
INVESTING IN EARLY FORMATIVE YEARS FOR ATTAINING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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¹nirupmasaini@yahoo.com and ²vandanasingh72@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

Early childhood years are crucial and are foundation years of life. Early years are formative years and the experiences of formative years have lifelong impact. Holistic development is a concept that emphasizes the importance of nurturing and developing an individual's well-being, encompassing all aspects of their physical, mental, emotional, and social growth. Holistic development aims to create a harmonious balance between different domains of life and enables individuals to lead fulfilling and meaningful life. The first Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) is to "ensure that all human beings can fulfill their potential in dignity and equality". Protecting, promoting, and supporting early childhood development is essential to enable everyone to reach their full human potential. Sustainability in early childhood suggests a way of thinking and being towards our environment. Exploring and interacting with natural environment allows students to gain a better understanding of it. In this paper authors will highlight how roles of Anganwadies and Preschools contribute in holistic and sustainable development of preschoolers. Case studies were conducted on five Anganwadies from rural areas and five Kindergarten from urban areas of Yamuna Nagar district of Haryana state. Health, nutrition, nurturance, hygiene, sanitation, safe water, early learning opportunities, social protection and child protection services promote young children's development through multi-sectoral approach. The last two to three decades have seen great improvements in child survival. According to James J. Heckman, a noble laureate in economics (2022) Heckman Curve proved that investing in childhood skills brings high returns to society. Early childhood development is a smart investment. Young children need help to reach their potential and develop their physical, cognitive, emotional, and social capacities. Investing in early childhood development will benefit them and society as a whole.

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood years are crucial and are foundation years of life. They are formative years and the experiences of formative years have lifelong impact. Holistic development is a concept that emphasizes the importance of nurturing and developing an individual's well-being, encompassing all aspects of their physical, mental, emotional, and social growth. Holistic development aims to create a harmonious balance between different domains of life and enables individuals to lead fulfilling and meaningful life. The first Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) is to "ensure that all human beings can fulfill their potential in dignity and equality". Protecting, promoting, and supporting early childhood development is essential to enable everyone to reach their full human potential. Sustainability in early childhood suggests a way of thinking and being towards our environment. The 17 SDGs are global agenda adopted by all UN members states in 2015 with the aim to bring prosperity for all by 2030 through five pillars or 5Ps -People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership. The SDGs are deeply interconnected with early childhood years, as the early years are crucial foundation for lifelong health, learning, and well-being. The SDGs recognize this by linking early childhood development (ECD) interventions to multiple goals, including poverty reduction (SDG1), zero hunger (SDG2), good health (SDG3), quality education (SDG4), gender equality (SDG5), and reducing inequalities (SDG10).

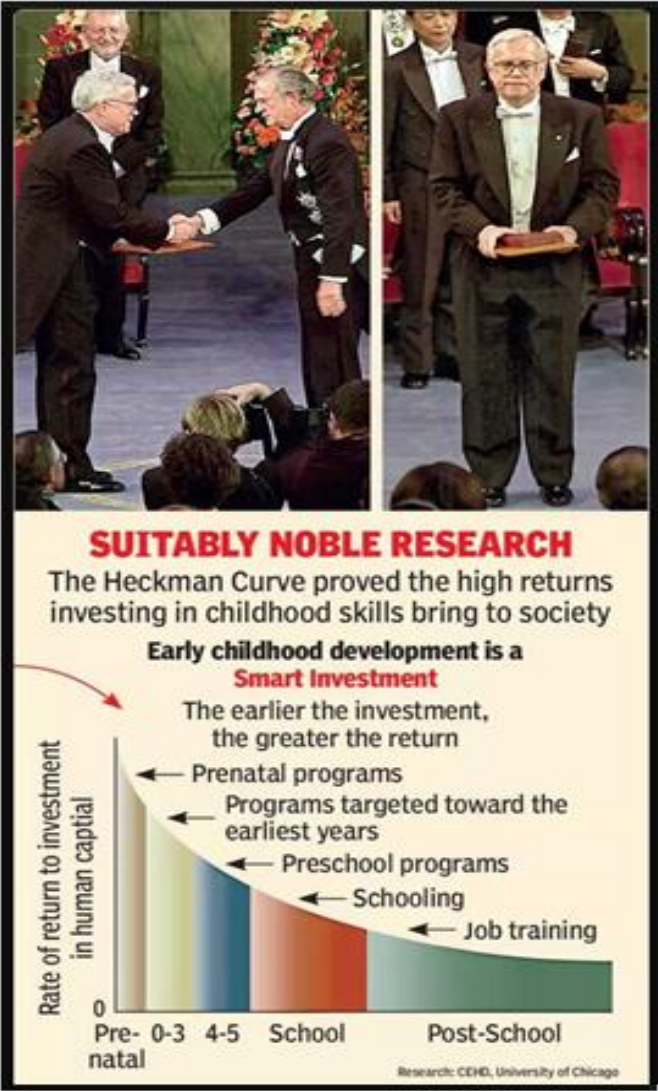
Investing in nurturing early childhood environment and providing quality early stimulation and care is essential for breaking cycles of poverty, empowering future generations, and achieving overall sustainable development. The Indian Government launched Anganwadi program under Integrated Child Development Scheme in 1975. The year 2025 is the golden jubilee year of this ICDS program. According to the recent article by Hindustan Times in March 2025, there are 13.99 lakhs operational Anganwadi Centres aimed at providing child and maternal care and combating hunger and malnutrition.

OBJECTIVES

The study will highlight roles of Anganwadies and Preschools in holistic and sustainable development during early childhood years.

Exploring and interacting with natural environment allows students to gain a better understanding of it. According to James J. Heckman, a noble laureate in economics (2022) Heckman Curve proved that investing in childhood skills brings high returns to society. Early childhood development is a smart investment.

Young children need help to reach their potential and develop their physical, cognitive, emotional, and social capacities. Investing in early childhood development will benefit them and society as a whole.



METHODOLOGY

Case studies were conducted on five Anganwadies from rural areas and five Kindergarten from urban areas of Yamuna Nagar district of Haryana state. Checklist was prepared to carryout observation on Health, nutrition, nurturance, hygiene, sanitation, safe water, early learning opportunities, social protection and child protection services that promote young children’s development through multi-sectoral approach. Nearly 25 parents and grandparents residing in rural areas and whose kids are preschoolers were interviewed .

RESULTS

*Anganwadies and preschools are playing vital role in enhancing potentials of preschoolers in their holistic development-cognitive, social overall. In Haryana govt has attached many anganwadies in the govt school premises and they are now called Model schools. It's step towards making them Saksham Anganwadi. They contribute in improving health status of preschoolers by providing nutritious mid-day meals and vaccination. Thereby contributing in their brain development too. But the sad part is few workers and parents were ignorant about its importance and not serious in carrying out their responsibilities. Parents complained of poor curriculum framework of anganwadies and prefer to send their ward to nearby privately run preschools.

*Anganwadis are facing a huge drop in enrolment due to lack of good facilities and slow acceptance of technology in comparison to the privately run preschools or Montessori schools. The location and condition of the building directly affects the number of beneficiaries who would be coming to the centres. Poor and inadequate infrastructure create many challenges in the delivery of ICDS services, and create hazards and health problems for anganwadi children and can result in the loss of beneficiaries.

*Parents prefer to send their ward to nearby preschools rather than anganwadies in their village because of early education quality, their curriculum and activities carried out there

*Opinions of Researchers, professionals, academicians were also taken. They all firmly expressed that anganwadies and preschools play crucial role in development. Their quality is non-negotiable. School Dropout rate reduced due to anganwadies exposure to rural children thereby reducing wastage of precious human resource. They immensely contribute children to reach their potentials.

*Authors also believe that contribution of rural young adults of Haryana in sports at National and International level can be attributed to some extent to the achievements of attainment of Anganwadies objectives of package of six services, viz. Supplementary Nutrition, Pre-School Non-Formal Education, Nutrition and Health Education, Immunization, Health Check-Up and Referral Services. It's contributing in gender equality too. Investing in early childhood development will benefit them and society as a whole.

SUGGESTIONS

The achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that aims to achieve zero hunger, food security and improved nutrition for all, and also SDG 4 on equitable, quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all lies at the forefront of Early Childhood Education program design.

*Anganwadi buildings should be sustainable learning spaces for children for a holistic growth and to make sure they are school-ready.

*The use of ICT in the education sector has been playing a crucial role in providing new and innovative forms of support to the learning process. Smartphones have been the brightest spot in the journey of the digital revolution of the Indian Education Sector. New generation smartphones combined with stable internet networks have played a big role in the conceptualization of the smart education system. Indian Education sector, under the umbrella of digital initiatives, has launched various web/mobile-based ed-tech platforms, and tools and smartphones have played a major role in delivering them. For the primary education sector, smartphones are envisioned to help in delivering a meaningful early childhood education, with autonomy to reflect the local context and the setting.

*Smart Anganwadis have become the need of the hour, as early childhood development is emerging as a significant development driver in the Indian context. Mobile technologies will help in monitoring the progress of the beneficiaries, introducing key learning tools for enhancing the learning experience, and sustained capacity building of the field level functionaries with the latest teaching methodologies as well as digital monitoring tools.

*The new generation Anganwadis are likely to drive enormous transformations in early childhood care and development, not only from a nutrition viewpoint, but in contributing to the overall mental and physical health of children.

*Culturally Responsive Technique (CRT) is a tool that acknowledges, respects, and leverages the cultural background of students to make learning more meaningful and effective. Embracing CRT is more than pedagogical shift, it is a commitment for shaping a future. It equips students with the skill to thrive in a globalized world while staying rooted in their cultural identities.

Educators can use and include examples from local folklore in folklore in a language lessons or use examples from local farmer's practices in science activities. This enhance learning. CRT is a not a program or a policy -

it's a mindset. It's about seeing our cultural diversity as an asset rather than a barrier. It is about creating an environment where every student, regardless of their background, feels seen, heard, and included.

*Digital detox matters to instill Healthy Digital Habits in children. Many advanced countries have banned cellphones for young children.







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