



NURTURING YOUNG MINDS: HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT THROUGH ECCE IN THE LIGHT OF NEP 2020

Kabita Nayak

Ph.D. Scholar, Regional Institute of Education (NCERT), Bhubaneswar

ABSTRACT Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) play a very significant role in fostering the all-round development of children. Knowing the significant role of early years, ECCE addresses the area of development for the child since birth to eight years. In this 21st century a child needs development in all area i.e., physical, cognitive, socio-emotional, linguistic, and ethical etc in order to maintain a better life. National policies such as National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, NCFSS- 2023, ECCE adopts a play-based, activity-oriented, and inclusive approach that nurtures creativity, curiosity, and foundational skills essential for holistic development. This paper explores how quality ECCE contributes to the holistic development of young children. It also highlights the importance of effective teacher, culturally relevant pedagogy, and community involvement in achieving the holistic development of children.

KEYWORDS : ECCE, Play-based Pedagogy, NEP 2020, Holistic development

INTRODUCTION

The National Education policy 2020 aimed to make education more inclusive, equitable and vibrant to meet the holistic needs of young child. It visualizes the nurturance and promotion of holistic development of all the children from pre-primary to Ph.D. students. In the first part of NEP 2020 it gives a special place to the children of foundational stage covering the period from birth to eight years of age, (Saikia, 2024). Every work demands a solid foundation whether it is industry or education that is the reason why NEP 2020 has given extreme emphasis on the foundational stage. Strong foundations in the early years have a significant impact on children's development and are considered to be critical inputs in improving the enrolment and participation of children in formal schooling, (Sahoo & Pradhan, 2024). The (NEP) 2020 stated that over 85% of a child's brain development occurs in the first six years of life. And considered this stage as the foundational pillar for a child's holistic development, (Kumbang, 2025)

NEP recognizes the critical role of ECCE in shaping a child's holistic development, including cognitive, social, emotional, and physical domains. The NEP also emphasizes the need for activity based, play-based and sports-based approach to learning during the early years, aiming to promote holistic development and school readiness. The goal is to ensure that every child has access to quality education, fostering a love for learning from an early age as well as developing abilities like critical thinking, problem solving skill etc (Sahoo, Pradhan, 2024).

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

Early Childhood Care and Education is a fundamental and integral part of the education system. Which addresses birth to 8 years as a critical stage for children that lays the foundation of social-emotional learning, education, health, and nutrition. It is a centrally sponsored initiative operated under the joint responsibility of Ministry of Education and the Ministry of women and child development, aiming to ensure care, education and development of children in early years.

Importance of Early Childhood Care and Education

Education is just as important as the child. The importance of education can't be denied in any stage. It is specially crucial in the early childhood stage, which is vital for a child's overall development. Education and care at this stage determine a child's entire future. During this time, a child needs maximum attention to ensure their comprehensive development, including proper brain, physical, emotional, and social development. Therefore, the roles of parents, community, and government policies are essential.

Different policies, committees, and commissions have discussed the importance of preschool and child development. The NEP 2020 places a strong emphasis on Early Childhood Care and Education, including it as an integral part of the policy. It highlights the importance of early education, holistic development, and child care.

NEP 2020 proposes a new 5+3+3+4 structure, which consists of four stages. The foundational stage is the first of these, dedicating the first three years to preschool and the next two years to Grades 1 and 2 (Kumbang, 2025)

Figure-1



Source

https://r.search.yahoo.com/_ylt=AwrKDrGej0tpuHQAI_Bu9oIQ;_ylu=c2VjA2ZwLWF0dHJpYgRzbGsDcnVybA--/RV=2/RE=1766588420/RO=11/RU=https%3a%2f%2fsenseselec.com%2fblogs%2fwhat-is-ecce%2f/RK=2/RS=ZfIg91W7oHhNjTSq9jh06drqTNI-

Role of ECCE in Fostering Holistic Development (As per NEP 2020)

1. Cognitive Development

ECCE enables the child to functions his cognitive aspects like critical thinking, problem solving, design thinking etc smoothly through play-way and inquiry-based learning, which helps children to analyse, evaluate, as well as solve problems. It also gives an exposure to the children through hands-on activities, projects, which develop a sense of discovery among children.

2. Physical and Motor Development

By taking the child's physical growth in to consideration ECCE gives emphasis on physical activity and play which help children to develop their gross motor skills, such as walking, running, jumping, and balance coordination. Additionally, engagement of children with preparing project also contribute to their brain development.

3. Language and Communication skills

In our initial stage language plays a vital role for the children. That's the reason ECCE emphasizes the significant role of mother tongue by making it as the medium of instruction for all. In that stage students are very comfortable with their home language in learning new things,

NEP suggests promoting the child's home language. ECCE activities that encourage children to express themselves through language, art, and music helps in developing their communication skills and confidence. It also encourages the development of multilingual skills.

4. Socio-Emotional Development

ECCE programs that focus on socio-emotional development help children to recognize, understand, and manage their emotions, which help develop emotional intelligence. Furthermore, it promotes social interaction, cooperation, and empathy among children that encourage self-reflection and self-awareness.

5. Moral and Ethical Values

ECCE programs emphasize moral and ethical values that help children to develop a strong character and a sense of responsibility. It also

promotes values such as honesty, respect, and cooperation which help children in developing a strong moral foundation. ECCE educators who model positive values and behaviours help children learn and internalize these values.

6. Creative and Aesthetic Development

ECCE programs that incorporate arts and music help children develop their creative and aesthetic skills, promoting self-expression and imagination. ECCE activities that encourage imagination and creativity help children develop innovative thinking and problem-solving skills.

7. Inclusivity and Equity

ECCE programs promote inclusivity and equity ensuring that all children, regardless of their background or abilities, have access to quality education. It celebrates diversity and promotes sensitivity help children develop empathy and understanding towards others. ECCE programs that provide support for children with diverse needs help ensure that every child receives the support they require to thrive.

8. Parental Involvement

ECCE program gives emphasis on parent involvement in children's learning and development which provide emotional support and helps in building strong parent-child relationships. It also promotes regular communication between parents and educators ensuring that children receive consistent support and guidance.

Constraints in implementing ECCE

1. Shortage of Trained Professionals

The ECCE sector in India faces a significant shortage of trained teachers and caregivers, particularly in settings like Anganwadi and Balvatniks. This shortage can lead to inadequate care and education, ultimately affecting children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. Moreover, the lack of trained professionals can result in a lack of standardized practices and inconsistent quality of care.

2. Unregulated Private Sector

The private ECCE sector is plagued by issues of unequal access, variable quality, and increasing commercialization, which can compromise the well-being and development of young children. The unregulated growth of private ECCE centres can also lead to exploitation and unequal opportunities for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Furthermore, the focus on profit over quality can undermine the very purpose of ECCE.

4. Quality Concerns

ECCE programs in India often suffer from uneven quality, with many children not receiving the nurturing and stimulating experiences they need to thrive. Poor-quality ECCE programs can have long-term consequences, including delayed cognitive development and reduced academic achievement. Ensuring quality ECCE requires a focus on trained staff, adequate resources, and a child-centred approach.

5. School Readiness Gaps

Many children in India lack the necessary skills and competencies to succeed in primary school, highlighting the need for improved ECCE programs. ECCE plays a critical role in preparing children for formal schooling, and gaps in school readiness can lead to future academic struggles. Addressing these gaps requires a focus on developing essential skills, such as literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional learning.

6. Lack of Convergence

ECCE stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, and parents, often lack a shared understanding of ECCE's importance and goals, leading to fragmented services. Collaboration and coordination among stakeholders are essential to ensure that ECCE programs are effective and efficient. A shared vision for ECCE can help align efforts and resources.

7. Capacity Constraints

The ECCE sector in India faces significant capacity challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, insufficient resources, and a lack of standards and regulatory mechanisms to ensure quality. Addressing these capacity constraints requires investment in infrastructure, training, and resources. Additionally, establishing standards and regulatory mechanisms can help ensure consistency and quality across ECCE programs.

8. Infrastructure and Facilities

Giving children a high-quality learning environment in many areas of India can be difficult since the infrastructure and resources are scarce to support ECCE. Inadequate infrastructure and facilities can hinder children's learning and development, making it essential to prioritize investments in ECCE infrastructure. This includes providing safe, clean, and stimulating environments that support children's overall development.

9. Parental Knowledge

As advocated by NEP 2020, improving parental and caregiver's knowledge of the intrinsic worth of ECCE necessitates intensive outreach initiatives and community involvement. Parents and caregivers play a vital role in supporting children's early learning and development. Educating them about the importance of ECCE can help them make informed decisions and provide better support for their children's growth and development.

CONCLUSION

Early Childhood Care and Education serve as the backbone for a child's lifelong learning, holistic growth, and well-being. ECCE also emphasizes universal access, inclusivity, and play-based approach that enhances cognitive, physical, socio-emotional and moral development (Sholihatun et al.2024). By integrating ECCE with school education, it not only promotes the interest of the students in education but also the overall development of children. If the government ensures proper follow-up of the previously implemented programme and provides additional fund for community engagement, parents involvement and teacher training in the ECCE programme then it will enhance the quality of ECCE as well as fostering the holistic development of children.

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