

Early Childhood Education: Trends and Challenges in Global Context

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Abstract

Addressing ECCE, this paper examines the challenges and opportunities associated with the implementation of "National Education Policy" 2020. "Early Childhood Care and Education" (ECCE) is defined by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 as an essential cornerstone for lifelong learning. It emphasizes the necessity of providing quality early childhood care and education (ECCE) that incorporates play-based education and holistic development to all individuals. NEP 2020 seeks to improve the quality of early childhood care and education (ECCE) programs in order to facilitate a smooth transition for young learners to formal instruction and promote their cognitive, emotional, as well as social development.

Keywords: ECCE, NEP 2020, Trends, Challenges, Education.

1 Introduction

Given the accelerated rate of development that takes place during the first 6 years of existence, this period is vital for an individual's progress. The significance of early years in brain development is illuminated by research conducted on a global scale. The establishment of an empowering and intellectually engaging setting during the formative years of early childhood education (ECCE) is advantageous for the long-term growth and education of children. While the initial two and a half to three years of a child's life may not invariably require formal education, the nurturing role of parents is vital in establishing a dynamic learning environment. The Ministry of Education unveiled the new "National Education Policy" in July 2020, which stipulates that ECCE is integrated into the curriculum beginning at age 3. The regulation

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Dr. Bhavna Ramaiya

stipulates that "Universal provisioning of high-quality early childhood development, care, as well as education must thus be accomplished as quickly as possible, and no later than 2030"(Abhishek Vadeyar, 2022)

1.1 Early Childhood Care and Education in National Education Policy-2020

In order to transform India into a vibrant and equitable knowledge society in a sustainable manner, National Education Policy aims to establish an education system that is deeply ingrained in Indian culture and propels the country towards becoming a global knowledge superpower. Until Class 1 commences at age 6, children between the ages of three and six are not presently enrolled in the 10+2 framework. The novel 5+3+3+4 framework incorporates an "early childhood care and education" (ECCE) foundation that commences at the age of three. Its overarching objective is to foster enhanced holistic learning, development, and well-being.

Prior to the age of six, a child experiences cerebral development that exceeds 85 percent on average. Consequently, to ensure optimal brain development and growth, it is critical to provide appropriate brain stimulation and care during early childhood. At present, a significant number of young children, particularly those hailing from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, are deprived of the opportunity to receive high-quality early childhood education. Substantial allocations towards early childhood education possess the capacity to ensure that every young child has the opportunity to partake and develop within the educational system for the duration of their lives. Hence, in order to guarantee equitable access to high-quality early childhood education, care, and development, and to ensure that all first-grade students are prepared for academic life, this objective should be realized by 2030 at the latest.

The ideal early childhood care and education (ECCE) curriculum is versatile, multi-level, inquiry-based, play-based, and activity-based. It encompasses a wide range of subjects, including alphabets, languages, numbers, tally up, colors, shapes, puzzles, logical reasoning, problem-solving, drawing, painting, and more visual arts, crafts, drama, puppetry, music, and movement. In addition, it emphasizes the development of sensitivity, social skills, good decorum, courtesy, ethics, public and private order, collaboration, and cooperation. Social-emotional and ethical development, both physical and motor development, mental growth, cultural and artistic development, and the enhancement of early language, literacy, and numeracy abilities are all aspects of early childhood care and education (ECCE) that strive for optimal outcomes.

NCERT has devised the "National Curriculum and Educational Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education" (NCPFECCE) in two sections, catering to children aged up to eight. Years of adherence to the aforementioned principles, the most recent investigations in the field of early childhood education, and understood national and global benchmarks. The ECCE effectively incorporates India's abundant indigenous customs, encompassing artistic expressions, narratives, poetic expressions, musical performances, and more, that have developed over millennia. This framework functions as a reference for early childhood education and care providers as well as parents.

The overarching goal will be to ensure that all citizens of the nation gradually gain access to high-quality

National Education Policy 2020: The Key To Development In India (Volume-1)

ECCEs. Specifically targeted and prioritized initiatives will be implemented in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods and locations. Early childhood care and education (ECCE) is delivered via an extensively refined and augmented network of establishments. This network comprises the following: (a) autonomous crèches; (b) Anganwadis operating in conjunction with primary schools (c) kindergartens or departments catering to children aged 5 to 6 in conjunction with established primary schools as well as (d) independent crèches staffed by personnel or instructors who have received specialized training in the ECCE curriculum and pedagogy.

To ensure that ECCE is utilized universally, Anganwadi centers will be fortified with high-quality infrastructure, play apparatus, and well-trained Anganwadi workers/teachers. Each Anganwadi is housed in a meticulously constructed, exceptionally ventilated, and child-friendly structure that fosters an intellectually stimulating atmosphere. To ensure a seamless transition via Anganwadi centres to primary schools, children residing in these centers are obligated to participate in activity excursions and engage in interactions with instructors and students from nearby primary schools. Anganwadis children, parents, and instructors are extended invitations to partake in programs organized by school complexes/clusters, with reciprocal engagement occurring between the two groups.

Every child prior to the age of five is scheduled to attend a "preparatory class" or "Balavatika" (i.e., prior to Year 1) taught by an ECCE-certified instructor. The preparatory class ought to predominantly employ play-based learning strategies to facilitate the development of early literacy and numeracy skills, in addition to cognitive, affective, and psychomotor abilities. The Eight-Day Fasting Provision of the "Central National Education Policy" 2020 is expanded to include primary school preparatory classes as well. Health screenings and growth surveillance, which are currently provided through the Anganwadi system, ought to be extended to Preparatory and Anganwadi pupils as well.

In order to properly equip the Anganwadi with its first cohort of high-caliber ECCE instructors, the current Anganwadi staff and teachers will undergo a methodical training program in accordance with the NCERT-designed curriculum and pedagogical framework. A one-year degree program will be offered to Anganwadi workers/teachers who have completed a minimum of 10 2 credits in ECCEs. Those with lower credentials will be enrolled in a certificate program for six months, which will cover critical aspects of ECCE such as early literacy and numeracy. By operating these programs remotely via smartphones and DTH channels, educators are able to obtain ECCE credentials without having to interrupt their current duties. The "Cluster Resource Centers" of the Department of School Education offer ECCE training for Anganwadi workers and teachers. As part of their ongoing evaluation, these centers organize a minimum of one contact hour per month. Using career mapping, mentorship programs, and on-stage vocational training, state governments are laying the groundwork for a future generation of highly trained teachers to focus on preschool and kindergarten. Additionally, facilities required for the ongoing professional development (CPD) and initial professional training of these trainers will be established.

1.2 Importance of Ecce in Nep-2020

For a variety of factors, "Early Childhood Care and Education" (ECCE) is an integral component of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. ECCE serves as a fundamental cornerstone for the holistic development of a child, encompassing cognitive, social, emotional, as well as physical domains. It serves as the foundation for subsequent academic achievement and success. In context of NEP-2020, ECCE's recognition as an essential component of the education system, with the objective of ensuring a solid foundation for children between the ages of three and six, emphasizes its significance. The significance of this recognition stems from the following factors:

1. **Holistic Development:** ECCE places emphasis on comprehensive development, encompassing not only scholastic aptitudes but also psychological and social welfare. This is consistent with NEP's emphasis on a holistic and multidisciplinary approach to education.
2. **Foundational Learning:** It is essential to set the groundwork for subsequent learning during the formative years. By fostering the development of critical cognitive and linguistic abilities, ECCE paves the way for a prosperous formal education.
3. **Inclusivity:** ECCE makes sure all children, regardless of their origin, have access to high-quality early education, thereby diminishing disparities from the outset, in line with the NEP-2020's emphasis on inclusiveness.
4. **Parental Engagement:** The policy acknowledges the significance of parental participation in the educational process. Promoting parental involvement, ECCE cultivates a synergistic atmosphere between educators and parents with the aim of advancing the child's welfare.
5. **Teacher Training:** The importance of teacher education and professional growth is emphasized in NEP-2020. Within the realm of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), the presence of adequately trained educators is critical in order to deliver high-quality early education and cultivate a constructive atmosphere for learning.
6. **Transition to Formal Education:** By bridging the gap between the home and formal education, ECCE facilitates transition for children. This is consistent with the NEP's objective of accelerating and streamlining education.
7. **Cognitive and Emotional Skills:** The early years of infancy are crucial for the formation of both cognitive and affective abilities. ECCE places emphasis on fostering these facets, thereby making a valuable contribution to a child's holistic development.

1.3 Early Childhood Care & Education (ECCE) Four Main Areas

Foundational Learning Curriculum: The curriculum for students aged 3 to 8 is divided into two sections: courses I and II for primary-school students aged 6 to 8, and the fundamental learning curriculum for ECCE students aged 3 to 6.

Universal Access: ECCE that is free, secure, and of high quality is available to all children aged 3 to 6 at pre-schools, Anganwadi's, and Balearicas.

Preparatory Class: Prior to entering Class 1, all children will be transferred to a "Calvatia" or "Preparatory Class" (preceding Class 1), where play-based learning will be facilitated by educators who are qualified in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE).

Multi-faceted Learning: A flexible instructional approach that prioritizes inquiry-based learning, play, and activity as means to develop foundational literacy and numeracy skills.

The Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD), Women and Child Development (WCD), "Health and Family Welfare" (HFW), as well as Tribal Affairs will work in tandem to develop and execute ECCE in a phased manner, in accordance with the National Education Policy 2020. A system of institutions that is both extremely robust and substantially expanded will be utilized to provide ECCE, comprising:

- Self-contained Pre-schools and Anganwadis that feature exceptional facilities, educational materials, and a stimulating atmosphere
- Co-located anganwadis and primary institutions
- Co-located pre-primary schools or sections that accommodate children aged 5-6 years alongside existing primary schools.

Additionally, National Education Policy 2020 stresses the importance of giving districts and regions that are socioeconomically disadvantaged considerable priority and consideration. Furthermore, it is highly recommended that ECCE be progressively implemented in Ashrams Halas situated in tribally dominant regions.

1.4 Trends in Early Childhood Education (ECE)

- 1. Holistic Development Focus:** NEP 2020 places significant emphasis on the integration of physical, cognitive, socio-emotional, as well as ethical development within the framework of early childhood education. This is consistent with worldwide patterns that prioritize the holistic growth of children over the acquisition of merely academic competencies.
- 2. Play-based and Activity-based Learning:** Consistent with international standards of excellence, the policy promotes an instructional approach that emphasizes action and play. This methodology facilitates the organic cognitive development of young children as well as cultivates their inquisitiveness, imagination, and evaluation skills.
- 3. Universal Access to ECCE:** By 2030, NEP 2020 seeks to guarantee that every child aged 3 to 6 will have the opportunity to attend high-quality early childhood education. This is consistent with global initiatives, including "Sustainable Development Goal 4" of the United Nations, which aims to ensure an equitable and inclusive quality of education for all individuals.

4. **Integration of ECCE with Formal Schooling:** The policy proposes the integration of early childhood education into the formal education system. This exemplifies a worldwide tendency to establish smooth progressions from early childhood environments to primary education in order to guarantee uninterrupted learning.
5. **Parental and Community Engagement:** The significance of engaging parents and community in educational process is emphasized by NEP 2020. This approach acknowledges the prominent influence that family and community have on the development of a child; this is a widely recognized and advocated practice on an international level.

1.5 Challenges in Early Childhood Education (ECE)

1. **Quality and Standardization:** NEP 2020 stresses that assuring the quality and uniformity of ECCE programs is a significant global challenge. Diverse resources, curriculum, and teaching standards may contribute to discrepancies in quality of education that children receive.
2. **Training and Professional Development:** For early childhood education to be effective, instructors must be well-trained. As in numerous nations, NEP 2020 recognizes that ECCE instructors face a prevalent obstacle in the form of inadequate training and ongoing professional development.
3. **Infrastructure and Resources:** Effective ECCE requires sufficient learning materials and infrastructure. NEP 2020 emphasizes the necessity of allocating resources and capital towards infrastructure development, thereby addressing a worldwide concern wherein numerous early childhood programs function with inadequate facilities and materials.
4. **Funding and Investment:** Obtaining sufficient funding for ECCE presents a formidable obstacle. NEP 2020 advocates for heightened public funding in early childhood education, a matter of global significance given the considerable financial challenges faced by numerous nations in allocating adequate resources to this fundamental phase of learning.
5. **Inclusivity and Accessibility:** A persistent challenge is ensuring accessibility and inclusion for all children, even those from disadvantaged and marginalized backgrounds. NEP 2020 endeavors to tackle this issue by ensuring universal access to ECCE, thereby mirroring international initiatives to assist the most marginalized communities.

Monitoring and Evaluation: The establishment of efficient surveillance and evaluation systems for ECCE programs is critical in order to guarantee both quality and accountability. NEP 2020 emphasizes the necessity for comprehensive assessment mechanisms, a challenge that ECCE faces on a global scale in order to uphold high standards as well as continuous improvement.

2 Literature Review

(Sethi & Mahajan, 2020) Education is a highly potent tool that has the potential to revolutionize society and create opportunities for achievement across diverse fields of study. It broadens the individual's perspective on world and lays the groundwork for all of our capabilities. Education is a critical element that serves as a link between various factors contributing to the progress and advancement of a country. To concretize this notion, the Indian government has issued the "National Education Policy" (NEP) 2020. Recognizing the critical need for a new set of priorities, commitments, strategies, and finances to implement and sustain effective supports for overall growth, the objective of this paper is to highlight the gaps in the recently released NEP'2020 and to emphasize the significance of the National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) as well as Early Childhood Mental Health inclusive education system in ensuring students' efficient education and well-being.

(Chetuwani Jaya, 2020) Education, being a critical investment in both human and economic progress, is susceptible to the effects of its surrounding environment. Policy responses are necessary in response to shifts in technology, labor market patterns, and the global environment as a whole. Traditions, culture, and religion all simultaneously influence and are influenced by the education system. The perpetual nature of change and continuity forces society to establish its own tempo and trajectory. Education has the capacity to instigate societal transformations through the induction of a shift in human perspective and disposition. It has the potential to alter the structure of social institutions and relationships, and thus may precipitate social change. Education for the Sustainable Development makes it possible for all individuals to attain the values, knowledge, abilities, and attitudes required to create a future that is sustainable.

(Dr.Abhaykumarsharma, 2020) Education serves as the preeminent instrument in fostering the progress of both communities and countries by means of enlightenment and empowerment. The trajectory of the nation is contingent upon the scientific as well as technological inquiry conducted within educational institutions. The future is built upon the foundation of children. Scientific evidence suggests that over 85% of child's cumulative brain development takes place prior to the age of 6, suggesting that the learning process commences in infants shortly after birth. This underscores the critical significance of early-life brain stimulation and care in fostering healthy and sustained brain development and growth. The influence of the family environment on a child's progress in learning is significant. Due to the prevalence of joint families in the past, children attended school and gained knowledge from their family members. Due to limited family sizes, children are presently unable to pursue their education in this field.

(Gandhi, 2021) NEP-2020 sought to invigorate the early childhood education and care (ECCE) program in light of the fact that 85 percent of a child's total brain development takes place before the age of six. This initiative places particular emphasis on communities from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds in order to facilitate the paradigm development of every preschooler. It will enable every child to thrive in life and develop the necessary abilities to contribute more effectively in future and serve as a valuable member of society. Present-day digital India as well as Atma Nirbhar Bharat necessitate

Dr. Bhavna Ramaiya

that every member of the populace be re-equipped with essential fundamental abilities. For example, fundamental financial transactions, Internet-based employment applications, utility bill payments, fee settlements, and retail transactions, among numerous others.

(Kamaldeep & Sarna, 2021) In the midst of significant upheaval in the education sector caused by the "Fourth Industrial Revolution" and COVID-19, the Government of India's Ministry of Education issued the National Education Policy – 2020 (NEP-2020) on July 29, 2020, with the endorsement of the Union Cabinet. The NEP-2020 outlines the overarching vision for the future education system in India, which revolves around the principles of perseverance and self-reliance. With a distinctive multidisciplinary approach and a great deal of flexibility regarding credit transfers, curriculum, skills, and access, the NEP-2020 is more student-centric. This paper examines a number of praiseworthy advantages proposed by NEP, including structured pre-schooling as well as an early start to learning, the universalization of inclusive education, and a paradigm shift from memorization to active learning. While the potential benefits of NEP-2020 are undeniable, concerns regarding its extent and practicality also arise, calling into doubt the optimism exhibited in the formulated policy.

(Sarkar, 2021) The introduction of NEP 2020 in India represents a substantial and critical departure from the preceding educational environment. Significant importance is attributed to the principles of inclusiveness and holistic development in this transition. With regard to "Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)" for children with disabilities, this research undertakes an exhaustive and comprehensive examination of the numerous provisions and significant consequences outlined in the "National Education Policy" (NEP) 2020. The investigation utilized in this study is based on a qualitative research design. The data were subjected to thematic analysis, and the results were interpreted in light of particular themes. The purpose of this study is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the current policies, provisions, and criticisms concerning early childhood education and care for children with disabilities in India, with a particular focus on the "National Education Policy" (NEP) of 2020. This will be achieved by conducting an extensive literature review and document analysis.

(Paras, 2022) Education is a significant factor in the development of a nation. This results in economic and social advancement and also determines the nation's and its citizens' futures. Long-lasting effects of education can be observed in the development and progress of the nation as well as its inhabitants. Education's function and significance cannot be disregarded in the current environment. The progression and maturation are evident when contrasting the period preceding independence with the one following it. The Indian government intended to alter the way we study after thirty-four years; this is third amendment to the education policy. Numerous modifications are outlined in the 2020 National Education Policy (NEP), all of which are certain to have an impact. The NEP 2020 seeks to establish India as a global knowledge superpower and to ensure that all aspirants receive a liberal education that is both multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary. Additionally, by 2035, it intends to increase the present gross enrolment ratio to 50%.

(Abhishek Vadeyar, 2022) The primary emphasis of this article is on "current trends in National Education Policy" 2020 regarding Early Childhood Care and Education, which reflect the global agenda

National Education Policy 2020: The Key To Development In India (Volume-1)

for education reforms. India's 2015 adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development encompasses the attainment of all principal objectives, one of which is Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education. This objective seeks to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education as well as promote opportunities for lifelong learning for all" by the year 2030. This objective reflects the worldwide educational development agenda. In order to ensure a comprehensive discussion on the key targets and Sustainable Development objectives of 2030 that are specified in the National Education Policy-2020 regarding the education and care of young children in India, this is necessary.

(Mistry, 2022) In an effort to reduce illiteracy and enhance the education system in India, Union government has established numerous educational commissions and policies since the country's independence in 1947. In 1968, the initial National-Education Policy was established; it underwent revisions in 1986 and 1992. Following an absence of nearly thirty years, the Indian education system underwent a paradigm shift with the introduction of the National Education-Policy 2020. Its objective is for the Indian education system to be entirely devoted to the sustainable transformation of our nation.

(Kumar & Chander, 2023) This scholarly article investigates the obstacles and recommendations pertaining to the execution of National Education Policy 2020 in Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. A comprehensive reform policy, the NEP 2020 endeavors to revolutionize the education system in India by emphasizing skill development, technology integration, experiential learning, and holistic and multidisciplinary education. Nevertheless, the execution of the policy encounters obstacles including insufficient infrastructure, resources, and capacity. In addition to capacity development, stakeholder engagement, evaluation and monitoring, resource mobilization, local adaptation, and collaboration with central government, the paper provides additional recommendations for addressing these challenges. In its entirety, the paper underscores the capacity of the NEP 2020 to revolutionize the educational landscape of Himachal Pradesh upon successful execution.

(Rahaman et al., 2024) The objective of this assessment was to examine "Early Childhood Care and Education" (ECCE) in India through the lens of various policies and initiatives. India has enacted a multitude of policies and schemes pertaining to early childhood education (ECCE), such as NEP 2020, NPE 1986, NCF 2005, ICDS, "National ECCE Policy", NPAC 2016, and SDG 4. These initiatives proffer recommendations on diverse facets of early education. These suggestions are crucial for the advancement of ECCE. ECCE encompasses a variety of programs that promote the physical, mental, and social development of infants and toddlers between the ages of seven and eight. The ECCE program is of the utmost importance because it lays the groundwork for children's future development. Similar to numerous other nations, India offers a plethora of policies and initiatives that cater to ECCE.

(Sahoo & Pradhan, 2024) Concerning ECCE, this article examines the obstacles and prospects associated with implementation of National Education Policy 2020. "Early Childhood Care and Education" (ECCE) is defined by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 as an essential cornerstone for lifelong learning. It emphasizes the necessity of providing quality early childhood care and education (ECCE) that incorporates play-based learning & holistic development to all individuals. The overarching goal of NEP 2020 is to improve early childhood education and care (ECCE) programs so that children have a smooth

transition into formal education and so that they may thrive socially, emotionally, and cognitively. An indicator for "Sustainable Development Goal" (SDG) number four in the domain of Early Childhood pertains to the global pupil enrollment rate one year prior to starting primary education. This metric represents the proportion of five-year-olds who are enrolled in structured educational programs. The UNESCO report "Setting Commitment: National SDG 4 Benchmarks to Transform Education," published in 2022, indicates that the global rate of transformation in education rose from 65% in 2002 to 75% in 2020.

3 Conclusion

The references provided here demonstrate NEP 2020's dedication to laying a solid foundation for children by means of comprehensive and age-appropriate early childhood education. In brief, the incorporation of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) into NEP-2020 signifies a dedication to fundamental educational principles and an awareness of the critical impact that the early years have on the development of an individual. The primary objective is to establish a solid foundation for an efficient and effective education system by guaranteeing quality, equity, and inclusivity in the early stages of education.

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National Education Policy 2020: The Key To Development In India (Volume-1)

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