



National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) in Relation to Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

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<p>Received: 19/05/2024</p> <p>Accepted: 24/06/2024</p> <p>Published: 09/07/2024</p>	<p>Abstract: Education is essential for fostering the development of our society. “Education is fundamental for achieving full human potential, developing an equitable and just society and promoting national development” (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020). In the 21st century, an important reformation in the field of education is the introduction of National Education Policy 2020. From several researches, it has been found that prior to 6 years of age over 85% of a child’s cumulative brain development happens (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020). Recognizing this fact, NEP 2020 has brought a modified 5+3+3+4 pedagogical and curricular structure instead of 10+2 structure of school education (Ramavath, 2021). In the modified structure, Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) has been given much importance for a child’s holistic healthy development. ECCE can be conceptualized as having “integral elements like care, health, nutrition and early education in a safe and conducive environment” (Kumar, 2023). According to National Education Policy 2020, “Universal provisioning of quality early childhood development, care, and education must thus be achieved as soon as possible, and no later than 2030, to ensure that all students entering Grade 1 are school ready” (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020). In this paper, Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) will be discussed in relation to National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), including the importance of toys in childhood and how they can be used in the learning experiences of the children the period of early education.</p> <p>Keywords: NEP 2020, Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), Universal Provision.</p>
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Introduction

Education is an important key for transforming our society in a better way, in changing our thinking capabilities and perception, in solving various issues, in eradicating poverty, in providing strength for fighting against injustice and in the development of the personal skills (Mahindra University, 2022). “Education is fundamental for achieving full human potential, developing an equitable and just society and promoting national development. Providing universal access to quality education is the key to India’s continued ascent and leadership on

the global stage in terms of economic growth, social justice and equality, scientific advancement, national integration, and cultural preservation” (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020). Governments of different countries worldwide focus majorly on the educational policies, where the end results of the educational policies and their impact on the social and economic development get increasing attention (Manjunatha, 2018). “The Indian Government has been trying to enhance the quality of education since the time of Independence. There have been numerous policies and schemes that aimed at providing better education for everyone, irrespective of caste and religion. Indian constitution allows children with the right to education, which means that education isn’t just something that children want, it is their right” (G.D. Goenka International School Rohtak, 2019). In the post- independent India, mainly three major shifts in the educational policies are seen, where the first National Policy on Education was introduced in 1968 by the government led by Smt. Indira Gandhi on the basis of the recommendations from Kothari Commission. After that the National Policy on Education 1986 was introduced by the Government led by Shri Rajiv Gandhi and this National Policy on Education 1986 was modified in 1992, which was led by the Government of Shri Pamulaparathi Venkata Narasimha Rao (Anbazhagan, 2020). After that the first national educational policy of 21st century is National Education Policy 2020, which was approved by the Union Cabinet of India, chaired by our Prime Minister Shri Narendra Damodardas Modi on 29th July, 2020. The chairperson of the drafting committee of National Education Policy 2020, was Dr. Krishnaswami Kasturirangan, the former chairman of Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO). The National Education Policy 2020 is a comprehensive policy framework aiming at the reformation and revitalization of the educational system in India and it has placed emphasis upon the inclusive and equitable education and upon giving quality education to all, irrespective of one’s socio- economic background and location (Fatima, 2022). In the field of school education, the National Education Policy 2020 has focused on the development of core values and principles among the students, that is, it has given importance in the development of the cognitive skills, including both the foundation skills of literacy and numeracy and higher order skills like critical thinking and problem solving skills and also social and emotional skills including empathy, cultural awareness, teamwork, leadership, perseverance and grit, communication among other skills (Ministry of Education, 2023).

This new education policy 2020 has included four parts: Part I includes the school education, Part II includes higher education, Part III includes other key areas of focus, i.e., professional education, adult education and life-long learning, arts and culture, use and integration of technology as well as online and digital education, and Part IV includes the implementation part, strengthening the central advisory board of education and financing.

Early childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is included in the Part I, i.e. School education part of National Education Policy 2020. In the National Education Policy 2020, the educational structures related to school education has been modified into 5+3+3+4 from previous 10+2 structure of school education. In this newly modified structure of school education, Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) has been given much importance and is proposed to have a universal provision to reach to every child below age 6, before they enter class I. In this paper Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in relation to National Education Policy 2020, and the importance of toys in childhood and how they can be used in the learning experiences of the children the period of early education will be focused.

Review of the Related Literatures

National Education Policy 2020 document published by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India has presented the newly modified structures of education in four parts, where the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) has been discussed under

the Part I, i.e., School education. Few studies (Ramavath, 2021; Shashtri & Rajput, 2022; Vadeyar, 2022; Kumar, 2023) have been done on the early childhood care and education in the new education policy 2020, focusing on the areas of the concept, objectives, principles, curricula, ways of strengthening and improving the facilities and quality of early childhood care and education, early childhood care and education in NEP 2020 in relation to sustainable development goal 4, role of NEP 2020 on early childhood care and education and importance of foundation of learning.

Objectives

1. To discuss about the Concept and importance of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE).
2. To discuss about the pedagogical and curricular structure of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in relation to NEP 2020.
3. To discuss about the goals for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE).
4. To discuss about the National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (NCPFECCE).
5. To explore the institutions for delivering Early Childhood Care and Education.
6. To explore the curriculum for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE).
7. To discuss about the importance of toys in childhood and the ways of using it in the learning experiences of children in the period of early education.
8. To discuss about the qualification of teachers in ECCE program.
9. To explore the responsible ministries for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) curriculum and pedagogy
10. To discuss about the ways to strengthen the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) facilities.
11. To discuss about the probable suggestions to increase awareness about the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE).

Method of Study

The study has been done on the basis of the secondary data including various research journals, Government document, articles, online websites etc.

Discussion

1. Concept and Importance of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE):

Children are the future foundation of our society. Early childhood care and education is very much important for a child's holistic healthy development. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) can be referred to as providing care, nutrition for maintaining health of the child, pre-school education through stories, poems, dance, music and playing toys etc. Quality early childhood care and education before entering class I always helps children to be well-adaptive in future in the school environment and also helps them to achieve better educational outcome in the school (Kumar, 2023).

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is important for every child because from several researches, it has been found that before 6 years of age over 85% of a child's cumulative brain development occurs. So in this crucial stage of child's development, a child requires proper care and stimulation of the brain for ensuring their healthy brain development and growth (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020).

2. Pedagogical and Curricular Structure:

In National Education Policy, 2020 the previous academic structure has been modified from 10+2 academic structure to 5+3+3+4 structure. In the 10+2 structure of school education Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) of 3 to 6 years age group has not been given importance as in 10+2 structure class 1 starts at age of 6 years. In the modified 5+3+3+4 structure, Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) of 3 to 6 years age group children has been given strong importance for ensuring a child's well-being and holistic development and making the child ready for joining school.

Previous Academic Structure (10+2 Structure)	New Pedagogical and Curricular Structure (5+3+3+4 Structure)	
(Class 11 & 12) (16-18 Years age)	(Class 9 to 12) (14-18 Years age)	Secondary
	(Class 6 to 8) (11-14 Years age)	Middle
	(Class 3 to 5) (8-11 Years age)	Preparatory
	2 Years (Class 1 & 2) (6 to 8 Years age)	Foundational
3 Years (Anganwadi/ Pre-School/ Balvatika) (3 to 6 Years age)		

Table 1: **Previous 10+2 Structure of School education and New Pedagogical and Curricular Structure of 5+3+3+4**

According to National Education Policy 2020, “Strong investment in ECCE has the potential to give all young children such access, enabling them to participate and flourish in the educational system throughout their lives. Universal provisioning of quality early childhood development, care, and education must thus be achieved as soon as possible, and no later than 2030, to ensure that all students entering Grade 1 are school ready” (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020).

3. Goals for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE):

According to NEP 2020, the goals for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) are:

- To achieve universal provisioning of providing quality early childhood development, care and education as soon as possible within 2030 to make the students school ready before entering grade 1.
- To engage the child in a flexible, multilevel, multifaceted, activity based, play-based and inquiry based learning.
- To develop social capacities, good behavior, ethics, sensitivity, courtesy, personal and public cleanliness, teamwork and cooperation of the child.
- To attain the optimal holistic development of the child in terms of physical and motor development, cognitive development, socio-economic-ethical development, cultural and artistic development, and the development of skills of communication and early language, literacy and numeracy.

4. National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education:

To achieve the aims of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), this framework is needed and it has been developed by NCERT. This framework is divided into two parts (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020; National Steering Committee for National Curriculum Frameworks, 2022):

a. Primarily at home environment (0 to 3 years age):

Up to age 3, the child should get adequate nutrition, responsive care, good health practices, safety and protection, cognitive and emotional care and stimulation for early childhood learning through talking, playing, listening to music, moving etc.

b. In institutional environment (3 to 8 years age):

3 to 6 years: During this stage the child should join the early childhood care and education program in Pre-schools, Anganwadis or Balvatias.

6 to 8 years: During this stage child will enter grade 1 and 2 in school.

5. Institutions for Delivering Early Childhood Care and Education:

- a. According to NEP 2020, the institutions for delivering Early Childhood Care and Education to the child (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020) are:
- b. Stand-alone Anganwadis.
- c. Anganwadis co-located with primary schools.
- d. Pre-primary schools, covering at least 5 to 6 years age, co-located with existing primary schools.
- e. Stand-alone pre-schools.

6. Curriculum for Early Childhood Care and Education:

According to NEP 2020, curriculum for ECCE (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020) should include:

- a. Flexibility as per the need and interest of the child.
- b. Multi-dimensionality for the optimal holistic development of the child.
- c. Education for early literacy and numeracy of the child.
- d. Early development of language and communication.
- e. Play-based, activity-based and inquiry-based learning.
- f. Learning through stories, puzzle solving, drawing, painting and other visual art and craft, drama, music and movement etc.

7. Importance of Toys in Childhood and the Ways of Using it in the Learning Experiences of Children in the Period of Early Education:

Toys play an important role in childhood, by promoting the holistic development of children. The importance of toys in childhood (Srivastava & Mehta, 2022) can be discussed as follows:

- a. **Physical Development:** The physical movement of children, while playing with toys, helps in their development of muscles, fine-motor skills, hand-eye coordination, which is important for physical development.

- b. **Cognitive Development:** Playing with toys also help in the cognitive development of the children by nurturing their creativity, and their cognitive abilities like thinking, reasoning, remembering etc.
- c. **Social Development:** Playing with toys can also help in social development of the child by improving their quality of self-discipline, sharing, caring and cooperation. It also helps the development of their communication skill.
- d. **Emotional Development:** Playing with toys contribute in the emotional development of the children by developing the quality of understanding the emotions of self and others within them. They learn to manage and regulate their emotions.
- e. **Moral Development:** Moral development of children also occur as a result of playing with toys by helping them to know which is right and which is wrong. It helps the child to learn the quality of honesty.
- f. **Educational Development:** At the initial stage, playing with toys help the children to learn different size, shape, colors, textures, numbers etc. By experimenting with the toys children learn new information. It also plays an important role in developing a sense of responsibility which is needed in their future life.

During the stage of early education, teachers can help children to learn new concepts and skills by selecting proper toys and by using it. Using toys in the early education process (Department of School Education & Literacy Ministry of Education, 2022) can be discussed as follows:

- a. Teachers can use puzzle games in the early education stage. By solving the puzzle games, children can develop the problem solving ability and strategic thinking skills.
- b. To encourage creative expression of children teachers can use various craft materials like beads, clay, Washable markers etc.
- c. Games such as construction of building using blocks, Playing with toys like kitchen sets can be used to develop children's fine motor skills.
- d. Jumping ropes, balls etc. can be used for developing their gross motor skills.
- e. Sands can be used by children in writing letters and alphabets in fun ways.
- f. Playing with colorful balls can also help children to learn about the different names of colors.

In this way toys can be used in early education stage for encouraging children to learn different skills and concepts actively.

8. Qualification of Teachers:

According to NEP 2020, all the institutions should recruit specially trained teachers in the curriculum and pedagogy of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). Anganwadi teachers with the qualifications of 10+2 and above have to do a 6 months certificate course in ECCE. The Anganwadi teachers with lower qualifications than 10+2 have to do an one-year diploma program in ECCE. These programs can be run through digital or distance mode. The mentoring of ECCE training of Anganwadi teachers will be done by Cluster Resource Centers of the School Education Department which will hold at least one monthly contact class for continuous assessment. In the longer term, the cadres of professionally qualified educators will be prepared by the State Governments for early childhood care and education. Necessary facilities for Continuous Professional Development (CPD) will also be created (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020).

9. Responsible Ministries for ECCE Curriculum and Pedagogy:

According to NEP 2020 (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020), for ensuring the continuity of ECCE curriculum and pedagogy from pre-primary school through primary

school, the responsibility lies upon the Ministry of Human Resource Development (presently known as Ministry of Education). The planning and implementation of the curriculum will be done jointly by the following ministries:

- a. Ministry of Human Resource Development
- b. Ministry of Women and Child Development
- c. Ministry of Health and Family welfare
- d. Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

With these ministries, a special joint task force will be made to guide continuously for the successful and smooth inclusion of early childhood care and education into school education (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020).

10. Ways to Strengthen the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Facilities:

Some ways to strengthen the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) facilities (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020; Shashtri & Rajput, 2022) are:

- a. To give attention to the universal access to quality Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) with special focus on the socio-economic disadvantaged population.
- b. Proper monitoring and maintaining the infrastructures and play equipments of the institutions consisting of Stand-alone Anganwadis, Anganwadis co-located with primary schools, Pre-primary schools, covering atleast 5 to 6 years age, co-located with existing primary schools and Stand-alone pre-schools for delivering Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE).
- c. Development of well-constructed, well designed, well-ventilated and child friendly learning environment.
- d. Developing the integration into the school complexes and Anganwadi children parents and teachers for participating in the school programs.
- e. Recruitment of well-qualified teachers and workers with necessary education in the field of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE).
- f. Mid-day meal facilities should be extended to the Anganwadi and preparatory classes of the primary schools.
- g. Health checkup and growth monitoring programs should be made available for Anganwadi and Primary Schools.

11. Probable Suggestions to Increase Awareness about the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE):

Some probable suggestions to increase awareness about the Early Childhood Care and Education (Shashtri & Rajput, 2022) can be as follows:

- a. Organizing nation-wide campaigning programs to make people aware of the importance of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE).
- b. Educating parents on healthy child care practices.
- c. Encouraging parents to be involved in certain home and school activities.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that, Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) intends to focus on the all-round healthy development of a child, which is worthy for developing efficient human resources. So the education sectors of India can be reformed in better way by giving proper importance to the early childhood care and education in National Education Policy 2020.

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