ABSTRACT

1.00 Introduction

Global research indicates that while 85 percent of a child’s core brain structure is already complete in the early years, the actual spending per child on children below 6 years is only one-eighth of the spending on children in the 6–14 year age group. Research on child development suggests that besides adequate nutrition, health and sanitation the stimulation provided by care givers to young children completes the circle. Only when these are adequately met children will realise optimal development. Research on brain development also suggests that care giver-child interaction facilitates various domains of development and increases synaptic connections in the brain.

The process of human development is characteristically cumulative, continuous and holistic in nature. The formation of certain habits and an active learning capacity contribute substantially to the participation and retention of a child in school. It, therefore, becomes important to note that a child’s status with regard to these variables in school is influenced greatly by what he/ she actually brings to the school in terms of pre-literacy skills, health status, socio-economic status, extent
of parental stimulation and overall home and preschool environment.

A study conducted by the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in four regions of the country on a sample of 1495 children admitted in Class I focused on assessing their levels of reading and writing readiness and readiness to learn mathematics.

1.10 Rationale of the Study

The process of human development is characteristically cumulative, continuous and holistic in nature. The formation of certain habits and an active learning capacity contribute substantially to the participation and retention of a child in school. It, therefore, becomes important to note that a child's status with regard to these variables in school is influenced greatly by what he/she actually brings to the school in terms of pre-literacy skills, health status, socio-economic status, extent of parental stimulation and overall home and pre-school environment. Global research indicates that while 85 per cent of a child’s core brain structure is already complete in the early years, the actual spending per child on children below 6 years is only one-eighth of the spending on children in the 6–14 year age group.
Nationwide studies show that less than half of the Anganwadi Centres of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme in India actually have learning materials for children and many states report nil yearly expenditures of preschool kits allocated in the regular ICDS budget.

Research has shown that the poorest and most marginalised are more likely to drop out of primary school when the foundations of school readiness are not strong. Therefore, quality of early learning has become a growing concern for children in India.

A study conducted by the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in four regions of the country on a sample of 1495 children admitted in Class I focused on assessing their levels of reading and writing readiness and readiness to learn mathematics. The study found the average reading score to be 47 per cent with marked deficiency in sound discrimination and audio-visual matching tasks. In mathematics readiness tasks, 60.8 per cent children performed below 75 per cent indicating the need for some intervention. The study concluded that children who come directly to school from their homes do not exhibit the desired levels of readiness. The approach should therefore be to involve these children in good early
childhood education programmes as well as to equip schools to receive these.

Lack of preparedness of children for school is a contributing factor to the high dropout in the first few years of primary schooling against a now nearly universal enrolment rate, with the highest level of drop-out in Grade Two. The poor quality and limited access to sound early childhood programmes also results in a pressure on primary schools to admit under-age children who are not developmentally ready. Official and unofficial under-age attendance in primary school is common. Early childhood environments in the home and through existing government programmes are not providing an effective foundational stepping stone for children, as has been recognised in the sub group report on ECE for the Eleventh Five Year Plan.

Non formal Preschool education is an important component of Integrated Child Development Services scheme currently operational in more than 6506 projects in India. ICDS, introduced in 1975 as one of the major vehicles for delivery of services to children less than 6 years, was envisaged to bring down infant mortality rates and malnutrition levels in India. It is an ambitious programme and is being projected to be universalized – reaching out to every block in India. The various
components of ICDS have been analysed in many expert studies and evaluations, but at the end of the day ICDS has to be evaluated in terms of its impact on the lives of children, especially those from poor families. There are 219 projects out of that 196 is working in Assam while 36918 AWCs are operational at present.

Lakhimpur district is situated on the North East corner of Assam. Its Head quarter is at North Lakhimpur. The total population of the Lakhimpur District is comprised of several population groups such as tribes, the indigenous non-tribes, Bengali, Hindu immigrants, Muslim immigrants, Nepali immigrants and backward district of Assam. The district has 10 ICDS project with 3065AWC. AWCs are the only government institutions which are providing Pre- Primary education in particularly rural and urban places of Lakhimpur district. This is a flood affected agriculture base poor district where 44% of the total population is under poverty line. Moreover large portion of the total population have to depend on ICDS for the referral services and mainly for pre-school education of their children.

In this context, the pre-school component of the ICDS programme assumes significance and was found to be very weak at the grass root level. In the absence of any other government planning for this age group (3 to 6
years) there is a need to build a better understanding of the content and other parameters of the programme. State responsibility for pre-school lies only with ICDS, which has a limited pre-school component. All other pre-school initiatives are in the private sector, which excludes the vast majority of children. Non formal Preschool education is an important component of Integrated Child Development Services scheme currently operational in more than 6506 projects in India.

There is great need to build a firm understanding of the characteristics of this age group, how they learn and thus the implications for programme content and structure. Focus will also be on building sensitivity about the learning needs of this age group amongst the stakeholders, especially the parents and the larger community, as their participation and understanding is seen to be the most critical factor in ensuring developmentally appropriate programmes of high quality in the anganwadis. Other related issues such as human resources required, their capacities, training facilities available as also the structural elements of the programme will also be taken up in to the consideration to build a holistic understanding of the preschool component of ICDS.

The detailed study of ICDS scheme with special reference to pre-school education in Lakhimpur district
gives the status of implementation of the scheme and throws the light on problems faced in way of its success. There is definite study conducted in this reference district this motivated the investigator to take up this study. Therefore the researcher is interested to conduct a comprehensive study on Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme and Pre-Primary Education in Lakhimpur District

1.20 **Objectives of the Study**

The study was designed with the following objectives:

8 To assess the growth and development of ICDS programme in Lakhimpur District.

9 To find out total number of Anganwadi/ICDS centers with their permanent and non-permanent buildings.

10 To find out total numbers of children enrolment in ICDS centres.

11 To study the dropout rate of children in ICDS centres

12 To study the curricular activities organized by Anganwadi centers.

13 To find out health and nutrition level of children in AWCs.

14 To suggest measure for effective implementation ICDS Programme Lakhimpur District.

1.30 **Methodology**

The first step of investigation work to select appropriate research methodology. The method which will
be useful depends on the nature of the problem selected and the kind of data necessary for its solution.

1.31 Method

Descriptive survey method of research was used in executing the present study. This method provides a method of investigation that describes and interprets what exists at present, where as survey studies are conducted to collect detailed descriptions, existing phenomena with the intent of employing data to justify current conditions and practices or to make more intelligent plan for improving them. The objectives of this method are not only to analyze, interpret and report the status of an institute, but also to determine the adequacy of status by comparing it with the established standards.

1.32 Population

Population in the present study comprise of all the AWCs in 10 projects/ blocks of Lakhimpur district. There were 2904 AWC in different ICDS projects. Each block is having one project. There are 10 blocks namely, Dhakuakhana Nowboicha , Karunabari, Bihpuria, Narayanpur, Baginadi , Lakhimpur Telali Ghilamora and Bardoloni

1.33 Sample

In the present investigation 200 ICDS centers i.e. AWCs were selected taking 20 AWCs from each project. The sample for this work constituted of 200 Aaganwadi
workers working in different projects. The AWCs were selected using simple random sampling method and using random number technique.

1.34 Tools Used
The following tools used for collecting data which were constructed and modified from the survey check list of the concern department

5) Questionnaire for Anganwadi/ICDS workers.

6) Standard health Criteria for measuring health and nutrition level of children.

1.35 Collection of Data

Data were collected personally by administering the questionnaire with due permission of the Social Welfare Department and AWWas per the direction therein by the researcher. In addition official documents, records, reports of various commissions, books, research journals and other reports were consulted for the study. The collected data had been arranged and tabulated for further analysis and interpretation..

1.36 Analysis and Interpretation
The qualitative and quantitative analysis had been done to achieve the objectives of the study. The percentage and graphic representation had been used for analysis and findings had reported accordingly.

1.40 Major Findings of the Study
Finding on Growth and Development of ICDS in Lakhimpur district.

22. The first ICDS project was introduced in Dhakuakhana Development Block, on 02.10.1975 with the 100 AWCs and children enrolment was 4911. The decadal growth and development of the AWCs was 653 with 4 ICDS projects, in 1985-94, while 1094 AWCs with 7 ICDS projects in 1995-2004. There were 3065 AWCs and 10 ICDS projects in the Lakhimpur district while 2904 AWCs were functioning at present.

Finding on Building Status of ICDS Centre

23. There were 2904 AWCs functioning effectively at present. In the Lakhimpur district 1268 AWCs were running in permanent buildings while 1636 AWCs were with temporary buildings and percentage of permanent building was 44% and that of temporary buildings was 56% (Table-06,07). The study also reveals that temporary building,(katsha), 16% was running at AWW's own house, 13% ICDS centre were running at Namghar(Harimandir), 31% ICDS centre were running at gaon Yuba Sangh and Library, while 40% ICDS centre were running at constituent L.P schools building

Finding on Children Enrolment in ICDS Centre

24. It is found that approximately 100%(99.97%) children 161918 (G:79339,B:82579 ) of the age group of 3+ years were enrolled in different AWCs of the existing 10 projects under Lakhimpur district in the year 2013 and 95832 (B: 49831,G:46001) in the year 2015. The percentage of boys was 51 % and percentage of girls was 49% of the total enrolment at 3+ stages, when percentage of
boys was 51.99 % and girls was 48% of the total enrolment at 5+ stages.

**Finding on Children Drop out and Absentees in ICDS Centre**

25. The total enrolment was 161918 at 3yrs of that 95832 children could reached at 5+ stage and the total drop out of children was 66086. The percentage of boys drop out was 51.99% while girl’s dropout rate was 48% and total dropout was 40.81% in Lakhimpur district. The dropout rate of the boys was higher than the girls.

26. 12% children remains absent in the AWC in Lakhimpur district. The percentage of boys’ absentees’ was 6.24 and girls absentee was 6.06.

**Finding on Pre-School Education Activities in ICDS Centre**

27. The curricular activities for the development of intelligence the activities were as like making sets, making patterns, arranging in order, learning number, and making shapes etc, while songs, storytelling, rhymes, dramatization masks playing, drawing, painting, clay modeling, paper craft, toys playing, dolls playing, tear and pasting activities were executed in all AWCs for the language, emotional and creativity development of the children’s. Walking, running, jumping, hopping, skipping, climbing, crawling, and bending etc were practicing for the physical development of the children’s.
28. Majority of the Anganwadi workers were of the middle age, married and Higher Secondary passed standard which fulfils the criteria of the ICDS Project

29. Among the Anganwadi Workers 81% had trained in pre-school education training while 19% Anganwadi Workers were untrained in Pre-School education training in ICDS centre.

30. The majority (73 %) of the Anganwadi Workers agreed that pre-school education training was very useful while 18% and 9% Anganwadi Worker expressed that, pre-school education training was useful to some extent and did not useful at all respectively. 58% AWW were facing some difficulties in carrying out pre-school education activities due to lack of pre-school education kit.

31. 60% Anganwadi workers had been feeling of over burden when they were entrusted duties for maintaining other records, as a result of which pre-school education activities were affected badly in AWCs.

32. 65% AWWs were taking 2hour time in pre-school education activities per day when 35% AWWs were spending less time -1 hour a day.
   Time stipulated to pre-school education activities is two hour per day in general.

33. 84% ICDS workers were following the time table while 16% were not conscious about that.

34. In the district 52% AWWs were happy with their job while 48% were unhappy in job. It was found that AWWs working in Dhakuakhana, and Ghilamora ICDS projects were unhappy than the AWWs working in the other ICDS projects of the district. The Anganwadi workers were
dissatisfied with their job as they faced irregular salary and the salary allowances were not sufficient to fulfil the economic needs of their lives. The salary is released very late sometimes 6-8 months which hamper their work and motivation.

**Finding on Health and Nutritional Status of Children in ICDS centre**

35. The weight efficiency of the 3yrs to 5yrs old was 85% while percentage of weight inefficient was 15% and the percentage of weight inefficient boys was 15% and girl was 16% in different ICDS project of Lakhimpur district. While comparing health status of the boys and girls it is found that there was a small difference in health status of boys and girls.

36. The health status of the childrens in Dhakuakhan, Karunabari and Bardoloni ICDS project had shown higher percentage of weight inefficient than the other ICDS projects.

37. The quality and quantity of food supplied was not satisfactory, Eight rupees (per child) had been sanction by the department for the nutritional food. It is observed that there was a significant effect of irregular food supply and children attendance in AWC. With the present prices the amount of rupees eight was not sufficient to provide nutritious food to children. Over and above the amount was not reaching on time. This creates a lot of problem in maintaining service of food to children and affects their attendance in AWCs. Instead of this the rural AWCs were showing more positive favour than the urban AWCs for the running the centre.
38. The study reveals that 91% AWW was staying in the same village while 9% AWW staying out side of the AWC. AWW were facing problems when they have to come from 3 to 4 km far away in every season.

39. 84 % AWC were providing education, and taking care of health and nutrition according to departmental roles while 16% AWC were not providing education and not taking care of health and nutrition.

40. The study revealed that 91% AWWs were staying in the same village while 9% AWWs were staying out side of the AWC. AWW were facing problems when they have to come from 3 to 4 km far away in rainy season.

41. The Anganwadi workers were dissatisfied with their job as they faced irregular salary and the salary allowances were not sufficient to fulfil the economic needs of their lives. The salary is released very late sometimes 6-8 months which hamper their work and motivation.

42. The CDPOs and Supervisors were visiting regularly (80%) but in the Nowboicha, Dhakuakhana and Karunabari ICDS projects there were less supervision than the others.

1.50 Discussion of Results

The ICDS programme has significant effect on the development of pre-primary education in rural and backward places of our country. There are no other educational institutions other than AWC to take responsibility of pre-school education especially for children living in rural, backward and slum area.
The study revealed that majority AWCs were running in temporary buildings which are major obstacle for Anganwadi workers to impart pre-school education. This findings supported by Bahl (1983), Goriawalla (1983), Saroja Devi (1984), Singh (1984), Sethi (1985), Nalini (1989), Barman, Nibha Rani (2001), Samridhi, Mahajan, Arti And Bharti, Shaveta. (2003), Rajni Dihingra and Iesha Sharma (2011), Dr Arun Chaudhari, Dr V S Mazumdar, Dr. R K Baxi and Dr. J R Damor (2014).

Present study indicates that there is significant difference in the enrolment of boys and girls while boy’s enrolment is better than the girls. The similar observations were given by the Sunderlal (1981).

The finding of this study observed that Anganwadi workers were dissatisfied in their work as they faced problem of low salary irregular payment of salary, and allowances which is not sufficient to fulfil the economic needs of their lives. This is too seen in the results of the studies made by Mehta (1985). Indira Bai (1980), Bandari (1980), Rane (1980) Singh (1984), Goriawalla (1985), Visvesvaran (1985), Bidarkoppa; Maggie; Philips, (1 986), Widge (1986), Panda (1990), Patil SB, Doibale MK, (2013) Thakur, Chauhan, Gupta, & Malla, (2015), Chhavi Bhatnagar & Dr. Subhasis Bhadra (2015). In their studies reported that the poor performance of AWWs can also be
attributed to the low honorarium paid to them. The Government has been equally concerned about these issues and has taken up appropriate steps. The case of creating a cadre for Anganwadi workers are under consideration.

The study also revealed that 60% Anganwadi worker had been feeling of over burden when they were entrusted duties for maintaining other records, as a result of which pre-school education activities were effected badly in AWCs. This findings supported by Thakare (2011) Patil SB, Doibale MK, (2013)

The present results identify that majority AWWs were facing some difficulties in carrying out pre-school education activities due to lack of pre-school education kit and other materials. The studies conducted by Gauri Deka (1982) Bahl (1983), Goriawalla (1983), Saroja Devi (1984), Singh (1984), Sethi (1985), Nalini (1989), Murthy (1989), Chudasama et.al. (2014) had supported the fact. AWWs were organizing pre-school education activities in most of the projects. It has been observed that there is an improvement in physical growth, language and mental ability of children as a result of pre-school education imparted in AWC. The constraints in organizing these activities are poor attendance, non-availability of teaching aids, lack of space and supervision etc.
In the present study it is found that 15% Children were weight inefficient and while comparing health status of the boys and girls it was found that there was a small significant difference in health status of boys and girls. However boys were found better than the girls on this aspect also supported by Gupta(1984) Farzana Alim and Farhat Jahan (2012)

The study revealed that there is significant effect of irregular food supply and children attendance in AWC between rural and urban AWC; the rural AWC were showing more positive than the urban AWC this result has been supported in the studies of Seema et al., (2002)

1.60 Conclusion

There is a greater demand for AWCs from sections of society that are more vulnerable in socioeconomic terms. This may have an impact on the provision, sustenance and growth of the AWC and these implications should be kept in mind while planning any interventions. The high worker absence is similar to the rates of school teacher absence across the country. From the present study it is observed and acknowledges that status of the pre-school education in ICDS centre is lying with very critical condition as like patient in ICU at hospital. This needs great critical intervention to do well for the country. The study revealed that majority AWCs are
running in temporary building with the congested environment. The children are deprived of food and play materials, as a result of that high significant dropout and absentees among the children are found. A good number of AWWs are in middle age and with the good qualification but they were not happy with the present economic conditions. The present study will help in the policy making process to uplifts pre-school education in ICDS centres.

1.70 Educational Implication of the Study

There is a growing awareness of the crucial significance of the preschool years for the optimum development of the child. This is the most sensitive and vulnerable stage of development - physically, intellectually, emotionally and socially. Bloom's (1964) work provides evidence that about 50% of the intellectual development of the child is complete by the time the child is about 4 years old and that environment exercises its maximum effect during the earlier years when development is most rapid. Further, the consequences of deprivation in the first years of life are much greater than those of deprivation in later years. This shows how crucial the early childhood stage is. The earliest years of life have a great influence in determining the basic patterns of all social and emotional development. Children's attitudes toward people and social experiences and their adjustment with other people
will depend largely on their learning experiences during the formative years of life. Ample opportunities for socialization are essential as children at this stage cannot be expected to lead a life of social interaction by remaining confined to family influences alone. It is in the nursery school that the child gets the opportunity to adapt himself to other children and adults outside his family. Unless children have a certain amount of exposure to other children they cannot grow through the various stages of social development.

The findings of the present study revealed that pre-primary education in ICDS programme had significant effect on the pre-school children which will encourage the educational administrators, planners, Child Development Project Officer (CDPO) and supervisors in giving more importance to the scheme. Pre-school education/ICDS programme launched in backward, rural and tribal areas. Non-availability of materials for play and learning in Anganwadi centres hindrances in both language and cognitive development of pre-school children. Hence efforts may be made to provide appropriate educational aids and play materials in each Anganwadi/ ICDS centre. The findings indicate that maximum Anganwadi/ ICDS centre are running in temporary buildings moreover there is no sufficient space for play by pre-school children. The
government should take in consideration that pre-school education plays a significant role in all round development of the children. Due to irregular supply of food there is high dropout rate and poor attendance in ICDS centres and instead of allocating sufficient financial budget by the central government the state government had failed to supply food and build the permanent buildings for the ICDS centre. The salary of the AWW should increase and that should be release in time so that they can afford day to day life expenditures. In the Right to Education Act less importance has been laid but pre-school education should be treated as top most priority in educational ladder. The Union Government as well as State Government should establish a separate department with full functionary for the pre-school education in the country. Pre-school education in ICDS centre is getting less importance that should be changed by replanning in ICDS programme. Government should adopt proper policy for eradicating the problems like lack of electricity and water, shortage of storage space; wastage and misuse of material, failure to maintain accounts and absence of staff, lack of transport facilities, village level politics, lack of community participation, ineffective community participation, ineffective co-ordination between ICDS and health staff, delay in the appointment of AWWs, lack of supervision,
poor interpersonal communication and leadership, poor or irregular attendance in AWWs, delay in food supplies and frequent transfer of project staff. Administrative reforms is highly significant in order to develop infrastructure, job responsibilities, job satisfaction, job performance, training of functionaries, while appointing AWW consideration should be made, of their socio-economic factors like age, marital status, educational background.

1.80 Suggestions for further Research

In the present study, the investigator made a humble beginning to find the different problems of in the context of Integrated Child Development Schemes services in Lakhimpur district. He felt that there are many gaps or areas in ICDS which need to be reselected and suggests the following areas/topics for further research.

11. Since the present study was conducted on ten ICDS project of Lakhimpur district it is suggested that the findings of the present study may be verified through replication studies over a large number of ICDS project in Assam as well as in other Indian States.

12. The present study had discloses the shortcomings of the pre-primary education in ICDS programme of Lakhimpur district. There is a great need to make the similar studies on impact of these findings in the development of pre-school education of the children in same district as well as in other district of the state.
13. In the present study questioner prepared by the investigator used in order to collect data for the objectives of the study. Research may be conducted with the help of other tools and techniques preferably through experimental methods that can contribute rich experiences to the programme to further enrich it.

14. Early childhood is a critical period in the developmental ladder. The Integrated Child Development Scheme Services (ICDS), the largest of its kind, is primarily intended to bring about a holistic development during this period with the aim of preparing children for the schooling life and hence aptly designating this stage as pre-school period.

15. The results indicate some relationship between demand for pre-school education and the socioeconomic conditions of the village and the parents. The exact nature of this relationship needs to be investigated further.

16. While this study unambiguously unforced the impact of the ICDS programme on early childhood development, it also brought to the force the deficiency in the age appropriate level of development nearly in all dimension. The effect of intervention of the programme although look effective, but not quite effective enough to accelerate the process of development.

17. Further, it is observed that the implementation of the programme is not as effective as it is expected. Hence there is a challenge on its effective implementation, which should be taken care of for the betterment of the children.
18. Micro-level studies have recommended to critically evaluate and revise the training of AWWs and to make training of Supervisors more practically oriented with a focus on development of supervisory skills.

19. There is a great need to conduct the similar study taking the variables of community, locality and socio-economic status of the parents.

20. The investigator will like to suggest for the further study in order to find the significance of ICDS in pre-school education in this region.