

Early Childhood Care and Education in NEP 2020

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Abstract: *The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 focuses on providing a strong foundation for children in the age group of 3 to 6 years. It recognizes the crucial role of ECCE in shaping a child's overall development, including cognitive, social, emotional, and physical aspects. The current trends in National Education Policy-2020 about Early Childhood Care and Education with the reflection of the worldwide agenda for education reforms are the focus here. Achieving all the key objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by India in 2015, includes Sustainable Development Goal 4- Quality Education, which aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by the year 2030. This goal reflects the global agenda for education development. So that all of the crucial targets and Sustainable Development goals of 2030 for this which are outlined in the National Education Policy -2020 concerning Early Childhood Care and Education in India are discussed accordingly. The care and nurture that provided to the children in the young age have a significant impact on their growth to adulthood. So, realizing the importance of ECCE, the study focuses on the importance of Early Childhood Care and Education and the reflection of Early Childhood Care and Education in NEP 2020.*

Keywords: Early Childhood, learning, NEP 2020, Educational Policy, Sustainable Development

I. INTRODUCTION

This is up to the equivalent of third grade. ECCE is described as an important period in child development. ECCE emerged as a field of study during the Enlightenment, particularly in European countries with high literacy rates. It continued to grow through the nineteenth century as universal primary education became a norm in the Western world. In recent years, early childhood education has become a prevalent public policy issue, as funding for preschool and pre-K is debated by municipal, state, and federal lawmakers. Despite these benefits, ECCE often Early childhood care and education (ECCE), also known as nursery education, is a branch of education theory that relates to the teaching of children (formally and informally) from birth up to the age of eight. Traditionally receives low priority in education policies and investment and may exclude marginalized groups. Quality improvement in ECCE can be driven by better training for caregivers, more robust community engagement, and improved infrastructure, such as better water and sanitation services in early learning settings. Early childhood, spanning from birth to age 6, is a crucial period for a child's cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development. During this phase, the brain is most receptive to learning, making it vital to provide high-quality care and education. Despite its importance, access to quality ECCE remains limited in many parts of India, particularly for children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. There is a widespread lack of awareness about the appropriate content and teaching methods for this age group, resulting in inconsistent educational experiences. The Indian Government released the National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) policy to provide integrated services for the continuous holistic development of children up to age 6. However, government Anganwadi centres, pre-primary schools, and private nurseries failed to implement it in full force and effect. The New Education Policy NEP 2022 brings a strong focus on ECCE and includes it in the new 5+3+3+4 pedagogical structure in the form of the Foundational Stage. The current 10+2 structure does not cover children ages 3 to 6, as Class 1 begins at age 6. Human beings are unique in that 75% of our brain growth takes place



outside the womb; and, most importantly, 95% of that growth occurs in the first three to five years of life, making this an especially critical period of our development. During our first years we are capable of learning and developing rapidly; we develop our senses and our motor skills, identify our group, develop our language and social behaviours. By age six, the brain is already 95% of its adult size. But the gray matter, or thinking part of the brain, continues to thicken throughout childhood as the synapses make extra connections in response to input from the world outside.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Significances of Early Childhood Care and Education

The early years of a child's life is very critical because in this period the brain development is rapidly occurred. Early childhood care stage helps to ensure opportunity for holistic learning. (Dr. Pallavi Saikia, 2024).

Children can acquire an assortment of abilities and attributes through education. As Krishna murti so eloquently stated, Education never ends with the reading of a book, clearing an exam, and then calling it quits. Instead, learning is a lifelong endeavour beginning from birth and continuing till death. The most significant educational policy of the twenty-first century is the National Education Policy 2020. (Iram Sleem Malik, 2024).

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is globally recognized as a crucial element of education for all. Therefore, countries have intensely pursued it. After many efforts, progress towards ensuring ECCE is apparent in many countries in the world. (Reetu Chandra, Ph.D., 2016), Good quality pre-schooling makes a distinction for our students at large, and students are balanced to profit than ever before, the education in preschool years receive must be reliable with and coupled to early elementary schooling with more focus on developmental needs, and efforts to prepare the future citizen for potential success as vigorous, fruitful, affianced citizen. (Mohammad Sayid Bhat, 2016).

The Sustainable Development Goals have focussed on optimum development for all children by 2030. For India, with 164.5 million population of children between 0-6 years, the magnitude of the problem is huge. We have been focusing on ECD since the launching of the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) in 1976. (Nandita Chattopadhyay, 2021).

1.2 Challenges of Early Childhood Care and Education

First, over the past 30 years there has been several large-scale longitudinal studies which have reported on the long-term effects of 'quality' ECCE. Social responsibility can also be practiced in the family even when children are young. (John Eric Wilkinson, 2021). The current political context necessitates discussions of social justice within education, and here we bring together early childhood professionals from a variety of perspectives to become part of the important debates that must be of them. The idea of a socially just society has been evident since the beginning of written records – Plato and Aristotle each discussed the concept (Zajda et al, 2006) – albeit based on a highly stratified society. Social justice is also implicit in many religions (for instance, the concept of tzedakah in Judaism and the idea of just distribution of wealth in Islam Edu-capitalism and the governing of early childhood education and care in Australia, New Zealand and the United States

1.3 Importance of Early Childhood Care and Education

The early childhood education development and implementation today and the early childhood education development in the future is seen based on the needs analysis and expectations of parents and educator. The study was conducted for 3 months from February to April 2019 at the Global Islamic School institution, on Jalan Raya Condet, East Jakarta. The research method is a qualitative approach with a case study strategy that aims to research natural object conditions, researchers act as key instruments, triangulation data collection techniques, inductive data analysis and qualitative research results emphasize more on meaning than generalization. (Riya Syafrida, 2020). Early childhood programs and policies gained popularity became widespread due to support provided by politicians and researchers around the world for academic development. However, the pre-schooling ratio in Turkey in the 2011-2012 academic year was 69.5% in 5 years old groups (60-72 months) and 44.04% in 4-year olds, (48-60 months), (Kocabiyik, 2013). In other words, 30% of children who started first grade in the 2012-2013 academic year started first grade without having received early childhood Edu-cation, Early childhood education is a critical stage in a child's development, laying the foundation for



future learning and growth. This article will explore the key concepts and best practices related to early childhood education, including the benefits of early learning, the different types of programs available, and the skills and competencies children can develop through these programs. (Pramod Singh, Magazine).

1.4 Roles of Early Childhood Care and Education

The Early Childhood Care and Education curriculum should be tailored to the physical, social, cognitive, and emotional development. The Early Childhood Care and Education curriculum should be thought-provoking, intriguing, and experimental. (Ramavath Naresh, 2021). Ahmad (2022) in his paper "Vocational Education in the light of NEP 2020" found that the NEP2020 can potentially lead to explosive growth of vocational education in the country, since it requires all educational institutions to integrate vocational education into their offerings. (Dr. Liposphere Das, 2022).

India's Ministry of Human Resource Development has outlined an extensive and comprehensive National Education Policy 2020. (NEP2020). Before India gained its freedom, the "Masters, the British Empire" had exclusive authority over the country's educational system. The goals of the education schemes, including the one created by Macaulay, were not to provide Indians with a superior education but rather to provide a constant stream of the "Babus," who are just servants of the masters who work as clerks and bureaucrats. (Mukul Mahato, 2022).

Anganwadi's were established under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme in 1975 with the objective of improving child health and nutrition. Over time, Anganwadi's have evolved to include early childhood education as a core component of their services. They cater to children aged 0-6 years, providing essential services such as immunization, health check-ups, supplementary nutrition, and early learning activities (Seth, 2019). (Tanmayi Raton, 2024).

The policy in NEP 2020 aims to imbibe moral values and traditional knowledge in children with spurring exposure towards versatile computational skills, design thinking, coding, and digital literacy, ethical reasoning, etc. (Renu Gandhi, 2021).

The purpose of the paper is to find various play through which children can be developed from the beginning of their life. The outcome of the paper shows various play with examples and make a content that children are most important for future strategy in everything because they are the future leader of every nation, therefore their appropriate development in mentally and physically, and spiritually is important for the wellbeing of a human being. (Ananda) This paper is meant to present theoretical ponderings on the matter of play. The author is not interested in the play and fun related aspect of the play. It is because the play that many educational and upbringing functions are served. Play is not a phenomenon assigned to just one age, category, culture or geographic region. Starting of its development dates back to the dawn of history as the cultural, anthropological, sociological or pedagogical. The characteristics of each child is different, every child has its own uniqueness that can be proud of. At an early age is the period where the most appropriate in developing the character of each child, because early childhood is the "Golden Age". At this time the child has a very large time and space to be developed into a character that is in accordance with the expectations of the nation, to be a good person, responsible, in accordance with ethical standards and norms. During this time needed the help of stimulus that can be provided by the teacher. (Prita Ridha Insani, 2019.)

1.5 Impact of Early Childhood Care and Education

The year 2020 has been unique for nations all across the world. A significant shift that occurred in India, along with COVID19, was the creation of the New Education Policy (NEP). The Government of India's recently announced New Education Policy was a positive step and a welcome piece of fresh news in view of the problems caused by the Covid19 outbreak. The NEP 2020 news came as a complete shock to many. Many education experts never anticipated the improvements that NEP has suggested. (Yogesh Desale, 2022). Children today are accustomed to gadgets such as smartphones, tablets, and laptops because of technological advancements. On average, children spend about eight hours watching Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. In comparison to modern electronic games, traditional games are better at improving a variety of life skills. (Showkeen Bilal Ahmad Gul, 2023). Curriculum development should be guided by values and norms, grounded in ethics, standards, and principles. Student learning should focus on creating meaning and enabling students to apply their learning to improve their lives. The curriculum should incorporate modern



and innovative strategies, be informed by cultural and learning research, and be skilled, experienced, and possess adequate knowledge and information related to their roles. (Dr. Suman Tripathi, 2023).

Thus, the NEP must develop a new approach for the promotion of mental well-being. There's a growing body of evidence that shows that adequate emphasis on ECMH, treatment, and awareness can create opportunities for India to reboot its economy and reflect on the dire need for boosting employment, controlling suicide rates, promoting gender inequity, and removing structural inequalities and their impacts that disrupt India's true potential of becoming a global superpower. Hence, in illustration of how sound mental health and education can help the government achieve the real objectives of the country, there's a need to take an account of unemployment —people who suffer from common mental health problems like depression, anxiety, PTSD have experienced more loss of productivity, workplace discrimination, issues with finances, decreased sense of motivation to make a change, building and maintaining relationships with friends and family all in all affecting their employment prospects, wages and the ability to compete with the present world, contributing for an increase in unemployment, etc.(Dalvi Sethi and Urvi Mahajan, 2021).

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Education is the most important tool for the development of society and nation through enlightenment and empowerment. The future of the country depends on the scientific and technological research that takes place in education. Children are the foundation for the future. The learning process for a child begins shortly after birth, with neuroscience evidence indicating that more than 85 percent of a child's cumulative brain development occurs before the age of 6. This indicates the vital importance of proper brain care and stimulation in a child's early years to promote sustained and healthy brain growth and development. The family environment plays an important role in a child's learning process. In the past, due to the existence of joint families, the children learned something from the family members and came to school. At present, children are not able to continue their such type of education due to small families. The responsibility of teaching and learning has been imposed on the schools. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is recognized as an important element of education for all globally. This stage is the Foundation of Learning. Therefore, countries have taken it forward rapidly. Recognizing the importance of ECCE, the New National Education Policy 2020 has extended the Right to Education eligibility window from 6-14 years to 3-18 years.

Case Study: -

In this story, Leilani, her family, and early intervention (cross-disciplinary) team navigate challenges and demonstrate components of Standard 1 Child Development and Early Learning:

- Candidates understand the impact of different theories and philosophies of early learning and development on assessment, curriculum, instruction, and intervention decisions. Candidates apply knowledge of normative developmental sequences and variations, individual differences within and across the range of abilities, including developmental delays and disabilities, and other direct and indirect contextual features that support or constrain children's development and learning. These contextual factors as well as social, cultural, and linguistic diversity are considered when facilitating meaningful learning experiences and individualizing intervention and instruction across contexts.

Case 1: - Leilani and Her Family

Leilani, a 24-month-old girl born with a cleft palate was born prematurely at 30 weeks and failed her newborn hearing screening. She was diagnosed with bilateral hearing loss. She spent about 12 weeks in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). Leilani underwent several surgeries to correct the cleft palate around 11 months of age. Additionally, she had a gastrointestinal tube (G-tube) until the age of 20- months. Recently, she has started accepting food through her mouth. Leilani is an only child and lives with her mother, Brianna, and her grandmother, Noelani, in a rural area far outside of town. Both Briana and her boyfriend moved in with the grandmother to be near family. Brianna has an older brother that lives nearby. The family members identify as Hawaiian. The Hawaiian and English languages are used interchangeably in the home. Brianna has severe bilateral hearing loss and receives disability payments. Noelani is the primary financial supporter in the home and works as an administrative assistant at a local non-profit. Briana's boyfriend was able to find a job at a local grocery store.



Leilani was automatically eligible for early intervention (EI) due to prematurity, cleft palate, and hearing loss., but Brianna opted out of services at that time. She recently visited a new paediatrician in town who referred Leilani to be evaluated by the local EI program. The paediatrician wrote in the referral that she was concerned with Leilani's communication and attention.

Case 2: - Nikhil, His Caregivers, and Important Adults

Nikhil is a 19-month-old child that recently qualified for services at a local Early Intervention program. Nikhil was referred for EI by his paediatrician. Along with the referral document, his paediatrician had sent the Modified Autism Checklist for Autism in Toddler screening results which showed some "red flags" for autism. Nikhil uses single-words and enjoys playing with a variety of toys (e.g., trains, balls, small toy animals). He has challenges with transitions to and from preferred activities and has tantrums several times per day. Nikhil also engages in motor stereotypy (hand flapping), especially when he watches television. Nikhil has a younger sister that is three months of age. He lives with his father, Avais and mother Zoya who immigrated to the United States for school from India and stayed and accepted positions as medical doctors at a local hospital. Nikhil's grandparents live with the family for half of the year. Currently, his grandparents are taking care of him and his sister during the day while his parents' work.

Case 3: - Early Childhood Development Centre of Nepal

It is a sunny day but with four windows on both sides of a room and an open door, the class is a bit parky. Well managed rooms with various early learning materials such as drawing kits, child literature, blocks, musical instruments and a learning centre for different subjects in each corner of the room looks impressive. The room has sufficient space for indoor play and 12 young children are sitting in four groups. A teacher named Sarita (name changed) is sitting beside them. Each child has a drawing paper and pencil and it seems they are about to draw something. The teacher asks them to draw anything and starts drawing along with them. Each child shows their drawing to her. After this, the teacher hands them a paper and asks them to write the name of the food they had before coming to the Early Childhood Education Development (ECED) centre. Then she asks them to play blocks in four groups and she also engages herself in their block play moving between groups, questioning what they were building and how they could build it. The children are enjoying and constructing different structures from the blocks and she admires their creativity. After an hour, some children have some discussion among themselves and the teacher initiates another activity. After a short recess, she requests all the children to sit in a semi-circle and she sits in front of them. She has a book in hand - 'Mero Ghar' - and is showing the cover of the book. She reads all the information written in the book. Children are listening attentively and watching her face and at times at the book as she reads the contents loudly. After the reading, they interact actively then she requests them to read a book from the book corner. While children are reading the book, she goes to the children individually and asks them about the story and participates in discussion with them. At 1:00 pm, children have their day meal and then are involved in subject-wise learning centres. Two groups participate in the language learning centre and the other two participate in the mathematics learning centre. They spend more than one hour in the centre and she provides different tasks to the respective groups. All the children are actively engaged with the teacher. They are learning about numerical literacy through math games, and ECED centre and heads towards her home.

Case 4:- Legal entitlements to ECEC and participation rates in the five countries studied

In Wallonia, the legal entitlement to ECEC exists from the age of 2 years and 6 months, and the last year of preschool is obligatory. Pre-primary services are free (apart from some minimal expenditures for food)¹⁰. Similarly, in Spain, a legal entitlement starts at age 3¹¹. In addition, the Royal Decree 95/2022 establishes that pre-primary education, being a legal entitlement, should be free and educational administrations in regions must guarantee enough places in public and publicly funded private schools. In, Italy pre-primary education (from age 3) is a right, and services are free (apart from parental contributions demanded for feeding). In Poland, children are legally entitled to language and phonics competency through language games. Now it is 2:15 pm, the time for music and movement. The teacher plays the music and starts dancing and the children join her. They seem to be enjoying it a lot. At 3:00 pm children are ready to go home. Some go with their parents and some are with their siblings. The teacher manages the room, sits down for tea and reflects on the activities and incidents of the day. She plans for tomorrow's activities and leaves the ECEC from the age of 3, according to the Law on School Education of 2016¹². Finally, in Germany, the legal entitlement to ECEC is



most generous, starting at age 1 (since 2013)¹³. As regards participation in ECEC, Belgium and Spain are the two countries with the highest participation rates in pre-primary education (for children aged 3 or above), at 98.4% and 96.1% respectively (EU-SILC, 2022). In Italy (94.2%), Germany (89.9%) Italy (30.9%), Germany 23.9%, and Poland 15.9% (EU-SILC, 2022).

Case 4: - Participation rate are primarily driven by the coverage of areas

Among the countries studied, Spain has the highest coverage rate, at 40.2% (Ministry of Education, 2021¹⁵). In Wallonia (Wall stat, 2020¹⁶), coverage of childcare services is 38%. Coverage rates in Germany are at 34.4% but higher for children above age 1 (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2021¹⁷). Moreover, the reform of 2013 establishing the legal entitlement to ECEC at age 1 has increased coverage 29.4% to 48.5%, for children aged 1 and 2 years old in less than a decade. Legal entitlements, together with policies guaranteeing that services are affordable also for middle-low-income families, might significantly boost participation¹⁸. In Italy, the coverage rate stands at 27% in 2021 (ISTAT, 2021¹⁹). Finally, in Poland, in the last years, investments have increased the coverage rate which reached approximately 20% in 2022 (in 2010, coverage rate was at 2.6%)²⁰. Considering children below age 3 but above age 1, the coverage rate is 25.6% (Eurydice, 2022²¹). While the majority of childcare services are public or publicly-funded/subsidized or sponsored²² in Germany and Belgium (and 70% of all services in Wallonia), in Italy and Spain, half of the services are private, and in Poland only one-third of providers are public, which

III. DISCUSSION

These references reflect NEP 2020's commitment to providing a strong foundation for children through holistic and developmentally appropriate early childhood education. In summary, the integration of ECCE in NEP-2020 reflects a commitment to the foundational principles of education, recognizing the importance of early years in shaping a child's future. It aims to provide equitable, inclusive, and quality education right from the beginning, setting the stage for a robust and effective education system.

Health and Nutrition: –

They beyond the mid-day meal: In the early years, at a time when the brain develops at an astonishing rate, and when health and nutrition play an essential part in brain development and subsequently cognition, any discussion of cognitive progress (towards school readiness) without considering the nutritional status of children, will be incomplete. In the ASER 2019 ECE survey across 26 states, girls were found to be ‘behind’ boys on cognitive tasks. There was a clear correlation to socio-economic status and mothers’ education levels – these mechanisms mentioned.

Social Distance’ between home and school: -

In the poorest areas, where schools are most stressed, the care needs (health, nutrition and pastoral care) of young children are also likely to be highest. There is evidence to show that early experiences of children in various domains/contexts interact to influence brain growth; maternal nutrition, maternal depression, domestic violence, parental responsiveness, availability of water and sanitation, hygiene practices, availability of and practices around nutrition, all contribute to children’s ability and readiness to learn. It is easy to see how a child’s gender may have an impact on all the above-mentioned factors. If they are forced to attend primary schools, which are typically further away as compared to the AWC, they may drop out, either temporarily, or permanently.

Structural Issues: -

Education belongs on the concurrent list and while the NEP provides national guidance on ECCE, ultimately it will be up to the states to integrate the ICDS system of Anganwadi’s, the privately run pre-schools and the pre-school sections of state primary schools into one cohesive system, leading to grade 1 and beyond. Each state has its own linguistic, historical and socio-economic milieu that dictates educational provision, the level of private participation and regulation. For instance, in 13 states, till very recently, age for entry to class 1 was five years, despite the Right to Education Act (2009) notifying that elementary education extends from 6 to 14 years. It is likely that in these states, where five-year-olds have long endured formal teaching of reading, writing and arithmetic, a sudden shift to the balalaika system might seem regressive to parents and teachers (although more developmentally appropriate).



IV. CONCLUSION

The urgency and importance that NEP 2020 has attached to early childhood care and education is very welcome. However, the translation of policy to practice will require two main things – first, a fulfilment of our commitment to children made as part of the Right to Education Act in 2009, that all children, everywhere in India will have adequate classrooms and teachers; and second, a paradigmatic shift in how school systems regard children and their learning. The undoing of teachers' beliefs about childhood and learning may become the biggest barriers in the implementation of this policy. In many ways, because Anganwadi workers and nursery staff are not considered 'teachers', they will require less unlearning of what is, and is not learning. The National Education Policy 2020 brings about a significant change in recognizing the importance of child care and education in childhood. Prioritizing universal access, play-based learning, teacher training, and inclusion, NEP2020 aims to build a strong foundation for children's educational journey. As India moves forward with the implementation of these reforms, a focus on early childhood child-care and education will play an important role in shaping a generation of learners who are curious, creative, and well-prepared for the challenges of the future. The National Education Policy 2020 is a very important and commendable step in planning for child education care at the primary level. Therefore, let us all work together to address the potential challenges of this policy as well as strengthen child care and education.

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