



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR LEGAL RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

Open Access, Refereed Journal Multi Disciplinary
Peer Reviewed Edition :

www.ijlra.com

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR LEGAL RESEARCH & ANALYSIS
ISSN

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THE CONNECTION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION IN THE NEW EDUCATION POLICY : A KEY IN ACHIEVING WHAT THE CONSTITUTION SUGGESTS.

AUTHORED BY: AKASH SANJAYKUMAR PAWAR

ABSTRACT

The National Education Policy, 2020 (NEP) represents a transformative vision for education in India. Anchored in values, NEP aims to create an equitable and high-quality education system, fostering India's global knowledge prominence. Guided by five pillars - Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability, and Accountability, NEP strives to redefine education, emphasizing holistic development.

NEP extends its vision beyond schools, envisioning a comprehensive education system for the 21st century, blending tradition and innovation. It advocates changes in teaching methodologies, examination systems, and technology integration to make learning more meaningful. NEP identifies the crucial role of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in laying the foundation for a child's educational journey, introducing the 5+3+3+4 structure.

In this Article we will see the Significance of ECCE, Need of ECCE And challenges in implementation with respective solutions. The article also emphasizes on Constitutional relevance of ECCE in India.

INTRODUCTION

National Education Policy, 2020¹

The National Education Policy, 2020 (NEP) wants to make big changes in education in India. It aims to create a good education system that is based on Indian values. This system should help turn India into a fair and smart society that knows a lot, making India a powerful country in knowledge around the world. NEP 2020 has five important ideas: Access (making education available to everyone), Equity (fairness), Quality (good education), Affordability (making education affordable), and Accountability (responsibility).

¹ <https://www.education.gov.in/nep/about-nep>

For schools, NEP 2020 talks about important values. Education should not only teach basic things like reading and math but also important skills like thinking and problem-solving. It also wants students to learn social and emotional skills, like understanding different cultures and being good team members. The policy wants all children to go to pre-primary school and be able to read and do math well by 2025. NEP suggests many changes to make schools better, like improving teaching, changing exams, and using technology. It wants students to learn less but understand more.

NEP 2020 also talks about changing everything in education, not just in schools. It wants to make a new system that fits the goals of education in the 21st century and also respects India's traditions. Technology will be a big part of education, with things like interactive textbooks and online learning for teachers and students. The policy suggests that small schools can join together to work better.

In higher education, NEP 2020 has good ideas too. It wants students to learn many things, not just one subject. It also wants universities to have more freedom, encourage good research, and use technology. The policy thinks that by doing all this, India will become a global leader in skilled people by 2047.

Making all these changes will need everyone's help – the government, states, schools, and many others. NEP 2020 wants everyone to work together to make education in India better.

Right now, kids aged 3 to 6 are not part of the 10+2 education system because formal schooling begins at the age of 6 in Class 1. However, in the new 5+3+3+4 structure, there is a focus on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) from the age of 3. This addition is meant to enhance overall learning, development, and well-being for young children.²

Early Childhood Care and Education: Building the Basis for Learning.³

1. Over 85% of a child's cumulative brain development occurs prior to the age of 6, indicating the critical importance of appropriate care and stimulation of the brain in the

² https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf

³ https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf

early years in order to ensure healthy brain development and growth.⁴

Right now, many young kids, especially those from families with fewer resources, don't have access to good Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). If India invest a lot in ECCE, all the kids will be given the chance to learn and do well in school. It's really important to make sure that every child, when they start Grade 1, is ready for school.

Currently, many kids, especially those who face money problems, don't get to go to good ECCE programs. If India spend more money on these programs for little kids, we can help all kids, no matter where they come from, do well in school right from the start.

Indian government is saying it's urgent to make sure all kids get good ECCE everywhere and quickly. They want to achieve this by 2030, which means they need to act fast. If they do this, all students will be prepared for school when they start Grade 1. This is not just about giving everyone a fair chance but also making our education system better and including everyone.

2. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is a way of teaching young kids that includes fun and interactive activities like playing, drawing, and singing. It helps children learn letters, numbers, colors, shapes, and more. ECCE is not just about academics; it also focuses on developing good behavior, teamwork, and being polite. The goal of ECCE is to help kids grow in different areas, such as physical skills, thinking abilities, and social and emotional skills. It covers things like playing indoors and outdoors, solving puzzles, and even learning about art and music. Overall, ECCE aims to make sure kids develop well in areas like their body, mind, emotions, culture, and communication skills.
3. NCERT will create a special guide called the National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (NCPFECCE). It will be for kids up to 8 years old and will have two parts: one for 0-3 year-olds and another for 3-8 year-olds. This guide will follow the given rules, the latest research on teaching little kids, and the best ways of teaching from around the world. It will also include the amazing traditions of India for teaching kids, like art, stories, poetry, games, and songs. This guide will help parents and schools know how to teach young kids in the best way possible.
4. The overarching objective is to ensure universal access to quality Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) for all children, regardless of their geographical location. The implementation strategy involves a phased approach, with a targeted emphasis on regions characterized by socio-economic disadvantages. The proposed expansion and

⁴ https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf

enhancement of the early-childhood education system include the establishment of various institutions: standalone Anganwadis, Anganwadis integrated with primary schools, pre-primary schools/sections accommodating children aged 5 to 6 adjacent to existing primary schools, and independent pre-schools. Each of these educational settings will employ educators who undergo specialized training in the ECCE curriculum and pedagogy, emphasizing a tailored approach for instructing young children.

5. To ensure universal access to Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), Indian Government plans to enhance Anganwadi Centers. This involves improving infrastructure, providing play equipment, and training Anganwadi workers/teachers. Each Anganwadi will have a well-designed, child-friendly building with a conducive learning environment. Children in Anganwadi Centers will engage in informative visits to local primary schools, facilitating a smooth transition. Government aims to integrate Anganwadis into school complexes, encouraging collaboration between Anganwadi and school communities through joint programs and participation. This approach fosters a seamless connection between Anganwadi Centers and primary schools, benefiting children, parents, and teachers alike.
6. The Indian government aims to improve Anganwadi Centers for universal Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) access. They plan to upgrade infrastructure, provide play equipment, and train Anganwadi workers/teachers. The goal is to create child-friendly environments in well-constructed buildings. The government also emphasizes connecting Anganwadi Centers with local primary schools to facilitate smooth transitions for children. The plan includes integrating Anganwadis into school complexes, fostering collaboration through joint programs, and encouraging participation between Anganwadi and school communities. This approach aligns with the government's vision to enhance ECCE accessibility.
7. The Indian government plans to train current Anganwadi workers/teachers to become high-quality Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) teachers. Those with 10+2 qualifications will undergo a 6-month ECCE certificate program, while those with lower qualifications will have a one-year diploma program. These training programs will focus on early literacy, numeracy, and relevant ECCE aspects. To ensure minimal disruption, the training may be conducted digitally through DTH channels and smartphones. The School Education Department's Cluster Resource Centres will mentor ECCE training, including monthly contact classes for ongoing assessment. In the long term, State Governments will establish professionally qualified educators for early childhood

education, offering stage-specific training, mentoring, and career development. Adequate facilities will be provided for their initial preparation and continuous professional development.

8. The Indian government intends to introduce Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) gradually in tribal-dominated areas, specifically in Ashramshalas and various alternative schooling formats. The approach for integrating and implementing ECCE in Ashramshalas and alternative schooling will follow a similar process as outlined earlier.
9. In ensuring a smooth transition of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) from pre-primary to primary school, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) will be responsible for the ECCE curriculum and teaching methods. Collaboration for planning and implementing this curriculum will involve the Ministries of HRD, Women and Child Development (WCD), Health and Family Welfare (HFW), and Tribal Affairs. To facilitate this integration, a dedicated joint task force will be formed to provide ongoing guidance.

Current Status of ECCE in India

The expansion of private preschools has not translated into satisfactory quality in preschool education, whether in private or government settings. Private preschools often employ rote learning, resembling the primary school curriculum, while government preschools adopt a more basic curriculum focused on alphabets, numbers, songs, and rhymes. Research from CECED, Ambedkar University, indicates that despite participation in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), children lack the cognitive and language skills necessary for primary schooling due to subpar program quality. This deficiency is evident in primary grade performance, where children advance without mastering fundamental skills (ASER, 2013; IECEI, 2014). A significant concern is the ECCE curriculum's insufficient emphasis on holistic child development, with practices suitable for first graders being introduced in preschools, resulting in an academic-focused environment with reduced playtime (Position Paper on ECE, 2006).⁵

Constitutional Provision

The constitutional provision for Early Childhood Care and Education for all the children in India is enshrined in the Constitution of India by 86th amendment act of India(2002)⁶, which represents

⁵ https://www.education.gov.in/shikshakparv/docs/background_note_ECCE.pdf

⁶ Art. 45, the Constitution of India.

a landmark legislation aimed at realizing the constitutional vision of providing Early Childhood Care and Education for all the children in India.

The foundation for Early Childhood Care and Education for all the children below the age of six (6) in India can be traced back to the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) outlined in the Constitution of India. Article 45 of the DPSP specifically addresses the duty of the State to provide Early Childhood Care and Education for all children until they complete the age of six (6). The legislators of India recognized the significance of Early Childhood Care and Education for all the children in India and envisioned a smooth transition to all the children of age six or up to the age six to the pre-primary and primary classes , irrespective of socio-economic backgrounds.

Need of ECCE

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), spanning from birth to 8 years old, is crucial as it leverages a period of significant brain development, enabling children to reach their full potential when of high quality. It establishes the groundwork for lifelong benefits in health, nutrition, education, social-emotional learning, and economic productivity. Despite the proven developmental gains, ECCE often receives low priority in education policy and investment, with potential exclusion of marginalized groups. Additionally, the vulnerability of ECCE lies in its widespread private provision.⁷

How UNESCO promotes ECCE

UNESCO collaborates with governments and key stakeholders to support the care and education of young children from birth to primary school entry. Their focus is on holistic pre-primary education for children aged 3 and above, emphasizing appropriate teaching methods and connecting with primary education, health, nutrition, and social services. They work globally to influence policies, advocate for evidence-based practices, share knowledge, build partnerships, and provide technical assistance. Initiatives like STEPP focus on teacher development, and UNESCO promotes family literacy and parenting education. The organization advocates for integrating Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) into national education plans, addressing diverse age groups and marginalized populations. Partnerships involving health,

⁷ Early Childhood Education, UNESCO, available at [https://www.unesco.org/en/early-childhood-education/need-know#:~:text=Early%20childhood%20care%20and%20education%20\(ECCE\)%2C%20which%20addresses%20the,them%20achieve%20their%20full%20potential](https://www.unesco.org/en/early-childhood-education/need-know#:~:text=Early%20childhood%20care%20and%20education%20(ECCE)%2C%20which%20addresses%20the,them%20achieve%20their%20full%20potential), last seen on 11-12-2023.

nutrition, social sectors, civil society, and the private sector aim to extend support to a broader range of children.⁸

Challenges and Solutions in the Implementation of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in India:

1. Limited Access:

Challenge: Many children, especially in rural and marginalized communities, lack access to quality ECCE programs.

Solution: Establish more ECCE centers in remote areas, focusing on inclusivity and targeting underserved populations. MHRD is looking into it.

2. Quality Disparities:

Challenge: Varied quality standards exist across different ECCE centers, impacting the learning experience.

Solution: Implement strict quality standards, regular monitoring, and training for ECCE educators to maintain consistent quality. NCERT is working on it.

3. Teacher Training:

Challenge: Insufficient training and professional development for ECCE teachers.

Solution: Invest in comprehensive training programs, including continuous development, to enhance teaching skills and methodologies.

4. Parental Awareness:

Challenge: Limited awareness among parents about the importance of early childhood education.

Solution: Launch awareness campaigns to educate parents on the benefits of ECCE, encouraging active participation in their child's early learning.

5. Infrastructure and Resources:

Challenge: Inadequate infrastructure and resources in ECCE centers, affecting the overall learning environment.

Solution: Allocate sufficient resources for infrastructure development, including age-appropriate

⁸ Early Childhood Education, UNESCO, available at [https://www.unesco.org/en/early-childhood-education/need-know#:~:text=Early%20childhood%20care%20and%20education%20\(ECCE\)%2C%20which%20addresses%20the,them%20achieve%20their%20full%20potential](https://www.unesco.org/en/early-childhood-education/need-know#:~:text=Early%20childhood%20care%20and%20education%20(ECCE)%2C%20which%20addresses%20the,them%20achieve%20their%20full%20potential), last seen on 11-12-2023.

learning materials and safe play areas.

6. Integration with Primary Education:

Challenge: Lack of seamless integration between ECCE and primary education systems.

Solution: Develop cohesive curriculum frameworks and policies to ensure a smooth transition from ECCE to primary education. NCERT is working on it.

7. Policy Coordination:

Challenge: Limited coordination among different government departments involved in ECCE policymaking.

Solution: Establish inter-ministerial coordination committees to streamline policies and ensure effective implementation.

8. Monitoring and Evaluation:

Challenge: Inadequate systems for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of ECCE programs.

Solution: Implement robust monitoring mechanisms to track the progress of ECCE initiatives, allowing for timely adjustments and improvements.

9. Financial Constraints:

Challenge: Sufficient budgetary allocations for ECCE programs.

Solution: Sufficient funding for ECCE must be there, for its long-term societal benefits and impact on educational outcomes.

10. Cultural Sensitivity:

Challenge: Lack of cultural sensitivity in ECCE curriculum and practices.

Solution: Development of culturally relevant and inclusive ECCE content is must, respecting the diversity of communities and their traditions.

Addressing these challenges requires a collaborative effort from government bodies, educational institutions, communities, and parents to ensure the effective implementation of ECCE in India.

The Implementation Plan

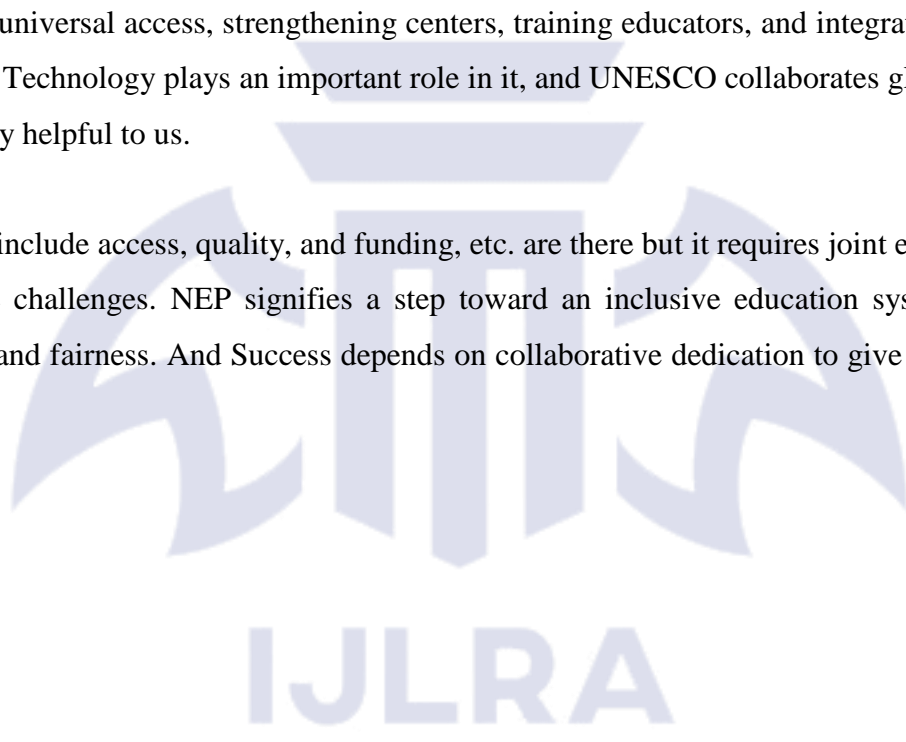
The MHRD is in charge of the ECCE curriculum, making sure it continues smoothly from pre-

primary to primary school, focusing on the basics of education. The planning and implementation of this curriculum involve collaboration between the Ministries of HRD, WCD, HFW, and Tribal Affairs. To ensure a seamless integration of early childhood care and education into school education, a special joint task force will provide continuous guidance.⁹

Conclusion

In short, the 2020 National Education Policy (NEP) envisions a major change in India's education, focusing on fairness, quality, and technology integration. A key part is recognizing Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) as vital. NEP introduces a new structure, emphasizing ECCE from age 3. This is crucial as 85% of a child's brain develops by age 6. The government commits to universal access, strengthening centers, training educators, and integrating ECCE in tribal areas. Technology plays an important role in it, and UNESCO collaborates globally which can be surely helpful to us.

Challenges include access, quality, and funding, etc. are there but it requires joint efforts to fight with all the challenges. NEP signifies a step toward an inclusive education system, valuing knowledge and fairness. And Success depends on collaborative dedication to give every child a strong start.



⁹ https://www.education.gov.in/shikshakparv/docs/background_note_ECCE.pdf