

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE.

Trends in Early Childhood Education (ECE) seem to be moving in two directions at once. On one hand there is an increased recognition of the need to base the ECE programs on indigenous knowledge (Cannella, 1997, Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999, Hatch, 1995), and on the other hand, the legacy of colonialism in countries like India and South Africa continues to discourage the inclusion of indigenous knowledge and activities in ECE programs (Ezeife, 2001; Goduka, 1997; Gonzales, 1999, Kumar, 1991; Serpell, 1993; Swadner, Kabiru & Njengs, 1997)

It seems that despite the efforts to recognize local cultures as valuable resources for planning appropriate education programs, early childhood programs are taking their cues from imported models that reinforce value shifts towards the individualistic, production oriented cultures of West (Myers, 1992). In sum, diverse influences come together in education settings as evidence of change in societies in transition. While it is agreed that 'the school' should adapt to the cultural conditions of the child, it is more likely that hegemonic patterns e.g Western curriculum materials and teaching methods, will persist and become even more entrenched with increased globalization. Thus it becomes necessary to study ECE programs in a context especially for societies that are undergoing transition.

In this light many ethnographic studies have been done in order to understand the cultural nuances interplaying in a context. A study done by Viruru (2001) brings to light the fact that Western industrialized societies have a high degree of influence on societies that are undergoing a rapid social change. Similarly a study done by Anandalakshmy (1998) captured the nuances of social contexts in understanding the child's social construction of knowledge. Thus, keeping in view the Indian scenario where varied cultural diversities operate, comprehensive and holistic understanding

is possible, if one grasp the ideas, interest, operating in the context. Hence, ethnographic approach was chosen for this study because it has the potential to provide a descriptive, interpretive, evaluative and potentially authentic vision of society (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995) that may help to get better understanding of the context. Thus helping us to evolve policies and plan ECE programs suiting to the needs of our Indian context. This may help us to determine ways that communities, parents and ECE educators can better prepare our children for the realities of schooling, while preserving the integrity of local norms and values.

The literature on Early Childhood Education highlights some interesting aspects:

Culture and Development

Culture is ordinary in every society and in every mind (Williams, 1989)”

“The culture is a conventional way in which people think and act, it is the usual way of finding solutions to the problems of challenges produced by the natural and the social environment” (Anandalakshmy, 1998).

Culture means terrain of practices, representations, languages and customs of specific society. It also means the contradictory forms of common sense which have taken root in and helped to shape popular life (Hall, 1996c:439). Culture is concerned with questions of shared meanings i.e. the various ways we make sense of the world. Cultural variations are expected to influence not the operations themselves, but the situations in which they are applied..

Thus it is not possible to make global inferences about all the children based on the researches taking place in one culture. This stands in the face of the evidence “that alternative patterns of care based on different moral and practical considerations can constitute normal patterns of development that had not been imagined in developmental theories” (LeVine, 2004, p. 163). This is consistent with the finding that experienced Sub-Saharan mothers understanding of infant care and development in ways that contrast “sharply

with expert knowledge in the child development field, (Le Vine, 2004, p163), a point that underscores the value of culturally appropriate approaches. It is also supported by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological model (1979), where he defined development as lasting change in the ways which a person perceives and deals with the environment therefore a need to study development with a context. Bronfenbrenner (1986) model examined the influence of external environments on the functioning of children and families as a context of human development. His approach recognized that children's learning and development is rooted not just in single setting like school and home but is also influenced by interactions between the settings. Thus human development occurs in cultural context. It is potentially multidirectional and necessarily contextualized. Emphasizing on the same, Sinha (1993) stressed that socialization processes should be content/culture specific to the community.

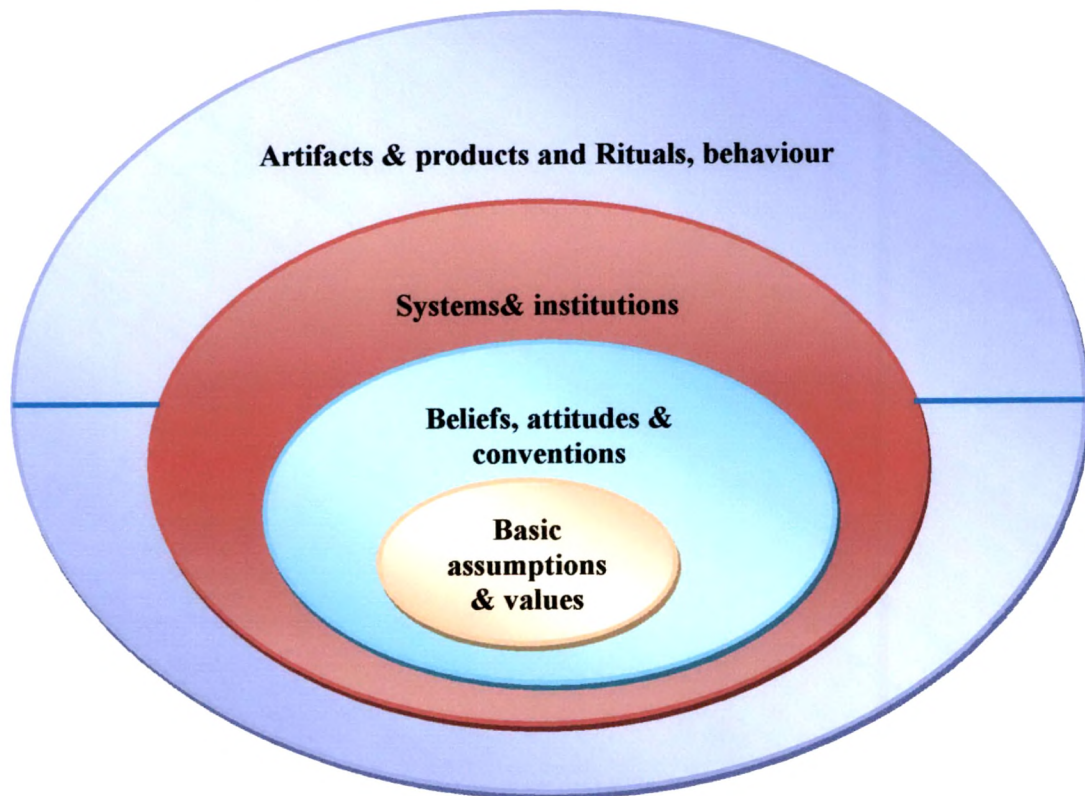
It is seen that cultural groups in every society have their own set of values, beliefs and practices, which are reflected in the socialization of their children also. Therefore these variations are visible in socialization of their children also. For instance in West the notion of giving independence to children starts very early in life but it does not hold true in Indian context, where the acceptance of norms by the children is valued more, though it may inculcate the sense of dependency (Kakar, 1978), but this is how the children are brought up. It reflects that the varied child rearing models prevail across the globe and they are different in their own ways. "Harkness and Super" (1992) developed the term "Parental Ethno-theories" to explain these differences. *"Parental Ethno-theories- are often implicit and reflect cultural beliefs about children's development and models of child rearing valued by the society in which the child is being raised (Harkness and Super, 1992, Rosenthal & Roe-Strier-2001).*

A child grows and develops not in a vacuum but in a community, a culture and a nation. It is near impossible to identify one "homogeneous culture" then how

it is possible to produce “Universal Child” or make inferences about “**The Child**” based on researches carried out in one cultural setting and ignoring the importance of other cultures. Therefore Cultural context should be taken into account so that we can characterize how people behave in their everyday lives, not just a sterile laboratory environment.

Spencer- Oatey (2000) proposed a model that highlighted that the culture is manifested at different layers.

Manifestation of Culture at Different Layers



Source: Adapted from G. Hofstede, *Cultures and organizations*, and F. Trompenaars and C. Hampden- Turner, *Riding the Waves of Culture*

Figure 1

These layers range from inner core basic assumptions and values, through outer core attitudes, beliefs and conventions to surface level behavioural manifestations where 'beliefs, attitudes and conventions' influence another layer, consisting of 'systems and institutions', which in turn are encircled by a split outer layer of culture. Thus, it is possible to describe culture as a shared set of basic assumptions and values, with resultant behavioural norms, attitudes and beliefs which manifest themselves in systems and institutions as well as behavioural patterns and non-behavioural items. There are various levels to culture, ranging from the easily observable outer layers (such as behavioural conventions) to the increasingly more difficult to grasp inner layers (such as assumptions and values). Thus culture shared among members of one group or society has an interpretative function for the members of that group. Hence the socialization goals and strategies of members of that group vary according to the characteristic of the particular culture. Based on the model it could be summed up that different cultural groups have their own beliefs, norms and values that are unique in their own ways. Therefore the cultural groups whether western or non-western, whose members are modally, more differentiated or less differentiated cannot be pegged as being at a higher or lower level of development, compared to each other.

Psychological Construction of Childhood.

Kessen (1981) suggested that different human cultures have different notions of childhood at different point in time. He further suggested the conceptions of childhood varied across cultures and across times so had methods of studying children.

Parent's belief systems are related both to more general cultural belief systems and to the particular experiences of raising individual children in a specific time and place. Practices index, cultural meaning systems that shape the agenda of child development in any given context, and this agenda can be expected to have important consequences for what and how children

learn. Though there are undoubted cross- cultural continuities and indeed universals in educational thinking and practice, no decision or action which one observes in a particular classroom, and no educational policy, can be properly understood except by reference to the web of inherited ideas and values, region or one group, distinct from other.

Throughout human history, every culture has taught its young, and has made great effort to train and prepare the next generation. The primary focus of basic education is on developing person. In every society, it is important that the education to be designed to help them understand themselves and their world. The imported system of education may not incorporate the cultural and economic realities of that society thus failing to connect appropriately with their everyday cognitions and life journeys. (Serpell, 1993). To throw light on the same, a study done by Bame Nsamenang, (1992) in Sub Saharan Africa is a good example. The vital statistics pointed to the failure of educational and developmental efforts in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Western type of education was introduced in Africa as a 'modernization' tool to assist Africa to catch up with the 'progress' and civilization however education ignored and undermine the African patterns of child development, economic development and participatory education. Thus education imparted to children was of limited relevance as it failed to mesh with the local realities and needs of that society. Therefore it is important that in country like ours "We must find our own unique indigenous strategies to meet multifarious demands esp. for our children whose number is equal to entire population of dozen of countries of the world".

Countries like Indian and Sub-Saharan Africa, which are immense, not only in terms of their size but more with respect to their cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity, it becomes even more important to consider the cultural realities of these societies before adopting the curriculum which is mainly taken from West, where western ways of viewing the world are imposed upon diverse group of people, including young children (Viruru,2001). It becomes

absolutely essential to acknowledge variation in the extent to which home environments provide children with the materials and experiences that are broadly considered desirable for success in schools since children's adaptation to the norms and expectations of school environments can be affected by the culturally determined experiences to which they have been exposed at home.

Global Perspective on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

The term ECCE refers to a philosophy of providing opportunities/ experiences to young children up to the age of 8 years of age in order to promote their holistic development (National Curriculum Framework (NCF)-2005). The first 0-8 years of child's life are globally acknowledged to be the most critical years for lifelong development, since the pace of development during these years is extremely rapid.

In every country, developed or developing, the resources and abilities of it societies are constantly being challenged in the search for strategies to meet the needs of children. Globally, many events have contributed to the realization of the significance of the early childhood years for a country's economic progress. The beginnings of this change started with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. For the first time, there was a set of international standards and measures intended to protect and promote the well-being of children in society. The second major event that drew attention to the issue was the creation of the Human Development Index, a summary measure of human development, by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1990. It measures the achievements of countries on three basic dimensions of human development:

- (1) Long and healthy life;
- (2) Knowledge and
- (3) Decent standard of living

It includes indicators that specifically relate to children, namely, mortality, education, and child labour. The third important event in the international arena was the World Conference on Education For All (EFA), held in Jomtien Thailand in 1990, where a global commitment to education was made in a document beginning with the famous words '*Learning begins at birth*'. In addition, the World Education Forum, held in Dakar, Senegal in April 2000, reiterated the importance of ECCE through the involvement of the state, the family, and the community. It may be said that these Global events and trends specifically have influenced the trends in ECCE in many countries especially in third world countries where "early childhood care and education is becoming top most priority.

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Indian Context

- ***Evolutionary Change***

The Indian society runs the whole evolutionary gamut from nomadic life, peasant subsistence, mechanised agricultural economy and middle class bourgeoisie to upper class modernised elite. Traditionally in India the early childhood years (from prenatal to five years) are considered to lay the foundation for inculcation of basic values and social skills in children. It is believed that these values are imbibed from the family as the '*sanskaras*' and the scriptures advocate an attitude of *lalayat* or indulgence as the desirable mode of child rearing at this stage. Consequently, in the past, much of the early care and education of the child was informal, within the family and largely through grandmothers' caring practices, stories 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 for children and changing social realities.

Growing urbanization and increase in women's participation in the work force across the country among all socio-economic groups has resulted sea change in social structures and practices. A significant indicator of this change has been the emergence of the nuclear family, a change which has converted child rearing from what was traditionally a shared responsibility into the sole responsibility of the young parents. This responsibility is often further delegated. While in the higher income brackets children are often left with paid surrogate care givers, in the lower socio-economic communities the responsibility of care giving get loaded on to the older sisters, thus keeping them often out of school and robbing them of their childhood. As a result, given the constant pressures and challenges of day -to day- existence in today's complex society, the possibilities of "informal early care and education' for the young child at home is becoming less of a reality. It was this changing social context, over the years, which laid the seeds for the introduction of the concept of Early Child hood Care and Education (ECCE) in our country.

- ***The Culturally Determined Attitudes to ECCE***

In India general system of education is formalised. There are between ten and twelve standard classes, beginning with five years old and continuing to high school. Instructional methods vary from rote method with systematic examination to the project method and internal evaluation, with the more progressive methods being restricted to the urban elite. Providing educational facilities to young child never was, and still not, the responsibility of the government.

Learning is seen as incidental in the early years. There is no strong belief that the young child should be offered a stimulating learning environment. Parents look for short term and not long term gratification. In Indian scenario the preschooler in a pre-primary – if a child is sent to a nearby pre-primary school, it is usually justified by the physical care offered. To the parents, a school is a

place for reading, writing and counting and they are unable to understand the lack of deliberate formal education in the preschool. Parents make hardly any conscious effort to stimulate the child's intellectual development. Traditional parents often have little perception of the benefits of a development program. (Khalakdina, 1974). Early education is seldom valued and even if children are in part-time group care, parents expect only formal learning and physical care as a prerequisite to formal school entrance (Seshamma, 1967, Gadh and Muthayya). Although non-formal approach is endorsed by experts as the best for children, it has little support in practice. In majority of the pre-schools, the main emphasis is on reading, writing and arithmetic (3R's), there is predominant use of English without realizing the different linguistic background of children and last but not the least, more emphasis is given on drill and practice methods of instruction (Khalakdina, 1974). In a preschool program parents expect their children to achieve formal learning, whereas field's workers stress upon conceptual development. However indigenous paraprofessionals are more knowledgeable concerning attitude to community residents than professionals and consequently have to arrive at a compromise between the goals they are expected to achieve and those they actually do achieve in the field.

In the competitive context of Indian school, majority of parents opt to provide their children with early head start for their formal instruction. The parents show preference for English language irrespective of their class or background. Despite what educational leaders suggest and what the government officially encourage, popular wisdom in middle class dictates that one should get one's children into English Medium school as soon as possible. There is growing realization that the service is paid for, it must be better than the one from government infrastructure. Free services, by their nature, are often not of good quality. Therefore, a parent soon realizes that a fee-charging preschool will help his/her child gets into a good primary school. But, it is precisely here that the parent has no option but to choose from what is available and what is

available is frequently of indifferent quality. Some of these pre-schools are more of 'teaching shops' that do not respect/regard the developmental norms of children. A survey of preschools in Delhi showed that the schools were real downward extension of primary school programming into preschools (Kaul, 1989)

- *Changing concepts in ECCE*

The early pioneers of the ECCE movement in India were Gijubhai Badheka and Tarabai Modak among others, who under the influence of Madame Montessori were influenced by not only the ideas of Montessori, Froebel and other Western thinkers, but equally importantly, by those of the great Indian thinkers of that period- Gandhi, Tagore, Aurobindo, and later, Zakir Husain. In 1946 Madame Montessori met Mahatma Gandhi, who asked her to 'indianize' her method to make preschool education available to a large majority of children. That was the beginning of 'pre basic education' in the rural parts of the country, largely through voluntary effort. Till India became independent of the British rule in 1947, the need, for ECCE particularly in the form of preschool education, was primarily fulfilled by voluntary agencies and private institutions.

The first government initiative in the area of ECCE was the setting up of a Central Social Welfare board in 1953, which started a grant –in –aid scheme for voluntary agencies. Over this half century, however, the concept of early childhood care and education integrating health, nutrition and education aspects, has taken primacy. India has in this context, been able to put together a fairly supportive policy framework and has launched some major initiatives for children for this stage of development.

During the post-independence period, the movement for the education of young children drew great support from the private and voluntary sectors. Apart from its educational values, the 'welfare' dimension also gained recognition. The

country's Five Year National Plans, while paying lip service to the need and importance of early childhood education suggested no definite plan or policy in this behalf nor did it make substantial allocations for promoting this field. Many committees and commissions were appointed; both in the education and social welfare sectors, but no systematic efforts were made for the implementation of the recommendations of these committees. It was in the Fifth Five Year Plan that the provision of an integrated package of essential services to young children and pregnant and lactating mothers was conceived and the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) was launched in 1975 with 66 pilot projects. The ICDS is broadly conceived as an integrated intervention strategy for the holistic development of the young child in the wider context of the family and the larger social group in which the child lives. Early Childhood Care and Education ECCE found its due place in the policy framework in India way back in 1986, when an exclusive chapter of the National Policy on Education was devoted to it. ECCE was defined, in the policy, as an integrated and holistic concept of care and education of children between 0-6 years from socially disadvantaged groups. It was a major breakthrough for the concept of ECCE

In **Seventh and Eight Plans**, there have been four successful trends. First, inter-linkages with world events saw a number of global policies ratified by Indian Government. Second, dialogue between the State and Voluntary sectors in collaborative interface (Quereshi, 1995). Third, the outside parameters of institutional efforts, aspects of ECCE began to appear on electronic media (Unnikrishnan and Bajpai, 1996). Fourth, documented demographic indices have paved the way for concerns about sex ratio and work contribution of women. The **Ninth Five-Year Plan** reaffirmed the priority accorded to the development of early childhood services as an investment in human resource development and stressed the involvement of women's groups in the management of ECCE programmes, particularly under the decentralised Panchayati Raj System (PRS). The **Tenth Five-Year Plan** adopted a rights-

based approach to child development, with major strategies aimed at reaching all young children in the country to ensure their 'survival', 'protection', and 'development'.

Though ECE has become the National Priority but recent statistics issued by UNICEF, 2005 in the "State of World's Children" revealed sorry facts for third world countries with main emphasis on India where- *Out of 140 million children who have never been to school in developing countries, 33 million are in India and out of 90 million who are underweight India accounts for 27 million.* The report derives home the need to think seriously the action plan for ECE programs in India. In the process of translating policy to action, several committees, task forces and study groups have been formed to make recommendations in this regard. However, inspite of this encouraging trend a gap continues to exist in the targets specified by the policies and programmes and the targets achieved till now (Mohite, 1993). Thus the efforts of government, educators and communities need to be channelised in this direction to fill these gaps. The need is to evolve ECE programs based on philosophical and cultural reality of Indian setting, placing value on indigenous knowledge and cultural specific assumptions. Thus there is a need to generate indigenous and to contextualize methodologies to make program more effective (Saraswathi, T.S.1993).

ECCE Services Available in India

India has 28 states and 7 union territories and administrative, legislative and fiscal powers are distributed between the central and state governments. ECCE provisions in India are available through three distinct channels -- public, private and non-governmental. In practice, however, ECCE programs for children have assumed various nomenclatures and definitions, depending on the priority a particular program serves. There is ECE/preschool education programs which are focused only on preschool education for 3-6 year olds (for

example nurseries, kindergartens, preparatory schools, pre primary etc.). These do not have any health or nutrition component, are often part of primary schools and generally in the non-governmental or private sector. The other category is of the more holistic programs of ECCE or Early Childhood Development (ECD) which address the all round development of the child and adopts a life cycle approach, as in the ICDS, which targets in addition to the child, the pregnant and lactating mothers and even adolescent girls for formal schooling. The different programs covered under ECCE in India are ICDS, Balwadis, Private Nurseries/Kindergartens, ECE centers run by NGO's under Grant-in-aid scheme, State run preschool centers, Day care centers, Crèches run by govt. agencies/ Private agencies. The programs sponsored by Public, government are largely directed towards the disadvantaged communities, particularly those residing in rural areas. While there are as many as 130 programs under the auspices of various departments and ministries, which target the development of children specifically 0-6 years, the most prominent one is ICDS:

- ***Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)***

As a sequel to the adoption of the National Policy for Children, Government of India initiated the Integrated Child Development Services Scheme (ICDS), on pilot basis in 1975. ICDS is currently the biggest program for early childhood development. It is probably the largest scheme in the world for pre-school children, reaching 18.6 million children and 2.7 million mothers (Muralidharan & Kaul 1993), that is, approximately the total of under-5 children in the United States. ICDS Scheme was conceived in 1975 with an integrated delivery package of early childhood services so that their synergistic effect can be taken full advantage. The Scheme aims to improve the nutritional and health status of vulnerable groups including pre-school children, pregnant women and nursing mothers through providing a package of services including supplementary nutrition, pre-school education, immunization, health check-up, referral services and nutrition & health education. In addition, the Scheme envisages

effective convergence of inter-sectoral services in the Anganwadi centres. Integrated and inter-sectoral nature, coordination mechanism, community involvement, training infrastructure and monitoring system make ICDS a unique program. The integrated package of services, of which non-formal pre-school education is a component, is delivered through the Anganwadi (courtyard school) by an Anganwadi worker who is picked from the community and given three-month training. It has demonstrated that even a modest investment in child development goes a long way in developing human resources.

Some ICDS centers, which are typically for 3-6year olds for preschool education, have been extended to include crèches for the younger children. But the number of these crèches is insignificant. In fact a study conducted by National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD) (2003) found that these crèches are for the most part custodial in nature and tend to miss out on the early stimulation and psycho social interaction that is important for the under 3's.

Over the last three decades, this scheme has emerged as a major national strategy for promoting holistic early childhood development in the country. Beginning with 33 Projects in 1975, ICDS has now expanded to 6113 sanctioned projects in all 35 States/ union territories in the country. Each Project covers a Block, which is the smallest administrative unit. Of these, 5635 are currently operational with 7,44,887 Anganwadi Centers as on 30th Sep, 2005. Though the program mainly covers rural and tribal population, however, it is also operational in urban areas through 523 ICDS projects to cater to the population living in slums and underdeveloped areas. Though the share of urban population in the country is approximately 27.78 per cent, however, only about 13 per cent of all ICDS projects are located in urban areas thereby providing services to the urban poor.

The Government of India has identified eight flagship program in which ICDS figures as one of them. In view of the importance of the program, the Government of India had made almost two times increase in budget estimate for ICDS in financial year 2005- 06. **The total budgetary allocation for ICDS in the year 2008, has been increased from Rs. 408.70 million to Rs 4761 million for the financial year 2007-08.** The universalisation of this program has been identified as the basic strategy to achieve the first goal of ECCE under EFA, as envisaged in the Dakar conference held in April, 2000.

Some Issues, Concerns and Challenges for India in terms of ECCE

However, there has been slow progress in making Early Childhood Education available to all children. This is evident from the fact that from 15 percent of the 3-6 year olds enrolled in 1989-90 the percentage improved to only 19.6 percent in 1996-97 and is currently 20.95 percent only.(Source: Lok Sabha, Starred Questions, 2004,reported in www.indiastat.com). Though, there are no figures available on unrecognized private sector initiatives (including family day care homes, nurseries, kindergartens and pre-primary classes), which are significant, the estimated number of children enrolled is about 10 million (National Focus Group, 2005). It needs to be acknowledged that in a country as diverse and large as India, achieving universal access is not an easy task. Before we delve into any description of the provisions and programs for young children in India, it would be important to consider the major challenge before the country in terms of the 'child population'. Thus sheer magnitude in terms of numbers is a major dimension of the problem (Rao & Sharma, 2002). As per the Census of India, (2001), children in the age group of birth to 6 years number around 158 million which is approximately 15.2 per cent of the total population of the country. The Technical group on Population Projections has further projected that in 2016, , pre school education services will need to be provided for 72 million children by 2016. Despite the regular expansion of the ICDS, the coverage of children for ECCE is still as low as 20 percent. This is

an issue of both inadequate access and inadequate quality of service delivery. With ICDS continuing to be the main vehicle for ECCE, the Government of India is proposing to expand the service further and universalize it within the next few years. While this is a welcome proposal, the risk is of expanding too fast and compromising on quality. Also, it may amount to ‘doing more of the same thing’ which has shown benefits to an extent but not commensurate with the investments made. A recent study on nutrition has indicated three mismatches in implementation of ICDS, which may need to be addressed. These pertain to mismatch of services, beneficiaries and geographical areas. (World Bank, 2005). The service mis-match refers to issue of too much focus on providing food security through supplementary nutrition rather than on improving child-care behaviors and educating parents, which would have more sustained impact. The second mis-match relates to inadequate focus on the very young children i.e. children below 3 years who can potentially benefit most from the ICDS interventions. The third mismatch relates to the need for better targeting of geographical areas, castes and communities that need the interventions the most. The World Bank, (2004) have identified some of the areas that require strengthening. These are targeting of the poorest communities, contextualizing of the program design, rationalizing of the workload of the service provider, promoting utilization through improvement in quality of service delivery, greater accountability and outcome focus and closer convergence with allied sectors.

Though, we are presently in a state of disorder. Despite several positive and well defined goals, we have not been successful in resolving these issues which are constraints in turning our dreams related to ECCE into reality. But in the years to come our vision for ECCE in India will expand and our hard work and perseverance will surely pay.

Role of Pre-school Education

The first 6 to 8 years of a child's life are globally acknowledged to be the most critical years for lifelong development since the pace of development in these years is extremely rapid. This stage in life is also important as a foundation for the inculcation of social values and personal habits, which are known to last a lifetime. The rapid development of the brain during the Early Years is crucial and newborns who receive proper care and stimulation will show school readiness and inclination towards learning. It is the crucial importance of investing in these early years to ensure an enabling environment for every child, and thereby a sound foundation for life, which is not only the right of every child but which will also impact, in the long term, the quality of human capital available to a country. Therefore it is essential that good ECCE programs should be available for the population and these initiatives will improve the overall quality of the population.

Research on Early Learning has indicated that:

1. Early experiences have lasting effects.
2. Early childhood is the critical period of Neurological development.
3. All children enter early childhood with active minds.
4. Early childhood is the critical period in Social development.
(Katz.1997).
5. Children exposed to preschool activities are at an advantage in language and intellectual development and learning readiness in comparison to their counterparts without the exposure. (Muralidharan & Banerji1974, 75).

The researches have shown a positive co-relation between preschool education and its effect on the child's development and learning.

One question that is currently of great interest to parents, educators and policy makers is the question of Readiness. Readiness is defined as the preparedness for learning that is located within the child (Graue, 1993).

It has long been recognized that children's readiness to begin their formal schooling influences their achievement and attitude throughout their academic careers. In recent times, readiness for schools is starting to be used as a benchmark to measure the degree to which early childhood policies, programs and parental support have been effective at the community, as well as at the societal level (Janus&offord, 2000).

How the needs of all children can be best met and educational success ensured, is one of the most critical issues in current research in early childhood education. In 1995, National Association of Education for Young Children (NAEYC, 1995) had described three prerequisites for universal school readiness, given as below:

1. Addressing the inequities in early life experiences so that all the children have access to the opportunities that promote school success.
2. Recognizing and supporting individual differences among children including linguistic and cultural differences.
3. Establishing reasonable and appropriate expectations of children's capabilities upon school entry.

Pre-school education not only play a significant role in making children ready for schools but also serve as an important foundation for subsequent literacy development (Neuman & Dickinson, 2001; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001). The degree to which children acquire requisite literacy skills is known to be a strong predictor of future academic success and has long-term social and economic implications for families and societies (Snow,Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Werner & Smith, 1992)

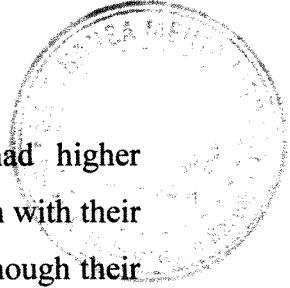
Longitudinal studies some of which have followed preschool graduates all the way into adulthood have identified many positive and significant relationships between preschool participation and task-related, social, and attitudinal outcomes. According to the researchers and reviewers, preschool graduates outshine non participants in the following areas:

Fewer referrals for remedial classes or special education. Preschool graduates were more likely to remain in regular classes throughout their public school years; were less likely to repeat grades, had fewer failing grades throughout their school years; showed greater social and emotional maturity; received higher teacher ratings on measures of social and emotional maturity; completed high school in greater numbers; had greater academic motivation, on-task behavior, capacity for independent work, and time spent on homework; showed lower incidence of absenteeism/detentions; had better attitudes toward school; had better self-esteem, greater internal locus of control. Older students who had attended preschool as small children had lower incidences of these behaviors, according to self reports; they showed more sports participation; showed higher future aspirations and more postsecondary education

Once out of school, young people who had attended preschool continued to make a better showing in life than those who had not. They were found to have:

- Higher employment rates and better earnings and, correspondingly, a lower incidence of dependence on welfare; fewer arrests and antisocial acts; better relationships with family members, a higher incidence of volunteer work, and more frequent church attendance.

In terms of attitudes of parents whose children attended preschool with those whose children did not. These researchers found that parents of preschool graduates:



➤ Had better attitudes towards their children's schooling; had higher expectations for their children's learning and greater satisfaction with their children's achievements; contacted teachers more often, even though their children had fewer school problems than children who had not been to preschool. (Berrueta-Clement, et al. 1985; Consortium for Longitudinal Studies 1983; Gray, et al. 1982; Illinois State Board of Education 1985; Irvine 1982; Lazar and Darlington 1982; Schweinhart 1985; Stallings and Stipek 1986). (Illinois State Board of Education 1985; Lazar and Darlington 1982; Featherstone 1986)

Researches in India have also provided evidence of the short and long term benefits of good ECCE programs, particularly for children from underprivileged sector. Researches done by Kaul et. al.,(1994) in the Indian context documented the effects of early childhood development programmes on the academic and social preparedness of children for formal schooling. The results indicated a difference of 15–20% in retention and achievement levels of children who attended early childhood development programmes.

A longitudinal cum cross sectional study was conducted by **NCERT (1993)** in eight states (Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Goa), who had come directly to Grade I, but with no exposure to Early Childhood Education. The results clearly indicated better rates of retention in children with ECE experience as compared to those who have sought direct entry in Grade 1.

In the year,1992 NIPCCD, conducted a study for evaluation of ICDS programme. The results indicated that 89 per cent of children with ECE experience were found to be continuing their education in primary school as compared to 60 and 67.7 per cent without ECE in both ICDS and non-ICDS areas. Further, lesser numbers of children with ECE were found to be in the

never enrolled category. Thus, the findings clearly indicated the positive role played by ECE in promoting enrolment, reduction in drop out and greater retention in primary schooling. Two other micro level studies (NIPCCD 1985; 1987) also indicated a positive impact of participation in the ICDS program in language and cognitive development scores, as compared to a control group, and also indicated better performance in first and second grades of primary school.

The various studies done both at National and International levels reach to a same consensus that early experiences have significant impact on children. ECCE has a pivotal role to play in nurturing children's learning and developmental needs, especially for underprivileged. It seems that good early experiences can set in motion a chain of events that pervades the child's life through high school and beyond, increasing the quality of his/her life experiences along the way. One such model is offered by Berrueta-Clement, et.al. (1985) summarized his workings as follows:

...the causal model confirms that preschool education provides poor children with a "head start" both intellectually and socially. It suggests that the initial effect of preschool on intellectual performance generates long-term effects through its intermediate effects on scholastic achievement directly, and on commitment to schooling and scholastic placement, which indirectly affect scholastic achievement. These intermediate effects are important in their own right-- increasing subjects' maturity, reducing their need for special education services, enhancing their scholastic achievement, and eventually helping them to stay in school longer. Finally, the effects of preschool have extended beyond school into the adult world as these young people have found more employment and have experienced less involvement in delinquent activities than their no-preschool counterparts. (p. 267)

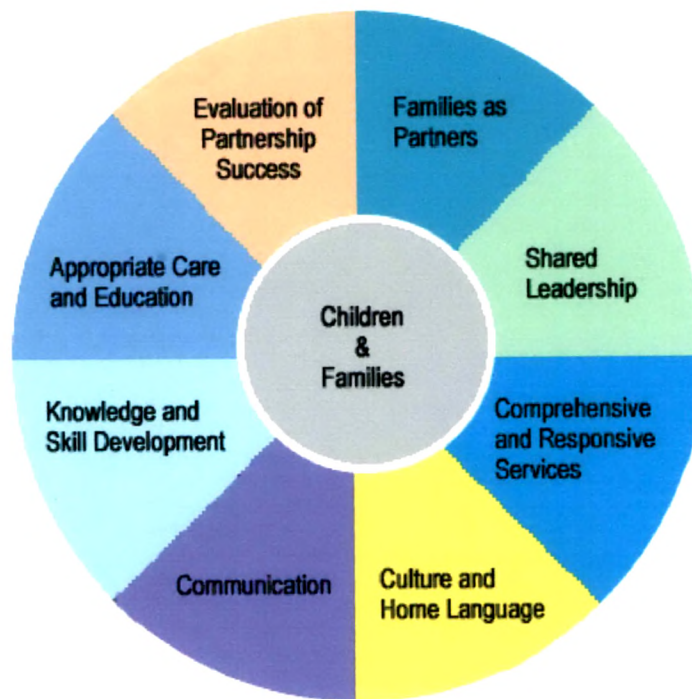
Some of the Important Features of a Pre-school Programme

a) *Home, School and Community Linkages*

"It takes a whole village to raise a child" (African proverb)"

It is the power of concerned and committed people, and their organizations, that can bring what needs to be done within the bounds of what can be done". (The State of the World's Children, 1995). An extensive body of research identifies the elements that contribute to children's well-being, beginning with those closest to the child and moving outward to encompass the family, early care/education, the neighborhood, the community, and beyond. This ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) has motivated a growing number of communities to focus more closely on the need for collaboration--engaging in a process that allows the community to address many problems at once rather than one at a time. One solution that many communities have adopted is the establishment of a collaborative partnership involving all the relevant partners--home, school, and service providers--in the planning and monitoring of services for children (Kagan, 1992; Hoffman, 1991). The goal of most of these collaboration initiatives is to improve child's outcomes, recognizing that many of the child's needs are closely linked to needs of the family and the community.

In 1995, the Early Childhood Laboratory Network Program developed *Continuity in Early Childhood: A Framework for Home, School, and Community Linkages* (U.S. Department of Education, 1995),



Elements of Continuity (U.S.Department of Education, 1995)

Figure 2

This document was designed with two key purposes in mind: first, an emphasis on the need for children and families to receive comprehensive and responsive services. Taken together, the elements are intended to promote a comprehensive understanding of continuity and transition during early childhood. Second, the Framework offered a set of guidelines that partnerships could use to compare and assess their current policies and practices, as well as identify areas in need of improvement.

A case study of Bovill, Idaho, Collaborative is one of the examples to highlight the impact of Framework in collaborative process. Bovill a small town (population 310) located in the North Central part of the State did not have any resident doctor or dentist. At the time, there was no child care center or preschool available to children. (The closest one was 35 miles away). In 1998, various members of the community. decided to do something to improve the

situation for children. The community came together and used the framework that made them aware about the key issues in providing high quality services. Thus their efforts helped in developing a powerful program in their community.

Though the partnerships are essential for successful implementation of any project but still there are certain barriers or factors that could contribute to the success or failure of a community collaborative as no two collaborative operate in exactly the same way. North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, in 1993 gave certain guidelines that seem to help smooth the way for a more successful partnership. These may include:

- involvement of all the key stakeholders;
- establish a shared vision of how the partnership will operate and expected outcomes for the children and families served;
- build in ownership at all levels;
- establish communication and decision-making processes that are open and allow conflict to be addressed constructively;
- institutionalize changes through established policies, procedures, and program mandates;
- provide adequate time for partners to meet, plan, and carry out activities.

b) Role of Teachers and Parental Involvement

The child's academic journey is possible only with the help of teachers. Effective learning in children takes place when there is a strong social and emotional bond between teachers and pupil. The importance of highly qualified or exemplary and effective teachers cannot be overlooked or underrated (Morzano et al (2001). More can be done to improve education by improving the effectiveness of teachers than any other single factor because effective teachers appears to be effective with students of all achievement levels, regardless of the level of heterogeneity in the classrooms.

The research base however, shows that the presence of qualified teachers who have attained a Bachelor's degree (BA) and additional specialized content in Child Development or Early Childhood Education (Barnett, 2003; Whitebook, 2003) is one of the most consistent indicators of improved child outcomes. Kaul.V. (1998) highlighting the importance of training for teachers reflected that absence of appropriate and adequate training of teachers and workers, one could be left with a pre-school curriculum that is both 'child unfriendly' and 'burdensome'. Pianta&Cox (1999a) highlighted that enhancing relationships between children and teachers constitutes an important supportive factor especially in first school years. Thus helping the children face the important transition from pre-school to elementary school. For any educational programme to be successful it is essential that parents and teachers should work in collaboration, as they share a common goal and i.e. "The Child". Family plays a very crucial role in making this transition easy for the child where family involvement is a viable strategy to address transition issues related to readiness (Boethal, 2004). There are good reasons for teachers to want parents to be involved in the education of their children (Olson, 1990). Thus the need is to establish good relationship with all the parents and a non-judgmental attitude towards them. Parents care desperately about their children. There could be many reasons why parents do not get involved in the school, but lack of concern about their children may not be one of them. Some parents may have negative experience in the school so that any contact with the school revives their own feelings of inadequacy; others may be overwhelmed with the pressures in their lives and unable to cope with one more demand. For some parents, it would be culturally inappropriate to be other than passive in their involvement in the school. Because in some cultures teachers are highly respected figures of authority and for parents from such cultures to take an active role in school would be perceived as an infringement of the teacher's authority. If teacher feels that the parental involvement is important then they will work to overcome the barriers that they perceive are keeping parents out of the school. Many parents do not see how their involvement at school could

possibly benefit their children. Here the role of a teacher becomes important he/she needs to provide specific information about why the parental involvement is important. Teachers need to find out from parents how they would like to be involved. The best way of doing this may be at the time of home visits or at the time of drop and pick of children.

Therefore it is important that the teachers must think about the expectations that children and families have from and for their behavior and learning in the school setting. While it is not acceptable for teachers to engage in practices they feel are inappropriate for children, teachers must always respect the parents and their culture.

Research indicates that children achieve more when the parents are involved in their schooling. The major findings from the research on parental involvement have been summarized by Henderson (1988).

- The family, not the school, provides the primary educational environment for children
- Involving parents in their children's formal education improves the children's achievements.
- Parents involvement is most effective when it is comprehensive, well planned and long lasting.
- Involving parents when their children are young has beneficial effects that persists throughout the child's academic career
- Involving parents with their children's education at home may not be enough to improve schools; a school's average level of achievement does not appear to improve unless parents are involved in the school.
- Children from low income group and minority families benefit the most when parents are involved in the schools, and parents do not have to be well educated to make a difference.

- Encouraging parents involvement aids teachers in building children's self esteem, reduces discipline problems and increases children's regard for themselves as learners. Greenberg (1989).

c) Importance of Play in Pre-school Education Programme:

Piaget, Bruner and Vygotsky, scholars in Developmental Psychology and Child Development, based on their research have emphasized, Play and Activity as the child's natural mode of learning (National Curriculum Framework (NCF)-2005) Early childhood educators espouse play as a sacred right of the child, as an avenue through which the children learn to be happy, mentally happy human beings. Play helps children weave together all the elements of life as they experience it. It allows them to digest life and make it their own. It is an outlet for the fullness of their creativity, and it is an absolutely critical part of their childhood.

A study conducted in the 1970s in Germany, at a time when many kindergartens were being transformed into academic rather than play- oriented environments, bears out the relationship between preschool play and elementary school success. The study compared 50 play- oriented kindergartens with 50 academically oriented ones. The children were followed until fourth grade, at which point the children from the play- oriented kindergartens excelled over the others in every area measured – physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development. The results were especially striking among lower-income children, who clearly benefited from the play-oriented approach.

d) Role of Story Telling and Picture Books in Pre- School Children's Learning and Development

Research has highlighted positive relationship between storytelling to preschool children and their future linguistic and academic development), (Chomsky, 1972; Durkin, 1966). According to Vygotsky (1978) children acquire intellectual and linguistic skills through social interaction. Gauvain (1995) stated that "symbolic tools and resources are developed and used by cultures to support mental activity" as such they play a central role in the development and organization of cognitive skill"(p.33). In order try to explain this developmental change, DeLoache, Pierroutsakos, and Troseth (1996) theorized that throughout the first few years of life children are exposed to pictures in books as well as reading interactions with caregivers. According to DeLoache, these experiences facilitate the development of a concept of picture. Supporting this, Bus, Van Ijzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995; Halle, Calkins, Berry, & Johnson, 2003; International Reading Association/ National Association for the Education of Young Children (IRA/NAEYC, 1998) highlighted the importance of reading aloud to children on a frequent basis as one of the most effective ways to promote early literacy development among young children.

A joint position statement issued by the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), stated, - "One of the best predictors of whether a child will function competently in school and go on to contribute actively in our increasingly literate society is the level to which the child progresses in reading and writing" (IRA/NAEYC, 1998, p. 30).

The authors of two of the most comprehensive syntheses released in 1998, by the National Research Council's *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) and the joint position statement of

the IRA and the NAEYC on Early literacy (IRA/NAEYC, 1998) emphasized upon the strategies that have been shown to be effective at promoting children's early literacy development. These included:

- Reading aloud to children in an interactive style fostering children's understanding of print concepts (IRA/NAEYC, 1998; Teale, 1984; Stanovich & West, 1989); arranging the classroom environment so that children have an opportunity to interact with books and other print materials; (Morrow & Weinstein, 1986; Neuman & Roskos, 1997);
- provides opportunities for children to experiment with writing (Richgels, 2001; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998);
- familiarize children with letters of the alphabet and their corresponding sounds (Adams, 1990; IRA/NAEYC, 1998);
- involves children in activities that promote children's phonological skill development (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998 ,Bus, van Ijzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995; et al) Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Hargrave & Sénéchal, 2000).

While all of the above strategies have been shown to be effective, many experts contend that the single most important teaching strategy for promoting children's early literacy development across multiple domains is- ***“Reading aloud to children in an interactive style that engages them as active learners”*** (Bus, van Ijzendoorn & Pellegrini, 1995; Halle, Calkins, Berry, & Johnson, 2003, et. al)

When children are encouraged to become active participants rather than passive listeners, they are more likely to experience improvements in their vocabularies and comprehension abilities (Hargrave & Sénéchal, 2000; Karweit & Wasik, 1996; Whitehurst, Arnold, Epstein, Angell, Smith, & Fischel, 1994). An examination of early childhood educators' practices also

revealed that they provide frequent opportunities for children to interact with books and other print materials on their own, which can lead to greater print awareness (Morrow & Weinstein, 1986; Neuman & Roskos, 1997).

e) Language Variability in the Classroom:

Language plays an important role in communication, exchange of information, development of reading skills, reading and comprehension, and in later years academic success. Language is believed to be the primary tool for the transference of socio- cultural message. The work of Language socialization has been defined as the process of “socialization through language and socialization to use language’ (Ochs,1986) and children develop competence in their socio-cultural functions and communications through participation in social interactions (Gardner, 1984, Ochs, 1986, Vygotsky, 1978).

Teaching through child’s first language or mother tongue, is internationally recognized as the most appropriate way of working with children in early years of concept formation. Children who attend pre-school programs conducted in their own mother tongue, face fewer problems of comprehension as compared to children whose mother tongue is different from the medium of instruction. National Curriculum Framework (NCF-2005) (NCERT). Many children bring to school not only a new language, but also cultural ways of using language that differ from those of mainstream school culture (Heath, 1983; Zentella, 1997). These differences can lead teachers to underestimate or misinterpret the competence of students. In order for all students to have equal opportunities for educational success, teachers must be aware not only of what children need to learn, but also of the knowledge and skills that they bring from their linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Cummins, 1986; Fillmore & Snow, 2002; Genesee, 1994; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).

The research is very clear about the importance of multilingual children's mother tongue for their overall personal and educational development.

In India a child is socialized by her family and the socio-cultural context to communicate in culturally-appropriate ways and children carry this to the school also. Therefore Monolingual program of mother tongue education is not enough for linguistic minorities and not even the speakers of major languages. Thus it becomes necessary to have educational program in which more than one language is used as the language of instruction having meaningful connections to the home language. Keeping in view the multilingual nature of Indian society, it has been noted that most Indian children growing up in multilingual environments develop a level of social awareness of language and their culturally appropriate use, which is perhaps unavailable to those growing up in monolingual environment till, at least later in their development. Mother tongue promotion in the school helps develop not only the mother tongue but also children's abilities in the majority school language. By contrast, when children are encouraged to reject their mother tongue and, consequently, its development stagnates, their personal and conceptual foundation for learning is undermined. Spending instructional time through a minority language in the school does not hurt children's academic development in the majority school language. Children's mother tongues are fragile and easily lost in the early years of school, to reject a child's language in the school is to reject the child. When the message, implicit or explicit, communicated to children in the school is "Leave your language and culture at the schoolhouse door", children also leave a central part of 'who' they are-their identities-at the school house door. Thus first task of the school should be, to relate the home language to the school language. Thereafter, one or more languages are to be integrated, so that one can move into other languages without losing the first one. This would result in the maintenance of all languages, each complementing the other. The need is to locate language education programmes in a multilingual perspective. However, Multilingualism seemed to be one of the least mentioned yet most striking features of the school. Dominant Western discourses about young

children speak about the acquisition and development of language as extremely important (Kostenlnik et.al, 1999). Discussions of how children learn language and literacy thus seems to assume monolingual as the norm (Wishon et. Al 1998; Kostenlinik et.al, 1999). However the exprencies of most of the world's children contradict this assumption (World Bank, 1995).

Therefore it is essential especially in country like India, that curriculum makers, textbook writers, teachers and parents start appreciating the importance of multilingualism, which sensitises the child to the cultural and linguistic diversity around her and encourages her to use it as a resource for her development.

f) Program Quality in ECCE:

Quality of services is indeed an important concern and is being emphasized universally. A holistic interpretation of term 'quality' also begins to take the shape from the experiences. Quality is related to factors like relevance to the community, and the basis in perceived needs, which vary greatly, as well as more stable, easily measured and an objective indicators, such as attainment to certain standards in health, nutrition and education. Here, flexibility, sensitivity and responsiveness to need, localization or adaptation to diversity, cultural relevance, low cost approaches and extent of community participation become important criteria for evaluation of quality. In terms of ECCE services. Quality of pre-school experiences has to do more with the process and people involved than it does with the plethora of material and other "inputs" that are so often cited as critical to school effectiveness(Fuller& Heyneman,1989). Reflecting on the significance of a quality ECE program, a micro level longitudinal study, done by (Kaul, 1993), which continuously followed up a cohort of children from the ECE stage through five grades of primary education indicated significant and continuous gains from a quality ECE program on mathematics learning in the primary grades.

A study done by Datta, (2001) on the quality of urban early childhood programmes in Mumbai revealed that 3.5 percent of ICDS centers, in the city were of good quality, while most (45.8 percent) were of low average quality and as many as 24 percent were of poor quality.

Research in India provides evidence of the short and long term benefits of good quality ECCE programs, particularly for children from underprivileged contexts. Evidence is available of effects of ECD programs in the short-term perspective on enrollment levels and academic and social preparedness of children Mohite, (1992) did a study to understand the linkages between preschool and primary education in three districts of Gujarat – Kheda, Bodeli and Panchmahal. The study indicates that ineffective ECCE programmes have implications on the primary school enrolment rates.

It is important to understand that mere increasing the number of ECCE programmes cannot give impressive results unless they are coupled with quality. Since the investments in high-quality early childhood education can increase readiness for school and provide long-term social benefits, particularly for low-income and minority children, however quantity –quality debate is a never ending dabate that is rightly put by Swaminathan (1998) , “the quality–quantity debate” in the ever–growing niche of ECCE programmes.

Since the present study was carried out in Gurgaon Block of Haryana State, under ICDS programme. Thus education pattern with emphasis on the pre-school education is being highlighted.

Educational Pattern in Haryana with Emphasis on Preschool Education

The present system of education in Haryana was introduced just fifteen years back. The State follows the 12 year system of schooling which includes eight

years of compulsory Elementary education, which is further divided into 5 years of primary education (classes/ 6-11 age group) and 3 years of middle stage of education (classes VI-VIII/11 to 14 age group). Elementary education is followed by 2 years of high school (classes IX-X/14-16age group) and 2 years of senior secondary education (classes XI-XII/16-18 age group). Haryana has free and compulsory primary education. Primary schooling facilities are available to almost all school going children of the age group 6-11 years. There is a primary school almost within a kilometer of every child's walking distance.

❖ *Pre-school education in Haryana*

The relevance of the ECCE program in is two fold:

- It frees girls from siblings care and household responsibilities to attend school regularly; and
- It facilitates school readiness among pre-school children. The ECCE specially focuses on need for early care and stimulation of children belonging to vulnerable section. The age span covered by ECCE is from inception to six years.

The existing ECE programmes in Haryana include:

1. ICDS
2. Balwadis and day care centres run by social welfare department
3. The pre- primary schools run by the State government.

Statistics for ICDS in Haryana State

There are 116 ICDS projects and 13546 AWCs reported in Haryana state. The Anganwadi centres (AWCs) are mostly located in rural areas spread over 92 blocks of State out of 124 blocks. At present there are 27 pre-

primary schools of State government for the children in the age group of 3-6 years and state government proposes to start pre-primary nursery class in each primary school.

No. of ICDS Projects/AWC's Reporting.	Year -2001-02 Pre-School Beneficiaries.	Year- 2002-03 Pre-School Beneficiaries.
Haryana Total (116/13546)	Preschool children- 530726	Preschool children- 493346

Source: CSS- Centrally sponsored scheme. ICDS-2001-04

Table 1

The figures in Table 1 highlighting the downward trend of pre- school beneficiaries using the pre- school program under ICDS.

Description of Gurgaon District

Gurgaon district is situated in National Capital Region (NCR) of Delhi, the capital of India. The town is about 32 kms away from New Delhi.

The village was given as Gurudakshina to the teacher by his students; the Pandavas and hence it came to be known as Guru-gram, which in course of time got distorted to Gurgaon. Thus, the district has been existence since the times of Mahabharata. Delhi & Rajasthan are its neighbouring states.

- **Location:**

The present Gurgaon district comprises of nine blocks namely Tauru, Nuh, Pataudi, Nagina, Punhana, F.P.Jhirka, Sohna, and Gurgaon & Farrukhnagar.

- **Language:**

The language of Meos is Mewati, a sub dialect of north-eastern Rajasthani. The language of the north and west of the district in which the Ahirs predominate is Ahirwati, another sub-dialect of the north eastern Rajasthani, while language in east of the district in which the Jats predominate, is the Braj Bhasha dialect of western Hindi.

- **Religion:**

The majority of population of the district consists of Hindus. They predominate both in the rural and urban areas except in the Nuh and Ferozpur Jhirka tehsils where the Muslims are in majority.

- **Population:**

Total Population of Gurgaon	No. of Males	No. of Females	Sex Ratio(No. of females per 1000 males)
1657669	884456	773213	874

Table 2

Source: Census of India 2001

Administrative set up of the State:

PanchayatiRajInstitution:3TierSetup.

Total Village: 289.

Village Level: Panchayat.

BlockLevel: Panchayat Samiti.

District Level: Zila Parishad.

Brief Description of Gurgaon Block (Location of the Present Study)

Gurgaon in Transition



**Villages , Shopping Malls and Corporate Offices Sharing Same
Boundary- Fig 3**

The present study was conducted in four different villages of Gurgaon block in Gurgaon District. In recent times public-private sector partnership in real estate development has led Gurgaon to emerge as the corporate capital. Lot of infrastructural development is taking place in some parts of Gurgaon district thus dividing Gurgaon into two parts i.e old Gurgaon and New Gurgaon (Modern part). New Gurgaon has all the modern facilities and a planned infrastructure, while old Gurgaon is still an old township trying to catch up with the new developments.

The villages where the study has been conducted were near the posh colonies, shopping complexes and high rise residential complexes, which have come up in the last seven to ten years. Though as per the administrative structure they are called villages, however they look more like part of new township. There are brick and mortar houses, well laid streets, modern amenities, vehicles including cars owned by the household. Due to permeation of modern infrastructure and greater connectedness of urban culture the community is undergoing rapid socio- economic change. Thus to gain an in depth understanding of the context especially for the society that is in transition, the present study adopted an ethnographic approach as a research design, where Tobin, Wu and Davidson, (1998) have highlighted the importance of ethnographic model in understanding the varied cultural diversities. So it becomes all the more important to develop policies and practices for preschool programmes in such a manner that are relevant to our Indian context.

This study is important for several reasons.

(1) As more and more children spend their pre-school years in Early Childhood centers and these Early Childhood programs becoming increasingly westernized in character, it becomes even more important to dovetail children's preparation for school with meaningful connections to the culture and language of the home community.

(2) Current academic discourse points to the need for more qualitative/ethnographic research which can paint in the fine-grained reality of educational processes within early childhood settings because the knowledge thus produced stands to, (a) increase understanding of how change in Early Childhood Education thought affects practice and how practice affects school readiness - variously defined as that may be, (b) to inform ECE policy, and (c) to contribute to revisions in teacher education programs.

(3) Without such in-depth knowledge remedial responses to identifiable problems in ECE are likely to be culturally- biased, superficial and ineffective.

The present study was planned with this review and rationale. The objectives of the study were:

OBJECTIVES

Broad Objective: To Understand and document the varied dimensions and Conceptions of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in rural setting of Gurgaon (Haryana).

Specific Objectives

1. Review and Analysis of select National and State level Policy documents on ECCE.
2. Assess Knowledge, Understanding and Awareness of the Policy directives at rural level.
3. Adults Conceptions of Early Childhood Education and Care (Parents, ICDS personnel and Members of Village Education Committee).
4. Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) conceptions of ECCE.
5. Observe and document the pre-school program in Anganwadi centres (AWCs).
6. Understand and Study the Interface/linkages among Policy–Program directives, Practice and thoughts/Conceptions of Community