

# Visible Impact of Negligence in Early Childhood Care and Education on Indian Pre-Schools

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**Abstract:-** The fundamental objective of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is to promote comprehensive development across several domains, including physical and motor development, cognitive skills, socio-emotional and ethical growth, cultural and artistic expression, as well as early communication, language, literacy, and numeracy skills. The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) emphasizes the importance of ensuring universal access to ECCE by 2030, with the goal of preparing all children for formal schooling by the time they enter Grade 1. For children aged 3 to 6, pre-schools play a crucial role in laying the educational foundation necessary for their advancement to Grade 1. The NEP introduces a restructured pedagogical and curricular framework to highlight the critical importance of these formative years. The policy advocates for a curriculum that is rooted in play-based, activity-based, and inquiry-based learning, aiming to foster holistic developmental outcomes. To realize this vision, NCERT has been tasked with developing a "National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education" (NCPF ECCE) for children up to the age of 8. Furthermore, the policy proposes the introduction of preparatory classes to bridge the gap between anganwadis and primary schools. It also outlines plans for training and certification programs for ECCE educators, primarily through digital platforms, with the overarching objective of achieving universal access to early childhood education.

**Keywords:-** Awareness of National Educational Policy India 2020, Secondary School Teachers Education Policy, Development, Higher Education, Teachers and Telangan State.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), approved by the Union Cabinet of India on July 29, 2020, represents a transformative vision for the country's education system. Replacing the National Policy on Education of 1986, NEP 2020 offers a comprehensive framework that spans elementary to higher education, including vocational training across both rural and urban areas. The policy seeks to overhaul the education system by 2021. Although the language policy within NEP serves as a broad guideline, its implementation is

left to the discretion of states, institutions, and schools. With this new policy, the 34-year-old National Education Policy has been superseded. A key feature of NEP 2020 is the introduction of the 5+3+3+4 educational structure, which outlines a systematic progression through four distinct stages of education. Additionally, the policy emphasizes universalizing Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), with the aim of ensuring that all children are adequately prepared for Grade 1 by 2030. This shift in pedagogical and curricular structure underscores the critical importance of early childhood education. Pre-schools are now envisioned as foundational institutions where children between the ages of 3 and 6 will receive basic education, effectively preparing them for formal schooling. The policy advocates for a curriculum that is play-based, activity-based, and inquiry-based, with the overarching goal of fostering physical and motor development, cognitive growth, socio-emotional and ethical maturity, cultural and artistic expression, and the development of communication, early language, literacy, and numeracy skills. This emphasis on developmentally appropriate practices builds upon the foundations laid by the ECCE policy of 2013. NEP 2020 assigns the NCERT the task of developing a "National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education" (NCPF ECCE) for children up to the age of 8. In addition, preparatory classes are proposed to bridge the gap between anganwadis and primary schools. The policy also underscores the necessity for training and certification programs for ECCE educators, with a significant focus on digital platforms. These initiatives aim to ensure universal access to early childhood education. Despite recognizing the need for substantial investments in ECCE, the policy does not address the role of private players in achieving the 2030 goals, nor does it consider the regulation of private pre-schools. Moreover, the policy lacks a clear roadmap for implementation, including budget allocations and its integration into the Right to Education framework. Given these outlined goals and strategies, it is anticipated that the NCERT's ECCE framework will align with modern international standards, ensuring that any pre-school adhering to global best practices will meet the framework's requirements. ECCE is acknowledged as a critical precursor to formal schooling, with the early years spent in pre-school playing a pivotal role in preparing children for future educational endeavors. An effective ECCE program contributes to higher enrollment rates, reduces early dropout

rates, and supports the development of foundational literacy and numeracy skills in the early grades. One of the global indicators under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, within the thematic area of Early Childhood, tracks student participation one year before entering primary school. This indicator reflects the percentage of five-year-olds engaged in organized learning programs. According to the 2022 UNESCO report titled "Setting Commitment: National SDG 4 Benchmarks to Transform Education," the global participation rate in organized learning for children at least one year before primary school increased from 65% in 2002 to 75% in 2020. In India, this participation rate reached 87.2% in 2020. The Indian government has set ambitious targets to raise this rate to 95% by 2025 and achieve universal participation (100%) by 2030. The Yearly Status of School Education in States and Union Territories of India 2022 report highlights the critical role of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) and the ongoing efforts under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. This policy aims to expand early childhood education institutions, particularly focusing on the inclusion of children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. For the first time, the NEP acknowledges the importance of initiating ECCE from age 3, emphasizing a holistic approach to development that includes physical and motor skills, cognitive abilities, socio-emotional and ethical growth, cultural and artistic expression, communication, early language skills, literacy, and numeracy. However, implementing ECCE initiatives presents several challenges. Ensuring the safety of pre-primary children, especially in settings where Anganwadis and Balvatikas are co-located with schools, is paramount. Additionally, extensive training for schoolteachers will be required to effectively deliver the Vidya Pravesh module and to mentor Anganwadi and Balvatika staff. These educators must also be sensitized to the specific needs of childcare. The existing teacher shortage may worsen due to the added responsibilities associated with ECCE, necessitating the recruitment of additional educators. Similarly, a significant number of resource persons will be needed for Anganwadis and Balvatikas. Schools may also need to expand their infrastructure, including the construction of additional classrooms and the provision of child-friendly toilets and drinking water facilities. Implementing the BALA (Buildings As Learning Aids) concept, along with providing child-friendly furniture, play equipment, learning materials, and pre-school books, will be essential. The hub-and-spoke model, where schools mentor nearby Anganwadis and Balvatikas and cluster-level education officials provide training to resource persons, will require robust logistical arrangements. Furthermore, as the mid-day meal scheme is extended to include pre-primary children, adjustments in the type of food served, as well as the timing and method of serving, will be necessary. The inclusion of vaccinations, food supplements, and other health interventions in the ECCE program could further expand the scope of work in schools. The significance of ECCE has been recognized in previous policies as well. The National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 and the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 emphasized the

importance of ECCE for two years, aligning with these recent developments. The experiences provided during pre-school years are crucial for a child's personality development and have a significant impact on their future education. The NCF underscores that ECCE involves providing care, resources, and experiences that promote a child's overall development—mental, physical, social, and emotional—and readiness for school. The NEP 2020 has overhauled the previous 10+2 educational structure, replacing it with a 5+3+3+4 model that now includes learners from ages 3 to 18. The first five years of schooling, covering children aged 3 to 6 years, were previously overlooked in the 10+2 system. The NEP 2020 establishes a strong foundation for ECCE starting at age 3, with the goal of enhancing learning, development, and overall well-being. Under the NEP 2020, the foundational stage of the first five years of schooling is divided into two segments:

- The first three years, for children aged 3-6, will be spent in Anganwadis, Preschools, or Balvatikas.
- The next two years will see children aged 6-8 attending classes 1 and 2, respectively.

Early childhood education plays a vital role in addressing the disadvantages associated with a family's socioeconomic status. The presence or absence of early childhood education can significantly influence a child's adjustment to school, academic performance, and continuity in education. One of the primary goals of NEP 2020 is to prepare an initial cadre of high-quality ECCE teachers in Anganwadis. Current Anganwadi workers and teachers will undergo systematic training aligned with the curricular and pedagogical framework developed by NCERT. Those with qualifications of 10+2 or higher will be offered a one-year Diploma program in ECCE, potentially delivered through digital or distance learning methods, such as DTH channels and smart phones, enabling teachers to obtain ECCE qualifications with minimal disruption to their ongoing work.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 introduces transformative changes with potential implications for all stakeholders, as emphasized by Kalyani Pawan (2020). Jha et al. (2020) critically examine the limitations inherent in the policy. As the third policy in India's educational history, following a 34-year gap since the previous policy in 1986, NEP 2020 aims to deliver quality education that aligns with global standards, promotes educational equality, and encourages private sector involvement. Suryavanshi (2020) underscores the importance of teacher development in Indian universities, suggesting that the Chinese university model could offer valuable insights. According to Kumar et al. (2020), NEP 2020 stands as a potential milestone in Indian education, providing a comprehensive framework that encompasses primary to higher education, including vocational and technical training. Despite its imperfections, the policy offers a thorough analysis of the global educational

landscape and must be implemented meticulously to address the challenges required for achieving universal quality education. Deb (2020) discusses the integration of Indian cultural values into the NEP 2020 teaching framework. Notably, the policy mandates early childhood education for the previously neglected age group of 3-6 years, aiming to support the developmental needs of children across all societal segments, particularly underprivileged and economically disadvantaged groups (Aithal & Aithal, 2019; Aithal & Aithal, 2020). This analysis is primarily descriptive, relying on secondary data from various websites, periodicals, journals, and publications, which were then evaluated and analyzed to draw conclusions.

#### ➤ *Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)*

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) emphasizes a play-based and activity-centered approach to learning, which includes elements such as alphabets, language development, puzzles, painting, and music for young children. Research indicates that over 85% of a child's brain development occurs before the age of six, underscoring the critical need for early education. The Committee recommended integrating ECCE for children aged 3-6 into the formal school system through the 5+3+3+4 curriculum structure. ECCE will be delivered through various channels, including (i) stand-alone Anganwadis, (ii) Anganwadis co-located with primary schools, (iii) pre-primary sections within existing primary schools, and (iv) independent pre-schools. Additionally, the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) will be responsible for developing a national curricular and pedagogical framework for ECCE. To ensure that Anganwadi workers are adequately prepared to provide quality early education, those with senior secondary qualifications or higher will be required to complete a six-month certification program in ECCE.

### III. THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION (ECCE)

The first five years of life are crucial for a child's learning and development, as the brain is most receptive and sensitive to learning during this period, particularly from ages 3 to 5. Numerous psychologists and physiologists emphasize that early brain stimulation has a profound and lasting impact on learning abilities. Therefore, these formative years are essential for the holistic growth and development of a child. However, access to quality Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) remains limited for many young children in India. The current state of education for children aged three to six years is highly uneven. Urban pre-schools often introduce concepts such as numbers up to 100 and letters from the alphabet, typically covered in Grades 1 and 2. Conversely, Anganwadis in rural areas may focus primarily on storytelling and teaching a few specific letters or rhymes.

This disparity highlights a broader societal issue: a lack of clarity on what and how to teach children in this age group. The neglect of ECCE is evident in many pre-schools. Recognizing these critical concerns, the New Education Policy (NEP) 2022 places a strong emphasis on ECCE, integrating it into the new 5+3+3+4 pedagogical structure under the Foundational Stage. Unlike the existing 10+2 structure, which begins formal education at age 6, the new framework includes children from age 3, providing a robust foundation in ECCE to enhance overall learning, development, and well-being. While the NEP 2022's focus on ECCE is a significant step forward, this attention is long overdue. Earlier policies and commissions also acknowledged the importance of ECCE. For instance, the concept was first introduced in the National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1986. However, the rapid advancements in technology, culture, and communication, along with the growing interest in education, have rendered the NPE 1986's implementation of ECCE inadequate.

#### ➤ *Revamping Early Childhood Care and Education: Insights from the New Education Policy 2022*

In 2013, the Indian government introduced the National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) policy to offer integrated services that support the continuous and holistic development of children up to the age of six. Despite these efforts, the full implementation of this policy across government Anganwadi centers, pre-primary schools, and private nurseries faced significant challenges. The New Education Policy 2022 represents a pivotal shift by mandating that all schools incorporate ECCE by 2030, ensuring that every child is adequately prepared for school by the time they enter Grade 1.

#### ➤ *Building a Strong Foundation for Lifelong Learning Through Early Childhood Care and Education*

UNICEF defines early childhood as the period from conception to eight years old, marking it as a crucial phase for a child's holistic development, including social, emotional, cognitive, and physical growth. This stage is fundamental in establishing a strong foundation for lifelong learning and well-being. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) extend beyond merely preparing children for primary school. Although ECCE traditionally focuses on the education of children aged 3 to 6, it ideally represents a comprehensive approach that includes programs and policies benefiting children up to six years of age, along with their educators and parents. The New Education Policy 2022 highlights ECCE, emphasizing its multifaceted role in early childhood development.



➤ *Strategic Recommendations for Enhancing Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) under NEP 2020*

To ensure that all children entering Grade 1 are prepared for school, it is essential to achieve universal access to high-quality early childhood development, care, and education by 2030. The goal of ECCE is to foster holistic development across several domains, including physical and motor skills, cognitive abilities, socio-emotional and ethical growth, cultural and artistic expression, and early language, literacy, and numeracy skills. This approach should incorporate flexible, multi-faceted, play-based, activity-based, and inquiry-based learning methods. Emphasis should also be placed on nurturing social skills, sensitivity, good behavior, courtesy, ethics, personal and public hygiene, teamwork, and cooperation. The development of a National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for ECCE, covering children up to the age of 8, will be undertaken by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). This framework will consist of two parts: one for children aged 0-3 years and another for those aged 3-8 years. It will be aligned with current ECCE guidelines, the latest research, and both national and international best practices.

➤ *Effective Planning and Execution of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)*

The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) will oversee the curriculum and pedagogy for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) to ensure a seamless transition from pre-primary to primary education, with a strong focus on foundational learning. The planning and execution of the ECCE curriculum will be a collaborative effort involving the Ministries of Human Resource Development (HRD), Women and Child Development (WCD), Health and Family Welfare (HFW), and Tribal Affairs. To facilitate the effective integration of ECCE into the school education system, a specialized joint task force will be established to provide ongoing guidance and support.

➤ *ECCE Curriculum Framework: Supporting Holistic Development in Early Childhood*

The ECCE curriculum outlined in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is designed to provide a comprehensive and developmentally appropriate learning experience for children aged 3 to 8. It emphasizes a play-based and activity-centered approach, acknowledging the value of experiential learning. This method allows children to explore, discover, and learn at their own pace. The curriculum aims to cultivate creativity, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and problem-solving abilities. In line with the new 5+3+3+4 educational structure, the NEP 2020 incorporates a nursery section, highlighting the need for specialized training for nursery educators. This training will focus on early childhood education techniques, play-based learning strategies, child development principles, and creating supportive and inclusive learning environments.

#### IV. FOSTERING EMPOWERMENT IN EARLY LEARNERS: ESSENTIAL OBJECTIVES OF THE ECCE CURRICULUM

The ECCE curriculum under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is designed to offer an enriching, developmentally appropriate, inclusive, and child-centered education, aiming to prepare students for lifelong learning and future success. The primary objectives of the ECCE curriculum are:

- **Holistic Development:** The ECCE framework in NEP 2020 emphasizes nurturing the comprehensive growth of young learners, addressing their cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and creative dimensions. It aims to create well-rounded individuals by providing a balanced and inclusive learning experience.
- **Play-Based and Activity-Centered Strategies for Effective Learning:** The curriculum advocates for a play-based and activity-centered approach, offering children hands-on experiences and active engagement. This method promotes learning through exploration, experimentation, and meaningful activities.
- **Advancing Inclusivity and Equity in Educational Practices:** The ECCE curriculum highlights inclusivity by ensuring that every child has equal access and opportunities, regardless of gender, socio-economic background, ability, or cultural differences. It strives to foster a learning environment that values and respects diversity.
- **Strategic Approaches to Inclusivity and Equity in Education:** The curriculum centers on key skills such as creativity, critical thinking, communication, problem-solving, collaboration, and self-expression. The goal is to equip young learners with essential skills needed to navigate and succeed in a dynamic world.
- **Well-Being and Health Strategies for Educational Settings:** The curriculum supports the well-being and health of children, focusing on aspects like nutrition, personal hygiene, physical fitness, and emotional wellness. It aims to create a safe and nurturing environment that promotes overall well-being.
- **Integrating Local and Cultural Relevance in Education:** The ECCE curriculum incorporates local and cultural knowledge, languages, and traditions, helping children develop a sense of identity and appreciation for their cultural heritage.
- **Foundational Principles for ECCE Curriculum Development:**
- **The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) curriculum should be designed to align with the physical, social, cognitive, and emotional development of young learners. It should be stimulating, engaging, and exploratory, guided by the following principles:**
- **Child-Centered Needs:** Preschool programs should be developed by parents and educators with a focus on

addressing children's needs for acceptance, empathy, opportunities, equality, freedom, cooperation, justice, and trust. The curriculum should allow children the freedom to express themselves and provide opportunities for active participation. Practical teaching methods should be employed to help children develop resilience and acquire essential skills to face future challenges.

- **Developmental Stages:** The curriculum should support various aspects of a child's development as they approach adolescence. Key developmental areas include motor skills, sensory experiences, cognitive abilities, language acquisition, emotional growth, and social and personal development. ECCE programs should aim to nurture these developmental aspects comprehensively.
- **Play and Active Learning:** Play and active learning are crucial components of the ECCE curriculum. Through interactive games, songs, stories, and the use of educational materials like beads, marbles, and pebbles, children engage in hands-on learning experiences. This approach ensures that the teaching and learning process is enriched by direct, meaningful experiences.

## V. CONCLUSION

The new curricular framework for early childhood education under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is set to transform how educators engage with young learners. This framework is designed to support the holistic development of children by addressing their cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and creative needs. It aims to foster well-rounded individuals through a comprehensive and balanced educational experience. Successful implementation of the ECCE goals under NEP 2020 will require substantial support from civil society organizations, experts, and other stakeholders. The policy emphasizes the importance of high-quality early childhood education and care, incorporating play and experiential learning through games and songs. It also seeks to extend ECCE services to underserved areas, including tribal regions, and stresses the need for targeted training for teachers in Anganwadi Centers. NEP 2020 views ECCE as a vital extension of primary education, with clearly defined approaches to improving learning outcomes. The policy represents a significant step towards enhancing foundational education and highlights the critical role of ECCE in shaping future academic success. To achieve its ambitious objectives, NEP 2020 will necessitate a collective effort from governments, communities, parents, and caregivers. By working collaboratively, we can ensure that every child has access to high-quality ECCE programs, laying a strong foundation for their future success. Investing in ECCE is an investment in the future of our nation, fostering a more equitable, inclusive, and prosperous society. With NEP 2020 as our guide, we are on the path to creating a brighter future for India's children, where every child can reach their full potential.

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