

National Education Policy, 2020

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE): Foundations of Learning

Background Paper For Teacher's Fest



National Council of Educational Research & Training, Delhi

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE): Foundations of Learning

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is defined as the period from birth to eight years of age. Early child development encompasses physical, socio-emotional, cognitive and motor development between 0-8 years of age. The early years are critical, because this is the period in life when the brain develops most rapidly and has a high capacity for change, and the foundation is laid for health and wellbeing throughout life. Nurturing care is provided in a stable environment, that is sensitive to children's health and nutritional needs, with protection from threats, opportunities for early learning, and interactions that are responsive, emotionally supportive and developmentally stimulating is at the heart of children's potential to develop.

Research and experience have repeatedly demonstrated that early childhood development programmes and opportunities for early learning improve child outcomes during subsequent schooling. Coordination across preschools and primary schools promotes smooth transitions, enables children to build on their preschool skills, and facilitates a coordinated, sequential strategy for promoting early learning, which provides support for children across the life course.

PRESENT STATUS

Although private provisioning for preschools is expanding at a phenomenal pace, the quality of preschool experience the children are getting in both private preschools and government centers is far from satisfactory. The practices in private preschools were seen to be largely based on rote and repetitive learning and content was a downward extension of the primary school curriculum. In the government, in contrast, the curriculum was observed to be more minimalist with some teaching of alphabets, numbers, songs and rhymes. The study conducted by CECED, Ambedkar University demonstrates that despite children participating in early childhood care and education (ECCE) they are not developing adequate cognitive and language capability which would prepare them for primary schooling, due to the low quality of the programmes. This impact can be seen in the performance levels in primary grades where children are going up the primary ladder without learning the basics (ASER, 2013; IECEI, 2014). One of the key issues related to the ECCE curriculum is inadequate attention to the holistic development of the child. Practices that were previously considered developmentally appropriate for 1st graders are being pushed down to pre-school. Increasingly, early childhood education is continuing to be characterized by homework, seat work, worksheets, computer time, a longer school day and less time for play (Position Paper on ECE, 2006).

NCERT'S INITIATIVES IN THE AREA OF EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION

NCERT has been working in the area of ECCE. The significant inputs and academic support are consistently provided to government and non-government organizations and agencies for Preschool

Education by undertaking many longitudinal and cross-sectional research studies, developing relevant resource material (print and non-print), conducting training and orientation programmes and organising extension activities such as national and regional level seminars, conferences and meets. Feedback/follow-up studies were also conducted to observe the progress of the spread of the knowledge and skills in the area of ECCE in the states/ UTs.

Realising the paucity of well-sequenced and entertaining materials for young children, Children's Media Laboratory (CML) was established in collaboration with UNICEF in 1977 to discover and develop inexpensive, non-formal and effective media of both educational and entertainment value for children. Early childhood education (ECE) project was taken up in collaboration with UNICEF for the setting of resource centers for ECE in 12 states. Each of these resource centers developed state-specific play and learning materials, locally developed and contextualized storybooks, preschool curricula and training package. The project was closed in the mid-1990s. Every year a National level Toy Workshop was conducted at NCERT. Teachers from all the states/ UTs participated to showcase the indigenous toys that they had developed. It was a popular workshop that motivated teachers to develop different types of toys using different media for all age groups of students. A six-month Diploma Course in ECCE was started in three phases in the year 2006. The course was targeted to build capacities of teacher educators working in DIETs, SCERTs, SSA, ICDS and private Nursery Teacher Training Institutions. The Diploma course was discontinued in the year 2014. Play Material, comprehensive "Resource Package for Awareness in ECCE" having multimedia resources such as folk, electronic and print have been developed along with manuals both in Hindi and English. The ECE kit titled "Play and Learn" presently in the prototype stage would soon be available. Books in Hindi and English for teachers and teacher educators have been developed. Many Audio-video programmes and spots were developed in Hindi and English. Teacher training, national conferences, regional workshops for strengthening preschool in States/UTS, etc. are conducted as and when needed and desired by STATES/UTs.

The NCERT also started Model Preschools in four Regional Institutes of Education in Bhopal, Bhubaneswar, Ajmer and Mysore. Recently, looking at the necessity of 3 years of preschool education two important documents '**The Preschool Curriculum**' and '**The Guidelines for Preschool Education**' have been developed by NCERT.

RECOMMENDATIONS RELATED TO ECCE IN NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY, 2020

Universal Provisioning

1.1 Universal provisioning of quality early childhood development, care, and education must be achieved as soon as possible, and no later than 2030, to ensure that all students entering Grade 1 are school ready.

Holistic development of children

1.2 The overall aim of ECCE will be to attain optimal outcomes in the domains of physical and motor development, cognitive development, socio-emotional-ethical development, cultural/artistic development, and the development of communication and early language, literacy, and numeracy

through flexible, multi-faceted, multi-level, play-based, activity-based, and inquiry-based learning. It also includes a focus on developing social capacities, sensitivity, good behaviour, courtesy, ethics, personal and public cleanliness, teamwork, and cooperation.

Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for ECCE

1.3 A National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for ECCE for children up to the age of 8 will be developed by NCERT in two parts, namely, a sub-framework for 0-3 year-olds, and a sub-framework for 3-8 year-olds, aligned with the above guidelines, the latest research on ECCE, and national and international best practices.

Expansion and strengthening of ECCE facilities

1.4 a. Universal access to high-quality ECCE in the country, with a special focus on districts and locations that are particularly socio-economically disadvantaged, will be provided in a phased manner.

1.4 b. ECCE shall be delivered through a significantly expanded and strengthened system of early-childhood education institutions consisting of (a) stand-alone Anganwadis; (b) Anganwadis co-located with primary schools; (c) pre-primary schools/sections covering at least age 5 to 6 years co-located with existing primary schools; and (d) stand-alone pre-schools - all of which would recruit workers/teachers specially trained in the curriculum and pedagogy of ECCE.

1.5 a. Anganwadi Centres will be strengthened with high-quality infrastructure, play equipment, and well-trained Anganwadi workers/teachers. Every Anganwadi will have a well-ventilated, well-designed, child-friendly and well-constructed building with an enriched learning environment.

1.5 b. Children in Anganwadi Centres shall take activity-filled tours - and meet the teachers and students of their local primary schools, in order to make the transition from Anganwadi Centres to primary schools a smooth one.

1.5 c. Anganwadis shall be fully integrated into school complexes/clusters, and Anganwadi children, parents, and teachers will be invited to attend and participate in school/school complex programmes and vice versa.

1.6.a.

Before the age of 5, every child will move to a "Preparatory Class" or "Balvatika" (that is, before Class 1), which has an ECCE-qualified teacher. The learning in the Preparatory Class shall be based primarily on play-based learning with a focus on developing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor abilities and early literacy and numeracy.

1.6.b The mid-day meal programme shall also be extended to the Preparatory Classes in primary schools. Health check-ups and growth monitoring that are available in the Anganwadi system shall also be made available to Preparatory Class students of Anganwadi as well as of primary schools.

Professionalisation of High-Quality Educators

1.7.a. Anganwadi workers/teachers with qualifications of 10+2 and above shall be given a 6-month certificate programme in ECCE; and those with lower educational qualifications shall be given a one-year diploma programme covering early literacy, numeracy, and other relevant aspects of ECCE.

1.7.b. These programmes may run through digital/distance mode using DTH channels as well as smartphones, allowing teachers to acquire ECCE qualifications with minimal disruption to their current work.

1.7.c. The ECCE training of Anganwadi workers/teachers will be mentored by the Cluster Resource Centres of the School Education Department which shall hold at least one monthly contact class for continuous assessment.

1.7.d. In the longer term, State Governments shall prepare cadres of professionally qualified educators for early childhood care and education, through stage-specific professional training, mentoring mechanisms, and career mapping. Necessary facilities will also be created for the initial professional preparation of these educators and their Continuous Professional Development (CPD).

1.8. ECCE will also be introduced in Ashramshalas in tribal-dominated areas and in all formats of alternative schooling in a phased manner.

Planning and Implementation of ECCE

1.9.a. The responsibility for ECCE curriculum and pedagogy will lie with MHRD to ensure its continuity from pre-primary school through primary school, and to ensure due attention to the foundational aspects of education.

1.9.b. The planning and implementation of early childhood care and education curriculum will be carried out jointly by the Ministries of HRD, Women and Child Development (WCD), Health and Family Welfare (HFW), and Tribal Affairs.

1.9.c. A special joint task force will be constituted for continuous guidance of the smooth integration of early childhood care and education into school education.

THE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Curricular and Pedagogical Framework

The responsibility of developing the curricular and pedagogical framework has been given to NCERT. A developmentally appropriate curriculum for 3 years of preschool education has already been developed by NCERT, which aims at the holistic development of the child through play, activity and inquiry-based learning. There is a need to orient the states, teachers and other stakeholders on the availability of this curriculum. There is a need to provide an upward linkage of this curriculum to classes 1 and 2, which will be done in due course of time. The curricular and pedagogical framework for 0-3 years will be developed by NCERT in the future as has been suggested in the policy. Monitoring mechanism to track the progress

of children and successful implementation of the programme will also need to be developed. Another document developed by NCERT '**Guidelines on Preschool Education**' provides the details of infrastructure, play material, indoor and outdoor play spaces, classroom organization, manpower requirements, duties and responsibilities of preschool staff, records and registers to be maintained, parent and community participation as well as on developing strong linkages for smooth transitions to primary grades. This document can be used by the anganwadies and preschool centers for creating a quality preschool education programme.

Teacher Training and Capacity Development

The Preschool Curriculum can be transacted in a developmentally appropriate way only when the teachers are trained in flexible, play and activity-based pedagogy. Therefore a teacher training package for preschool education is being developed by NCERT. The training package will have standardized modules and PowerPoint presentations and short videos. This package will be for a short term training of the Preschool teachers. This material can be contextualized as per need and state-specific training can be conducted.

Readiness Package for Preparatory Class (Balvatika)

NCERT is also developing a readiness package for the preparatory class before class 1, which will focus on play-based learning with a focus on developing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor abilities and early literacy and numeracy.

Research, Evaluation and Documentation

Longitudinal and cross-sectional research studies in different dimensions of ECCE needs to be taken up to come out with findings that have implications for the policy as well as the field. To generate indigenous knowledge, concurrent and operational researches can be taken up. Action research and impact studies should also be taken up to generate innovative and successful models.

Strengthening Institutional capacities

To train the manpower required in the field, existing capacities in SCERT/DIET/ MLTTC needs to be strengthened. To give momentum to ECCE, all the states should develop ECCE Cells or ECCE resource centers which will undertake state-specific research, develop local specific low-cost teaching-learning material and provide support for training, counseling, advocacy, etc. One person should be designated as ECCE Coordinator to oversee the work related to ECCE. NCERT will collaborate with SCERTs for contextualizing the curriculum, teacher training, capacity building of key resource persons and in undertaking community mobilization and awareness generation of ECCE programmes.

Parent Education Programmes

Since children are best cared for by their parents in the family environment, their capacities must be enhanced. Parent education programmes focusing on good child care practices, infant and young child

feeding practices, growth monitoring, nutritious diet, play, stimulation and early education need to be taken up.

Advocacy and awareness generation

Parents and other stakeholders often lack an understanding of the importance of early years and the implications of neglect, age-appropriate needs and developmentally appropriate interventions required to be made. It is therefore imperative that advocacy programmes using folk art, print and electronic media be made and used to educate parents, caregivers and other community members.

Coordination and Convergence among policies and programmes

Effective delivery of early childhood services requires convergence of goals and a shared understanding of holistic child development by different sectors like health, education, and social protection. There should be vertical convergence between all stakeholders such as policy planners, administrators, implementers, providers, parents and community and also horizontal convergence between, different ministries, departments and sections within departments, dealing with different components of medical, health, care and early education to implement quality preschool programmes leading to the holistic development of the child.

Regulatory Framework

To ensure basic quality inputs and outcomes across all service providers a Regulatory framework for opening and offering education at the foundation stage should be developed by the states, which would require registration and accreditation of ECCE Centers.

Organisation of Seminars/Conferences/Workshops

To know about the new initiatives, innovations in the field, a platform should be provided to the practitioners to share their experiences and initiatives. Also, to deliberate on various implementation issues, policies, and strategies concerning ECCE and for academic rigor, seminars, conferences and workshops should be organised so that stakeholders can learn from each other and replicate successful initiatives.