and education by the Government of India, there is still a gap between the number of preschoolers and those enrolled in pre-schools. Learning assessments also show that literacy skills are poor in early primary grades. In a study conducted by Malvankar (2018), Primary schools, when it comes to formal classroom learning, about 40 percent students are unable to do simple subtraction. Nearly 62 percent students in Grades 4 and 5 cannot read a simple story.

To ensure optimal development for all children, there is a need to create a planned curriculum framework, encompassing developmentally appropriate knowledge and skills, with flexibility for contextualization.

UNICEF (2013) in collaboration with MWCD, support is being provided for implementation of the National ECCE Policy framework. As part of support to National ECCE policy, a pictorial handbook on 'Quality in ECCE' was developed by MWCD and UNICEF, to unpack Quality Standards. This handbook for practitioners is a bilingual document (in English and Hindi), which illustrates different aspects of quality, through pictures of real examples from the field. UNICEF states offices have been involved in developing state ECCE curriculum. It also facilitates adoption of a common pedagogical approach to ensure a certain level of quality and address the widespread diversity in the ECCE program available for the young children in India.

1.2.7 Early childhood Curriculum followed in India

A curriculum framework is required to ensure that important learning areas are covered, taking care of all the developmental needs of the young child (Early Childhood Curriculum 2013). A curriculum helps to ensure that staff cover important learning areas, adopt a common pedagogical approach and reach for a certain level of quality across age groups and regions of a country. A curriculum can also be a focus for further training. On the other hand, it is widely recognized that the aims of the early childhood curriculum must be broad and contribute to the child's overall development as well as to later success in school. These aims will include, for example, health and physical development, emotional well-being and social competence, positive approaches to learning, communication skills, cognition and general knowledge.

Early childhood curriculum was prepared in 2013. It has given a great deal of importance to ECCE/Preschool Education. It takes into account the holistic nature of early childhood care and education and has pointed out the need for organizing programmes for all round development of children. It specially focuses on the need for early stimulation, since the age covered by ECCE is from three to six years, emphasis is given to child centered approach, play way and activity based learning. Play was also highlighted in this curriculum and specified as the way of children's learning. In addition, as children like to use their senses and try to learn the limits of their abilities, significance of providing wide variety of materials to children were emphasized. Here, it was the role of the preschool teacher to provide such a rich environment for the children. On the other hand, according to this curriculum, the preschool teachers are responsible for encouraging children to make them engage in activities rather than forcing to do, directing children to play with different materials, praising children verbally when needed, giving responsibilities to the children according to their abilities, informing children regarding the dangerous situations. Within this curriculum, parent involvement was emphasized as well. School-family collaboration was supported and the teachers became the responsible actors to inform the parents about the child's development.

Contents of Early childhood curriculum

The curriculum must address the following interrelated domains of holistic development through an integrated and play based approach which focuses on development of life skills (Early Childhood Curriculum 2013).

Physical and Motor Development :

- Gross motor skills
- coordination of fine muscles with dexterity
- eye hand coordination
- sense of balance
- physical co-ordination and awareness of space and direction
- nutrition, health status and practices.

Language Development :

- Listening and comprehension
- oral skills/speaking and communicating
- vocabulary development
- letter- sound correspondence
- recognition of letters

- building words and sentences and early writing.
- Introduction to language of school transaction.

Cognitive Development :

- Development of various concepts including pre number and number concepts and operations e.g. knowledge and skills related to comparing, counting
- patterns and estimations in measurement, observing, reasoning and problem solving; and knowledge about concepts and physical, social and biological environment.
- Socio-Personal and Emotional Development
- Development of self-concept
- life skills/ self-help skills
- habit formation
- cooperation
- compassion
- social relationships
- group interaction
- expressing feelings
- accepting others feelings.

Sensorial Development:

- Development of the five senses through visual, auditory and kinesthetic experiences.
- Development of Creative and Aesthetic Appreciation
- Exploring different art forms, develop dispositions, expression and appreciation for artistic, dance/ drama and musical activities

For Children between 3 to 4 years : Focus on health, nutrition and early psycho social stimulation through free play and a lot of adult child interaction e.g. infant games, traditional songs and syllables, access to variety of play materials, individualized adult attention and interaction, opportunities to explore, early introduction to stories, infant books, drawings etc. in safe, spacious and clean environment.

For Children between 4 to 5 years : Planned play based programme for all round development with more of free play. Continuous opportunities, more free but some guided, for adult-child, child-child interaction and interaction with play materials and environment through a variety of individual, small group and large group activities. Opportunities to listen to stories, learn rhymes, create, indulge in imaginative play, ask questions, do simple problem solving, experiment to promote active and interactive learning and generally have a great experience for a positive self-image.

For Children between 5 to 6 years : Moving towards an increasing ratio of adult guided vs. free play activities, and more of large group activities focused more on specific school readiness, increasing vocabulary, developing interest in reading through picture books, storytelling etc., interest in writing, eye hand coordination, fine motor development through activities such as beading, puzzles and large muscle development through running, jumping, balancing activities etc., developing creativity through cultural activities, field trips etc. The programme should be relevant to individual and societal needs. The age demarcations are indicative and the activities have to be planned according to the developmental level of the children.

1.2.8 Definition of Key Terms

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE): In the present study, early childhood is defined as the period from birth to 6 years old. A time of remarkable brain development, these years laid the foundation for subsequent learning. Children in the Anganwadi Centers are usually between the ages of 3-5.

Integrated child development services (ICDS): In this study, Integrated child development services (ICDS) is an Indian government welfare program which provides food, preschool education, and primary healthcare to children less than 6 years of age and their mothers.

Anganwadi or Anganwadi Centre (AWC): In the present study, the word Anganwadi means "courtyard shelter" as in Indian languages. They were started by the Indian government in 1975 as part of the Integrated Child Development Services program to combat child hunger and malnutrition. A typical Anganwadi center also provides basic health care in Indian villages and early education to the children.

Anganwadi Worker (AWW): In this study, the Anganwadi worker is a community-based frontline worker of the ICDS program. She plays a crucial role in promoting child growth and development. She is also an agent of social change, mobilizing community support for better care of the young children. She is responsible for organizing preschool activities, conducting regular surveys of families, providing health and nutrition education to families, especially pregnant women, educating parents about child growth and development, educating teenage girls and parents by organizing social awareness programs and identifying disabilities in children. Anganwadi worker is supported by an Anganwadi Helper who help her in integrated service delivery.

Mid-day meal: In this study, Mid-day meal scheme is a school meal program of the government of India designed to better the nutritional standing of school age children nationwide. The program supplies free lunches on working days for children in public schools including Anganwadi centers.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Pre-school teachers as key players in young children education have a crucial role to play in early childhood curriculum implementation. This may include child guidance and discipline, respecting cultural diversity, adopting the appropriate methods of teaching and learning, encouraging self-dependence and many (Hegde & Cassidy, 2009). Teachers perception about teaching and learning are strongly influencing the implementation of early childhood curriculum. Esqueda (2008) also suggested that understanding of the early childhood curriculum by the teachers is crucial for proper implementation of the curriculum to help achieve its goals. This means that once the preschool teachers do not comprehend what the early childhood curriculum's theoretical and practical framework in details, they will not be able to successfully implement the early childhood curriculum.

Now awareness among the parents is increasing and they know the importance of early childhood education and its long-term positive effects. 90% of parents are sending their boys and girls to preschool, then also there is a gap in the quality of education delivered in a preschool. Previous researches showed that In India, an average children's school readiness levels at age 5+ were far below expected levels. Most Preschools fail to use age appropriate methods, materials and activities. Thus, children entered primary schools unequipped with the skills necessary to meet the demands of the Primary school curriculum. It is easy to question the ability of teachers or blaming them for the poor literacy skills and low development of children. Therefore, in my study I want to be the voice of preschool teachers. The purpose of this qualitative study is to contribute the research to the preschool teacher's experience and challenges and let their voice be heard. In this sense, as a researcher examining their experiences and identifying the challenges pre-school teachers face during the implementation of the curriculum is a necessity which shapes this study.

1.4 Statement of Relevance

This study is relevant because it focuses on the problems that Preschool teachers face in the implementation of the early childhood curriculum as it has a long-term effect on the learning and development of the children. Preschools or playschools are the first exposure to schools many children encounter. Accessibility in the early childhood programs means that all children can interact with materials, activities, teachers and peers to the fullest extent possible and with equal frequency and enjoyment (Gibbs, 2012). Teacher's knowledge and understanding of the basic methods, practices, equipment and materials in the early childhood education is very important (Mira Choudhry, 1992). According to Parker (2012), there are multiple roles of the preschool teachers and these roles are not exclusive of each other, but are complex, varied and interdependent. Especially, when the role is related to curriculum implementation, things are getting more challenging and heavier responsibility creates on the shoulders of the preschool teacher. As a researcher, In my study, examining their experiences and identify the challenges pre-school teachers face during the implementation of the curriculum is a necessity because once the challenges were detected precisely, it is easier to deal with those challenges by finding ways of managing those challenges. In this light, it is very important to conduct an empirical study to shed some light on how preschool teachers cope with their responsibilities of implementing the curriculum in underprivileged settings in rural India.

The main purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of preschool teachers in a public preschool in rural India. Also, the study aims to explore how preschool teachers experience the challenges of the implementation of the early childhood curriculum in rural area in India. In order to understand the challenges faced by preschool teachers in implementation of the curriculum in India, It is also important to understand about the role of teacher and the essential qualities required in a teacher as they play important role in the development of the children. As stated by Joshi (2009) in a study that teacher's interaction and contribution in activities with children impacted the environment in early childhood classroom. Teachers interaction with children, parents and co-workers contribute to the advancement of children's early development and implementation of curriculum.

1.5 Objective of the study

The main objective of the current study is to examine the preschool teacher's perception and experiences of implementing Early childhood curriculum in rural areas of India. Furthermore, it also aims to shed light on their views of coping with the challenges related to curriculum implementation in demanding underprivileged settings.

1.6 Research Questions

The study aspires to give preschool teachers an opportunity of expressing their personal experiences of working with the children and challenges faced by them in curriculum implementation in public preschools in rural India. The research questions are :

How do the preschool teachers experience their efforts to implement a curriculum in public preschool in rural India?

What challenges of curriculum implementation do the preschool teachers identify in their everyday work in public preschool in rural India?

1.7 Significance of the study

This qualitative study is about the experience and challenges of the preschool teachers working in the public preschool in rural India. Illuminating the experiences of Preschool teachers may help to

understand the challenges they face implementing the early childhood curriculum. Thus, the research findings can be used as a reference document for further studies related to the similar topic. Also, the results of this study can be of interest to several stakeholders in early childhood education in India e.g. school leaders, policy makers and teacher unions. Also, it is the chance to use current findings to adopt appropriate program within preschool in order to improve the condition of public preschools, preschool teachers and early childhood education.

1.8 Structure of the study

The first chapter introduces the object of study, that is, the preschool teacher's experiences and challenges of curriculum implementation. Also, in this chapter are described the background of the study, statement of the problem, statement of the relevance and Purpose of the study. Research questions, significance of the study, structure of the study and limitations of the study are also presented here. Second chapter contains the Literature review on the study object. It gives the presentation of the previous studies related to ECCE and the preschool teachers. Third chapter presents a theoretical framework used to gain knowledge on the preschool teacher's experiences and challenges of curriculum implementation. The study used the Ecological systems theory, as the theoretical framework of the study. Finally, application of theory to the empirical data is justified. Fourth chapter presents the Research methodology used for conducting this study. Also, in this chapter are described the research design, Area of study and research tools, that is, interviews used to collect and analyze the data, the research sample, the way the data were collected and analyzed in the study. The sample views, once categorized and coded, are used for a meaningful dialogue with the theoretical framework. Also, the issues of validity, reliability and ethics are discussed in this chapter. The fifth chapter presents the findings of the study. Sixth chapter contains the discussion and interpretation of the research findings, based on relevant theories and data from Indian and non-Indian studies. Finally, this chapter also presents the general conclusions of the study. Seventh chapter contains recommendations and some suggestions for future studies. At the end of the study, they are listed the bibliographical references, websites and the appendices with the Informed consent form and the interview guide.

1.9 Limitation of the study

All research methodology manuals point out that it makes sense to have limitations on any real-world research. These limitations are due to several factors such as inadequate variable measurements, lack of participants, small sample sizes and other factors commonly associated with data collection and analysis (J. W. Creswell, 2019)

Firstly, the small sample size is a clear limitation of this study. The sample was found to be satisfactory for investigating the findings according to purpose and research questions. However, its small size cannot lead to generalized conclusions. The sampling method used also has limitations, as the sample is unrepresentative for the whole population. These limitations do not allow for generalizations but it gives the clues that lead to findings that may give rise to further investigation. Also, no qualitative studies can lead to generalizations so my study is no exception.

Secondly, the time was limited and some of the participants were feeling shy. Visiting and meeting the participants in the public preschool before the study and the familiarity in the area assisted me to minimize these limitations and thus I was able to get the data for the study. Finally, regarding the qualitative research, each researcher finds it difficult to deal with his own data objectively as it carries his own experiences (Ireland & Yeung, 2020).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the study related to Early childhood care and education and people who work for it i.e. Preschool teachers. It is mostly country specific i.e. related to India, as my study is based on Early childhood care and education and challenges faced by preschool teachers in rural India. It gives the presentation of previous studies related to early childhood care and education in India. But some studies are from other countries also, as these countries education system is similar to Indian education system and they are also developing countries like India. Therefore, by reading their literature I enhance my knowledge about the topic. The chapter concludes by a summary of the findings relevant to the study.

2.1 Literature Review of the study

Early childhood education is a special branch of education that relates to the teaching of children from birth to six years of age (Mathur, 2018). The definition of the term, Early childhood care and education (ECCE), depends on where it is looked at the issue from. In terms of child's life, it is the period from birth to eight years of age (Malvankar, 2018). It aims at the holistic development of a child's social, emotional, cognitive and physical needs in order to build a social and broad foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing.

Early childhood care and education is for the holistic development of children. Significance of the early childhood education increased tremendously all over the world within the last twenty years and importance of preschool education for children to succeed in further stages of education (Chopra, 2016). Verma (1994) describe a brief history of the development of early childhood care and education in pre and post Independent India.

Kaul and Sharma (2018) find out that the issues related to the quality of early childhood care and education in India are in need of further investigation. They argue that the quality of early childhood education is lacking in some respects, for instance regarding basic facilities and school readiness. Therefore, Kaul and Sharma (2018) point out that administrative work tasks, work overload and insufficient salaries pose a challenge to strengthen the professional role of preschool teachers in India. Another study by V. Kaul (2019) investigates how Indian preschool teachers work to improve children's school readiness, also describe the historical and cultural background of ECCE in India.

A study by Gibbs (2012) showed low level of readiness in children for primary schools due to low quality of early childhood education. According to Chopra (2016), low learning outcomes are common among children attending schools. Low levels of learning are often associated with poor quality educational programmes. Significant differences were observed in overall quality scores of grade II, grade I and nursery, with nursery scores being the highest. The decline in quality scores from nursery to grade II is a sign of decreasing quality and prevents a smooth transition of children from pre-primary to primary.

Chopra (2012) stresses importance of curriculum and how it is implemented. According to Chopra (2012) the quality of early childhood education relies on teacher's efforts to provide education and care that is in line with the curriculum. Thus, curriculum implementation improves the quality of early childhood education.

There are studies on the challenges of preschool teachers, Among them Gupta (2004), specifically identified large class size as a problem in implementation of curriculum. The findings showed that due to large class size, there is no interaction between teacher and children which decreases the overall quality of early childhood education. Also it reduces the child-teacher interaction, thus affects curriculum implementation and the quality of early childhood education (Gupta, 2004). This implies

that large class size as a problem in implementation of curriculum. Another study by Chamundeswari and Hallberg (2013) revealed that lack of proper facilities is also a problem in implementation of curriculum. Findings of study revealed that for the calculation of basic facilities, many preschools scores were below average (Chamundeswari & Hallberg, 2013).

Moreover, teaching-learning materials helps in successful implementation of curriculum. Gogoi (2015) points to the lack of teaching-learning materials in preschools in India. This study expressed the use of teaching-learning materials helps children understand abstract concept, solve problems and develop critical thought process. Thus, resources or teaching-learning materials are critical to successful implementation of curriculum, yet they are not available in schools (Gogoi, 2015).

The work conditions of preschool teachers have been shown insufficient (Chamundeswari & Hallberg, 2013). Some suggestions have been made to improve the educational situation in preschools in the given social circumstances. Chamundeswari and Hallberg (2013) suggested appropriate instruments in his study to improve job satisfaction, occupational and organizational commitment and performance of teachers.

Excessive workload increases stress and have a significant impact on teachers performance. Chamundeswari, Vasanthi, and Parvathi (2009) also investigated that school administrators need to focus on maintaining the physical and psychological well-being of teachers to enhance teacher performance. Many studies revealed that parents support is very less in ECCE programs. The results of the study by Jambunathan (2012) indicate that Parent participation is traditionally viewed in Western settings as involving the parents in activities related to the class and helping them to understand what goes on in the school.

Regarding the preschool teacher education, M. Choudhry (1992) found out that the teachers are not trained and sometimes the training provided to them are not appropriate. Proper training of teachers is necessary for the development of early childhood education. Training helps teachers to understand early childhood curriculum, effective class practices and child behavior management. Another study by Joshi (2009) connected the impact of teacher training with teacher's satisfaction maintaining the high quality of the teacher-child interactions which generally improves the quality of ECCE. A study by Jambunathan (2012) suggested use of developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood classrooms for improvement in ECCE. These practices are age appropriate, individually appropriate and culturally appropriate, which implies training of developmentally appropriate practices help in developing skills in children which impacted school readiness.

2.2 Conclusion of the Literature Review

From the above literature review it is evident that the topic of early childhood care and education and challenges in curriculum implementation for improving the quality of ECCE from a perspective of preschool teachers, in particular Anganwadi workers needs further studies. There is need for researches, as researches contribute to knowledge, find answers to questions, filling gaps and discovering new treatments which allows improvement in any system.

In general, the previous researches related to ECCE and Preschool teachers are quantitative studies. That is why this qualitative study, the experiences and challenges faced by preschool teachers in curriculum implementation in rural India, is important to gain knowledge about them and let their voice to be heard.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework used in this study is the Ecological systems theory by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979)². The ecological system theory explains how human development is interconnected and how individuals in their daily life are influenced by the contexts they live in. In this study, I tried to understand the experience of preschool teachers and challenges faced by them in curriculum implementation by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, where the ecological development is conceived as a set of nested structure, each inside the next, like Russian dolls.

3.1 The Ecological systems theory

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, is the theory of human development. It is used to explain the process of human socialization and it has been a key to understanding education. In the theory, a distinction is made between five levels, that is, the Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, Macrosystem and Chronosystem. The theory has later been modeled in different ways and have new versions. However In this study, I use the old theory i.e. the ecological systems theory by Bronfenbrenner which allows me to study preschool teachers as individuals who develop professionally in relation to their work tasks and their occupation. In ecological systems theory, Bronfenbrenner (1979) believed that a person's development was affected by everything in their surrounding environment, further Person's environment is divided into five-level nested model comprised of the following concentric circle ecosystems:

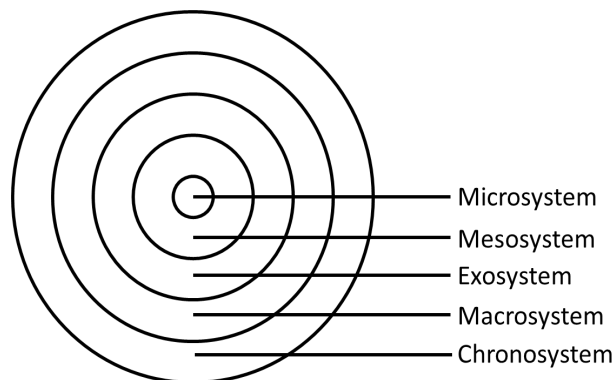


Figure 2 Bronfenbrenner's ecological system model

² The older version of ecological system theory by Bronfenbrenner (1979) is sufficient to use in the study as it covers all the points of the study in the five systems of this theory. In Ecological systems theory, all the systems are interconnected within and between settings, thus, they are inseparable from one another and greatly impact the individual at the center of the system.

Level 1 – Microsystem

A Microsystem is a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The microsystem is the system closest to the person and the one in which they have direct contact. Some examples would be home, school or work. A microsystem typically includes family, peers, or teachers. It encompasses an individual's human relationships, interpersonal interactions and immediate surroundings. An example of this system would be the relationship between an individual and his or her parents, siblings, or school environment. This is the most influential level of the ecological systems theory. In this study, the innermost level i.e. the microsystem contains the preschool teachers in a given setting for a particular period of time. A setting is a place, such as classroom where interactions between teachers and children takes place.

Level 2 – Mesosystem

A Mesosystem is the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates such as, for a child, the relations among home, school, and neighborhood peer group: for an adult, among family, work, and social life (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In this study, Interconnections or relations between home and school, school and workplace would also be an example of this system. Preschool teachers visit homes and give them knowledge about hygiene, vaccinations and government policies.

Level 3 – Exosystem

An Exosystem is one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Even though there is no direct engagement, the individual can still be impacted negatively or positively and in a powerful way (Dooley, 2018). Examples can include workplace politics, school's development. In this study, developments at the district level and at the state level are also exosystem activities that have impact on the capacity of schools to meet the needs of their students. For instance, when preschool teachers try to conform to the policy requirements that may put multiple demands on them related to the public health education as well as well-being of individual pupils.

Level 4 – Macrosystem

A Macrosystem refers to patterns at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology underlying such overall patterns (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Included in a macrosystem are societal belief systems, cultural norms, ideologies, policies, or laws that indirectly influence the person (Onwuegbuzie, Collins, & Frels, 2013). This system holds inside it the cultural values, traditions and laws. In relation to country specific realities, such traditions may include dominating views on parenting and schooling of young children.

Level 5 -Chronosystem

A Chronosystem is a description of the evolution, development or stream of development of the external systems in time. The chronosystem, the fifth level is considered as part of the later versions. The chronosystem models can cover either a short or long period of time (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The time system as related to the systems was not included in the original theory. It came about only later. The changes over time include not only those within the person but also in the environments in which that person is found (Eriksson, Ghazinour, & Hammarström, 2018). In this study, the chronosystem refers to change in work structure, change in curriculum implementation, policies related to employment and salary conditions.

3.2 Application of theory to the study

This adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's model helps to see the complexity of the teacher-as-person, challenges faced by them and the skills that are required of them to fulfil their professional work as Anganwadi workers in highly demanding circumstances.

The ecological environment, according to this theory, consists of a set of nested structures, each inside the next. At the innermost level is the immediate setting containing Anganwadi workers as person involved in the process of professional development. This microsystem concerns relations between the person and his or her immediate environment (e.g., children, co-workers, friends). The next circle, the mesosystem, represents the relation between the settings in which the developing person participates (e.g., work tasks and home, school and local community). The third level, exosystem refers to one or more settings that affect the person but do not contain the person (e.g., workplace or home visits in the local community). The fourth level, the macrosystem, refers to values, laws, and customs of the culture that influence all the lower orders (e.g., personal values, beliefs and interactions). The final level, the chronosystem, is the largest of all and encompasses the changes and similarities over the course of time (e.g., change in work and employment structures and curriculum implementation).

Within the ecological theoretical structure, there is interconnectedness both within and between the settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). By integrating the research on preschool teacher roles into the Bronfenbrenner model, the inner-most circle, the microsystem, represents the preschool teacher-as-person with all the subjective characteristics such as perceptions, norms, values, professional role understanding and expectations level of education, communication skills, ways to interact with others knowledge of the child or children that have developed from their experiences including the present challenges to understand and implement the curriculum. The next circle represents the mesosystem where the teacher interacts within the school as a work place and home bringing what they have experienced with them. It refers to the relations between school and home as preschool teachers visit children's homes to educate on issues of public health, monitoring, immunizations schemes, other government schemes and national programs. The next circle, exosystem, represent the effect of activities in classroom and influences of the more distant environments, often formulated through goals of policy documents. The fourth circle, macrosystem, refers to societal beliefs that are not easy to change, for instance traditional views on the roles of parents and carers. The final circle, chronosystem, represent the changes takes place in the workplace as an institution, policies of employment and changing curriculum, goals and intentions.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is the specific procedures or techniques used to identify, select, process, and analyze information about a topic (Duignan, 2016). This chapter presents the methodology used to collect and analyze data of the current research study. It shows how the study was conducted and describes the research procedures starting with research design, study area, data collection and research sample. Also, this chapter presents data analysis and discusses reliability of the research and ethical consideration.

4.1 Research Design

Research design is a plan or strategy of inquiry for conducting the research study (Wiersma, 2005). In this study, I am following qualitative research design and use semi structured interviews for data collection. The semi structured interview is a "verbal interchange where one person, the interviewer

attempts to elicit information from another person by asking questions” (Elliot, Fairweather, Olsen, & Pampaka, 2016). Therefore, I chose semi structured interview as method of data collection since it provides rich data and gives the researcher in-depth insights into the participants experiences. This approach allowed me to interpret the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of the problems in curriculum implementation in preschool system in India. Moreover, qualitative research design appropriately captured the attitudes and perceptions of the participants involved in the study, all the while providing me a deeper understanding of the education system and experiences of preschool teachers. In the qualitative research design, I am doing an interview study, in which I am interviewing the preschool teachers of public preschools in rural India.

4.2 Area of the study

The study was conducted with 8 preschool teachers of different public preschools (Anganwadi centers) in Hamirpur, Himachal Pradesh, India. Himachal Pradesh state has 12 districts - Hamirpur district, Nadaun district, Sujampur district, Badsar district, Bhoranj district, Tauni Devi district and Galore district. Hamirpur district is a rural area with land area about 1,118 km sq. and population of 454,768 (Male = 217,070 and Female = 237,698) as reported by Government of Himachal Pradesh in the year 2020. Labour force participation rate is 64.76% Main source of income in the district is from the Agriculture sector and Small private businesses. Mostly people are from low economic status and dependent on government facilities like government schools and government hospitals.

There are 1300 Anganwadi centers (AW’s) in Hamirpur, Himachal Pradesh, India, reported in 2020. Total number of children between 0 to 6 years of age group are 48,548 i.e. 10.68% (Boys = 11.85% and Girls = 9.60%). Area of the study includes 8 Anganwadi centers situated in Hamirpur, Himachal Pradesh. Each Anganwadi center has 1 Anganwadi worker (AWW) and 1 Anganwadi helper (AWH).

4.3 Data collection

Interview is the interaction between individuals led by the researcher in order to obtain information related to the research topic (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). It is used for in-depth exploration of views, experiences, emotions, perceptions, beliefs and motivations of individuals in relation to specific issues (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). In general, it is based on free and open communication and as a data mining technique, helps the researcher not only to approach his subject in depth, but also to utilize his experiences and feelings (Packer, 2010). Furthermore, interviews help researchers in educational studies to understand lived experiences, as well as the range and variation in perspectives and opinions about a phenomenon (Frey, 2018).

The interviewer has the opportunity to clarify some of the answers by making follow- up questions (Packer, 2010). Also, to find out information that maybe is inaccessible using other tools (Blaxter, 2006). The interviewer with his presence can ensure mutual understanding with the interviewee, as he/she may simplify or rephrase those questions that were misunderstood and provide more accurate data for the research (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). In addition, through the recordings of an interview the collected data can be reviewed several times and produce accurate research findings (Berg, 2009).

However, interviews gain a lot of critic for being time-consuming, also for me, it is time-consuming as I did interview in their local language and then translated it for my study. At the same time, spending more time on it gives me an exact interpretation and understanding. Thus, interview might be one of the most enjoyable and revealing methods, but it is also deceptively difficult (Byrne, 2001).

The interviews with 8 preschool teachers were conducted in February,2020. Selected participants were approached individually, and explained the topic of the study, purpose of the study, data collection

procedures, measures to protect the identity of the participants, confidentiality of the information etc. With the permission of the participant teachers, a mutually date, time and venue was agreed for the interview. I decided to carry out the interviews in the local language, which was time consuming because its data needed to be transcribed, coded and translated (Hofisi, Hofisi, & Mago, 2014). My decision was to make it easier for the participants to express more freely (Gill & Baillie, 2018). Thus, the interviews were conducted in Hindi, for the convenience of the participants and then translated into English.

The interview guide (Appendix 2) was carefully designed to include general questions and allow subjects to express themselves freely. The semi-structured interviews provide me enough flexibility to ask questions with my interviewees without being restricted to a certain structure or pattern of asking those questions. Moreover, posing open-ended questions allowed for responses in the form of opinions. The interview questions were designed in easily understandable language meant to put interviewees at ease and to make the interview 'conversation-like' about challenges faced by preschool teachers and their thoughts on the implementation of the curriculum.

Some introductory questions about the demographic and social characteristics of the sample (age, educational and occupational status) were preceded and then the questions related to the purpose and research questions. For Pilot study of the interview questions, a pilot interview was conducted, and their evaluation provided useful feedback for improvement. Their answers and observations have greatly helped to formulate the content, sequence and final formulation of the interview. The pilot phase was very important in order to avoid misunderstandings in the formulation of the questions and its participants were excluded from the final sample (J. W. Creswell, 2019).

All participants were given a written Informed consent form (Appendix 1) to sign their voluntary participation in the research. The interviews were conducted at the researcher's home, providing the appropriate conditions for the respondents to feel comfortable and friendly. This gave participants the necessary time and convenience for an in-depth interview. Their duration ranged from 30 to 45 minutes. Dialogs were recorded in a modern recorder to ensure no loss of data, since the exact statements of the interviewee are the target of the qualitative researcher (Punch, 2013). However, the participants were asked to feel free to share their experience or any information considered necessary for the researcher to know. Finally, the researcher thanked them and asked if they wanted a summary of the research results (J. W. Creswell, 2019). The participant teachers were given an opportunity to review the transcript to confirm its accuracy.

4.4 Research sample

Sampling is conducted to obtain the detailed study of just a part instead of the whole population (Trotter, 2012). Based on appropriate participants required to fulfil demand of the research study, Montanez (2014) proposed that purposive sampling is a method whereby the researcher intentionally selects the participants to be included in the sample. As mentioned above the sample comes from a rural area, Hamirpur district in Himachal Pradesh, India which is also hometown of the researcher. A convenient and purposive sampling technique has been applied to select 8 preschool teachers (Anganwadi workers) from 8 government preschools (Anganwadi centers) for the study. They were all female in the age span between 30 and 48 years, fully qualified for their job and with at least 5 years of work experience, which was assessed as sufficient to provide experience regarding their efforts in curriculum implementation and its challenges.

The reason behind choosing the government preschools for this study was the reputation of government preschools in the society. They had the reputation of being inefficient in terms of teaching, insufficient staff as well as their infrastructural facilities. Parents prefer private preschools for their children as they were considered much more efficient but were unaffordable for the masses due to their enormously high fee structure. Mostly people are from low economic status and dependent on government facilities.

Therefore, they prefer or even are forced for economic reasons, to send their children to public preschools. Thus, my intension was to interview the preschool teachers who work in clearly demanding and perhaps underprivileged settings.

4.5 Analysis of data

Data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data that was collected during the research (Manning, 1999). In this qualitative research, my analysis of data had different stages - preparing and arranging the data, coding and reduction of the data into themes. The themes that emerged are present in the result chapter for further discussion (J. Creswell & Race, 1999).

In this study, for analysis of the interviews, Content analysis was applied. Content analysis is a flexible method for analyzing the data (Drisko, 2015). Content analysis is a widely used qualitative research technique. The analysis involves obtaining an overview of the data and then the coding of themes that emerge (J. W. Creswell, 1994). The extracts that provided information for each research question were identified and coding started. This was an inductive process to extract meaning from the data and then yield it with a code. Codes then are sorted into categories based on how different codes are related and linked. These emergent categories are used to organize and group codes into meaningful clusters (Coffey, 1996). In the next step, the codes and categories were compared and merged to produce the themes that function as answers to the research questions. By re-reading the text material, pinning down the key themes and repeated words, the data collected was then coded to identifying themes and similar patterns in order to connect to the specific research questions to present findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Finally, the presented findings are illustrated with typical extracts from interviews.

4.6 Research reliability and validity

Apart from proper planning of research, effort was made to ensure the reliability and validity of research. Reliable research is the one whose results are consistent (J. W. Creswell, 2018). In the present study, reliability was ensured by making the interview questions in a clear way and the formulation of an accurate, complete and adequate research design. Also, the researcher paid a lot of attention on technical issues that might occur, such as equipment malfunction and recording errors (Robson, 2011).

Visiting and meeting the participants in the public preschool before the study helps me to develop a trust relation with the participants. Talking with them in their language and familiarity in the area reduced their shyness and I made an effort to make them feel safe and relaxed with me as an interviewer.

Validity is the degree to which the findings of a research correspond to reality and accuracy of a result (Robson, 2011). In simple words it is about whether they are accurate, correct or true. I made efforts not to influence my interview persons. The pilot study also helped me to improve the wording of my questions.

4.7 Ethical consideration

Research ethics have become an important topic for every researcher, as it appears that there is a growing concern regarding the ethical dimension on the design and implementation of research. The field of social sciences has developed a lot, and this has brought an increasing awareness on the ethical issues (Cohen et al., 2018)

In a Qualitative study, it is necessary to consider the ethics of research study before actually collecting any data (Johnson, 2014). The concern of ethical issues becomes more salient when conducting face to face interview with participants. Research ethics tends to be associated with the concern for research participants (Silverman, 2013). The protection of human subjects through the application of appropriate

ethical principles is important in any research study. Thus, there are some basic principles that the researcher should follow in order for his research to respect ethics. Voluntarily participation, confidentiality, no harm to the participants and no deception are some of the most important rules that every researcher needs to follow (Miller, 2012).

In this study, in order to achieve the rule of voluntarily participation, before asking them to participate, the participants were fully informed of the topic and the motives of the study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). Furthermore, Informed Consent Form (Appendix 1) was given to all participant teachers. Informed consent incorporates issues of clarity of purpose, trust, honesty and integrity (Hartas, 2010). The researcher distributed to the participants a paper of Informed Consent Form to sign, with all the necessary information regarding the study (identity of the researcher, research topic and purpose of the study), so that they were fully aware of the topic and purpose of the research. Hence, they declared their willingness to voluntarily participate in the research study by signing an Informed Consent Form.

For a study to guarantee confidentiality the researcher and the people who read the research should not be able to identify the participants from their responses. Preschool teachers (the interview participants) were assured of confidentiality during this study including every discussion that take place to be confidential with no identification of names in presentation of the data. Thus, in this research, as soon the researcher assured that there is no need for additional information from the respondents, all the identifying data were removed, and the names were replaced with pseudonyms. Finally, after the completion of the study, the data of the research were destroyed (Babbie, 2017).

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The findings of the study are presented in two sections. In the first section, results for the experiences and challenges of preschool teachers as government workers/officials are discussed. Second section investigated the experiences and challenges of preschool teachers as the preschool education professionals.

The following table 1 summarizes up some basic characteristics of the preschool teachers that participated in the study. This includes the data provided by preschool teachers during the personal interviews which were used in order to create the table below, are related to preschool teacher's gender, age, their qualification and finally total years of their working experience in public preschool in rural area in India.

Table 1 Teacher's Characteristics

Preschool Teacher	Gender	Age	Qualification	Work Experience
T1	Female	35	B.A.*	10 years
T2	Female	48	Class 12	22 years
T3	Female	40	Class 12	14 years
T4	Female	30	B.A.*	5 years
T5	Female	33	B.A.*	8 years
T6	Female	42	Class 12	16 years
T7	Female	36	B.A.*	11 years
T8	Female	44	Class 12	18 years

* B.A. – Bachelor's Degree in Arts

All the participants participated in the study are female. Due to ethical considerations, the names of preschool teachers are referred to as T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7 and T8. Age is ranged between 30 years to 48 years. In terms of their qualification, all eight participants are well-educated for their job which is appropriate for my study.

5.1 The experiences and challenges of preschool teachers as government workers/officials

The findings describe the experiences and challenges of preschool teachers as government workers or officials. It seems that working in a public preschool offered some rewarding experiences as well as posing challenges, captured by the following headlines.

As an interesting and enriching experience

All the participants in the study, unanimously, described working in a public preschool in rural Himachal Pradesh as an interesting and enriching experience for them. As it is shown in their interviews, they explained how working in public preschool affected their professional and personal lives. However, feeling and acting as a government worker meant the need to juggle a very diverse type of work tasks.

Preschool teacher T1 discussed about the workload and how they perform all activities in the public preschool.

.....I have to work full day. Beginning with the circle time, teaching kids, doing activities, giving them mid-day meal, maintaining registers, visiting houses in the village and training lactating mothers about hygiene. I do door to door survey of the children belonging to the age group of below five years to bring under vaccination programme.....

Preschool teacher T2, T3 and T4 explained about the dominant sense of being useful for others and at the same time being a worker or servant to the government was often present in the Anganwadi worker's talk. Being and acting as government workers contributed to a sense of personal stability, security and a feeling of belonging to a local community. The preschool teachers expressed that they contributed to the well-being of their villages in their role as government officials. Also a feeling of inclusion emerged in common local language was appreciated. The theme of being of use to a local community, doing good for others by educating the public was often brought up by the teachers as interesting and enriching. Typically, the teachers felt active and well-informed about the government policies, working for the benefit of their villages.

.....I like to work for the people of my village. It gives me so much information about the government policies made for the welfare of children and mothers, it's my duty to inform them about the benefits of government policies.....

.....I get comfortable, very comfortable in this job...I thought this like my home as it is located in my village.....I know all the children, their parents... and I can help them in the local language I am happy that I can help them in this way.....

.....it's my own choice to work in a public preschool as it is close to my house and when I teach people in my village about hygiene and childcare I feel like I am strongly connected with them.... Which is a very nice feeling.....

Preschool teacher T5 explained what is interesting while working in a preschool and how Working in public preschool offered the teachers an opportunity to create a safe environment for underprivileged children. The teachers valued this opportunity and saw it as both their duty and a source of job satisfaction.

.....it has been interesting....to teach children and prepare them for the next school.....as children come from low background families so it is our duty to give them knowledge about proper hygiene and sanitation as well.....

Preschool teacher T6 told me about creating an encouraging environment for children which is an interesting experience and also about providing mid-day meal which is a great concept.

.....it's a very nice and interesting experienceits very good for the children from an early age to be enrolled in preschool....so from early age they learn to stay away from home for some time and easily mix with other childrenwe create an encouraging environment for children.....also here they learn new things and get mid-day meal.....

In addition, Preschool teacher T7 emphasize how learning to operate different government schemes and national programs for improvement e.g. Public health, contribute to their sense of meaningful work. Working on administering such national initiatives often included learning from supervisors and seniors in workplaces.

.....I like to work in a public preschool as here we got opportunity to learn from our supervisors..... we learn about government schemes launched for the people and children of villages.....our supervisors and seniors explain us about new schemes, and we learn from their experience.....

Preschool teacher T8 stated their experience as interesting and enriching about learning new things. Learning from more experienced people also meant that policy implementation was more about trading ready-made interpretations of new policies from seniors to juniors.

.....I always put my focus to learn about the schemes and plans made by the government for the benefit of the children and mothers. Also, this whole experience of working as a preschool teacher is like a new learning for me. our supervisors help us and explain us about the changes and new policies. Also explain us how to implement them.....

Likewise, the study revealed that working in a public preschool in Hamirpur District, Himachal Pradesh (India), an interesting and enriching experience for the preschool teachers. They welcome new children and create an encouraging environment for them so that they feel safe and easily mix with other children. Preschool teachers help the children to learn through activities and play way method, which is also interesting and enriching for the preschool teachers. Also, they provide knowledge about hygiene and new policies to the people of village which develops their overall personality.

As a challenge for becoming better

Most of the preschool teachers sharing their thoughts and experiences through personal interviews described their experience of working in a public preschool in rural Himachal Pradesh as a challenge for personal self-improvement. The areas for self-improvement included communication or social skills that they could use in their private as well as professional life. Especially the appreciated how their work as Anganwadi workers helped them to become confident public speakers worthy of listening by others.

Preschool teacher T1 explained how she accepted the challenge of improving her self-confidence and developed skills of talking with so many people.

.....I choose to work in public preschool because it is located in my village.... it allows me to spend time with children and work for the people of my village. It is a challenge for me to talk in front of many people, also meet people and tell them about new policies implemented by the government.....

Preschool teacher T3 also responded about how they perform activities in the public preschool to educate them about personal hygiene and good health. Also, learning new skills to make environment children friendly.

.....children learn with activities, drawing and games which help them develop necessary real-life skills, with the end goal that both their minds and their bodies be active and healthy. I tell them about personal hygiene and good health through rhymes and dance and creating a children friendly environment.....

Preschool teacher T4 expressed concern for the amount of work related to their role as government officials eg. Maintaining health record of individual children.

.....I teach children in the public preschool and also maintain records for the government policies. I maintain record of the weight, monthly health checkups and immunization of the children.....

Another area of concern to the preschool teachers was a great amount of work devoted to meal preparation on a daily basis. These teacher T5 reported having to follow dietary prescriptions eg. Weighing food ingredients and distributing meals assisted by helper.

..... with the teaching in the preschool, I also distribute mid-day meal. Helper cooks the food and helps in distributing it to the children. It is also my responsibility to measure and check food. I also prepare records of the children height and weight and their health checkups.....

By using fewer words and speaking in a simple way, Preschool teacher T7 explained also how this challenging experience helped her to become better on professional and personal level.

.....I learn from other's experiences.....it was a challenge for me.....(also) I speak more now...I am getting better.....

The study shows that the day to day routine in a public preschool in rural area is quite a challenge for preschool teachers for personal and professional growth. While taking care of the children in preschools, they do other tasks also such as maintaining registers, distributing mid-day meal, meeting people and supervisors, learning about new policies and sharing information with people in the village. They try to improve their overall personality and become better as they go through it.

As being community-based Frontline worker of the ICDS program

The preschool teachers participating in the current study expresses a sense of belonging to government workers. The willingness to work on behalf of the government and its proclaimed policies working on dispersing governmental decisions and intensions, often termed as personal duty. Moreover, they express in many ways how comfortable they feel and they present themselves as "Frontline worker" in the community which is a very responsible role.

Preschool teacher T1 and T2 responded that it's a great feeling to work as a community-based frontline worker of ICDS program and work for the welfare of the community.

..... I promote health education with early childhood education in my village. After preschool, I continue with other tasks like preparing record of pregnant mothers, spreading awareness for health-related issues, importance of immunization etc. by visiting individual houses in the allocated area in the village.....

.....working as a frontline worker and spreading awareness about health and hygiene in my own village gives me opportunity to work for the children and mothers. In this way, I feel like I am doing something good for my own people and it is a great feeling.....

Preschool teacher T6 and T8 told me about the work and responsibilities of a preschool teacher as a Frontline worker of ICDS program and how she tries to improve herself.

..... Apart from running the preschool it's also my responsibility to prepare records of the health condition of children in preschool and newly born babies in the village. As I am in my village so it's easy for me to develop friendly relation with the ladies and talk to them about health and hygiene.....it's a big responsibility and I always try to improve myself.....

.....As a Frontline worker, I work in the preschool as well as in the village. I promote awareness about the government schemes, so people get benefit from them. I try to get more knowledge about new schemes so that I can share that knowledge with other people.....

The Anganwadi Worker appears in the study as the community - based voluntary frontline workers of the ICDS Programme. The study revealed that preschool teachers like to work as a frontline worker and want to make their community better. Selected from the community, they assume the pivotal role due to her close and continuous contact with the beneficiaries. The Anganwadi Worker monitors the growth of children, organizes supplementary feeding, helps in organizing immunization sessions, promote health education, prepare record of pregnant mothers, spread awareness for health-related issues, distributes vitamin A, iron and folic acid supplements. They have a great feeling in working for the people of their village and community.

More work and Underpaid

All preschool teachers complained about low and delayed honoraria as a major demotivating factor in the work environment. They described that working in a public preschool as a full day work and more time consuming. A common theme among all the teachers in the study was the dissatisfaction with the remuneration system as part of the employment conditions. Several teachers reported being involved in protests against government for getting a raise in their salary and to provide them a permanent government employees status so that they can also get benefits same as a government employee.

Preschool teacher T1, T2 and T3 stated that they protested against government for getting a raise in their salary and to provide them a permanent government employees status.

..... My salary was approximately 6,200 rupees per month (822 SEK). We protested against government for two years, then last year government increased 500 rupees (66 SEK). Now my salary is 6,700 rupees per month (888 SEK), which is still very less as compared to our workload and current inflation rate in India.....

..... Our salary is very low. We protested against government and demanded increase in the salary. Since we work under government schemes, we should be treated as government employees. But government just increased 500 rupees (66 SEK) in the salary and rejected other demands.....

.....We demanded increase in our salary and government increased just 500 rupees (66 SEK) which is very less. They should give salary according to the work.....

Preschool teacher T4 responded that the work is more, as they work after preschool time also but they are not paid according to their work, especially not for overtime they put in.

.....Many times, I have even worked extra time in surveys, and I get no extra money for this.....

Preschool teacher T5 complained that despite being an educated workforce, their pay remained lower than the daily wage rate of unskilled workforce. As they are supposed to open preschool for only four hours, they seem as part-time workers.

.....Salary in Public preschools is very low. My salary is just Rs. 6,700 (888 SEK) and Salary for Anganwadi helper is half of my salary which is very less. We have extra workload yet paid less.....

The monthly salary preschool teachers received is very less and they are working on a contract instead of a permanent job. Each anganwadi workers receives 6,700 rupees (888 SEK) per month which is very low remuneration, but the responsibilities of these workers are very extensive. Yet, they have been found to be among the most dedicated and committed of public servants who have developed grass root contacts and are able to identify particular individuals and groups in any community, easily. Moreover, Preschool teachers also received their monthly honorarium with three to four months of delay. The feeling of not being valued by the state government hinders their motivation and self-esteem. Preschool teacher **T6** explained that working as a preschool teacher in public preschool is not an easy task, they work very hard yet are underpaid.

.....Managing children, their daily meals, preschool lessons, health and hygiene and visiting village to give counselling to lactating and pregnant mothers is time consuming job and monthly salary for this job is only 6,700 rupees (888 SEK) which is very less as compared to time spent for the job. Sometimes government delayed salary and this demotivates me

Preschool teacher T7 and T8 expressed worries not being able to support themselves and their families.

.....I work full day and salary for this job is very less. It is very difficult for me to manage home in such a small salary.....

.....I am not satisfied with the salary, I work so hard and the salary I received is very less as compared to my work. I wish if government can increase salary of preschool teachers working in public preschools.....

The study shows that the preschool teachers in public preschools are not paid well. They are supposed to open for only four to five hours a day, yet they have been found to be among the most committed and dedicated of public servants. After preschool, they work for the benefit of the people in their village. They conduct meetings, maintain records, share knowledge about government policies etc. The activities for preschool teachers are very extensive yet the monthly salary they received is 6,700 rupees per month

and its difficult for them to manage their homes in such small salary. This shows that the salary is much lesser and the expected work is more from the preschool teachers. They are not at all satisfied with the salary is being paid to them.

5.2 The experiences and challenges of preschool teachers as preschool education professionals

Large Class size

Mostly, Preschool teachers participating in the study, expressed large class size as a challenge for them. They explained that their class size is too large for them and it is difficult to handle the class and allocate time properly which causes a decrease in the overall quality of the education carried out in the classroom. This means that they felt restricted in fulfilling their intention to cater the needs of individual children.

Preschool teacher T1 and T2 explained that crowded classroom made difficult for them to handle a large class size and to allocate time properly to each child individually.

.....It is very difficult for me to connect with each child in the classroom during the activity time. In my classroom, I have 34 children in three groups in the classroom and I am the only teacher with one helper. Sometimes, it is very difficult to handle all the children.....

.....As I have 28 children in 3 groups and its only me handling 3 Groups, it is difficult to allocate the time properly to each group or child individually. There are many activities to do in a classroom setting but it is very difficult with a huge class.....

The preschool teachers complained about not being able to attend to each child's needs in activities and interaction. Preschool teacher T3 and T5 responded about the activity time and how it is difficult for them to actively participate each child in activities with such a large class size.

.....I have 30 children in this preschool. I do want to interact with each child in my classroom during activity times however it is impossible to do when you are with such a large number of children.....

.....I try to involve all the children in the activity so that they participate and enjoy it but sometimes it is very difficult for me to focus on every child as there are 26 children in preschool.....

Preschool teacher T6 and T8 responded that they try to do activities related to curriculum and they are the only teacher with a large number of children which is a tiring work. It affects their performance also.

.....We have 28 children of age group 3 to 6 years and I am only teacher with such a large number of children. I try to do activities related to curriculum. At the end, I get so tired as it takes all the time with such a large class size.....

..... In this preschool we have 32 children. As its only me handling 3 Groups, it is difficult to allocate the time properly to each group or child individually. I try to best utilize the time as much as I can.....

Preschool teachers explained that large class size cause a decrease in the overall quality of the education carried out in classroom settings. For teachers, first of all, this eliminates the one-to-one interaction with children. Teachers had to deal with the overall performance of the children rather than finding a chance

to interact with each child individually. Also, the more children preschool teachers have in the classroom, the more they get tired physically, this affects their classroom performance and implementation of curriculum accordingly.

Lack of proper facilities

The Preschool teachers participated in this study stated that they are dealing with the problem of lack of proper facilities in preschool. They stated that there is a lack of proper facilities such as unavailability of drinking water and toilet facility. Also, there is improper electricity and heating supply in their preschools. Some preschools have one small room and no proper playing area.

Preschool teacher T1 told about the lack of infrastructure, unavailability of drinking water facilities and improper sitting arrangement in the preschool.

.....There is no proper facility for drinking water supply. The Anganwadi helper fills water container every morning from the neighbor's water supply. Also there is no proper sitting arrangement, children sit on thin blankets laid out on the dusty ground.....

Preschool teacher T3 and T4 stated that electricity supply is very poor in the preschool. Also, there is no heating facilities and doubted about the public image of the preschool.

.....This preschool has no heating facilities for the winters. In summers, there are so many power cuts. Sometimes there is no electricity supply for whole day and it's very hard for children to spend whole day in preschool without electricity.....

.....There is severe lack of proper facilities in this preschool. It is just one room with no proper water, toilet and electricity facilities.....

Preschool teacher T7 and T8 explained about the lack of proper play area and small room which is not suitable for activities for children. Play is also an important aspect of curriculum that determines the quality of the early childhood program.

.....It is just one room and children sit on mat laid on the floor. There is no playground, just a small open space outside the room where children play. There is lack of proper area for activities and play time.....

.....The room is small and not suitable for the activities with movements, the activities must be limited. Children needs to play more therefore they just play in the small area outside the preschool.....

The study revealed that the preschools in rural area are dealing with the problem of basic facilities. There is no proper facility of drinking water, toilet and electricity. Even during winters, some preschools have no heating facilities. Also, no proper electricity supply in summers. Some preschools have very small area and no playground for children to play. Even though the Quality standards of ECCE maintains that the government needs to provide physical facilities such as spacious classrooms, libraries and sports fields in order to create an enabling environment in which implementation can take place, the teachers in the study faced sub-standard conditions in their daily work.

Lack of teaching-learning materials

Teaching-learning material are important for the implementation of curriculum. Preschool teachers participated in this study expressed that teaching-learning materials are important for the development

of children and successful implementation of curriculum. They also stated that there is lack of teaching-learning material in public preschools.

Preschool teacher T1 and T3 responded that due to lack of teaching-learning materials they are not able to make good activities for children.

.....There is a lack of teaching-learning materials so we have to do the same things during our daily activities. Also, there is not much playing material for children.....

.....There is a problem of teaching-learning material, to be able to make good activities for children, I need different teaching-learning materials.....

Preschool teacher T5 and T6 expressed that how bad they feel as they can't allow children to do activities due to lack of teaching-learning materials. Also, they are small kids and they are more interested in playing.

.....I have very less teaching-learning material therefore it is very difficult to perform activity with all the children. Sometimes I only perform the activity and show it to them, but they don't get chance to perform it by their own.....

.....I have limited teaching-learning material to involve all the children in performing activity. In Activity time, settling the kids in the room is quite difficult as they are small, they just want to play and sometimes they don't listen.....

Preschool teacher T7 and T8 stated that there is lack of teaching-learning materials. For activities, some preschool teachers only give papers and color pencils to children for drawing and painting.

.....There is lack of teaching-learning materials, sometimes children only do Drawing and coloring on the name of activities. I feel bad but what can I do.....

.....On the name of teaching-learning materials, I have only color papers and color pencils, children paint or draw or they sing rhymes in place of performing activities.....

The study shows that in their daily work Anganwadi workers experience that they have to cope with very limited access to teaching-learning materials in the public preschools. When resources are available for early childhood education program, it helps the teacher to support the development of children and to successfully implement curriculum. The use of teaching-learning materials helps children understand abstract concept, solve problems and develop critical thought process. This means that the curriculum to be fully implemented as planned, the government should supply preschools with adequate teaching-learning materials in order to enable teachers and learners to play their role satisfactorily in the curriculum implementation process. Therefore, resources or teaching-learning materials are critical to successful implementation of curriculum, yet they are not available in many preschools.

Excessive workload and Record maintenance

The majority of preschool teachers interviewed felt overburdened and emphasized that the high workload demotivated them and influenced job satisfaction. Also, they use classroom time for finishing their excessive record-keeping work. They responded that they have excessive workload and preparing record of surveys, assisting health programs, preparing record of children height and weight, all these are time consuming. Due to this, they feel difficulty in focusing in the classroom activities.

Preschool teacher T1 responded that as a preschool teacher, they teach in preschool and also maintain records in the registers. Therefore, they have excessive workload in public preschool.

.....Apart from teaching in preschool, I have to maintain record in the registers like survey register, immunization register, Antenatal care (ANC) register etc. Sometimes I have to assist for other health programs like Pulse Polio program, Vitamin A distribution program etc.....

Preschool teacher T2 and T4 stated that maintaining records and registers each day increases their workload and make them busy and they get very less time for doing activities in the classroom.

..... I have to write the daily schedule for the children in register and other Activities like record and report maintenance, planning for lunch also consumes time. The helper will cook food for children; however, teacher needs to measure the items (like rice, lentils etc.) for cooking and give it to her for cooking according to the number of children present on that particular day. It takes almost half an hour.....

.....Maintaining record for each child is time consuming, as there are many children in the classroom. Most of the time in classroom is consumed by the record maintenance and left less time for children activities.....

Preschool teacher T5 and T7 accepted that sometimes they use classroom time for finishing their record keeping work, as they have excessive workload. They try to finish work when children are playing on their own and the teacher do not get time to interact with the children at all.

.....Apart from our work in preschool, government has involved us in other activities like undertaking household surveys for Census, election cards and ration cards. I have already a lot of work and sometimes I have to fill the records in the classroom instead of playing with the children.....

.....Due to excessive workload, I can't focus on children. In the classroom, when children are playing, I sometimes try to finish my register work and record maintenance.....

The study revealed that apart from teaching in preschool, Anganwadi workers perform many responsibilities like doing surveys, assisting health programs, record of children, record of food, maintaining registers. All these responsibilities affect the performance of preschool teacher in the classroom. Due to workload, it's difficult to focus on classroom activities and sometimes they use classroom time for finishing the register work. This finding shows how the various task that belong to the area of social work restrict the teacher's work as educators.

Lack of teaching time

Most of the preschool teachers participating in the study responded that they feel the overall preschool duration is not long enough to cover all the things like teaching, activities, record maintenance etc. They have a lot of work to do in preschool thus overall duration of the job must be increased.

Preschool teacher T2 responded that as there is lack of teaching time and she has a lot of work to do, it is hard for her to fit everything in a day.

.....I find as a preschool teacher it is so hard to fit everything in each day. There is not enough time for me to do all the activities in the classroom. Planning lunch and feeding small children takes most of the time.....

Preschool teacher T3 stated that the register work is so much, we have to do that also with teaching. Thus, we have very less time for the children to do activities.

.....I have a lot of administration work. With the register work, I have to record daily updates from the day. I realize how little time I have for children. I wish I have more time for the children to play and explore.....

Preschool teacher T5 explained that they have so much work to do in a day and sometimes it is not enough to cover all the requirements of early childhood curriculum.

.....I felt that the preschool day was not long enough to adequately cover all the requirements of early childhood curriculum. I try to best utilize the time as much as I can.....

Preschool teacher T7 stated that she tries to follow the curriculum, yet due to lack of teaching time it is difficult to execute it.

.....I try to follow the curriculum but sometimes it gets difficult to execute it, as I have more work and less teaching time.....

Following up on the teacher's experience of administrative burdens, the finding points to a pressing lack of time that the teachers feel should be devoted to getting involved with the children. Planning lunch, feeding small children and maintaining records takes most of their time. In the classroom, every day preschool teachers take attendance of children, measure food items for cooking, record daily updates from the day in the register.

Lack of Parental involvement

Preschool teachers participating in the study complained about lack of parental support or parental involvement in early childhood care and education. The impression was that Parents do not see early education as important as primary education. For them Preschool is not a real school. Parents perceived public preschool as a playing area for the children not as a learning place.

Preschool teacher T1 explained that some parents thought public preschool as a playing area for the children and they send their children just for spending time. They didn't understand the importance of activities performed in preschools.

..... Some of them do not follow the time schedules and send the children late to preschool, which disturbs the ongoing activities and affects the overall activities planned during the day.....

Preschool teacher T5 stated that parents support, and involvement is very less. They are not aware of the benefits of early childhood education and facilities from ICDS schemes. Also, she suggested to motivate parents to involve them in ECCE programs.

..... Parents are not much involved as they are not aware of the facilities and benefits of Anganwadi (Public Preschool) and ICDS schemes. They send their child less frequently which disturbs the regularity of child in preschool. We should aware and motivate parents to involve themselves in ECCE programs.....

Preschool teacher T7 responded that parents should be more responsible and send children to preschool regularly. Some parents didn't follow the time schedule, they just send their children to preschool to get free meals and play.

.....The parents need to take some responsibility too by regularly sending the children to preschool and follow the time schedule. They are not taking public preschools seriously. They send children very late in day and after having food (mid-day meals) they take them back to home. It seems like they think Anganwadi is a place for children to play for some time and where they will get free meals.....

The study points to a lack of parental involvement, hampering the work done by the teachers. Parents support is very less in ECCE programs and they are not aware of the benefits of ECCE and ICDS schemes. Some of them send children very late and do not follow the time schedules which disturbs the activities schedule in preschool.

Lack of in-service training

Preschool teachers participated in the study noted a need for in-service training for the professional development. While talking about the challenges they face in the public preschool, only three preschool teachers expressed their feelings that they have limited knowledge about curriculum and special education.

Preschool teacher T1 and T3 stated that they feel in-service training is important for them to understand about early childhood curriculum and special education.

.....I know that I have less knowledge about early childhood curriculum. I do only what my supervisor tells me or instruct me. They should give us proper training about early childhood curriculum.....

.....I have a special child in my preschool, but I don't know how to treat or how to help him. It's a big challenge for me as I don't know anything about special education. I think government should train us for such situations.....

Preschool teacher T6 and T8 responded that training sessions are important for their personal and professional development. They got training about taking care of children's health and hygiene, educate mothers and spreading awareness for healthcare issues. They were also informed about early childhood curriculum.

.....Yes, trainings are important for our development and to do better as a preschool teacher. I go for in-service training sessions but not much. In the training sessions they tell us about taking care of children's health and hygiene. Also, how to educate new mothers about taking care of the newly born baby and Spreading awareness for healthcare issues like nutritious food, personal hygiene etc. Sometimes they tell us about curriculum also. If there are some changes in the curriculum they inform us about it.....

.....There are also some incidents in past where I went for the training session, but then I was informed that training has been cancelled today and will happen on some other day. Then it is just a waste of time.....

The study revealed that preschool teachers are not very much trained about early childhood curriculum. They need in-service training to understand early childhood curriculum, effective class practices and child behavior management. These training sessions develop their personality and they do better as a preschool teacher. Also, they need special education to help in case of special child.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this section, the results of current study will be discussed in relation to previous research findings and in relation to the theoretical framework. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore preschool teacher's perception of experiences and challenges faced by them in curriculum implementation. Data was obtained from eight preschool teachers by interviewing and comments were qualitatively analyzed and coded. Thus, the interpretation of data is based on the ecological systems theory by Bronfenbrenner (1979). As this theory allows me to access to treat the preschool teacher's voice in the light of their constant interaction with different levels of the system and their experiences can be understood as being in constant interaction with those levels.

In responding to the research questions, all the preschool teachers participated in this study unanimously described working in a public preschool as an interesting and enriching experience for them, despite the demands put on them and the lack of resources provided to them. Preschool teachers explained how they create encouraging environment for the children at the same time attending to basic needs such as proper nutrition. They also explained how working in public preschool affected their professional and personal lives. They expressed a feeling of pride acting as government workers, active and informed about the government policies and actively work for the benefit of their community which is related to the macrosystem in the Bronfenbrenner ecological system theory of human development (1979). The preschool teachers interviewed expressed a sense of belonging in the community. Preschool teachers work as a 'Frontline worker' and promote awareness about the government schemes, prepare record of pregnant mothers, spreading awareness for health-related issues, importance of immunization etc. by visiting individual houses in the allocated area in the village. They have a great feeling in working for the people of their village and community. Most of the preschool teachers participated in the study described during the interviews, their experience of working in public preschool as a challenge for them to get better in their profession. Apart from teaching in the preschool, they perform other responsibilities also like record keeping, surveys and visiting houses in the village and training lactating mothers about hygiene as it comes under mesosystems which affects the overall work of the preschool teachers. Participating in these activities develop networking and social skills in them, and preschool teachers participating in this study show a great interest in their professional and personal development. These preschool teachers present themselves as people who like challenging themselves and finally as people who like keep on learning in professional and personal level.

It is very disappointing that the preschool teachers were not satisfied with the salary they get for their hard work and it belongs to chronosystem which describe the employment and salary conditions, it effect on their work satisfaction. In line with Chamundeswari and Hallberg (2013) also stated if teachers are satisfied with their work then improvement in curriculum implementation can be seen in the performance of teachers in India.

Apart from the workload related to their work as government workers and social workers, the teachers complained about issues that seriously impacted on their work as preschool teachers. Dealing with large classes minimized one-on-one interaction with children, which confirms the findings in previous researches by Chopra (2016) and Gupta (2004).

Teachers had to deal with the overall performance of the children rather than finding a chance to interact with each child individually. Also, the more children preschool teachers have in the classroom, the more they get tired physically, which is related to microsystem where interactions between teacher and children are important, this affects their classroom performance and implementation of curriculum accordingly.

As the preschool teachers participated in the study, expressed concerns with basic physical facilities such as lack of drinking water, toilet and electricity. Even during winters, some preschools have no heating facilities. Also, no proper electricity supply in summers. Some preschools have very small area and no playground for children to play, according to the teachers. The Quality standards of ECCE maintains that the government needs to provide physical facilities such as spacious classrooms, libraries and sports fields in order to create an enabling environment in which curriculum implementation can take place. The availability of the basic facilities has a great influence on curriculum implementation and development of children. My study confirms some previous findings on the unavailability of basic facilities in public preschools (Chamundeswari & Hallberg, 2013; Chopra, 2016).

Another challenge in curriculum implementation for the preschool teachers participated in the current study is lack of teaching-learning materials. Preschool teachers feel discouraged sometimes in preparing activities for the children according to their age and interest. Gogoi (2015) found in his study that when resources are available for early childhood education program, it helps the teacher to support the development of children and to successfully implement curriculum.

In respect to Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory of human development (1979), as a theoretical lens in my entire study, the researcher in responding to the research question which are needed to reveal the challenges pointed out by the participant teachers in curriculum implementation in the present study are excessive workload and record maintenance. It is related to exosystem where preschool teachers try to conform to policy requirements that may put multiple demands on them, thus Preschools teachers feel stressed. Apart from teaching in preschool, they perform many responsibilities like doing surveys, assisting health programs, record of children, record of food, maintaining registers etc. All these responsibilities affect the performance of preschool teacher in the classroom. Therefore preschools teachers also faced the difficulty of lack of teaching time. Due to workload, it's difficult to focus on classroom activities and sometimes they feel so stressed that they use classroom time for finishing the register work (Chamundeswari et al., 2009). Therefore, they get very less time for getting involved with children. In line with the study by Mira Choudhry (1992), the teachers in my study cannot give all their attention to the overall development of the child through play, activity, child-centered approaches because they have lot of administration work to do and they are not able to spend more time with the children to play and explore.

Present study also revealed that parents support is very less in ECCE programs. Parents are not aware of the benefits of ECCE and ICDS schemes. Some of them send children very late and do not follow the time schedules which disturbs the activities schedule in preschool.

Another challenge mentioned in the present study for preschool teacher is lack of in-service training. The study revealed that preschool teachers are not very much trained about early childhood curriculum. They need in-service training to understand early childhood curriculum, effective class practices and child behavior management. These training sessions develop their personality and they do better as a preschool teacher. Also, a preschool teacher expressed her wish to learn special education to help in case of special child. Mira Choudhry (1992) and D' Souza and Jament (2015) also describe the need of in-service training for teachers and to get training about the behavior skills and capacity building strategies. For quality early childhood education, there is an obvious need for providing to preschool teachers more education, training and professional support.

The present study intends to shed light on experience of preschool teachers and challenges in curriculum implementation are viewed from the perspective of the preschool teachers. With respect to the current study and my knowledge, this research is the first to explore the experiences and challenges in curriculum implementation in public preschools (Anganwadi centers) in Hamirpur District, Himachal Pradesh (India). Teacher's thoughts and voices are important for the improvement in early childhood

education. For this reason, in the current study teachers' voices had the opportunity to be heard through the interviews that the participants gave.

In India, ICDS services are offered through a network of 1.3 million Public preschools (Anganwadi centers) spread out across all the regions (Population of India is more than 1.3 billion). According to MWCD, every urban or rural community of 600 to 800 people has at least one Public preschool (Anganwadi center). ICDS service delivery is indeed a tall order. A commonly observed outcome of this is that among the six services, pre-school education or early childhood education is the one that is most time and effort intensive if done well, and is therefore in many cases not also given due attention. Since ECCE has all along been one of the six components of ICDS, getting only one-sixth the attention and this may well continue unless there is a conceptual shift in the design within the education sector.

While a favorable policy framework and appropriate curricular guidance is available in the country for ECCE, the reality is that there is a large gap between what is prescribed and what is practiced. In private preschools, there is an over-burdened private pre-school curriculum which is in most cases a downward extension of the primary curriculum and In Public preschools, the ICDS education curriculum is heavily diluted 'mere song and rhyme'. Preschool teachers and children in public preschools are involved in only routine activities like taking attendance, feeding the children and getting children to sing rhymes and songs. Preschool teachers are bounded due to lack of infrastructure facilities, lack of teaching-learning material, large class size, excessive workload etc. Government should provide basic facilities like availability of drinking water, spacious and clean classrooms, availability of electricity and heating supply in winters and proper teaching-learning materials suitable for children, in all preschools.

The Preschool teacher (Anganwadi worker) has to carry out other functions like health awareness, immunization, surveys etc. as well, in addition to pre-school education, making her job profile highly unrealistic. The study can strongly recommend for consultations on ICDS to make a strong plea for a second preschool teacher dedicated to ECCE. Also job satisfaction is very important in any work field. Preschool teachers in public preschools are not satisfied with their monthly salary, government should raise their salary taking into account their preschool job and duties they perform outside preschool for welfare of the community. I would like to mention here, During the Coronavirus Pandemic, Preschool teachers are leading from the front to spread awareness about how to stay healthy in rural areas. They are named as 'Corona Warriors' and going door to door to create awareness regarding coronavirus. In view of the nationwide lockdown, they are providing primary health facilities right at the door steps of pregnant women and children. Also distribute ration and other nutritional food supplements to women and children who are part of ICDS program.

It is evident from the present study that there is lack of understanding on what exactly is Early childhood education and how to plan an appropriate programs for young children, as majority of the program planners and implementers are not trained in the field of early childhood education and child development. With the help of the Ecological systems theory, it is clear that changes on a macrolevel are needed to improve the work conditions for Anganwadi workers, making their personal experiences of job satisfaction.

This evolve uncertainty in the quality and type of early childhood education to be provided to the children. The impact of this ignorance resulted in the non-accomplishment of curriculum goals and objectives, as well as the ways of planning and implementing curriculum. Therefore the study can recommend that there is need of proper teacher education, training and professional support. Effective preparation of teachers is the key to the issue of quality of ECCE, especially since its focus is on a play based, child centered methodology which requires very specialized skills and knowledge to equip the teacher to address specific contextual needs of classroom. Also they should be given training on special education so they can help in special cases.

Over the past 3 decades, some headway has been made in terms of quantitative expansion of ECCE facilities. The lack of even minimum physical infrastructure, poor and inadequate training of workers, their low salaries and workload all mitigate towards perpetuating the problem of providing poor quality services. The NCERT has recently worked out minimum standards for pre-schools in terms of space, facilities, teacher training, activities undertaken, teaching learning materials. It is hoped now that some licensing and supervisory procedures are set up at the State level and District level. Some sort of accreditation of training programs also needs to be seriously considered. Further the study can recommend encouraging teachers to prepare effective durable and creative teaching aids by allocating more time from their work schedule and using alternative materials.

CHAPTER 7: RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study aimed to investigate the experiences and challenges faced by preschool teachers in Hamirpur District, Himachal Pradesh. Since Education is the basic right for all children and Early childhood education is the base for future development and success in school and life. The strategies and suggestions underscored in this study can be useful in improving the quality of early childhood education in public preschools. Also, the findings revealed in this study proposed a valid background for further research in this area. Experiences of preschool teachers and challenges faced by preschool teachers in public preschools are almost same in all parts of India, which influence the quality of early childhood education and needs improvement. Therefore, I can recommend that, further studies may use these findings as a point of departure on exploring ECCE in other preschools in other states of India.

Also, it would be interesting for the topic of this study to be researched in a much wider population. This would give the opportunity for findings and conclusions with more generalizability. Finally, for future research, it would be interesting for a comparative study between India and a country that has better Early childhood education system, as for example Sweden. It would be interesting to see the different perspectives and practices of ECCE in these two countries in same time period.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Informed Consent Form

Dear teacher,

First of all, I really appreciate your willingness to help me with my research project and I would like to thank you for giving me some of your precious time. Taking into consideration that giving an interview can make respondents feel nervous, I want to give you some information in advance so as to make the whole process easier and you feel comfortable.

I am a student at University of Gothenburg, Sweden doing International Masters in Educational Research. I am conducting a study on 'Early childhood care and education and challenges of preschool teachers in rural Himachal Pradesh (India)'. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences and identify the challenges preschool teachers face during the implementation of curriculum and the reasons of mostly stated challenges from the perspective of preschool teachers. I would like to invite you to participate in the study. Participation in the research is voluntary and participants are at liberty to discontinue participation at any point in the study. Participants interview will be audio-recorded and then transcribed. You will be given an opportunity to review the interview transcript.

Finally, I need to inform you that any kind of information used for the project will be confidential and anonymity will be ensured for the participants and preschools.

Feel free to contact me for any questions you may have and please let me know when you are available for the interview.

Thank you once again for helping me.

Best regards,

Shalini Katoch

E-mail : guskatosh@student.gu.se

Phone : 991xxxxxxx

I have read the above and I accept my participation in the research.

Name.....

Sign.....

Date.....

Appendix 2: Interview Guide

- Q.1 What is your Qualification?
- Q.2 When did you start working in this Anganwadi (Preschool)?
- Q.3 How much is your total working experience?
- Q.4 How many children are enrolled in this Anganwadi (Preschool)?
- Q.5 How many children are in each group?
- Q.6 How many teachers are there in one Anganwadi (Preschool)?
- Q.7 What is the family background of the children studying in this Anganwadi (Preschool)?
- Q.8 Do children dropout from Anganwadi (Preschool) frequently? How many dropouts in a year approximately?
- Q.9 Why children dropout from Anganwadi (Preschool)?
- Q.10 What is the daily routine of the children in this Anganwadi (Preschool)?
- Q.11 What do you know about Curriculum?
- Q.12 Are you involved in curriculum planning?
- Q.13 Do you follow the curriculum in your Anganwadi (Preschool)?
- Q.14 What challenges do you face at Anganwadi (Preschool) level while implementing curriculum?
- Q.15 Are there any problems you face in your day to day work as Anganwadi worker (Preschool teacher) that you are unsatisfied with?
- Q.16 Do you get the required support from helper or supervisors?
- Q.17 Do you get Parents support or Parents involvement in Early childhood care and education?
- Q.18 Did you attend in-service training sessions for Anganwadi workers (Preschool Teachers)?
- Q.19 What is the salary of Anganwadi worker (Preschool teacher) and Are you satisfied with this salary?
- Q.20 Do you as Anganwadi worker (Preschool teacher) take any initiative in order to improve the level of education?
- Q.21 What are your thoughts to change or improve in Early childhood care and education in India?