



EXPLORING OF ECCE AS A FOUNDATIONAL STAGE OF EDUCATION IN LIGHT OF NEP- 2020

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Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to exploring of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) as a Foundational stage of Education in light of NEP 2020. It is an endeavour to understand to importance of Early childhood education for the holistic development of the children. Pre -school education is the mainstream of Education in National Education Policy 2020. It has pre-school education in compulsory school education for promoting better learning and wellbeing of a child. Also mentioned the themes such as the curricular and pedagogical reform, difference model, teacher training and qualification; planning and implementation and so on were identified and reflected on. The findings of the study shows that the early childhood education is most important in NEP 2020 for developing values, physical and mental development of as well as in future learning.

Keywords: Early Childhood Care and Education, National Education Policy-2020, Foundational stage, Pre-school Education, ICDS

Introduction:

The term Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) describes educational programs geared toward kids ages 0 to 8. According to the article 45 as per the 86th amendment of December, 2002, the constitutional provision of India stated; "The state shall endeavour to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they compute the of six years." (Government of India, 2023)

According to the ECCE Reports, by National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development, the purpose of Early Childhood care and Education (ECCE) in ICDS is to ensure responsive care, early learning and development which includes physical and motor; language, cognitive, socio-personal, emotional and creative and aesthetic appreciation.

In order to promote healthy brain development and growth, it is crucial to provide the right care stimulation for the brain in the early years. Over 85% of a child's cumulative brain development happens before the age of six. The activities included in ECCE programs give young children a loving and engaging environment as they get ready for formal schooling. To guarantee that all students entering Grade 1 are prepared for school, universal provision of high-quality early childhood development care, and education must be realized as soon as practicable and no later than 2030.

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) promotes an enabling and stimulating environment in these foundation phases of lifelong learning, which benefits children's long-term development and learning.

Objectives of ECCE:

The objectives of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) program in India, as outlined in the National Education Policy (NEP)2020, is to provide a strong foundation for children's learning and development during their early years. Some key objectives of ECCE under NEP 2020 include-

- To focusing on the holistic development- cognitive, effective and psychomotor.
- To facilitating the acquisition of basic skills early language literacy and numeracy.
- To promoting the physical and mental well-being of children, including nutrition and health care.
- To ensuring that ECCE programs are accessible to all children, regardless of their background, abilities or disabilities.
- To involving parents and the local community in a child's early education and development.
- To maintaining high standards in curriculum, teacher training, and facilities to ensure a quality ECCE experience.
- To recognising social capacities, sensitivity, good behaviour, courtesy, and respecting the cultural context of the children and their families.
- To recognising the importance of play in a child's learning and development.
- To developing habits of cleanliness in the child at home as well as the school environment.
- To encourage aesthetic appreciation stimulate creative learning process.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development has suggested some objectives for achieving-

- To ensure each child is valued, respected, feels safe and secure and develops a positive self concept.
- To enable a sound foundation for physical and motor development of each child's potential.
- Enable children for effective communication and foster both receptive and expressive language.
- To promote development and integration of the senses.
- To enhance development of pro-social skills, social competence and emotional wellbeing.
- To enable a smooth transition from home to ECCE centre to formal schooling.
- To enhance scope for overall personality development.

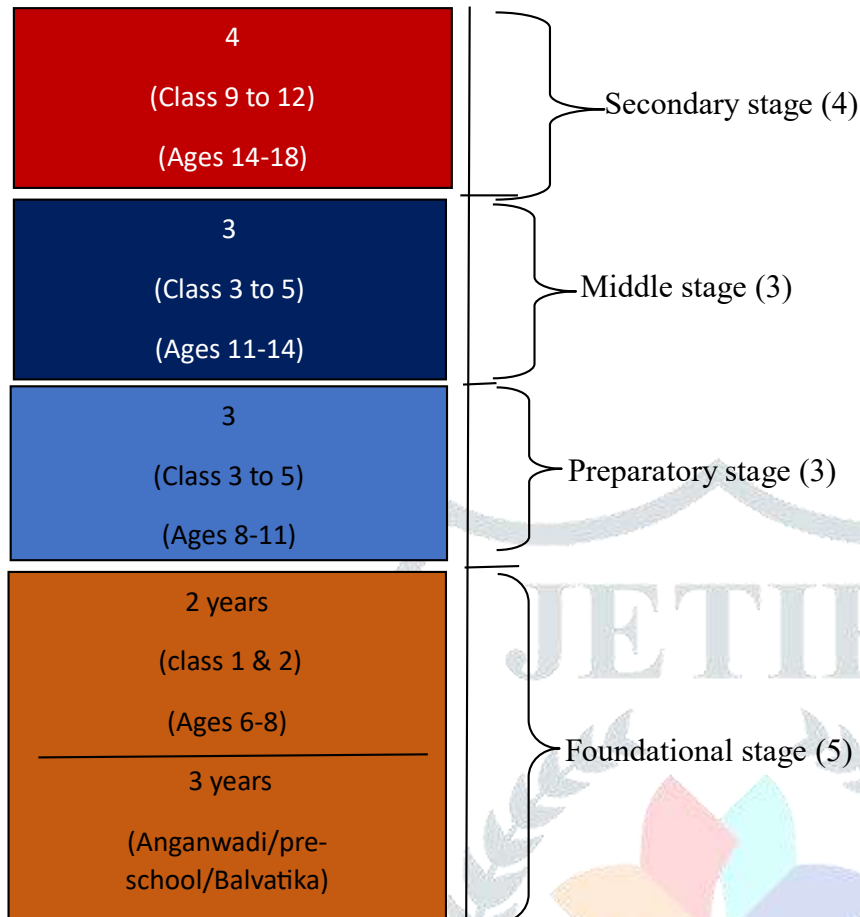
Importance of ECCE:

- **Brain Development:** Every childhood is crucial for a child's brain development. Through stimulating environments and activities that promote cognitive, emotional, and social development, ECCE programs lay the foundation for future learning.
- **School Readiness:** Key skills like language, numeracy, and social interaction are developed during ECCE and are essential for a smooth transition to formal school.
- **Socialization:** In ECCE settings, children can make connections with their peers, develop social skills, and grow in their understanding of empathy, teamwork, and respect for others.
- **Inclusivity:** ECCE can help identify and address developmental delays or learning difficulties early on, ensuring that all children, regardless of their abilities or background, receive the support they need.
- **Improved language skills:** In ECCE, exposure to a multilingual setting improves communication and language development.
- **Health and Nutrition:** ECCE programs frequently contain elements related to nutrition and health, encouraging healthy behaviours from an early age.
- **Parent-child Bonding:** Parents may participate in ECCE programs, increasing family involvement in a child's education and enhancing the parent-child bond.

New Education Policy-2020: Foundational stage

School education-

New Pedagogical & Curricular Structure-



- Re-structure of school education: A strong foundation of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) starting at age 3 is also included in the new 5+3+3+4 structure, which aims to promote greater overall learning, development, and well being year 3 of ECCE would be Anganwadi/Pre-school/Balvatika.
- Vision of ECCE: The ideal ECCE program includes flexible, multifaceted, multilevel, play-based, activity-based, and inquiry-based learning that includes learning about alphabets, numbers, counting colours and shapes. Achieving the best result in the areas of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development and the development of communication and early language, and numeracy will be the overarching goal of ECCE.
- Foundational years: Five years (3-8 years) Foundational stage provide pre-school education which is flexible, multilevel, play-based, activity-based, and the curriculum and pedagogy of ECCE.
- Medium of Instruction: The MOI will be home language/MT/RL whenever possible until at least Grade 5, but preferably until Grade 8 and beyond. Both public and private school will adhere to this multilingual environment and exposure to multiple languages.(Shashtri, 2022)
- Bilingual approaches: Teachers will be urged to work with children whose home languages may differ from MOI using bilingual methods, including bilingual teaching and learning materials.(Venita_Kaul.2020)

Integrating Child Development Services (ICDS in ECCE)-

The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) plays a crucial role in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) component of the National Educational Policy (NEP) 2020 in India. Here are some key aspects of the ICDS's role-

- Holistic Development: The ICDS aims to provide an all-encompassing approach to early childhood development, focusing on cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and social aspects of a child's development.
- Nutrition and Health: Young children are given additional nutrition and healthcare services by ICDS to ensure their physical health, which is essential for successful learning and development.

- Early Stimulation: ICDS facilities offer early stimulation and age-appropriate activities that help in cognitive development and school preparation.
- Anganwadi workers: In order to provide ECCE services, such as preschool education, to children between the ages of 3 to 6, ICDS hires Anganwadi personnel.
- Parental engagement: The ICDS promotes parental participation in a child's early education and development, as well as caretakers.
- Community outreach: For many children in rural and underserved areas, ICDS is frequently their first point of contact, ensuring that ECCE reaches children in isolated communities.
- Convergence: To create a complete ECCE framework, NEP 2020 emphasizes the convergence of various ministries and departments, and ICDS is a crucial participant in this collaborative effort.

Overall, the ECCE goals outlined in NEP 2020, which seek to offer high-quality early childhood education and care for all children in India, are greatly advanced by ICDS.

ECCE: The Foundation of learning, Different Models-

- Stand-alone Anganwadi.
- Anganwadi co-located with primary school.
- Pre-primary schools/sections covering at least age 5-6 years co-located with existing primary schools.
- Stand-alone pre-schools.

ECCE Teacher Training and Qualification:

- Anganwadi workers/teachers with qualifications of 10+2 and above will be given a six month certificate programme in ECCE.
- Those with lower educational qualifications will be given one-year diploma programme covering early literacy, numeracy, and other relevant aspects of ECCE.
- The programs will run through digital/distance mode using DTH channels as well as smartphones.
- The cluster Resource Centres of the school education development will supervise the ECCE training of Anganwadi workers and teachers and host one monthly contact class for continuous assessment.
- In long run, state govts. Shall prepare cadres of qualified educators for ECCE through training, mentoring and career mapping.

Curricular and Pedagogical Framework:

- A National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (NCPFECCE) for children up to the age of 8 will be developed by NCERT in two parts, namely-
 - A sub-framework for 0-3 years old.
 - A sub-framework for 3-8 years old.

(-according NEP 2020)

- Appropriate curriculum for 3 years of pre-school developed by NCERT that aims at holistic development of children.
- The "Panchakosha" concept for education for children ages 3-8 has been referenced in the new framework.
- High quality ECCE teachers/workers in Anganwadi, developed by NCERT.

Planning and Implementation:

- The MHRD be in charge of overseeing the ECCE curriculum and pedagogy to ensure its continuity from pre-primary school through primary school and to guarantee proper consideration for the fundamental elements of education.
- The planning and implementation of ECCE curriculum will be carried out jointly by the MOE, Women and Child Development (WCD), Health and Family Welfare (HFW), and Tribal Affairs.
- For ongoing guidance on the seamless integration of early childhood care and education into school education, a special joint task group will be established.

Strengthening of ECCE facilities:

- Anganwadi centres will be upgraded with high quality facilities, children's play equipment, and staff members with advanced training.
- To ensure smooth transition from Anganwadi centre to primary schools, children to take tours of their local primary school.
- Anganwadi shall be fully integrated into school complexes/clusters, and teachers to attend and participate in school complex programmes.
- Before the age of 5, every child to attend a "Preparatory class" or "Balavatika" (that is before class 1), which has an ECCE qualified teacher.
- The mid-day meal programme to be extended to the preparatory classes in primary school.
- All Anganwadi and elementary school students will have access to health check-ups and growth monitoring.

Challenges of ECCE in NEP-2020:

There are several challenges in implementing ECCE under NEP-2020-

- Ensuring access to quality ECCE facilities, especially in rural and underserved areas, remains a significant challenge.
- Lack of proper infrastructure, trained teachers, and resources hampers effective ECCE delivery.
- Designing developmentally appropriate curricula that holistic development, including cognitive, social, emotional, and physical aspects is a challenge.
- Developing effective methods for monitoring the progress of children in ECCE programs and assessing their learning results can be challenging.
- Involving parents and communities in the ECCE process is vital.
- The new education system is a hangover of the British and Industrial age. The change in mind-set in involve two or more generation of parents, teachers, and educators where focused generation has to give way to the NEP. There will be several challenges in challenging this mind-set.
- To achieve quality ECCE, NEP-2020 relies heavily on Anganwadi workers who are overburdened with health and nutrition related duties and not recognised as formal employees. Their salaries are meagre and this expectation creates an undue burden. The government might face resistance to implementation.

Suggestions:

- Planning meetings must be established to administer the pre-school education program.
- Focus children's safety, healthy and happiness.
- Allocate more resources to ECCE programs to ensure access for all children, regardless socioeconomic background.
- Provide comprehensive training and professional development for ECCE educators to enhance their skills and knowledge in child development and teaching technique.
- Continuously update and improve the curriculum to align with the latest research in early childhood education and promote holistic development.
- Encourage and support parental involvement in ECCE, as engaged parents can positively impact a child's learning experience.
- Implement effectiveness assessment tools to track children's progress and identify areas for improvement in the ECCE system.
- Ensure safe and conducive learning environments with adequate facilities, materials, and equipment.
- Ensure a smooth transition from ECCE to primary education, maintaining continuity in children's learning experiences.
- Regularly assess and adapt ECCE policies and practices to meet the evolving needs of children and families.
- Reconceptualise foundational mission for 'Early learning; not just for literacy and numeracy.(Achumi & Joseph, 2022)

Conclusion:

Our education system has included pre-school education in the mainstream education by approving National Education Policy-2020. The children of 3 to 5 years of age in compulsory school education. ECCE programme will help in the holistic development of child and prepare them for future by developing their physical and mental abilities as well as their character by inculcating good habits among them. Now it has been concluded that ECCE is the foundational stage of education system, which helps to develop a child into an ideal citizen in the future.

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