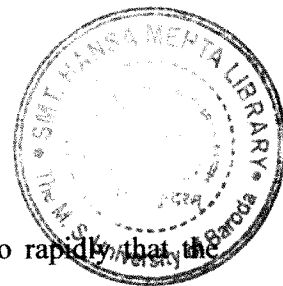


INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION



Contemporary Indian society has been undergoing several changes so rapidly that the construct of childhood differs from what it was even a generation ago. The young Indian child is at the center of a series of ever widening “circles of influence:” the family (extended or nuclear); growing parental employment; the local community (large or small); society (monolithic or decentralized); and—in recent times—the whole world. Children and their parents today have a large variety of choices that considerably differ from the choices faced by their own parents or grandparents. In industrialized societies, many parents increasingly experience the pressure of providing their children an academic head start.

Education is an umbilical link between society and its people. Vital forms of training and support are provided through it. According to Durkheim’s classical definition:

“Education is the influence exercised by adult generations on those that are yet not ready for social life. Its object is to arouse and develop in the child a certain number of physical, intellectual and moral states which are demand of him (her) by both the political society as a whole, and by the particular milieu for which he (she) is specifically destined” (1956:71).

The comprehensive ideal is that all young people—irrespective of social class, economic circumstances, ethnic origin, intellectual power, and geographic location—should be emancipated by their own powers.

According to the Faure Commission report, the provision of age- and need-appropriate education for every young child is:

“An essential pre-condition to any educational and cultural policy, just because it alone can maximize the probability that the next generation will be alert, curious, imaginative, stable, and flexible enough to tackle and solve the personal, familial, social, and political problems which are not being generated—mainly but not solely by technological change—all over the world.”

Today, children are the target of considerably more serious attention, not only because they play an important part in the demographic statistics or constitute a significant charge on the social budget but also because they deserve consideration in their own right. Children are still underage and dependent on adult care, guidance, and economic support. Why do humans feel the need to educate their children? Through education, the community attempts to bring the child to a stage where he/she can become a productive unit of society. Education grants possession of the understanding, knowledge, skills, and dispositions by which one makes sense of the physical world to be understood through sciences and mathematics; the social and political world within which one's life is too often shaped by others; the moral world of ideals and responsibilities; and the aesthetic world of beauty and style through which one finds pleasure and delight. However, entry into those different worlds is more than making a sense of that which is inherited from others. It gives access to ideas and tools through this understanding and actively facilitates distinctive personal development.

Early Childhood Education

The first six years of a child's life are crucial formative years and the importance of these years of childhood has been recognized worldwide. The young, intensely curious, imaginative, and very active child acquires most of his/her personal and social habits at this pre-school age. This is the stage at which early childhood education (ECE) is executed. On the subject of ECE, the *Encyclopedia of Educational Research* states that:

“ECE is meant to contribute to the development of young children. It is an environmental influence that gradually interacts with the developing abilities and disposition of young children to form all aspects of their personality, such as social, emotional, affective, moral, physical, intellectual, creative, and esthetic.”

Early learning begets later learning and success, just like early failure breeds later failure; this belief has been validated in both previous economic and educational research (Boocock, 1995; Heckman, 1999). According to the World Development Report (Jaycox, 1992), educational and economic development are positively correlated, making education intrinsic to development. Therefore, the potential long-term benefits for children's cognitive and social development (Barnett, 1995; Gonzalez, 2000) have inspired increased interest in ECE research. This shows that high-quality early education can lead to lasting benefits that persist throughout adolescence and adulthood. High-quality active learning in the early years provides significant lifetime benefits for children, especially for those living in disadvantaged circumstances. Studies have shown how they can positively affect educational performance, economic status in adulthood,

criminal behavior, and family stability (Schweinhart et. al, 1993; O’Flaherty, 1995). Murlidharan (1973), while highlighting the importance of ECE in India, emphasized that:

“Preschool years are also crucial for developing proper values and attitudes in children. The foundation of scientific attitude and proper values such as hard work and national sentiment can be better developed in children if a beginning in this direction is made in early childhood.”

Currently, the ECE is moving in two opposite directions. To some ECE educationists, it seems that ECE can and ought to be strengthened in the direction of supporting more effective total learning and growth for young children in ways that matter to children, and yet remain significant in the eyes of adults. This approach does not focus on specific academic skills but focuses on creating a base for children. To others, it seems appropriate to hasten a child’s entry into a watered-down version of first standard.

Currently, many programs and services that impart and implement ECE programs are available, each having diverse goals and contents; they are provided by government, non-government, and private organizations. It is necessary to scrutinize the present sheer variety and number of such programs and materials, all of which claim to be new, non-sexist, cognitive, and creative, and are presented in attractive packages.

Children are no longer viewed as isolated and egocentric or as engaged in action with objects alone. Our view of children does not emphasize only the cognitive aspects, belittle their feelings or what is not logical, and does not consider the role of the affective domain with ambiguity. Instead, we visualize children as being rich in potential, strong,

powerful, competent and, most of all, connected to adults and other children (Malaguzzi, 1993).

Irrespective of the diverse perspectives, there are many arguments in favor of services for the young children. According to Robert Myers (1992):

- *Human rights argument:* Children have the right to live and to develop to their fullest potential.
- *Moral and social values argument:* Humanity transmits its values through children. To preserve desirable morals and social values in the future, one must begin with children.
- *Economic argument:* The society can benefit economically by investing in child development, through increased productivity and cost savings.
- *Program efficacy argument:* The efficacy of other programs (health, nutrition, education, etc.) can be improved by combining them with programs for children.
- *Social equity argument:* By providing a “fair start” (or the best possible start), it is possible to modify distressing socioeconomic and gender-related equities.
- *Political argument:* Children provide the rallying point for social and political actions that build consensus and solidarity.
- *Scientific argument:* Research evidence demonstrates that the early years are critical in the development of intelligence, personality, and social behavior and that there are long-term effects associated with early intervention programs.

- *Changing social and demographic circumstances:* The increasing survival of vulnerable children, changing family structures, country-to-city migration, inclusion of women in the labor force, and other changes require attention towards early care and development.

When viewed collectively, these arguments provide a powerful basis for focusing on children. Children are both part of, but also distinct from, the family, and their interests may not always coincide with those of the parents and other adults. Children have a recognized and independent place in society, with their own rights as individual human beings and full members of society. Children are considered to be a social group: “psychological individualization of children gives way to sociological consideration of how as a group their lives are affected by large-scale socioeconomic factors” (Mayall, 1996: 61). Thus, the ECE encompasses the unfolding of behaviors from immature to mature, from patterns of behavior ranging from simple to complex, and the evolution of the human being from dependency to autonomous adulthood. More simply, ECE is a process of change in which the child learns to handle more complex levels of thought, emotion, and interactions with people and objects in the environment.

International Commitments, National Policies, and Legislation Framework

On the international front, India has been signatory to the Jomtien Declaration of 1990 and the Dakar Framework of Education (2000). Further, in between these two landmark developments, the World Summit on Children (1990) and ratification of the Convention of Rights of Children (1992) have reaffirmed the commitment of the nation towards

survival, protection, participation, and development (with equal opportunities for education, including preschool education) of child rights.

Article 45 (Directive Principle of State Policy) has directed the State to provide free and compulsory education to all children up to 14 years of age. The inclusion of children in the age group of 0–6 years within this constitutional directive implies the intent to provide conditions for holistic child development with preschool education as an important component. The Constitution's 86th Amendment Act of 2001 has split the age group of 0–14 years into 2 clear categories to cover the interests of children of both age groups under separate Articles in the Constitution. Articulating the intent to specifically cater to the needs of the 0- to 6-year old children, the 86th Amendment Act has modified Article 45 (Directive Principle of State Policy) to read as follows: "The state shall endeavor to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete 6 years of age." The tenth Five-Year Plan (2002–2003) has also acknowledged ECE as the first step in the educational ladder and has reaffirmed its priority for child development with special focus on Early Childhood Care and Education adopting a rights-based approach as advocated by the draft National Policy and Charter for Children (2002).

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is one of the major initiatives of the Government of India (GoI) for universal retention by 2010. It is a mission for adopting innovative school readiness projects on small scales. The SSA (2000–2010) acknowledges the importance of the ECE and reiterates the postulates of the National Policy on Education (NPE; 1986), and ensures support to preschool education. Thus, all states and union territories under the Indian union are now being activated through the SSA to implement ECE programs.

Taking cognizance of these facts, the National Council for Educational Research and Training designed the National Core Curriculum Framework (2000) and advocated the introduction of a 2-year early education for all children in the age group of 3–6 years. These recent constitutional obligations and developmental initiatives make it imperative to extend the need and scope of ECE services at an accelerated pace.

The 2001 Census revealed that India has approximately 593 lakh children in the age group of 3–6 years (Department of Women and Child Development, 2001). However, integrated child development service (ICDS)-based preschool activities cover only 153 lakh children, and the remaining 440 lakh remain deprived of the benefits of ECE initiatives. The Ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD), Government of India, recommends that one ECE center should be made operational for 20 (\pm 5) children of the related age group (MHRD, 2003). However, in reality, there is only one preschool for every 8,000 children in India.

Imparting ECE: Government, Non-Government, and Private Consortia

A democratic concept of the quality of education should necessarily take into consideration access to preschools. In a populous country like India, 0- to 6-year-old children account for 17.5% of the total population. With rampant inequality of income distribution among regions, it is important to identify who has access to education, what kind of education is offered, and by whom. How these early childhood services are delivered, organized, staffed, and funded, as well as the number of places available for such services varies widely across the country. Nonetheless, it shares the same vocabulary: promoting development; ensuring readiness to learn and readiness for school;

enhancing school performance; early intervention for children deemed to be in need, at risk, or otherwise disadvantaged; developmentally appropriate practices and desirable outcomes; models and programs; plans and cost effectiveness; regulation and standards; and most pervasive of all, the language of quality. Although the laws have been strictly mandated by the Government of India, they are not enforced.

There are three channels that assist in imparting ECE:

A) Government Initiative (Public Sector)

There are various government-initiated ECE programs such as ICDS and early childhood care education (ECCE) under the District Primary Education Program; preschools attached with primary, elementary, and secondary schools; ECE scheme in educationally backward states; crèches and daycare services; and ECE centers run by state municipal corporations.

B) Initiatives by Non-Government Organizations

The process of development cannot be tackled in isolation. The magnitude of the task ahead is so gigantic that the government alone cannot achieve it. Recognizing the impossibility of achieving the goal, participation of non-government organizations (NGOs) and voluntary agencies has been given an important place in the implementation of basic education program. It is envisaged that the involvement of NGOs will expand the network of agencies and individuals implementing basic education programs and bring greater flexibility and innovation into basic education program.

The ECCE services being provided by NGOs play a vital role in providing education for all ages in socially and economically backward areas (GoI, 2000). These NGOs primarily work with special groups in difficult circumstances such as tribal communities, migrant laborers, and children from rural areas. They mainly run crèches, rural daycare centers (*balwadis*), and ECCE centers by mobilizing local resources. Although the effectiveness of this program has not been systematically evaluated, children who attend these centers are more likely to move on to primary school, and the parents of these children have reported positive outcomes (Swaminathan, 1998). Programs designed by NGOs such as self-employed women's association (SEWA), Nutan Balsevak Sangh, and Mobile Creche have demonstrated successful methodologies for meeting the childcare needs of diverse communities.

C) Private Institutions

The private ECE centers are intended to generate profits for the agencies that own and manage them. Though exact figures are not available, it is estimated between 50,000 and 1,00,000. An estimated 10 million children receive education from privately owned programs (Sharma, 1998). However, these children are scattered and concentrated in urban settings and the numbers are confined solely to the subgroup of the population that can afford such services (Verma, 1994; Swaminathan, 1996).

However, there are no regulations for the registration and operation of these ECE centers; nor are there any curriculum guidelines and personnel policies in place. The absence of such control mechanisms has resulted in ECE centers sprouting as separate enterprises under different names, with variations in quality—majority of these centers

having low quality (Swaminathan, 1993). Such preschools are criticized for their ambiguous nature and in socializing children into an authoritarian reality of the Indian education system by emphasizing only on reading, writing, and numerals and as a downward extension of primary schooling (Kaul, 1998).

Quality of Early Childhood Education

“In past eras, quality was perceived more as a luxury than a necessity, merely a handmaiden to quantity... [Today] quality matters and it matters a lot. On the heels of this realization, quality enhancement efforts are sweeping through US business and industry, bringing with them revitalized commitments to workers, to collaboration and to a new culture of quality. Those concerned with human services in general, and with young children in particular, are seeing similar developments.” (Dahlberg and Asen, 1994).

The term “quality” has different meanings in different contexts. According to Sedere, “Quality is excellence, quality is the best, quality is the standard, quality is satisfying, quality is efficiency, and quality is effectiveness.” (Tapan, 2002). Quality is one of those illusive words that everyone seems to understand, but few are able to articulate (Sharma, 2004). Quality in early childhood services is a constructed concept, is subjective in nature and based on values, beliefs, and interest, rather than on objectives and universal reality. Quality childcare is, to a large extent, in the eye of the beholder (Pence and Moss, 1994)

Further, Woodhead (1996: 17, 37) said:

“I challenge the global distribution of any one single framework on quality. Such a framework might inevitably lead to a world of uniformity, a standardized recipe for the quality of childhood...There are many different potential criteria of quality, which are closely linked to beliefs about goals and functions. These beliefs are in turn shaped by perspectives on childhood, by cultural patterns and personal values....”

For most people, quality remains a challenge, something to be achieved and questioned. As the amount of provisions in early childhood institutions has increased, the focus on the quality of services provided has also increased.

In a recent report of the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century entitled “Learning the Treasure Within,” the Commission identified four pillars of learning: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be (Delor’s Commission, 1996, quoted in: Sharma, 2004). This provides a broad vision statement of quality education, and it can be aptly applied to ECE by stating that quality is what makes learning under the ECE a “pleasure” and a “joy.”

The concept of a good-quality ECE program is multidimensional. The key dimensions are:

Central focus. Clear aims and objectives set and shared by teachers, the management, and parents, which are subjected to modification through a process involving all the interested parties.

Good education agents (teachers). The continuous presence of sensitive, healthy, committed, loving, and responsible adults who, as a result of experience and training, are knowledgeable about how children develop and who interact with children in a consistent, respectful, supportive, and unthreatening way.

Relevant and useful curriculum. A quality curriculum that integrates education; adopts a holistic view of child development; and attends to children's physical, social, and emotional needs as well as their cognitive and intellectual needs. It fosters sound relationships of the child with self, others, and with the environment.

Organizational setup. Good physical environment that is clean, ventilated, stimulating, secure, and healthy and is sufficiently spacious for the children to play. The ratio of children to adults should be suitably low to permit frequent interaction and personal attention when needed.

Resources. Consistent and permanent financial and material resources to sustain educational activities so that education agents are not distracted from their immediate task of educating children.

Parental participation. Parental participation in the functioning of the ECE centers and their activities.

Appraisal and monitoring. Continuous appraisal of the staff and institution for upgradation, innovation, and smooth functioning.

Well-managed institutions. Local boards and committees where parents and other individuals (e.g., community leaders) can ensure that the school serves their children

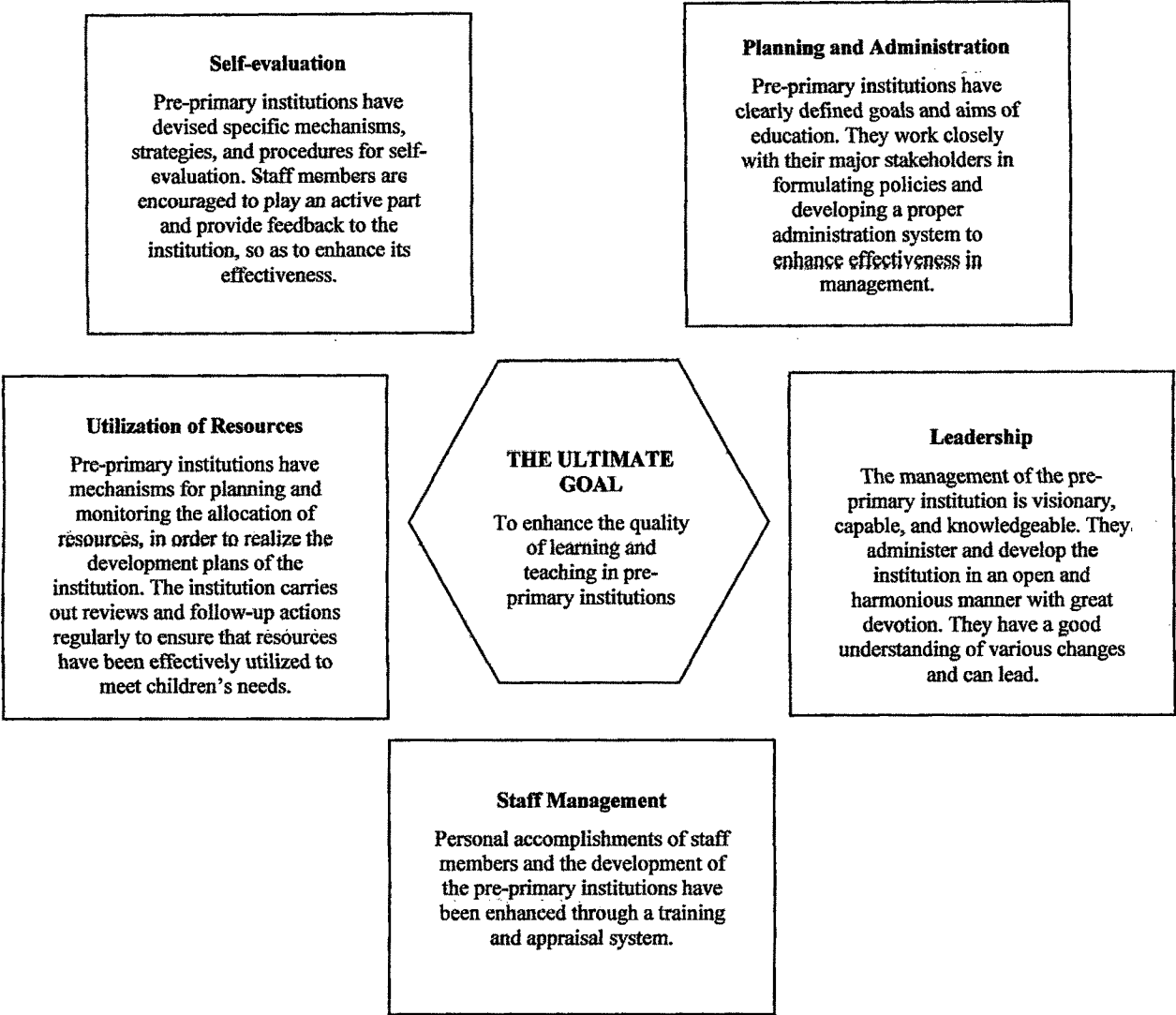
well. Further, constantly raising the quality and standards is an important management challenge.

Management and ECE

The way a service is managed indicates how well those involved understand and support the principles of ECE. A quality service will have management practices such as:

- Planning the direction and development of the service in the short, medium, and long terms.
- Being a good employer (constructive criticism, recognition, and rewards).
- Regular professional development and training for staff and management.
- Concern for the needs and wishes of children, parents, and staff.
- Formative evaluation of the services and how they are rendered.
- Reporting and communicating clearly to parents and the community.

FIGURE 1: The Management Process



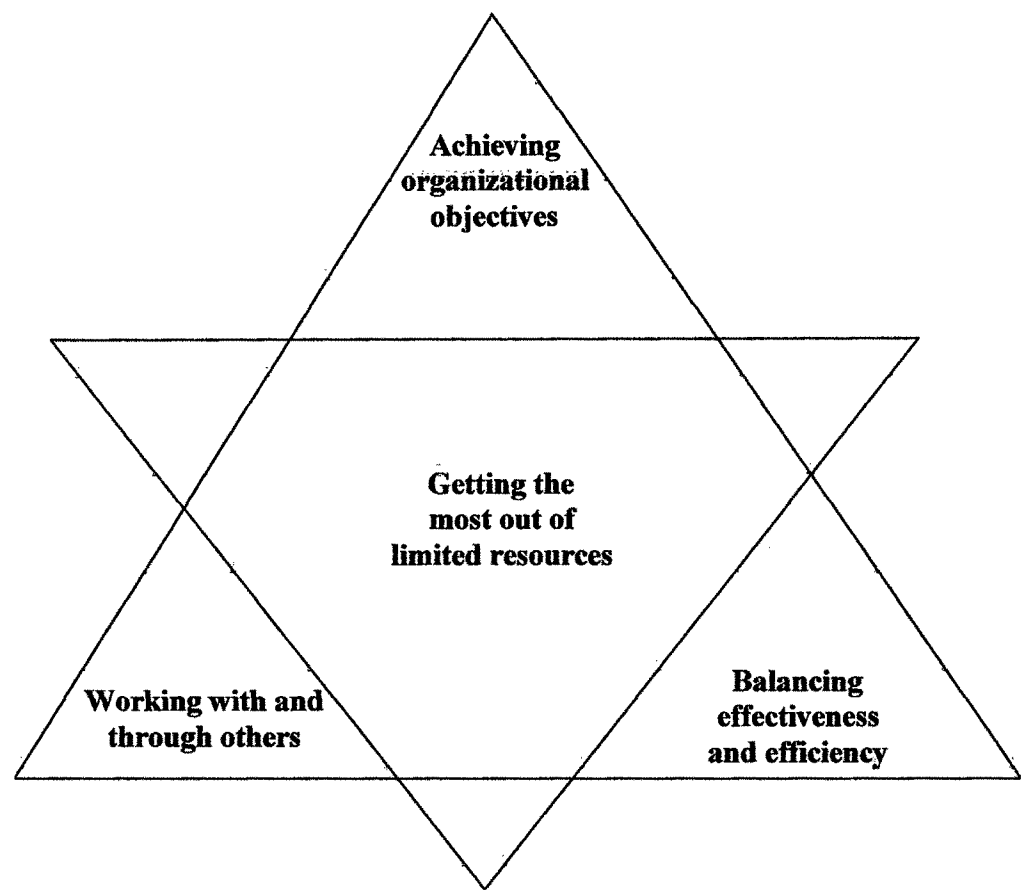
Management is an activity that coordinates individual and group efforts toward achieving goals. Management is the process of planning organizing, leading, and controlling the use of resources to accomplish performance goals. Planning is defined as formulating methods for doing or making something beforehand. Plans usually specify goals as well the course of action. Organizing is defined as arranging elements and coordinating

activities so that all of the interdependent parts contribute effectively towards the desired goal. Staffing is a process of recruiting and dealing with human resources required to perform the function of the centers. Leading is the process of directing and influencing others through example, talent, information, and personal interaction skills. Monitoring and controlling are defined as evaluative and action-oriented functions of maintaining high quality in promised services (Figure 1).

Good management and organization would help enhance the teaching and learning effectiveness in pre-primary centers. It is necessary for the management of pre-primary centers to work closely with staff, parents, and the community, and to establish an open and transparent management system so as to bring about continuous improvement and progress.

Management can also be defined as the process of working with and through others to achieve organizational objectives in a changing environment. Central to this process is the effective and efficient use of limited resources (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2: Changing Environment



As Kumarmangalam Birla, named Business Leader of the Year in 2003, stated: “Cultivating a new generation of managers and fostering a participative culture are key to the increasingly energetic, people-centric, and performance-focused culture that we aspire for.” This study is designed to be another step in the direction of investigating the quality and management aspects of ECCE.

Study Rationale

In the 21st century, there are many strong opinions about what is right or wrong in the education of young children. It is important to examine what happens within the ECE settings where children spend their formative years, which in turn play a major role in determining the subsequent life trajectories of these children. Raising an indigenous child in a post-colonial, global, capitalist society is an increasingly complex and challenging endeavor. The current study is necessary for the following reasons:

- a) ECE centers, as a whole, are a relatively new concept and very little is known about them in totality. The available information is fragmented and isolated, and it has failed to illustrate the interdependence of quality and management, and other variables such as quality and stakeholders have been relegated to the background.
- b) All ECE centers encounter an increasing volume of children with time. Therefore, it is important to find about the effects of such an increase.
- c) The management practice and structure of ECE centers can be better understood by examining the centers. Also, quality indicators need to be observed for their implications on the improvement of the centers.

Given the lacunae in the currently available material with regard to in-depth research in aspect of management of ECE centers, this study will aim to fill the crucial needs for qualitative and quantitative analysis of the same by focusing on three major cities of India: Jaipur, Mumbai, and Baroda. By means of critical analysis, it will aim to provide a new research paradigm.

Broad Objective

This study aimed to understand the quality and management of ECE centers in three different settings: government (municipal schools), non-government (NGO-run), and private ECE centers in three selected cities (Jaipur, Mumbai, and Vadodara).

Specific Objectives

1. To assess the quality of the selected ECE centers.
2. To study the relationship between the quality and management of early childhood institutions.
3. To observe pre-school center functioning in government, non-government, and private settings in order to understand its program, goals, and management dimensions,
4. To identify and understand the similarities and differences between the three different ECE centers.
5. To understand the perception of parents, teachers, and administrators with respect to the functioning of ECE centers.

Explanation of the Terms

- (1) Early childhood refers to the age prior to school entry, i.e., two to six years of age.
- (2) Early childhood education centers: This term refers to the premises used (exclusively, mainly, or regularly) for the education of children under six years of age by the day or part of the day.

- (3) Government school: The school run by the municipal corporation of that city.
- (4) Non-government school: Non-government schools are non-profit making centers in the community that may be part of the project.
- (5) Private centers: These are entrepreneurial/commercial centers that operate for profit (using terms such as preschool kindergarten, Montessori, or nursery).
- (6) Quality: This is a challenging term. In context of the present investigation, the following quality dimensions are considered
 - (1) Physical setup
 - (2) Program content
 - (3) Staff and personnel
 - (4) Parent-teacher association, involvement, and participation.
 - (5) Children
 - (6) Management: Management is the specific and distinguishing organ of any and all organizations. For the current study, management is observed on the following domains/parameters.
 - a. Planning and Administration
 - b. Leadership
 - c. Staff management
 - d. Utilization of resources
 - e. Self-evaluation