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## ECCE DELIVERY IN CHAMPHAI: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ANGANWADI AND STAND-ALONE PRESCHOOLS

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### Abstract

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) serves as a foundational stage for holistic child development and has gained renewed emphasis in India's educational landscape through the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. This study examines and compares two key models of ECCE delivery in Champhai district, Mizoram - Anganwadi Centres and stand-alone preschools with a focus on their physical facilities, teacher qualifications, training and experience in ECCE. Drawing on qualitative methods, including structured interviews and direct field observations, the study reveals notable disparities between the two settings. While preschools generally demonstrate superior physical facilities and higher academic qualifications among head teachers, Anganwadi workers show greater access to ECCE specific training and longer teaching experience. The findings underscore the complementary strengths of each model and highlight the need for integrated policy efforts aimed at capacity-building, infrastructure enhancement and professional development across both sectors. The study contributes to the localized understanding of ECCE implementation in border and tribal regions and offers insights for improving early childhood education practices in similar contexts.

**Keywords:** Anganwadi Centres; Champhai; Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE); Physical Facilities; Stand-alone Preschools; Teacher Qualification.

### Introduction

Early childhood care and education (ECCE) is a crucial phase that lays the foundation for a child's development — socially, emotionally, cognitively, and physically. It has emerged as a crucial component of India's educational framework, with growing recognition of its role in shaping cognitive, emotional, and social development in the formative years of a child's life. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has reinforced the importance of ECCE by proposing a robust foundational stage (ages 3–8), emphasizing play-based and activity-oriented pedagogy delivered by trained educators in developmentally appropriate learning environments. Within this framework, Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) and stand-alone preschools serve as two principal models of early childhood education delivery in India. Anganwadi Centres, operating under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme, have traditionally served as the primary institutions for providing preschool education, health, and nutrition services in rural and underprivileged areas. These centers are community-based and cater predominantly to children from low-income families. In contrast, stand-alone preschools which are often privately managed typically operate with greater autonomy and resources, offering structured learning environments, modern infrastructure and English-medium instruction.

### Significance of the Study

In Champhai, as in the rest of Mizoram, ECCE is increasingly recognized as essential for bridging learning gaps and promoting lifelong learning. Given that Mizoram boasts high literacy rates, there is a general cultural value placed on education, which extends to the preschool level. While Champhai is relatively remote, the region has shown a strong commitment to improving education outcomes, with early childhood education gaining attention in recent years. ECCE in Champhai includes both formal preschools and informal early childhood education centers such as Anganwadis under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme and private Stand-alone preschools. These cater to children typically between the ages of 3 and 6. Operated under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme, Anganwadis play a dual role in providing basic health care and early education to children in rural and semi-urban areas. In Champhai, these centers are important access points for ECCE, especially for families from economically weaker sections. In recent years,



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there has been a rise in private stand-alone preschools in Champhai town. These institutions often follow a mix of Mizo and English medium instruction and may use popular early childhood curricula like activity or play-based learning.

Previous researches have highlighted significant disparities between Anganwadi centres and private preschools in terms of physical infrastructure, availability of learning materials, teacher qualifications and pedagogical practices. While Anganwadis are lauded for their outreach and integration with maternal and child health services, they often suffer from challenges such as inadequate facilities, low teacher training levels, and lack of child-centric educational spaces. On the other hand, stand-alone preschools, though better equipped, may prioritize academic preparation over holistic development and are sometimes inaccessible to economically disadvantaged families.

In the context of Champhai district a border region in Mizoram, both types of ECCE institutions play an important role in early learning. However, there is limited empirical data comparing the quality of services provided by Anganwadis and Stand-alone preschools in this specific setting. Given the geographical, cultural and infrastructural uniqueness of Champhai, it is important to evaluate the relative strengths and challenges of these two models to inform ECCE policy and practice at the district and state levels.

This study aims to compare Anganwadi centres and stand-alone preschools in Champhai with a particular focus on two critical dimensions: (1) teacher qualifications and training as well as experiences in the field of ECCE and (2) physical facilities. By employing qualitative methods such as interviews and direct field observations, the study provides a ground-level understanding of how these institutions function and highlights the key factors that influence learning environments in early childhood care and education settings in Champhai.

## Objectives

1. To compare and examine the education qualification and training of Anganwadi and Stand-alone preschool teachers.
2. To compare and examine the teaching experiences in ECCE of Anganwadi and Stand-alone preschool teachers.
3. To evaluate and compare the physical facilities of Anganwadi and Stand-alone preschool.

## Methodology and Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to compare Anganwadi Centres and Stand-alone preschools in Champhai district with regard to their teacher profiles and physical facilities. The design was chosen to enable in-depth understanding of institutional facilities and practices, environments and personnel through direct observation and interaction with stakeholders.

## Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in the town of Champhai, a border district which is located in the eastern part of Mizoram, India. The locale was selected due to its diversity in ECCE service providers, including both government-run Anganwadi Centres and Stand alone preschools.

## Population and Sample

All the Stand alone preschools in Champhai and all the Anganwadi centres in the town of Champhai constitute the population of the study. There are only 5 Stand-alone preschools in the town of Champhai, therefore, all the population was used as sample for the study and a random sampling technique was used to select the sample Anganwadi centre from the population of Anganwadi centres in Champhai. However, for comparison of the teacher's educational qualifications and



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experiences, only the Head teacher in the case of Stand-alone preschools and only the workers in the case of Anganwadi were used for the sample.

## Tools and Techniques of Data Collection

Two primary tools were used for data collection: Semi-Structured Interview Schedules was developed for Anganwadi workers and Stand-alone preschool head teachers which includes questions focused on educational qualifications, training received and teaching experience; and Observational Checklists was designed to assess physical facilities such as classroom space, furniture, sanitation, learning materials, playground availability and safety measures. Observations were conducted during operational hours to capture real-time functioning and classroom practices.

## Data Analysis

The data collected through interviews and observations were analyzed and tabulated for comparison and displayed in percentages. Comparison tables, narrative interpretations and descriptive summaries were used to highlight differences and similarities between Anganwadi Centres and Stand-alone preschools.

## Result and Interpretation

Objective 1: To compare and examine the educational qualification and training of Anganwadi and Stand-alone Pre-school teachers.

Table 1: Comparison on Educational Qualification between Anganwadi and Stand Alone Preschool Teachers

Educational Qualification	Anganwadi		Pre-School	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
HSLC	3	60	Nil	
HSSLC	1	20	Nil	
Graduate	1	20	5	100
Post Graduate	Nil		Nil	

Table 2: Comparison on training related to ECCE between Anganwadi and Stand Alone Preschool Teachers

Training related to ECCE	Anganwadi		Pre-School	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Diploma in ECCE	Nil		Nil	
Any other training related to ECCE	5	100	1	20

From Table 1 and Table 2, it was revealed that majority (60%) of the Anganwadi workers have completed only HSLC, 20% have completed HSSLC and another 20% are Graduates, but none have a Postgraduate qualification. It was also revealed that 100% of the teachers in Anganwadi were trained in ECCE. On the other hand, out of the 5 Stand-alone pre-schools, 100% of the teachers were graduate but only 20% have trained in the field of ECCE.

Objective 2: To compare and examine the teaching experiences in ECCE of Anganwadi and Stand-alone Preschool teachers.

Table 3: Comparison on the teaching experiences in ECCE between Anganwadi and Stand-alone Preschool teachers.

Teaching Experiences in ECCE (in year)	Anganwadi		Pre-School	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Less than 1	Nil		Nil	
1 – 5	Nil		2	40



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6 - 10	2	40	Nil	
More than 10	3	60	3	60

Table 3 shows that 60% of the Anganwadi teachers had more than 10 years of teaching experiences in the field of ECCE and 40% of the Anganwadi teachers fall under the range of 6-10 years of teaching experiences in the field of ECCE. While among the Stand-alone Preschool teachers, 60% had more than 10 years of teaching experiences in the field of ECCE and 40% had 1-5 years of teaching experiences in the field of ECCE.

Objective 3: To evaluate and compare the physical facilities of Anganwadi and Stand-alone preschool.

Table 4: Check list on Physical Facilities of Anganwadi and Stand-alone Preschool

Sl. No.	Items	Anganwadi					Pre-School				
1	Proper ventilated rooms	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
2	Adequate space for various activities	X	X	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
3	Adequate toilet facilities	√	X	√	√	X	√	√	√	√	√
4	Adequate storage facility	X	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
5	Adequate furnitures (chairs, table, mat, swings, slides,blackboard/white board etc.)	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
6	Adequate Drinking water facility	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
7	Free from hazards (drainage, ponds, wells, pollution, stairs)	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	X	√
8	Water connection & water storage facility	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
9	Separate kitchen	X	X	X	X	X	√	√	√	√	√
10	Painted wall & displays on the wall	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
11	Adequate Outdoor Space	X	√	X	X	√	X	X	X	X	X

The comparison of physical facilities between Anganwadi centres and Stand-alone preschools in Champhai reveals notable differences in physical facilities for early childhood care and education.

- Well-ventilated rooms are available in both Anganwadi centres and preschools, indicating basic attention to classroom air quality and comfort.
- Adequate space for various activities is more commonly found in preschools. A majority of Anganwadi centres lack sufficient space, potentially limiting children's engagement in diverse learning and play activities.
- Toilet facilities are generally adequate in preschools. However, some Anganwadi centres still face issues of inadequate or non-functional toilets, posing hygiene and safety concerns.
- Storage facilities are mostly available in preschools, while many Anganwadi centres lack proper storage, indicating limitations in organizing teaching-learning materials and resources.
- Furnishings such as chairs, tables, mats, swings, slides, and boards are consistently available in both setups, reflecting a shared emphasis on providing essential classroom tools and play equipment.
- Drinking water facilities are adequate in both Anganwadi centres and preschools, ensuring children have access to safe water throughout the day.
- The criterion regarding whether centres are free from hazards like open drainage, pollution, or unsafe stairs shows mixed results. Anganwadi centres generally perform better, while few preschools pose safety concerns.
- Water connections and storage facilities are reliably available across both types of centres, indicating basic infrastructure support in terms of water supply.
- Separate kitchen facilities are largely absent in Anganwadi centres but present in most preschools. This difference may impact the quality, safety and variety of meals provided, especially where Mid-Day Meals are prepared on-site.





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10. Painted walls and educational displays are a common feature in both settings, suggesting attention to creating visually stimulating and child-friendly learning environments.
11. Adequate outdoor space, crucial for physical development and recreation, is generally lacking in preschools and only present in few Anganwadi centres, signaling an area needing improvement in both sectors.

## Discussions

The findings related to teacher's educational qualification and training received highlights that Stand-alone preschools in Champhai employ comparatively more qualified personnel than Anganwadi centres, with all head teachers having graduate-level education. In contrast, Anganwadi workers tend to have lower educational qualifications, which may influence the quality of early childhood care and education provided. This could be due to the traditional recruitment policies and limited training/upskilling opportunities within the ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) system. In Stand-alone preschools, 100% of the head teachers are **Graduates**, reflecting a higher minimum qualification standard. However, there is **no representation of HSLC, HSSLC, or Postgraduate qualifications**, indicating a narrow but consistent hiring criterion—at least a bachelor's degree. The absence of postgraduate-qualified staff in both types of institutions points to a gap in advanced training or professional specialization in early childhood education in the region. This difference underscores the need for capacity-building, in-service training, and qualification enhancement for Anganwadi workers to ensure uniformity in early childhood education standards across sectors.

None of the workers in either Anganwadi centres or preschools hold a formal diploma in ECCE. This absence of specialized academic credentials highlights a critical gap in formal professional preparation for those engaged in early childhood education, across both sectors. All Anganwadi workers (100%) have received some form of training related to ECCE, likely through government-provided modules under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme. In contrast, only 20% of preschool teachers reported having undergone any ECCE-related training. This suggests that while Anganwadi workers may have lower academic qualifications, they receive practical or field-based training relevant to ECCE. Conversely, even though preschool teachers are academically more qualified, they may lack specialized training in child development, pedagogy, or ECCE best practices. The comparison reveals a paradox in early childhood education staffing in Champhai. Anganwadi workers tend to be less academically qualified but better trained specifically for ECCE through government programs.

The findings reveal the distribution of teaching experience among Anganwadi workers and preschool teachers in the domain of Early Childhood Care and Education. Neither Anganwadi nor Stand-alone preschool teachers reported having less than one year of experience, indicating that all respondents have at least some sustained exposure to ECCE settings. A range of 1 to 5 Years of Teaching Experience is exclusive to preschool teachers, where 40% fall under this category. It indicates a relatively newer workforce entering the preschool sector, possibly due to higher turnover or recent expansion of private early childhood institutions. 40% of Anganwadi workers have experience ranging from 6 to 10 years. Both Anganwadi and Stand-alone preschools in Champhai benefit from a stable core of experienced educators, with 60% in each group having over a decade of experience. This is a positive indicator for ECCE programs in the region, as long-term experience often correlates with better classroom management, child engagement skills and contextual understanding. However, Anganwadi workers tend to have longer and more consistent teaching tenures, while preschools are seeing an influx of younger or newer teachers, likely driven by expansion and hiring of graduates.

The findings also show that Stand-alone preschools are generally better equipped than Anganwadi centres in terms of physical facilities, especially in areas like space, kitchen and storage facilities. While both settings perform well in ventilation, furniture, drinking water and classroom aesthetics, significant gaps in safety, hygiene and space in Anganwadi centres call for policy-level attention and targeted infrastructure development.



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## Conclusion

Preschools and early childhood care and education in Champhai are evolving, driven by both community values and government support. While challenges exist, particularly in physical facilities and teacher training, the overall trajectory is positive. The findings suggest that stand-alone preschools outperform Anganwadi centres in terms of physical facilities and academic qualifications of staff, while Anganwadi workers are better trained and more experienced in ECCE-related practices. This duality indicates that both systems have unique strengths but also expose critical gaps. Anganwadi centres need infrastructural improvement and academic upskilling of workers. Preschools need to focus on providing ECCE-specific training to their staff to enhance pedagogical effectiveness. Therefore, policy efforts should aim at capacity-building in both sectors, ensuring that caregivers are both academically qualified and professionally trained, and that learning environments meet the holistic needs of children. Strengthening ECCE in Champhai will not only prepare children for formal schooling but also contribute to the broader development goals of the region.

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