

Sustainable Development Goal 4- Quality Education and National Educational Policy-2020 for Early Childhood Care and Education

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ABSTRACT

The current trends in National Education Policy-2020 about Early Childhood Care and Education with the reflection of the worldwide agenda for education reforms are the main focus here. Achieving all of the key objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by India in 2015, includes Sustainable Development Goal 4- Quality Education, which aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by the year 2030. This goal is a reflection of the global agenda for education development. So that all of the crucial targets and Sustainable Development goals of 2030 for this which are outlined in the National Education Policy -2020 concerning Early Childhood Care and Education in India are discussed accordingly.

KEYWORDS: *Early Childhood Care and Education, National Education Policy, Sustainable Development Goal, Quality Education, Inclusive Education*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The first six years of life are crucial for a person's growth since they occur at a faster rate than any other point in their development. We learn about the importance of the early years for brain development from global brain research. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) promotes an enabling and stimulating environment in these foundational phases of lifelong learning, which benefits children's long-term development and learning. The first two and a half to three years may not necessarily need to be spent in a formal learning environment, but parents' role as caregivers is crucial in creating a dynamic learning environment for the kid. (Early Childhood Care and Education (ECC(E) – UNESCO Digital Library, n.d.). In July 2020, the Ministry of Education released the new National Education Policy, where schooling begins with the inclusion of ECCE from age 3. The policy states "Universal provisioning of quality early childhood development, care, and education must thus be achieved as soon as possible, and no later than 2030". (Nep 2020 Pdf - Google Search, n.d.)

1.1. Early Childhood Care and Education

- Early Childhood Care and Education concern children from birth to age 8, from prenatal care to promoting a smooth transition to primary school. It includes both in-home and out-of-home settings and can target either parents or children. The role of families in ECCE is paramount: parents are children's first educators and caregivers.
- ECCE includes 'care' such as health, nutrition and child care in a nurturing environment and 'education' play, socialization, guidance and developmental activities, ideally provided in an integrated manner.
- ECCE is featured as expanding and improving comprehensive ECCE, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children acknowledging its role in laying the foundation for lifelong learning. High-quality ECCE has been shown to have multiple benefits to children and society; the benefits are greatest for disadvantaged children. ECCE is a right of young children, as inscribed in the widely-ratified

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

- The points defining ECCE above reflect international perspectives put forth in the following documents: 'Learning begins at birth. This calls for early childhood care and initial education. These can be provided through arrangements involving families, communities, or institutional programmes, as appropriate.' (Article 5, World Declaration on EFA, Jomtien, 1990).
- Good quality early childhood care and education, both in families and in more structured programmes, have a positive impact on the survival, growth, development and learning potential of children. Such programmes should be comprehensive; focusing on the entire child's needs and encompassing health, nutrition and hygiene as well as cognitive and psycho-social development.' (Paragraph 30, Dakar Framework for Action, 2000).
- The adoption of a broad and holistic concept of ECCE as the provision of care, education, health, nutrition and protection of children from zero to eight years of age. ECCE is a right and an indispensable foundation for lifelong learning. Its proven benefits are manifold, and include better health and nutrition, improved educational efficiency and gender equity, greater employability and earnings, and better quality of life.' (Paragraph 2, Moscow Framework for Action and Cooperation: Harnessing the Wealth of Nations, 2010).
- Young children are holders of all rights enshrined in the Convention [on the Rights of the Child] and [that] early childhood is a critical period for the realization of these rights. (General Comments 7: Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood, 2005)(Early Childhood Education, n.d.)

1.2. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL-4(SDG4) AND NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY-2020(NEP-2020)

A just and equal society, the advancement of national progress, and the realization of all human potential depend on education. In terms of economic progress, social fairness and equality, scientific advancement, national integration, and cultural preservation, ensuring that everyone has access to high-quality education is essential to India's sustained rise and leadership in the international arena. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by India in 2015, includes Sustainable Development Goal 4-Quality Education which aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by the year 2030". This

goal is a reflection of the global agenda for education development. So that all of the crucial targets and Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda can be accomplished, such a high aim will require the entire educational system to be restructured to support and nurture learning. The United Nations has declared the decade of 2020-2030 as the 'decade for action. However, it is also starting a decade of resilience as the world is shaken up by the pandemic. In an unprecedented move, the government has decided to make a bold and transformative statement with the release of the New Education Policy. The NEP-2020 says: "This Policy proposes the revision and revamping of all aspects of the education structure, including its regulation and governance, to create a new system that is aligned with the aspirational goals of 21st-century education, including SDG4, while building upon India's traditions and value systems (Education Policy of India, 2020). The NEP seems to support holistic and inclusive education where learning based on inquiry, curiosity, discovery, discussion, and analysis is preferred. It also brings lead: Access, equity, Quality, Affordability and Accountability in education. This policy is aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and aims to transform India into a vibrant knowledge society and global knowledge superpower by making both school and college education more holistic, flexible, and multidisciplinary, suited to 21st-century needs and aimed at bringing out the unique capabilities of each student. Implementing SDG-4: SDG - 4 envisages ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all. The NEP through the following provisions strives to achieve these targets.

- Multi-Disciplinary Approach
- Education and Skills Integration
- Making Education More Inclusive
- Effective Regulation
- Allowing Foreign Universities

The New Education Policy 2020 has started making interventions now. Schools and Universities have an advantage because they can introduce any number of positive changes - interventions and actual transformations that 'align' with the true purpose of education. There have been ripples all over the country and we can see some daring among policymakers about getting into the changing waters. This change was much awaited. Fortunately, we are in a new age of 'sustainable survival' and the NEP 2020 can be encased with some worthy dividends. (Sharma, n.d.)(National_ecce_curr_framework_final_03022014 (2).Pdf, n.d.)

1.3. Early Childhood Care and Education in National Education Policy-2020

To make India a global knowledge superpower, the National Education Policy envisions an education system rooted in Indian culture that directly contributes to changing India sustainably into an equal and vibrant knowledge society. As Class 1 doesn't start until age 6, children in the age range of 3-6 are currently not covered by the 10+2 framework. A strong foundation of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) starting at age 3 is also included in the new 5+3+3+4 structure, which aims to promote greater overall learning, development, and well-being.

- A child's cumulative brain development of over 85% occurs before the age of six. This indicates that it is very important to provide proper brain care and stimulation during early childhood to ensure healthy brain development and growth. Currently, millions of young children, especially those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, lack access to quality early childhood education. Strong investments in early childhood education have the potential to provide all young children with such access, enabling them to participate and grow in the education system throughout their lives. Therefore, to ensure the universal provision of quality early childhood development, care and education, to ensure that all students entering grade 1 are ready for school, as soon as possible but no later than 2030 should be achieved.
- ECCE ideally consists of flexible, varied, multi-level, play-based, activity-based and inquiry-based learning consisting of alphabets, languages, numbers, counting, colours, shapes, indoor and outdoor play, puzzles and logical thinking, problem-solving, drawing, painting and more visual arts, crafts, drama and puppetry, music and movement. It also includes a focus on developing social skills, sensitivity, good manners, courtesy, ethics, personal and public order, teamwork and cooperation. The overall aim of ECCE is to achieve optimal results in the following areas: physical and motor development, cognitive development, socio-emotional and ethical development, cultural/artistic development and the development of communication and early language, reading and numeracy skills.
- National Curriculum and Educational Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (NCPFECCE) developed by NCERT for children up to age 8 in two parts. Years in line with the above guidelines, the latest research in early childhood education, and national and international best practices. Notably, India's rich local traditions, which have evolved over thousands of years in ECCE, including arts, stories, poetry, games, songs, etc., are also properly integrated. This framework serves as a guide for both parents and early childhood care and education providers.
- The overall objective will be to ensure gradual universal access to high-quality ECCEs across the country. Particular attention and priority will be given to neighbourhoods and places that are particularly disadvantaged from a socio-economic point of view. ECCE is provided through a greatly expanded and strengthened system of early childhood education institutions, which includes (a) self-employed Anganwadis; (b) Anganwadis together with primary schools; (c) kindergartens/departments aged between 5 and 6, together with existing primary schools; and (d) independent crèches, which would all employ workers/teachers specially trained in the ECCE curriculum and pedagogy.
- Anganwadi centres will be strengthened with quality infrastructure, play equipment and well-trained Anganwadi workers/teachers to make the use of ECCE universal. Every Anganwadi has a well-ventilated, well-designed, child-friendly and well-constructed building with an enriched learning environment. Children in Anganwadi centres are required to go on activity trips and meet teachers and students from local primary schools to ensure a smooth transition from Anganwadi centres to primary schools. Anganwadis are fully integrated into school complexes/clusters and Anganwadi children, parents and teachers are invited to participate in school complex programs and vice versa.
- It is planned that every child before the age of 5 goes to a "preparatory class" or "Balavatika" (i.e before Year 1) with an ECCE-qualified teacher. In the preparatory class, learning should be mainly based on play-based learning, where the focus is on the development of cognitive, affective and psychomotor skills, as well as early reading and numeracy skills. The Central National Education Policy 2020 8-day feeding is also extended to the preparatory classes of the primary school. Health checks and growth monitoring available in the Anganwadi system should also be available to Anganwadi and Preparatory students.
- To prepare the initial batch of quality ECCE teachers for the Anganwadi, the existing Anganwadi workers/teachers will be

systematically trained as per the curriculum/pedagogical framework developed by NCERT. Anganwadi workers/teachers with a minimum qualification of 10 2 will be given a six-month certificate program in ECCEs; and those with lower qualifications receive a one-year degree program covering early literacy, numeracy and other essential aspects of ECCE. These programs can be run in digital/remote mode using DTH channels as well as smartphones, enabling teachers to acquire ECCE qualifications without interrupting their current work. ECCE training for Anganwadi workers/teachers is facilitated by the Cluster Resource Centers of the School Education Department which hold at least one monthly contact hour for continuous evaluation. In the longer term, state governments are preparing a cadre of professionally qualified educators for early childhood education and training through on-stage vocational training, mentoring mechanisms and career mapping. Necessary facilities will also be created for the initial professional training and continuing professional development (CPD) of these trainers.

- ECCE is also gradually being introduced in Ashramshalas in tribal areas and all forms of alternative education. The process of integrating and implementing ECCE in Ashramshala and alternative education is similar to that described above.
- The responsibility for the ECCE curriculum and pedagogy rests with the MHRD to ensure its continuity from preschool to primary school and properly address the core aspects of education. The Ministry of Human Rights, the Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD), the Ministry of Health and Family Affairs (HFW) and the Ministry of Tribal Affairs are jointly responsible for the planning and implementation of the early childhood education curriculum. A dedicated joint working group will be established to continuously guide the seamless integration of early care and education into school education. (Nep 2020 Pdf - Google Search, n.d.)

1.4. Conclusion

The National Education Policy 2020 has recognized the need for strong investment in ECCE but has so far failed to mention the role of private sector actors in achieving the 2030 target. The policy also does not address the regulation of private school-age childcare facilities. There is no action plan for its implementation without discussions about budget allocations and its inclusion in education. Based on the approaches presented, it can be assumed that the ECCE framework created by NCERT follows the modern international curricula and all preschools that follow international best practices also meet the requirements.

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