



## **Quality of Pre School Education in Anganwadi Centres**

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### **Abstract**

This paper looks into the quality of pre-school education being offered in Anganwadi Centres in Gurugram and Manesar with special attention to learning conditions, teaching and learning methods and the perception of various stakeholders. Primary data were gathered using descriptive research design in a sample of 100 respondents who included parents and other members of the community that were part of the chosen Anganwadi Centres. The results show that Anganwadis continue to play an important and convenient role in imparting early childhood education in urban and peri-urban environments, and that the perceptions toward care, safety, and the worker-child relationship are mostly positive. Nevertheless, the quality of pre-school education was observed to be skewed depending on the differences in infrastructure, availability of age-specific learning facilities, frequency of pre-school activities and workforce based limitations. The study points out that although the basic early learning practices exist, there is a tendency to limit the depth and consistency of instructions to competing service responsibilities and pressures of the contexts. The study adds localised data to advance initiatives that would strengthen the foundation of education with the help of Anganwadi Centres.

**Keywords:** Anganwadi Centres, pre-school education, early childhood care and education, quality of education, urban India

### **Introduction**

Pre-school education by the Anganwadi Centres is a fundamental part of the Integrated Child Development Services offered in India aimed at offering early learning to children in addition to nutrition and health services to those between the ages of 3 and 6. This has been taken on as a new urgent policy measure since the National Education Policy has made the foundational stage (since age 3) pivotal to subsequent learning outcomes and has demanded scaled-up early childhood care and education by ensuring better curricula, learning environments and workforce capacity in Anganwadis and similar institutions (Ministry of Education, 2020). The national programme evaluation also indicates that the quality and stability of early childhood care and education differ significantly across centres and the quality of the services depends on infrastructure, access to learning materials, preparation and monitoring systems of the workers (NITI Aayog, 2023). Empirical studies also emphasize the fact that quality dimension is multidimensional and includes aspects of physical

infrastructure, WASH, pre-school learning environment, curriculum transmission, teacher-child interaction, child safety, and Anganwadi environments tend to be average on many of these dimensions compared to other pre-school modalities (Tabassum, 2025; Development and Validation of Anganwadi Pre-school Assessment Scale, 2023).



In this context, Gurugram and Manesar offer a rather topical area of investigation of the Anganwadi pre-school quality. Both are rapidly expanding urban-industrial areas typified by strong in-migration, non-uniform settlement and steep socio-economic gradients which will both increase demand on available public early education as well as exert pressure on the conditions of delivery. The urban Anganwadis in India report that environments of early learning may be limited in terms of space, routines that privilege care activities compared to pedagogy and also irregular quality of adult-child interaction with consequences on school preparedness and equal development (Rao, 2025; Somani, 2023). Haryana is also undertaking to upgrade Anganwadi centres to the model of play school, which is an indicator of administrative focus on the pre-school aspect and increasing expectations when it comes to classroom organisation and learning resources (Women & Child Development Department, Haryana, 2024). It is on this background that the current study explores the quality of the pre-school education in the Anganwadi Centres in Gurugram and Manesar in the context of primary data obtained on 100 respondents on how the classroom processes, and service inputs experience affect the local stakeholders and where quality gaps exist in the study setting.



### **Need Of the Study**

The current research is necessitated by the fact that despite the continued worry on the disparity in quality of pre-school education provided by Anganwadi Centres, especially in the rapidly urbanizing and industrializing areas like Gurugram and Manesar. Although Anganwadis are required to offer early childhood services and education as part and parcel of the Integrated Child Development Services, the empirical studies show that the pre-school component is not stressed in practice, and more emphasis is paid to nutrition and health services (Rao, 2015; Kaul et al., 2017). It has been demonstrated that the differences in infrastructure, access to age-appropriate learning materials, training of workers, and pedagogical practices have a direct effect on the cognitive and socio-emotional achievements of children, and that such differences are not properly reported at the local level (Britto et al., 2017; NITI Aayog, 2023).

Gurugram and Manesar are two unique settings characterized by high population growth, migration and socio-economic diversity resulting in a complicated set of needs to the public early childhood services. The current literature on Anganwadi operation in the urban and peri-urb environment is small and frequently depends on secondary information or governmental surveys, which creates gaps in comprehending the perception of the stakeholders of pre-school quality (Somani, 2023). Also, the policy-based necessity of micro-level evidence to guide the application of the focus of the National Education Policy on the foundational stage and further transformation of the Anganwadi Centres into better learning facilities (Ministry of Education, 2020). This study will deal with the necessity of context-specific information regarding the quality of pre-school education by producing primary data on local respondents, which will enable outlining viable constraints and the areas where a specific intervention should be adopted.

### **Scope of the research**

The current research is confined to an analysis of quality of pre-school education offered by Anganwadi Centres in Gurugram and Manesar with special reference to the early learning practices as opposed to the overall ICDS mandate. The research is centered on pre-school quality dimensions like quality of learning environment, accessing and utilization of teaching learning materials, pre-school daily routine, interactions between Anganwadi workers and children, as well as, stakeholder perception of school readiness. The 100 respondents, including beneficiaries and community members related to the chosen Anganwadi Centres, are regarded as a primary data collection to provide the ground-level experiences and evaluation of the quality of the services. The study is not aimed at comparing it with the private pre-schools or evaluating the nutritional and health outcomes in detail, and geographically it is limited to the chosen urban and peri-urban localities, which gives an opportunity to determine the quality of pre-school education in the chosen context.





### Literature Review

Quality in pre-school education has been theorised as a cluster of structural quality, process quality, results of child development and best and most consistent relationships to child learning are achieved through process dimensions of responsive interactions, language replete routines and play based pedagogy. According to the modern early childhood policy and research, the enabling conditions mediate these everyday experiences and include the safety of infrastructure, water and sanitation, adequate learning materials, the appropriate adult:child ratio, and a trained and supported workforce (World Health Organization et al., 2018). This quality agenda has been of relevance especially in India where the National Education Policy has re-packaged the early childhood care and education (ECCE) as the first-level beginning at the age of three and requires a higher Anganwadi provision, improved school transmission and learning conditions to enable school preparedness and equity (Ministry of Education, 2020). It is, however, found in the literature that the expansion of access, despite being significant, has not always resulted in homogeneous quality, and that the inequality in quality is often concentrated in socio-economically disadvantaged localities and in high-growth urban peripheries where the pressure on the services is increasing faster than the ability of the system to meet it (Rao, 2021).

Anganwadi Centres remain the largest provider of pre-school in the Indian ECCE environment but scholarship uncovers a structural opposition in the design where the same frontline agents are expected to offer pre-school education, nutritional supplementation, health-linked work and significant recordkeeping. Such multi services need can blur the teaching time and restrict pedagogical focus particularly in cases where the staffing is low and the administrative needs broad (NITI Aayog, 2023). Based on large-scale programme evaluation and review assistance, it is perceived that most centres will be in areas that are not designed in the most optimal way to support early learning and the amount of safe play space, age-based instruction-learning resources, and the frequency of planned pre-school actions



will be inconsistent (NITI Aayog, 2023; Central Square Foundation, 2023). These restrictions are timely because the foundation level assumes having predictable routines, guided play, emergent literacy and numeracy, and socio-emotional learning opportunities, which should not only rely on materials but also on the capacity of workers to set up classrooms and ensure high-quality interactions (Ministry of Education, 2020; World Health Organization et al., 2018). Therefore, the existing body of literature states that quality improvement in Anganwadi pre-schools should be examined with reference to the provision-side (infrastructure, materials, training, monitoring) and experience-side (interaction quality, inclusion, child engagement) indicators in comparison with the ones focused on the enrolment or attendance indicators exclusively (Rao, 2021; Central Square Foundation, 2023).

It is possible to make a number of empirical contributions to enlighten on what quality would be in Anganwadi pre-school set ups and where they would be typically deficient. The policy question, access rather than access to pre-school facilities, was non-existent according to the India Early Childhood Education Impact Study commissioned by UNICEF and implemented as a large-scale longitudinal initiative stating that access to pre-school facilities in most areas was high (UNICEF, 2017). Besides this, a study regarding provision of equity and quality in pre-school in India states that, even after the increase in the centre-based pre-school attendance, quality differentials are high and quality differentials are linked to the household wealth, parental education, and local service ecosystems (Rao, 2021). Under the conditions of assessments that touch upon the ECCE element, yet mainly rely on the public health orientations, the outcomes of school readiness and correlates have been utilized to infer the problems of quality issues, with the findings having revealed the importance of uniform learning operations, beneficial adult contacts and the general homecentre association (Samanta, 2017). Taken together, it indicates that such an improvement in the level of inputs may not be sufficiently sufficient to increase classroom processes and involvement of children.

Recent measurement oriented studies also further develop the literature which offer systematised means of measuring the quality of Anganwadi pre-schools in terms of infrastructure not in the form of generic checklists. The other area of quality that has been covered is development and validation of Anganwadi Pre-school Assessment Scale which has been used to measure various aspects of quality including physical infrastructure, WASH facilities, pre-school environment, curriculum transaction plus teacher -child interactions and child safety. This positioning strategy underlines the thesis that quality must be considered as a coherent construct with safety, hygiene and pedagogy playing a joint role on daily lives of children ( Development and Validation of Anganwadi Pre-school Assessment Scale in Indian Context, 2023). Also, the practice of urban Anganwadis suggests that the quality of processes is often restricted due to the reduced space, the unequal distribution of resources and conflicting activities, and can be successfully profiled using the observational tools designed in the early years educational context. A case of such an assessment of learning conditions in urban Anganwadis reported an interaction of space and materials with frequent organisation



and learning opportunities, therefore, qualifying the concept of quality by the context of tangible opportunities of centres of urban disadvantaged populace (Dockrell et al., 2024; Rao, 2025). It would be useful in the study particularly in areas like Gurugram and Manesar where urbanization, mixed nature of migration and settlement might lead to visible differences in the centre states and parent engagement sustainability.

Another theme that appears to be widely used in the literature is the capacity within the workforce and the implication of the workloading on pre-school pedagogy. Based on evidence of national assessment and review of policies, the Anganwadi workers are under constant pressure as pre-school education is a field with less time compared to nutrition distribution, coordination with health services and administrative reporting, which could reduce the amount and quality of communication with a child during interaction with instructions (NITI Aayog, 2023). This coincides with the experimental and implementation research studies which are emerging to support the pre-school aspect by helping the workers and parents. Using the example of an experimental evaluation of a pre-school service improvement program at Anganwadis, the baseline restrictions on the time spent on instruction, as well as the opportunities to alter the routines of the centres and learning outcomes based on the structural supports, are examined (Keskar, 2024). The evidence of the interventions cannot be perfectly linearly compared across states, but it assists to present a meaningful process: the quality improvement could mean giving the workers a chance to plan and administer pedagogy with the assistance of simplified routines, practical training, and tools that would make more parents participate in the home-based learning (Keskar, 2024). Similar studies on reimagining ICDS and refurbishing centres as part of initiatives such as Saksham Anganwadi have been discussed nationally with governance and capacity-building as the primary drivers of improving early learning, and not as the support resources (NITI Aayog, 2024).

The state level reforms make the quality debate even more contextual by showing the way that governments attempt to ensure that the learning environments are operating. In Haryana, it is documented that the Anganwadi Centres have been renovated into the exemplars of play schools to improve the pre-school aspect, which is an indicator of the friendlier environments, the devices, and the learning based programs (Government of Haryana, 2024). This emphasis aligns with the national policy objectives of the foundational level, but literature cautions that the enhancement of infrastructure can hardly lead to positive interactions and curriculum transaction without training, mentoring and monitoring with the focus on pedagogy (Ministry of Education, 2020; Central Square Foundation, 2023). Other ethnographic studies of ECCE in India also put forward the significance of demands of families, language and local political economy as driving force of the daily functioning of early childhood institutions, which means that quality should be a relational phenomenon, as well, trust, communication and perceived value between parents and communities (Centre for Budget and Policy Studies, 2019). It is especially applicable to urban and peri-urban environments where the hopes of parents may be to seek out private-provide, not necessarily in accordance with developmentally appropriate practice (Rao, 2021; UNICEF, 2017).





In general, all literature since 2015 has been reduced to three implications on researches on the quality of the Anganwadi pre-school. First, quality should be considered a multidimensional notion, which will entail the integration of infrastructure and WASH with pedagogy, quality of safety and interaction, since the shortcomings of one field can make the learning of children complex (Developing and Validating Anganwadi Pre-school Assessment Scale in Indian Context, 2023; World Health Organization et al., 2018). Second, the workforce constraints and governance design are key issues to the quality and level of pre-school education delivered in a multi-service centre (NITI Aayog, 2023; NITI Aayog, 2024). Third, urbanisation and socio-economic heterogeneity will be prone to enhance differences in service experience and parent perception, which needs local evidence to decipher quality differences and develop effective means of ameliorating it (Rao, 2021; Rao, 2025). Regardless of these teachings, location-specifically-based data is sparse especially, primary data, on fast-growing urban-industrial areas such as Gurugram and Manesar, in terms of stakeholder perceptions of the learning environments, the quality and the routines of interactions, as well as the enabling conditions. This omission is a vivid reason as to why the current research is geared towards gauging the quality of pre-school education in the Anganwadi Centres in Gurugram and Manesar on the basis of the primary data on 100 respondents which is consistent with recent measurements approaches and policy focus without reducing the quality to single measures and purely administrative quantifications (Ministry of Education, 2020; NITI Aayog, 2023).

### **Methodology**

The research design is descriptive research design that will be carried out using primary data as a means of studying the quality of pre-school education in Anganwadi Centres, Gurugram and Manesar. A total of 100 respondents were used to gather data in order to obtain the perspectives of the stakeholders regarding the practice of early learning and conditions in the centres. The respondents included the parents or their primary caregivers of the children in Anganwadi Centres and the community residents who have close contacts with the centres so that the data are based on the lived experiences of service delivery. The data collection tool comprised of a structured questionnaire that addressed issues related to the learning environment, the availability and use of teaching and learning resources, daily pre-school routine, and interactions between the Anganwadi workers and children. The questionnaire was filled in face to face by the respondents and by the help of the assistants to maintain clarity and completion. The research will employ the simple descriptive analysis to interpret the answers and the results will allow to evaluate the quality of pre-school education in the context of the chosen urban and peri-urban settings.

### **Results and Discussion**

Findings of primary data based on 100 respondents give an insight into quality of pre-school education provided by Anganwadi Centres in Gurugram with special focus on learning environments, pedagogical practices as well as stakeholder involvement. Most of the respondents indicated that children were regularly enrolled and attended activities of the Anganwadi pre-school, an indication that the centres still serve as a viable entry point to early

learning activities, particularly to the lower and middle socio-economic families. Nevertheless, the quality was highly differentiated among the locations and indicated the disparity in infrastructure, the availability of spaces, and the organisation of routine. The respondents in comparatively better equipped centres reported on cleaner, better-ventilated and more supportive classrooms with respect to structured play and group activities, with others emphasizing the overcrowding and lack of indoor space to limit children movement and interaction.

<b>Survey Indicator</b>	<b>Response Category</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Overall satisfaction with pre-school education	Satisfied	58	58%
	Neutral	27	27%
	Dissatisfied	15	15%
Adequacy of teaching-learning materials	Adequate	42	42%
	Somewhat adequate	38	38%
	Inadequate	20	20%
Quality of Anganwadi worker-child interaction	Good	55	55%
	Average	30	30%
	Poor	15	15%
Regularity of pre-school activities	Regular	46	46%
	Occasional	34	34%
	Irregular	20	20%
Perceived support for school readiness	Yes	60	60%
	Partly	25	25%
	No	15	15%



Overall satisfaction with pre-school education

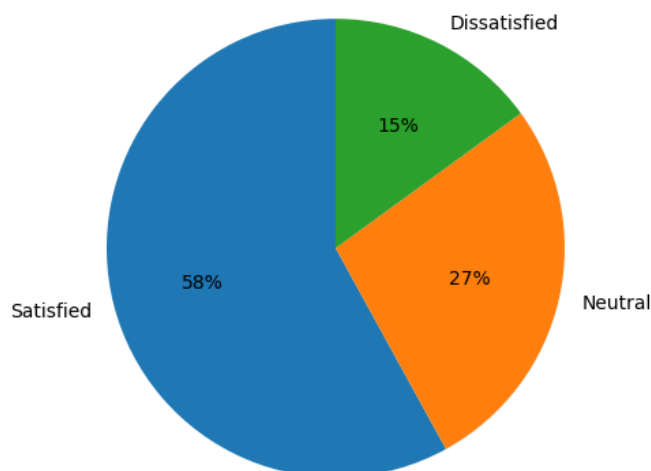


Figure 1 depicts the general level of satisfaction with pre-school education in Anganwadi Centres. According to the chart, most of the respondents (58 per cent) were satisfied with the quality of pre-school education, with 27 per cent stating that they were neutral and 15 per cent dissatisfied. Such allocation shows the overall positive opinion and significant quality issues.

Regarding the aspects of learning environment and instruction-learning materials, the respondents tended to answer in the affirmative that they had the basic materials like charts, picture cards and toys but most of them pointed out these materials were fewer in number and not necessarily age related. Some of the respondents noticed that resources were used repeatedly and the resources lacked diversity to maintain the interest of children in the long period of time.

Adequacy of learning materials

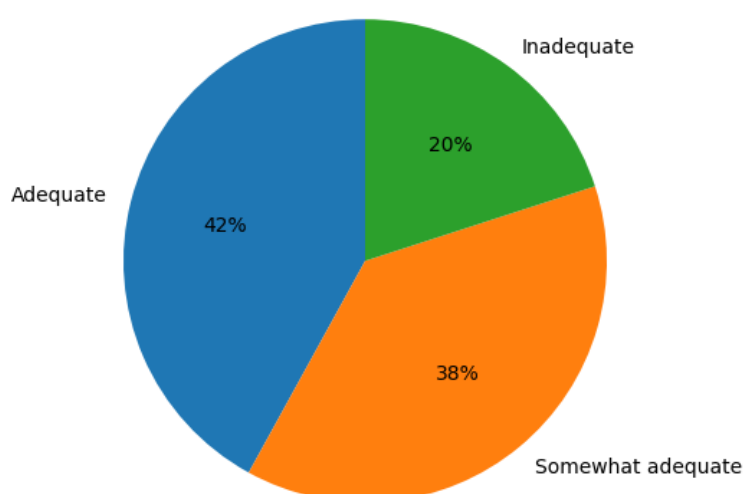


Figure 2 shows the perceptions of the respondents towards the sufficiency of the teaching learning materials. Approximately 42 per cent saw the materials as sufficient, 38 per cent

reported that they were only partially sufficient and 20 per cent perceived that they were insufficient. The chart illustrates variations in material adequacy and diversity in centres.

This observation is in line with the implicated issues in the literature, that the availability of materials in itself does not accrue to quality unless resources are multifaceted and incorporated into learning habits of day-to-day learning. It was also found that, outdoor play, which was recognised to be significant, was inconsistent in centres that did not have a secure open space, especially in industrial-proximate or densely populated areas of Gurugram and Manesar. Consequently, physical play and exploratory learning were seen to be unevenly distributed across centres.

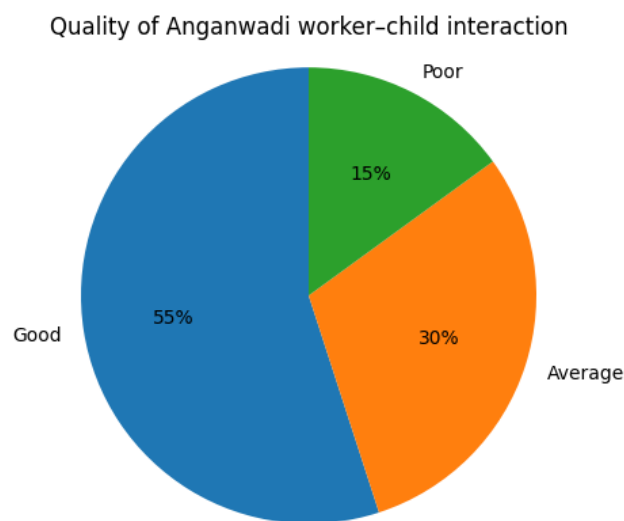
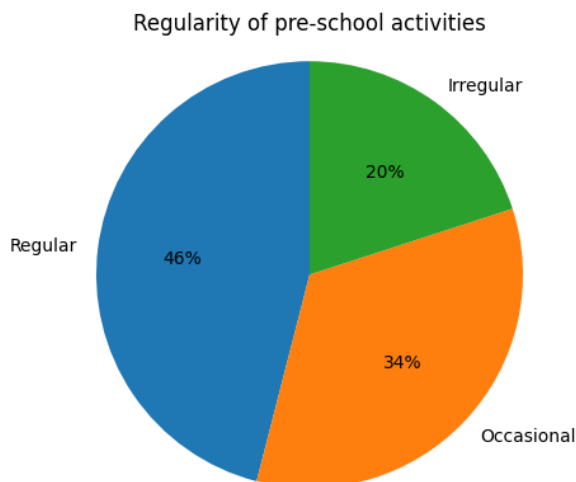


Figure 3 presents the views on the quality of Anganwadi worker- child interaction. An obvious majority of the respondents (55 per cent) rated interactions as good, with 30 per cent rating interactions as average and 15 per cent rating interactions as poor. This indicates comparative power in care giving bonds, and inconsistency in the instructional interaction.

The routine practices of pre-school on a daily basis proved to be a primary influential factor in the perception of quality. Most respondents were found to have limited periods of pre-school activities during the Anganwadi schedule which were generally limited by nutrition distribution and other service related checks. It was also reported to have storytelling, rhymes and simple counting and this indicates that basic literacy and numeracy concepts existed.



The regularity of pre-school activities is represented in figure 4. About 46 per cent of the respondents affirmed that they undertook the activities fairly frequently, 34 per cent affirmed that it was done occasionally and 20 per cent affirmed that it was irregular. This is indicative of lack of consistency in routine application between centres.

Simultaneously, the respondents mentioned that activities were often routine and dependent on the personal initiative of the Anganwadi worker instead of being predetermined in the framework of a specifically applied curriculum. In centres perceived to have motivated and attentive workers, and this is where the respondents explained more involving routines, such as interactive songs, question answer sessions and supervised play. On the other hand, pre-school sessions in centres experiencing staffing or heavy administration workload were reported to be shorter and less interactive, which supports the opinion that the quality of processes is strongly connected with the state of the workforce.

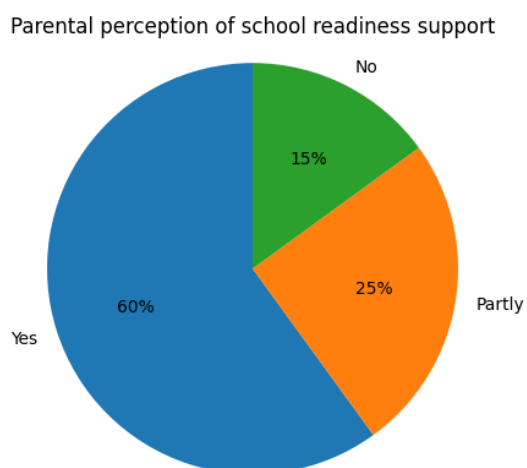


Figure 5 gives the perceptions of school readiness support of parents. Sixty per cent of the respondents believed that Anganwadi pre-school schools helped children prepare to attend the primary schools, 25 per cent believed that it was part rather than complete help and 15 per cent did not believe that it helped in any way.



Relations between the workers and children at the Anganwadi were also viewed positively particularly in issues of care, familiarity as well as emotional support. Most of the respondents trusted the workers and could see their significance to the provision of a safe and supportive environment. However, the respondents were more mixed as far as instructional interaction is concerned. Some referred to the encouragement and patience and attention to individual, other said that too many people in a group limited the potential of personalised communication and the likelihood of having responsive communication. The given observation signifies the contrast between quality of caregiving and pedagogical interaction in which the centrality of warmth and supervision can be prevalent in most centres compared to the instructional depth. The other observation that the respondents noted was that language use was different and the teaching mode tended to be in the local language thus easy to understand but against what the parents would have envisioned their children to learn in their early years especially in Gurugram city.

The other aspect of results discussion that emerged was parental education and interest in pre-school education. Majority of the respondents alleged that they valued Anganwadi due to the nutrition and child care services but pre-school education was an added value but not the goal of visiting an Anganwadi. Parents however were becoming more enlightened and realizing the importance of early learning to school preparedness particularly those parents who had a feeling of exposure of the private pre-schools. Other respondents exchanged light communication between the Anganwadi workers of information about the progress of the children, and other respondents reported that they received little feedback including in terms of attendance and health related information. This is a one-sided interaction signifying that the quality of pre-school education as perceived is also prone to communication practices and parental expecting that are socio-economic background dependent and educational background.

Comparison of Gurugram and Manesar response revealed differences in the context. The Gurugram respondents raised space constraints and high-enrolment pressure, which is one of the characteristics of urban density and migration demands, more frequently. In Manesar, there were greater possibilities of the respondents reporting variation in the continuity and attendance which is linked to the mobility of the families of industrial workers. All these situational factors impacted on the quality experience factor, which implies that the general standards may not be capable of capturing the changing nature of service delivery in the urban-industrial settings. Generally speaking, the results show that despite the Anganwadi Centres being a very essential source to get pre-school education, the quality of learning experiences obtained is uneven and directly relies on the sufficiency of infrastructures, the quantity of work-force, and the allocation of different service activities.

### **Conclusion**

The current paper investigated the quality of pre-school education in Anganwadi Centres in Gurugram and Manesar with regard to learning environments, teaching and learning methods, and stakeholder views based on primary data. This evidence shows that the Anganwadi Centres are still a vital and convenient resource of early childhood education, especially to



those families that depend on state-provided services in the rapidly urbanising and industrial areas. Frequent enrolment and mostly favourable views of been taken care of and security imply that Anganwadis maintain a high community presence and some form of trust among beneficiaries, which is a fundamental success factor of providing early learning.

Simultaneously, the research indicates that quality of pre-school education is unequally experienced among the centres. Although a large number of the respondents admitted having the basic teaching-learning materials, and regular activities, space issues, the variety of materials and the length of time that the structured pre-school activities take were often cited. These limitations seem to be closely connected with the contextual factors like high enrolment, migration contingent mobility of families and multiplicity of responsibilities that Anganwadi workers have. The results support the literature that states that the performance of early childhood education is less tied to the nominal access and more to the quality of day-to-day interactions, routines regularity and the possibility of the worker to make children experience meaningful and play-based learning (Rao, 2021; NITI Aayog, 2023).

The research indicates also that caregiving and emotional support role is thought to have been perceived as higher than instructional depth in most Anganwadi Centres. Good employee-children contacts were extensively recognised, but individualised attention and language-enriched communication were limited by the number of people in the group and the amount of work. The parental perceptions also reveal that despite the growing awareness of the significance of school preparation, the expectations of pre-school education continue to be influenced by comparisons with the provision in the private sector and the lack of communication about the learning progress of children. It is in agreement with a wider body of literature that would focus on the necessity to enhance parent-centre involvement as a quality enhancement in early childhood education (Britto et al., 2017; UNICEF, 2017).

On the whole, the research highlights that both enabling conditions and classroom processes are to be taken into consideration in order to improve the quality of pre-school education in Anganwadi Centres in Gurugram and Manesar. Infrastructure improvements and materials supply, although being essential, should be accompanied by facilitation of Anganwadi workers to focus on pedagogy as part of their diverse responsibilities, as well as systems that promote parental knowledge and involvement in early childhood education. The study offers the benefits of offering location-specific evidence due to the use of primary data, which can serve as a contribution to the current policy and academic debate on reinforcing the initial phase of the education process with the help of Anganwadi Centres in complex urban and peri-urban settings.

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