

EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION WITH REFERENCE TO NEP 2020

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Abstract

Early Child Care and Education (ECCE) is the first step towards preparation for life. So, it must lay foundation for building personality of the future. ECCE programmes are normally designed for children from age 3 and include organized learning activities that constitute, on average, the equivalent of at least 2 hours per day and 100 days per year. Early childhood refers to the period between birth and 8 years of life. The widely used term 'early childhood care and education' (ECCE) refers to a range of processes and mechanisms that sustain and support development during the early years of life: it encompasses education, physical, social and emotional care, intellectual stimulation, health care and nutrition. It also includes the support a family and community need to promote children's healthy development. The NEP 2020 proposes to implement uniformly, in state-run and privately-run schools, a child centred ECCE curriculum that prepares children for rigours of formal curriculum of reading, writing, arithmetic, and EVS in subsequent Preparatory stage. This is done by providing strong foundation of a holistic, multi-faceted discovery-based learning experience that develops all aspects of the learner's personality from cognitive to social, emotional, creative, and physical. The overall aim of ECCE will be to attain optimal outcomes in domains of physical & motor development, cognitive development; socio-emotional & ethical development; cultural/artistic dev & dev of communication & early language, literacy and numeracy. This paper discusses the ECCE with relevance to NEP 2020.

Key Words: NEP 2020, Education, Quality, ECCE



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Introduction

Children must be taught how to think, not what to think.

Margaret Mead

The new school structure by NEP 2020 includes the newly added Foundational Stage for the first five years of the school life i.e. ages three to five years. This subsumes the first two years of the erstwhile primary stage. Therefore, the Foundational Stage comprises of three years of pre-primary (Nursery, KG and Upper KG) and two years of primary (Classes I & II). This

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provision aims to curb the detrimental trend of the downward extension of primary curriculum to pre-primary classes that was resulting in over-load of teaching-learning content causing extreme stress and overwork to the early learners who were expected to master reading, writing, and numbers operations at pre-primary stage.

Children are curious and have an innate desire to learn. Children observe what happens, talk, discuss and reflecting on their findings, stretch their imagination for possibilities, ask questions, and formulate answers. While exploring and learning young children construct their knowledge and understanding of the world, they learn as well as from teachers, family members, peers and older children, and from books and other media. To enable these ECCE teachers/caregivers must use multiple teaching strategies in meeting children's different learning needs. Research studies have shown that preschool education enhance early literacy skills, child's ability to learn, to communicate ideas and feelings and to get along well with others. Children who receive quality preschool education are more likely to succeed in school and in life. Children with richer literacy environment demonstrate higher level of reading knowledge and skills at preschool entry.

Importance of early childhood

In recent years, our understanding of children's developmental needs has advanced considerably. Research into the neurobiology of children's development has strengthened the arguments in favour of providing high quality services for children from the earliest age.

1. This research has demonstrated that the skills and abilities acquired in early childhood are fundamental to a person's success and well-being in later life.
2. A positive early childhood provides personal and economic benefits to the individual and also to society. On the other hand, negative experiences in early childhood fundamentally undermine the building blocks on which later achievement relies.
3. A landmark study in this area concluded that virtually every aspect of early human development, from the brain's evolving circuitry to the child's capacity for empathy, is affected by the environments and experiences that are encountered in a cumulative fashion, beginning in the prenatal period and extending throughout the early years.
4. This period of development sets either a sturdy or fragile stage for what follows.
5. Early learning not only supports the development of cognitive, social, emotional and motivational skills, but also drives later learning and achievement, which in turn contributes to the 'human capital' that underpins the economic well-being of the broader community.
6. While it is clear that a child's family is the most powerful influence on their development⁵ it is also true that good quality ECEC services can have a substantial impact as well.

Scope of ECCE

ECCE policies and provision vary according to the age and development of the child, and can be organized in formal, non-formal and informal arrangements. The broad, holistic scope of ECCE is captured in the policy objectives associated with it around the world

- i) Providing health care, immunization, feeding and nutrition;
- ii) Supporting new parents through information sharing and parenting education;

- iii) Creating a safe environment for young children to play and socialize with their peers;
- iv) Compensating for disadvantage and fostering the resilience of vulnerable children;
- v) Promoting 'school readiness' and preparation for primary school;
- vi) Providing custodial care for children of working parents and family members;
- vii) Strengthening communities and social cohesion.

Objectives of Pre-Primary School

According to Miss Grace Owing, a pioneer in the field of early childhood education, there are seven objectives of pre-primary school, they are

1. To provide healthy environment to children like-space air, light and sun shine.
2. To provide a healthy, happy and regular life.
3. To provide continuous medical supervision.
4. To assist in the formation of healthy and good life.
5. To give opportunities for the development of different interests and skills of various kinds.
6. To give experience of social life on a small scale where children work and play together.
7. To establish real unity between external environment and home life.

The Education Commission of India 1964-66 has also enunciated the following objectives of pre-primary education:

1. To develop in child good health habits and to build up basic skills, necessary for personal adjustment, such as - dressing, toilet habits, eating, washing cleaning etc.
2. To develop desirable social attitudes and manners and to encourage healthy group participation.
3. To develop emotional maturity by guiding the child to express, understand, accept and control his feelings and emotions;
4. To encourage aesthetic appreciation.
5. To stimulate intellectual curiosity concerning the environment and to help him understand the world in which he lives.
6. To encourage independence and creativity by providing the child with sufficient opportunities for self-expression.
7. To develop the child's ability to express his thoughts and feeling in fluent, correct and clear speech.

Overall aim of ECCE

ECCE ideally consists of flexible, multi-faceted, multi-level, play-based, activity-based, and inquiry-based learning, comprising of alphabets, languages, numbers, counting, colors, shapes, indoor and outdoor play, puzzles and logical thinking, problem-solving, drawing, painting and other visual art, craft, drama and puppetry, music and movement. It also includes a focus on developing social capacities, sensitivity, good behaviour, courtesy, ethics, personal and public cleanliness, teamwork, and cooperation. The overall aim of ECCE will be to attain optimal outcomes in the domains of physical and motor development, cognitive development, socio-emotional-ethical development, cultural / artistic and development of communication and early language, literacy, and numeracy.

1. Strong investment in ECCE has the potential to give all young children such access, enabling them to participate and flourish in the educational system throughout their lives.

Universal provisioning of quality early childhood development, care, and education must thus be achieved as soon as possible, and no later than 2030, to ensure that all students entering Grade 1 are school ready.

2. ECCE ideally consists of flexible, multi-faceted, multi-level, play-based, activity-based, and inquiry-based learning, comprising of alphabets, languages, numbers, counting, colours, shapes, indoor and outdoor play, puzzles and logical thinking, problem-solving, drawing, painting and other visual art, craft, drama and puppetry, music and movement. It also includes a focus on developing social capacities, sensitivity, good behaviour, courtesy, ethics, personal and public cleanliness, teamwork, and cooperation. The overall aim of ECCE will be to attain optimal outcomes in the domains of: physical and motor development, cognitive development, socio-emotional-ethical development, cultural/artistic development, and the development of communication and early language, literacy, and numeracy.

3. 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 year-olds, and a sub-framework for 3-8 year-olds, aligned with the above guidelines, the latest research on ECCE, and national and international best practices. In particular, the numerous rich local traditions of India developed over millennia in ECCE involving art, stories, poetry, games, songs, and more, will also be suitably incorporated. The framework will serve as a guide both for parents and for early childhood care and education institutions.

4. The overarching goal will be to ensure universal access to high-quality ECCE across the country in a phased manner. Special attention and priority will be given to districts and locations that are particularly socio-economically disadvantaged. ECCE shall be delivered through a significantly expanded and strengthened system of early-childhood education institutions consisting of

- (a) Standalone Anganwadis;
- (b) Anganwadis co-located with primary schools;
- (c) pre-primary schools/sections covering at least age 5 to 6 years co-located with existing primary schools; and
- (d) Stand-alone pre-schools - all of which would recruit workers/teachers specially trained in the curriculum and pedagogy of ECCE.

Anganwadi Centers

For universal access to ECCE, Anganwadi Centers will be strengthened with high-quality infrastructure, play equipment, and well-trained Anganwadi workers / teachers. Every Anganwadi will have a well-ventilated, well-designed, child-friendly and well-constructed building with an enriched learning environment. Children in Anganwadi centers shall take activity-filled tours - and meet the teachers and students of their local primary schools, in order to make the transition from Anganwadi centers to primary schools a smooth one. Anganwadis shall be fully integrated into school complexes/clusters, and Anganwadi children, parents, and teachers will be invited to attend and participate in school/school complex programmes and vice versa. ECCE programmes are normally designed for children

from age 3 and include organized learning activities that constitute, on average, the equivalent of at least 2 hours per day and 100 days per year.

Challenges ahead in Early Childhood Care and Education

- i) Stronger and more partnerships between government and the private sector, an important ECCE stakeholder in many regions.
- ii) High-level political support, an essential element.
- iii) A consultative process to develop a national ECCE policy for children from birth to age 8, specifying the administrative responsibilities and budgetary commitments across relevant sectors and levels of government.
- iv) On-going national and international data collection and monitoring efforts to assess needs and outcomes in meeting the EFA goals.
- v) The designation of a lead ministry or agency for policy on young children and ECCE, and an interagency coordinating mechanism with decision-making power.
- vi) Well-enforced national quality standards covering public and private provision for all age groups.
- vii) Upgrading of ECCE staff, particularly through flexible recruitment strategies, appropriate training, quality standards and remuneration that retains trained staff.
- viii) Increased and better-targeted public funding of ECCE, with particular attention to poor children, children living in rural areas and those with disabilities.
- ix) The specific inclusion of ECCE in key government resource documents, such as national budgets, sector plans and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers.
- x) More attention – and more funding – from donor agencies

Conclusion

Early childhood refers to the period between birth and 8 years of life. The widely used term 'early childhood care and education' (ECCE) refers to a range of processes and mechanisms that sustain and support development during the early years of life: it encompasses education, physical, social and emotional care, intellectual stimulation, health care and nutrition. It also includes the support a family and community need to promote children's healthy development. Good preschool education increases cognitive abilities, school achievement, improves classroom behaviour, decrease grade repetition among children. Parents consider that preschools, kindergarten, Balwadis or Anganwadi play a vital role to enhance the overall development of the child. Children at this stage need to be encouraged to develop positive attitude through child to nature and the child to child interaction education is to be designed carefully to provide wholesome growth and development of children. Parents play an important role in the early childhood care and education. Parent involvement is linked to children's total learning. The greater parent involvements in children's learning positively affect the school performance including higher academic achievement. Parents believe that three to six is the right age for the child to receive preschool education as the child is able to understand things well. Parents perceive that play way approach in preschool centres is the best method for teaching as it helps in total learning and facilitate developmental out comes in children. Preschool education is therefore an integral part of child –rearing experience provided by any agency for all children.

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