



Early Childhood Care and Education in India: A Contextual Analysis

KEYWORDS

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The Constitution of India envisages that early childhood Care and education (ECCE) should be made available to the children from the age group of Zero to the age of 6 Years. This Early childhood care and education (ECCE) was incorporated in the Constitution of India by 86th Constitutional amendment in the year 2002. Now this concept of ECCE is in the Directive Principle of State Policy under the Chapter IV of the Constitution of India. The Constitution of India under its Article 45 inculcated the provision of Free and Compulsory education up to the age of 14. Then after it gets its Constitutional status under Article 21 (A) which is incorporated in part the III of Indian Constitution by the virtue of 86th Constitutional amendment. Thus, there is need to have a statutory back up to the provision of ECCE in Article 45. ECCE, being a broader areas of activity, it covers the physical, intellectual as well as psychological development of the child.

Right of the Children for Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 is a unique one under which the ECCE is coming. Being a key concept for the successful transition of the child from Pre-primary to primary Education, ECCE is overlooked by the States. It defuses the perennial root cause for the failure of primary education in India as it has enough potential to prepare the children to attend primary education in the subsequent stage. In view of the significant role of ECCE in realising the rights of the children, there is a need to provide a statutory back up to the provision of the ECCE in India so that it can be realised in a right based legal frame work.

By giving a statutory back up to the ECCE, it will be an enabling condition to secure access to primary education as Zero to 6 years of age of the child's life is considered as the most crucial one for the all round development of the child. It is therefore, the need of the hour to widen the scope of ECCE for the betterment of the child's physical, social as well as Psychological development. The Section 11 of the Right of the Children for Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 has strictly instructed the states to implement the Pre School provisions in their concerned State rules and implement them properly but it is all in vain.

Early childhood Care and education refers to the programmes intended to provide Care for children until they complete 6 years of age. It includes all round development of the child including cognitive development, language development, and Social development, psycho-motor development etc. It is an opportunity for the readiness of the children to attend the formal (Primary) education. Thus it focuses the importance of Pre Primary education and care environment where health and nutrition are given adequate attention which contains the root things of early childhood care and education.

The concept of ECCE is understood as an integrated package of measures laid by the Government of India for the fulfilment of the young children.

These rights are recognized by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child (UNCRC) which the Govt. of India ratified in 1992. The United Nations Convention on the rights of the child had given maximum emphasis that early childhood care and education has its root in a rights based approach to the system of service for the young children especially the children from the age group of 3-6 years of age.

Thus, the Govt. should address the rights of the children in a holistic way so that their rights to education, health, nutrition, protection, affection etc will be achieved. Early childhood care and education combines the elements from the field of child development, early childhood education, stimulation, health, nutrition, community development and parent education etc.

Significance of ECCE:

Early childhood care and education encompasses a variety of services relating to Health, Nutrition, education, health check up, immunization etc as all these are essential for all round development of the children. The Early childhood care and education (Pre-primary education) containing health, nutrition, education should be given adequate attention.

The National policy on education has given maximum emphasis upon ECCE. As per National policy on Education, ECCE is important to inculcate in the means of human resource development. It has also recommended for strengthening the ECCE as an important aspect of human development and will help in ensuring universalisation of Elementary education. Looking in to different aspects, a legal status should be given to ECCE as a result of which the mission, vision and goal can be realised properly.

Early Childhood can be considered as the basis or the foundation in human life. At this stage, the foundation to adult life is laid where the personality and character of a child gets moulded. Research finds that, about 80% of the personality characteristics observable in men or women develop during the Early Childhood years. According to the brain cells, which affect the whole life of a man or woman, are developed before the end of five years during Early Childhood. It has also been revealed that quality development of at about 60% of his intelligence is developed during these years. At the end of Early Childhood, a child will acquire language skills and also skills such as walking, jumping, playing and to live "alone" doing his work by himself. Accordingly the Early Childhood is signifi-

cant as a critical stage, which cannot be compared to any other stage in life as it lays the foundation for aspects of human life.

According to new research in the fields of Education and Psychology mal-nutrition, under-development and poor health contributes to backwardness in learning and low intelligence during formal schooling. It is therefore necessary to provide a child in the Early Childhood years not only the required nutrition and adequate health facilities but also care, love, protection, enthusiasm, pleasant-ness and a favorable social environment. Educational psychologists have indicated that the child who does not receive these basic requirements will not have opportunity to develop their personality and at a later stage in their life will be subjected to various mental ailments, in addition to grade repetition, and backwardness in learning which would be difficult to avoid. At the International Conference on "Education for All" held in 1990 the meaning of the two words "Basic Education" was broadened to include the educational needs in the Early Childhood years and as such, according to the Work Plan adopted at this Conference, the pre conditions of Quality Development, equality, and efficiency have been accepted.

Universal Retention

The retention rate¹ in primary level was 70.26 and 53.9 in elementary level for 2006-07. The retention rate among SC & ST students is lower than the overall retention rate. Dropout rates among All –Categories, Schedule Caste, & Schedule Tribe Children in elementary level (Classes I-VIII) in States & Union Territories of India.²

Scale of dropout	All Categories	Schedule Castes	Schedule Tribes
Above 80 %			Bihar, Odisha
70-80 %	Assam, Bihar	Assam, Bihar, Odisha	Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal
60-70 %	Mizoram, Meghalaya, Orissa, Rajasthan, Sikkim, West Bengal	Andhra Pradesh, Meghalaya, Rajasthan, Sikkim, West Bengal	Tripura, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur
50-60%	Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura	Uttar Pradesh	Arunachal Pradesh, Rajasthan
40-50 %	Gujarat, Jammu & Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland, Uttar Pradesh, Dadra & Nagar Haveli	Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Tripura, Chandigarh	Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu,
30-40 %	Karnataka, Nagaland, Chandigarh	Arunachal Pradesh, Delhi	Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka, Nagaland, Sikkim, Dadra & Nagar Haveli
Below 30 %	Goa, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Andaman & Nicobar Island, Daman & Diu, Delhi	Goa, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Dadra & Nagar Haveli	Kerala, Andaman & Nicobar Island

ECCE in Odisha:

On April 01, 1936, Odisha became a separate State which has an area of 155,707 square kilometers constitutes 4.74 percent of the total geographical area of India. There are 3 revenue divisions, 30 districts, 58 sub-divisions, and 171 tehasils, 314 community development blocks, 6234 gram-panchayatas, 103 urban local bodies, and 51,349 villages in the State. The State Odisha extends from 17° 49'N to 22° 34'N latitude and from 81° 29'E to 87° 29'E longitude on the eastern coast of India. Odisha has a population of more than 36.8 million as per census-2011, accounting for 7.58 percent of India's population. The decadal population growth rate was 19.9 percent against Country's growth rate of 21.5 between 2001-2011. As per Census-2011, 0-6 year aged child population of the State was 9.4 million, precisely constituted 19.6 percent of the State total population. Among the 0-6 year aged child population, the ST children accounted 26.7 percent and SC shared 17.5 percent. The sex ratio among aggregate population is 972 and sex ratio for children (0-6 Year) is 952, as per the estimation of Census-2011. Orissa is the homeland of 62-schedule tribe communities of them 13 tribes have been declared as primitive tribes. Schedule Tribes constitute 23.0 percent of State's total population. Nearly 16.5 percent of the State population belongs to the Schedule Castes. The overall literacy rate, as per Census-2001, is 63.08% with 59.8% in rural and 80.8% in urban Orissa. The literacy rate of Schedule Tribe and Schedule Caste population has been much lower than rest of the population. As against the overall literacy rate of 63.08% in the State, the literacy rate of 43.3% among the Schedule Tribes is considerably below. The schedule tribe female literacy rate of 29.1% is much lower than the State average female literacy of 50.5%. Around 40% of State's population is below the poverty line.³ As per NFHS-3 Report, in Orissa 65.8% of children aged below six years is received with any services of ICDS⁴. To further disaggregate, 62.5% of children have received food supplements in the form of either cooked food or home rations, 51.6% have received immunizations, 43.1% have received health check-up. Only 37.7% of pre-school aged children are going to the anganwadi centers for pre-school education. According to Annual Status of Education Report (Rural)- 2010, 26.3% of 3 years aged children, and 20.9% of 4 years aged children in the State are deprived of receiving ICDS service. Only 23.8% of 5 years aged children have received pre-school education through ICDS.

Odisha has highest percentage of Infant Deaths & Neo-Natal Deaths among the States of India. The IMR for the State is 83 per 1000 live births. The Neo-Natal Mortality is 61 per 1000 live births. 54.4% Children born in Odisha are underweight. 20.7% of Children below 3 years of age are severely underweight and another 54.4% are moderately underweight. Even after 30 years of its existence, ICDS still fail to reach every poor child. Services under ICDS covered only 2.5 Million Children in the age group of 0-6 years, while the children need early childhood care through ICDS network is estimated to be 4.0 Million. Adequate and appropriate infrastructure remains a major obstacle in the implementation of the programme. Although the enrolment at primary levels shows an increase in recent years, yet the level of retention in schools remain a matter of concern. The enrolment ratio at upper primary level is not encouraging. The dropout rate is higher among girls, SC & ST children. It is an estimated that 336459 numbers of children are affected by serious physical or mental disabilities.⁵ The Department of Women and Child Development was created in 1995. It is also aimed at implement-

ing different social welfare schemes meant for persons with disability, the old, infirm and indigent persons. Women & Child development Department is committed for strengthening the initiatives of Government for holistic development of Women and Child, which constitutes 49.3% and 14.6% of the Orissa's population. This is the nodal Department for formulating plans and programmes for development of women & children in the State.

Why ECCE is Important

Since 1990, the UNCRC, ECCE implies a comprehensive service meant for holistic development of the child before 6 years, the period when the child is ready for going to receive primary education. Behavioural and scientific research proves that the initial development of the brain takes place during the first few years of the life. The essentiality of Early Childhood Care and education for the inclusion in the Constitution of India from Directive principles of State policy to Fundamental Rights category.

The World Declaration on Education for All (UNESCO) in 1990 also agreed up on this. In spite of the Constitutional recognition to Early Childhood Care and Education right through 86th Constitutional amendment, the goal of ECCE is still a far cry. On the other hand ECCE which is coming under the Directive Principle of state policy is non Justiciable in nature. Thus, it shall be the duty of the state to place it under Fundamental Rights category.

As three to six years of age in every child's life is crucial period and he picks up every things during this stage and observe it accordingly. ECCE should to ascertain a legal status in India under Article 45 of Indian Constitution in conformity with UNCRC. It should discover the laws, policies and plan of action prepared by the Govt. of India in relation to ECCE and to explore the present legal status. Maximum development takes place during this period, thus proper care and service will be provided during pre-school period, a child will develop in all aspect be it physical, mental or, psychological.

This will lead to decrease the retention and drop out rate. It confirms that early development of the child takes place in the first few years of the child. It enhances social, psychological, physical, imotional, language development and cognitive development of the child. It was accepted in the World Declaration on Education for all (UNESCO) in the year 1990. The importance of early childhood care and education was felt in India when India ratified the Convention of the Rights of the child.

Book Review:

Early childhood care and education , principles and practices by J.C. Agrawala and S. Gupta- This book contains how proper and qualitative Early childhood care and education is making a deep impact upon the all round development of the child. It also contains the nature and significance and objective of the qualitative Early childhood care and education. This book reveals the issue relating to Early childhood care and education in the light of observation and recommendation of Committees and Commissions etc. At the same time it deals with curriculum, health, hygiene, nutritional needs, immunization and health records etc.

Education System-

V.K Rao, APH publishing corporation, New Delhi, Education as an important factor in creating social order founded on the values of justice, Freedom and equal opportunity it should be given top most priority The various aspects of this book is relating to strategies for effective childhood education, administration strategies for basic education and policies for effective education and challenges and opportunities of education etc. At the same time how open learning environment, education strategies in rural areas are helpful in creating good education environment are also discussed.

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