Early Childhood Care and Education for Well Being: A Path to SDGs and NEP-2020

Dibya Gope[1], Dr. Madhumita Baidya[2]

[1]Research Scholar, Department of Education, Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University, Purulia
[2]Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University, Purulia

Abstract

A child's Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is fundamental to transforming their physical, mental, emotional and social skills from birth to eight years, providing the basis for continuous learning and development throughout life. ECCE is a key factor in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), by promoting the holistic development of young children. NEP 2020 of India also emphasizes the aspects of health and nutrition services provided within ECCE, in terms of inclusion of children below six years of age as well as positive child outcome. The study explores ECCE's impact on child development and global development goals, its incorporation into NEP 2020, and identifying key challenges and opportunities. Using a theoretical approach, this study investigates existing literature, expert perspectives and relevant data on Early Childhood Care and Education in India. This research seeks to answer the question of how ECCE is capable of meeting the targets in NEP 2020 alongside the sustainable development goals, in order to further enhance inclusivity, equity and quality in the educational framework for children.

Keywords: Early Childhood Care and Education, Sustainable Development Goals, National Education Policy 2020, Child Development

1. Introduction:

Today's youth will become future active citizens of the country and their development is already a reflection of the future of the country. The role of schools in the personal development of children is so vital for society forward, that they need to be given proper attention. Education contributes to economic, social and political development. Only proper education can mould the children today, so that they will be able to lead the nation in the future.

- **Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE):** ECCE is all encompassing from birth to age eight including intellectual, physical, social and emotional development of a child. It is accepted as the first phase of lifelong learning since it provides basic skills to children that prepare them for both school and life. In India, ECCE first received attention with the National Policy on Education in 1986, and later the National ECCE Policy. Both highlighted the importance of the first six years of life in development of the brain. The National ECCE Curriculum Framework set out a structure to guarantee that young children are given the necessary aspects of care and education to support their learning and development as well as to ensure they start school ready to learn.

- **Overview of Sustainable Development goal and its alignment with ECCE:** Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) focuses on achieving inclusivity and equity in education, along with

promoting engaging learning opportunities throughout one's lifetime. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) contributes fundamentally to the attainment of SDG 4, especially Target 4.2, which seeks to educate children aged 3-6 years and prepare them for subsequent learning. Target 4.2 of SDG 4 encamps, learning at the young age of 3-6 years requires Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). Additionally, ECCE plays an important role in ensuring holistic cognitive, emotional, social and physical development, eliminates barriers to basic education, creates equal opportunities and enhances school readiness.

- **Overview of National Education Policy- 2020 and its alignment with ECCE:** The Comprehensive National Policy on Education (NEP) 2020 represents a change in the understanding and approach of the Indian education system by ensuring inclusivity, equity and quality for all. Policy aligns with the ECCE Policy in terms of family-centered, inclusive, accessible, and quality early childhood education. NEP 2020 underscores the significance of the first eight years of life in a child's development by advocating for play based pedagogy, pre-service and in-service teacher training and universal access. These two policies focus on laying groundwork to foster healthy development of children by combining health, nutrition and education for an effective integrated early years strategy.

- **ECCE and Well-Being:** ECCE is important for children's all-round development, which includes the intellectual, physical, emotional, mental and social aspects.

1. **Integrated Development:** Making children self-aware, empathetic, and give more resilience through eLearning experiences, emotional and social nurturing.
2. **Mental And Emotional Health:** Active support for development. Such as, empowering children with emotions to be able to control and regulation their own
3. **Relationships and Social Skills:** Positive interpersonal relationship skills development promotes effective communication, active collaboration, and healthy dispute resolution.
4. **Physical health:** Play is promoted, food taken is wholesome and healthy which enhances cognitive ability and emotional well-being.

This clearly demonstrates, children are taken care of in all aspects and they are provided with education through ECCE that correlates to wide well-being, and that children that possess adequate holistic measure are bound to be extend compassionate, multi-faceted and sturdy communities.

2. Objective of the study:
1. To assess how Early Childhood Care and Education impact on child development.
2. To explore the role of ECCE in promoting the Sustainable Developmental Goal 4.
3. To evaluate the integration of ECCE into National Education Policy 2020.
4. To Identify the key challenges and opportunities in implementing ECCE programs.

3. Methodology:
This research employed a theoretical and qualitative methodology for the review of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) system in India. It focused on following components; the component was the detailed review of research literature, policy documents and reports available from government, scholarly journal and international bodies to capture the scope of the available ECCE literature and its issues and prospects.

4. Limitations:

The research used of secondary data which comes with issues regarding accuracy and timeliness. The research might not fully represent the socio-economic hardships of children from rural tribal and other underprivileged socio-eco regions due to paucity of research pertaining to these areas.

5. Ethical Consideration:

The study incorporated the public record documents from different institutions including the government portals and the research papers. Since the research was solely based on the publicly available databases, there was no need for ethical clearance.

6. Discussions and Findings of the study:

Objective 1: To assess how Early Childhood Care and Education impact on child development

Discussion 1: The Holistic impact of ECCE:

The Government of India adopted the UNCRC in 1992, committing to national education for all, which supported the implementation of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). Since 1951, different integrated care education programs have been implemented which included care, health, education, and nutrition. Other policies like National Policy for Children (2013), 86th Constitutional Amendment (Article 45), Right to Education Act (Section 11), and preliminary policies like Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) (1975) and DPEP have aimed at widening the scope of children's access to ECCE.

- **Objectives of ECCE:**

  The key objectives include:

1. Make certain each child is honoured and cared for and is encouraged to form a healthy self-image.
2. Ensure an adequate basis for physical and motor skills development appropriate to his/her age level.
3. Promote healthy nutritional, hygiene, physical and grooming self-care practices and skills.
4. Enable active reception and expression of language and support effective message articulation.
5. Promote the intellectual capacity for inquiry, as well as understanding of the world through movement and experimentation.
6. Foster social, cognitive and emotional development.

- **Holistic approach of ECCE on child development:**

The holistic perspective of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in regards to a child's development focuses on following areas:

1. **Cognitive Development:** ECCE supports children's intellectual development by fostering curiosity along with problem-solving abilities. Children start to grasp concepts and understand the interrelation of different elements while developing critical thinking skills.
2. **Physical and Motor Skill Development:** Through play and physical activities, ECCE improves children's health as well as their coordination and motor skills. This also enhances gross and fine motor development, which helps children's overall well-being.
3. **Emotional and Social Development:** ECCE teaches social skills and emotional intelligence through facilitating interactions among peers. Children exhibit empathy, cooperation, and constructive conflict resolution to guide others and themselves emotionally.
4. **Language and Communication Development:** With a positive net soliciting environment, ECCE allows children to improve language development, structure, and strengthen vocabulary as well as receptive and expressive communication skills.

5. **Interdisciplinary Approach:** ECCE provides care together with education, health, nutrition and other aspects which reflects an interdisciplinary approach toward addressing the children's comprehensive needs for welfare.

Finding 1: The ECCE Program serves a crucial role in the multidimensional development of a young child by implementing cognitive, physical, psycho-emotional, sociolinguistic, and other developmental activities. With nurturing self-care, motor skills, and self-image, ECCE also nurtures self-intellect development. It's broad in scope, combining education, health services, and welfare. ECCE facilitates the transition from the home environment to the Centre and primary school while fostering the development of empathy, communicative, and analytic skills. Investing in quality early education pays off in the long run for individuals, communities, and society as a whole, thereby ensuring that all children receive appropriate opportunities.

Objective 2: To explore the role of ECCE in promoting the Sustainable Developmental Goal 4:

Discussion 2: SDG-4: Quality Education for All

India endorsed the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015 which includes achieving Sustainable Development Goals 4 for Quality Education. SDG 4 sets to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning for all by the year 2030. This goal emphasizes the international attention being paid to educational progress and calls for a complete transformation of the educational system that encourages learning at all tiers. ECCE aids in the development of skills, abilities, and knowledge needed for future learning while fostering cognitive, social and emotional growth.

- **Key Steps towards achieving SDG 4 through ECCE:**

To meet SDG 4, the following approaches that focus on ECCE are most relevant in priority:

1. **Multi-disciplinary Approach:** ECCE programs must employ different instructional methodologies to meet the varying needs of young learners.

2. **Content Methodological Integration:** In order to meet the needs of young children, ECCE can integrate early academic training with practical living skills to achieve comprehensive development.

3. **Broadening Access to Education:** All children should be able to get quality early educational care, irrespective of their socio-economic status, gender, ability, or disability stag.

Finding 2: Striving to ensure this goal globally or within India, these strategies make it clear that ECCE can be used to achieve the fourth SDG. Ensuring the access of quality early childhood education to all children does not only facilitate academic achievements but empowers children to be active participants of the society. ECCE is crucial aspect of education, but also a critical foundation for national development and international advancement.

Objective 3: To evaluate the integration of ECCE into National Education Policy 2020.

Discussion 3: Integration of ECCE into India's NEP-2020:

- **Introduction to ECCE in NEP-2020:** The National Education Policy-2020 envisages an education system that is strong, inclusive, and at per with the Indian ethos, while making the country a knowledge superpower in the world. As a part of this vision, the NEP recognizes the significance of ECCE for children between ages 3 and 6. It establishes the policy 5+3+3+4 where the primary basic education is oriented towards serving ECCE purpose to foster all round child development and lay the foundation for lifelong learning.

- **Key Objectives of ECCE in NEP-2020:** The NEP 2020 credits ECCE with goals that target the overall development of a child and aspect of school readiness. The following are some key listed objectives:

- Encouraging healthy habits and basic motor skill by promoting coordination and basic health that aids in physical development.
- Desirable social attitudes, good manners, and emotional sensitivity are encouraging in the social and emotional growth aspect.
- A clear speech and fluency to communicate thoughts and emotions is developed in the communication skills section.
- In fostering development of the individual in cognitive, social, and emotional aspects, holistic personality development is captured.
- A love for learning through joyful play-based activities is as well instilled.
- **Importance of ECCE in NEP-2020:** The purpose highlighted of the ECCE in NEP 2020 aids understanding the critical objectives of the child's assistance framework in this particular document. To give references, below are some important aspects formulated with the help of NEP content.

1. **Holistic Development:** ECCE equally deals with educational, social, emotional, and physical development which the NEP regards as whole some education.
2. **Foundational Learning:** Early childhood education sets the stage for development of cognitive and language skills essential in the subsequent learning endeavours.
3. **Inclusivity:** It helps in providing all pupils access to quality care and education irrespective of their background, social status, or other factors at the early stages of education.
4. **Parental Engagement:** The policy aims at getting parents directly involved in the development of their children by putting them in charge of planning and implementing ECCE activities.
5. **Teacher Training:** The NEP 2020 on ECCE also stress the employment of trained and qualified educators to offer quality early education.

- **Curriculum Framework for Basic Education:** NEP 2020 calls for a play-oriented curriculum applicable to preschool children. The curriculum is expected to help accomplish assorted methodologies for Early Childhood Care and Education:

1. **Constructive Play:** Activities that children are free to engage in, for instance, language games, counting and number puzzles, music, and outdoor games to enhance cognitive and motor skills development.
2. **Multi-curricular Approach:** The encompassing approach which incorporates a variety of activities which are appropriate at different levels of developmental progression and skill acquisition.
3. **Local Content Inclusion:** Includes aspects of culture, art, stories and other Indian traditional practices for better indigenization and cultural conservatism.

Finding 3: As far as India's National Education Policy 2020 is concerned, its attempts to integrate ECCE is a move in the right direction towards establishing a truly holistic and inclusive system of education. This policy formulation where early childhood education is given special emphasis targets the need for establishing a basis for healthy and sustainable learning for all. The words in this policy will remain words unless they are acted upon with proper execution, allocation of resources, and monitoring to ensure that all children are given the chances especially those from marginalized communities. Through these efforts, the NEP 2020 aims to lay the groundwork for a future-ready generation of learners.

Objective 4: To identify the key challenges and opportunities in implementing ECCE programs:

Discussion 4: The key challenges in implementing ECCE in India:

India faces several crucial issues regarding the execution of ECCE.

1. **Parental Demand and Awareness:** Quality ECCE is unattainable for lower-income families because of their unwillingness to pay the high fees charged by private preschools for preschoolers. On the other hand, most parents, especially those from rural localities, are generally ignorant about the significance of ECCE and how they can facilitate their children's learning at home.

2. **Financial and Monitoring Challenges in SDGs:** A considerable volume of funds is needed to meet the goals for the ERSE, which cannot be provided due to financial gaps, and evaluation and supervision hindered due to a lack of proper coordination.

3. **Challenges in NEP-2020 Implementation:** The formalization of the Anganwadi system of the Integrated Child Development Services Program Is faced with numerous challenges that are infrastructural, financial, logistical, behavioural and attitudinal, requiring higher levels of teacher training and greater central-state government collaboration.

4. **Health and Well-being Gaps:** Nutrition and health services are negatively impacted by a lack of coordination between the ECCE and health departments, and the centers often have inadequate provision of basic health infrastructure.

5. **Geographical and Socio-Demographic Barriers:** Rural and tribal populations are affected by infrastructural and transportation inadequacies, which restrict their access to ECCE services. The gap in the quality of education provided by expensive private preschools as compared to cheaper ones is worsened by the varying socio-economic status of the students.

These challenges would require clear and transparent reforms, better coordination, teacher training, and more spending on infrastructure and development to provide fair and adequate quality of service in high and low-level early childhood care and education.

▪ **Opportunities for implementing ECCE in India:**

1. **Learning and Development Curricular Provision:** Develops a curriculum that is child focused and promotes cognitive, social, emotional and physical growth which consequently results in effective learning.

2. **Enhanced Teacher Training:** Specialized training of ECCE teachers towards teaching effectiveness as well as responding to the learning diversity.

3. **Strengthening Anganwadi Centers:** The improvement of Anganwadi centres helps in extending appropriate early childhood education in disadvantaged regions.

4. **Involvement of Parents and Community:** Parents and communities are able to provide support towards learning and thus enhance the development of children.

5. **Focus on Social Inclusion Marginalized Group:** Bringing all forms of socially excluded persons to the level where all is to be empowered through education for all.

Finding 4: To summarize, the execution of Early Childhood Care and Education in India is facing some obstacles like lack of parental attention, budgetary issues, poor infrastructure, and socio-economic inequalities. These concerns impede equal opportunity in rural regions. Nevertheless, possibilities such as mainstreaming ECCE, its incorporation into the public school system, refinements in teacher education, and Anganwadi centre's consolidation provide solutions. Concentrating on social inclusion and learning by doing in India will assist in building a better education system. With reforms in place and funds directed toward the right areas, India can build a strong ECCE system for all children.

7. Conclusion:

Early Childhood Care and Education is important with regard to achieving Sustainable Development Goa-

ls (SDGs) and meeting the targets specified within the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 of India. Overcoming issues like inadequate supervision, socio-economic disparities and the necessity of more robust pedagogy makes it possible for ECCE to facilitate the development and well-being of children in their early years significantly. The plan of the NEP-2020 to assimilate Anganwadi into the formal educational system is a chance to improve the educational system by making it more inclusive, equitable and providing better standards of quality. India needs to undertake holistic changes such as good governance, better infrastructure spending and enhanced inter-ministerial coordination in order to achieve SDG goals and realize NEP-2020 vision. Focusing on ECCE can provide a solid base for every child's learning and education and contributes towards India becoming the world's knowledge superpower.

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