



Traditional Roots and Emerging Practices: A Study of Anganwadi Curriculum Implementation in Kerala and Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

The Anganwadi curriculum, under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) program, is based on well-established values of overall child development and seeks to impact children aged 3-6 years through play and activity-based learning. The effective implementation of the curriculum at the grassroots level is essential for ensuring quality Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). With a focus on the perspective of established roots and new developments, the current study proposes a quantitative method to understand the implementation of the Anganwadi curriculum in the states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. A total of 30 Anganwadi workers in each state were chosen for the study, using the purposive sampling technique. The data was collected using a semi-structured interview and classroom observation schedule, and the data was analyzed using descriptive analysis. The results show that the Anganwadi centers in both states are following the national framework of ECCE and are committed to child-centered and play-based pedagogy. Though some major differences were noticed in the basic principles of curriculum implementation, the emergence of technology-based practices like digital learning materials, mobile applications, and audiovisual materials is more evident in Kerala. In both settings, the Anganwadi workers have been pointing out some common difficulties in terms of workload, infrastructural issues, and time constraints. The need to acknowledge both the continuity of traditional approaches to ECCE and the growing inclusion of new approaches is emphasized. Improving professional support, infrastructure, and technology use can further help in curriculum implementation in Anganwadi centers.

Keywords: **anganwadi curriculum, ECCE, curriculum implementation, thematic analysis, Kerala, Tamil Nadu**

Introduction

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is recognized as a foundational stage that has a great impact on children's cognitive, social, emotional, linguistic, and physical development. The early childhood years have a critical role to play in shaping the learning path, socialization, and overall well-being of children. In India, the ECCE services are mainly provided through the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme through

Anganwadi centers, which are the main institutional setup for early childhood education, nutrition, and health services.

The Anganwadi curriculum, which is in line with the National ECCE Framework, focuses on play and activity-based learning, experiential and hands-on learning, early language and communication development, socio-emotional development, and health and nutrition awareness. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 also reiterates the



importance of ECCE by recognizing it as the foundation of the learning continuum and promoting developmentally appropriate, joyful, and discovery-based approaches for children aged 3-8 years. NEP 2020 also recognizes the significance of strengthening the Anganwadi centers through enhanced training, curriculum alignment, and the integration of innovative practices.

However, despite the existence of a common national framework and policy, the implementation of the curriculum differs from state to state based on the administrative system, training process, resource availability, monitoring process, and contextual realities (Rao, 2013). Kerala and Tamil Nadu are two states that are well-known for their long-standing social welfare programs and human development efforts, thus providing a significant context for understanding the implementation of the Anganwadi curriculum. Rather than taking an effectiveness or comparison-based approach, the current study takes a descriptive analytical approach to understand the process of implementation of the curriculum through the experiences of Anganwadi workers and supervisors.

Need and Significance of the Study

It is imperative to comprehend the implementation of the curriculum at the Anganwadi level to enhance the quality and equity of ECCE delivery. Although national policies and curriculum documents outline the necessary guidelines, effective implementation largely relies on the frontline functionaries, specifically Anganwadi workers, and the support structures provided to them (Sharma, 2018). NEP 2020 emphasizes the importance of continuous professional development, supportive supervision, and context-specific implementation strategies to ensure that the policy vision is translated into meaningful classroom practices.

The discussion on the implementation of the curriculum in Kerala and Tamil Nadu helps to tap into the context-specific practices, adaptations, and trends, including the increasing trend of technology-mediated practices in ECCE delivery. This helps to comprehend the Anganwadi workers' experience in

implementing the curricular demands, infrastructure, workload, and community context. This study adds to the existing knowledge base on ECCE by providing practitioner-level insights to inform training programs, supervisory structures, and evidence-based policy refinement aligned with the vision of NEP 2020.

Objectives of the Study

The study was undertaken with the following objectives:

- To explore how the Anganwadi curriculum is implemented in selected centres of Kerala and Tamil Nadu.
- To identify key aspects related to teaching-learning practices, resource use, and supervision.
- To understand the emerging use of technology in Anganwadi centres.
- To examine the role of training and institutional support in curriculum implementation.

Methodology

Research Design: The study employed a quantitative design to gain an in-depth understanding of curriculum implementation practices.

Sample: The sample consisted of 30 Anganwadi Workers each from Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation from rural and semi-urban Anganwadi centres.

Tools for Data Collection: Semi-structured interview schedule for Anganwadi workers and Classroom observation schedule aligned with ECCE curriculum components were employed for the data collection.

Data Analysis: Descriptive analysis was employed for the data analysis.

Analysis and Interpretation

The following aspects of curriculum implementation in Anganwadis were selected for the analysis.

Understanding of the Anganwadi Curriculum

Realizing the importance of the preschool years, the Thematic Calendar (Government of Kerala, 2014-15)



was introduced by the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) to bring about the overall development of children. The curriculum is designed with the fundamental ideas of Malayalam, Mathematics, Environmental Studies, and General Knowledge in thirty themes. Two or three themes are introduced to the children every month through activity-oriented methods for children aged 3+, 4+, and 5+ years (Sanam & Gafoor, 2021). Tamil Nadu has also been introducing a curriculum in Anganwadis with different themes, which are delivered to the children depending on the context. The government provides handbooks on different themes to teachers every month.

80% Anganwadi workers in both states showed a clear understanding of the curriculum's emphasis on the overall development of children, play activities, and routine activities. They also highlighted the significance of age-appropriate practices.

Classroom Practices and Learning Experiences

The classroom observations showed that storytelling, rhymes, free play, and activity-based learning are practiced in both Kerala and Tamil Nadu. 66.67% of the workers felt that they have many limitations in implementing the curriculum, although they perform many adapting activities according to the interests of the children and the culture of the place, which is a constructivist approach in ECCE.

Availability of Learning Materials

Most of the anganwadi teachers in Kerala are satisfied with the availability of learning materials. But only 50% of the anganwadi teachers in Tamilnadu are satisfied with the availability of logistic supplies, especially the necessary aids for teaching themes.

Use of Teaching-Learning Materials and Technology

One of the important aspects that came out from the data was the increased use of technology in the Kerala Anganwadi centers. The workers utilized digital content, smart TVs, and audio-visual aids to facilitate storytelling, rhymes, and concept building.

They considered technology as an aid and not a substitute for play-based learning. In Tamil Nadu, although the use of traditional teaching-learning materials was widespread, the use of technology was less and dependent on its availability.

Training and Professional Support

43.33% of the selected participants from Tamil Nadu emphasized the importance of induction and refresher courses in supporting the implementation of the curriculum. However, the majority of the Kerala Anganwadi Teachers (85%) felt that regular cluster meetings and on-site support had a positive impact on their teaching practices. However, workers felt the need for more practical training sessions (Singh & Gupta, 2020).

Challenges in Curriculum Implementation

Anganwadi workers from both states reported challenges such as increased administrative workload, time constraints, and inadequate infrastructure. They acknowledged these issues and emphasized the need for systemic support to enable workers to focus more on pedagogical aspects.

Conclusion

Analysis of data on the implementation of the Anganwadi curriculum in Kerala and Tamil Nadu shows that both states show strong compliance with the fundamental principles of ECCE as enunciated in the National ECCE Framework and reiterated in NEP 2020. Play activities, routine activities, and the inclusion of health and nutrition components are found to be generally prevalent in Anganwadi centers in both settings. The analysis shows that there are some differences in certain aspects of the implementation of the curriculum; however, it also points out that there is a relatively higher level of integration of technology-based practices in Kerala, which helps to improve child engagement, teaching support, and documentation processes.

At the same time, Anganwadi workers and supervisors in both states point out that they face common challenges in terms of workload, infrastructural constraints, and the availability of



age-appropriate learning materials. These factors tend to affect the extent and quality of implementation of the curriculum. In keeping with NEP 2020, the analysis suggests that improving professional development opportunities, ensuring context-sensitive support systems, and facilitating age-appropriate technology integration can further improve the quality of ECCE implementation in Anganwadi centers.

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