

# **UNIVERSALISING EDUCATION IN INDIA THROUGH EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION: MAJOR CONCERNS IN THE LIGHT OF NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY, 2020**

**Dr DurgaLekshmi G S**

*Post-Doctoral Fellow, Department of Education, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, India*

## **ABSTRACT**

**Purpose:** The purpose of the study is to analyse the concerns of National Education Policy (NEP, 2020) regarding ECCE. The author examines various provisions given in the draft of new education policy in school education especially Early Childhood Care and Education.

**Methodology:** The author attempted a qualitative research method where content analysis of the data was analysed and interpreted. The author analysed the recommendations of NEP, 2020 by reviewing the drafts of NEP and various research articles and news reports.

**Findings/ Result:** NEP has laid the foundation for Universalisation of Education through Universalisation of Early Childhood Care and Education. The target period is ten years i.e. to complete the mission by 2030. The time devoted to ECCE is five years, from age 3-to 6 where the children are provided with basic or foundational education. The Policy focuses on the all-round and holistic development of the individuals by providing optimal learning situations. The National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework put forward by NCERT highlights the importance of skill development, cognitive and psychomotor development, socio-cultural-emotional development, and the development of 3Rs and communication skills. There are also plans for ideal communication between Anganwadis and primary schools by providing quality training to the workers and teachers. All these proposals will help learners get universal access to education through ECCE. The Policy promotes the involvement of private and non-governmental organisations to take part in ECCE and thereby help the national goals of education.

**Paper type:** Qualitative Research Paper

**Keywords:** National Education Policy, Early Childhood Care and Education, Universalisation of Education, Education for All, SarvaSiksha Abhiyan

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Universalizing education in India is the joint responsibility of both central and state governments. Since the establishment of the Indian Constitution in 1956, various programs and policies have been implemented. Education for All (EFA) is provided through various agencies of education such as formal and non-formal agencies. Why do we need non-formal agencies in universalising education? When we analyse the current formal education scenario, we get the answer that the present formal education system miserably fails in certain situations where the equality of educational provisions is denied to a large portion of the target groups due to cultural, religious, socio-political, economic and geographical conditions. Other than the state and central initiatives, various NGOs join hands with the government and try to universalize education in India. This paper examines the major concerns of the Indian Education System in the Universalisation of Education in India. National Educational Policy 2020 primarily focuses on Early Childhood Care and Education to fulfill the desired goals of the India-centered education system which is capable of transforming our society into a vibrant knowledge society.

## **2. NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

### **2.1. Universalising Education through ECCE**

The national education policy (NEP-2020) is divided into four main parts i.e. School Education, Higher Education, and Other key areas of focus and making it happen. The first section of School education deals with Early Childhood Care and Education. One of the major objectives of NEP is ensuring Universal Access at all levels of schooling from pre-primary school to Grade 12 by ensuring quality early childhood care and education

for all children between 3-and 6 years. The new curricular policy ensures the provision of free and compulsory quality ECCE for all children of 0-6 years. Each state shall endeavour to fulfil the requirements in maintaining the quality and outcomes of education during the pre-primary and primary stages. As already told, the equalising nature of ECCE bridges the gap between individuals on the basis of different kinds of stratification. The first stage of education in an individual's life will definitely cater to his or her later stages.

## **2.2. Government Initiatives in Universalising Education in India**

Indian concern for primary and adult education aims at eradicating illiteracy and self-development of the individuals. The basic and fundamental idea of universalization of education was borrowed from the major six goals identified at the Dakar Conference held in April 2000 to analyze the developmental nature of Education for All (EFA). That venture was an attempt to link national as well as global goals of EFA. One of the major focus areas was on the expansion and improvement of comprehensive early childhood care and education for the children from the weaker sections of society. It also focused on providing education to all especially girls who belong to ethnic minority groups and those from unfavourable circumstances to access good quality free and compulsory elementary education. Ensuring the learning needs of all individual including young and adults, achieving 50 per cent improvement in adult literacy, achieving gender equality in education by 2015, and realising observable and measurable learning outcomes in literacy, numeracy and life skills were also focused on.

Based on the Dakar goals, central and state governments joined hands and implemented programs such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and National Literacy Mission (NLM). These helped to reach the unreached and involve the people at the grassroots level through decentralization of educational governance all over the country mainly through local self-governing bodies and Village Education Committees and school management bodies. Another major initiative was the constitutional amendment and thereby making basic education a child's right. These establishments are to meet the demands of hard-to-reach local communities such as scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, people from rural parts of India, and those from the weaker sections of the society.

## **2.3. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)**

Early childhood care and education (ECCE) aims at early intervention in the life of the child for a holistic development giving due importance to their health and nutrition, and all-round development of the child. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) was one of the most important initiatives of the Government of India to universalize elementary education by providing quality education to all children belonging to the 6- 14 years age group by the year 2010 especially girls, children who belong to SC, ST, and those from unfavourable learning circumstances, religious and linguistic minorities, and children with special needs. SSA was a gender-focused program giving prime importance to initiatives like back-to-school camps for adolescent girls to bring the out-of-school girls to school. But when it comes to NEP 2020, the major objective of ECCE is to provide free, safe and high-quality education and care to all children belonging to the age group of 3-6 by 2030. In the present scenario, the author examines the various provisions given in NEP 2020 on Early Childhood Care and Education.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

The author attempted a qualitative research method where content analysis of the data was analysed and interpreted. The author analysed the recommendations of NEP, 2020 by reviewing the drafts of NEP and various research articles and news reports.

## **4. MAJOR FINDINGS**

It is known that in the Indian education system, early childhood care has been neglected. In NEP 2020, priority has been given to five-year primary education which is presently known as the 'Foundational Stage.' The first three years are meant for ECCE and the remaining two years are for Grade 1 and 2. A spiral approach to curriculum is adopted during these years. Foundational literacy and numeracy are given much focus. NEP recommends 3Rs into ECCE. NEP's approach to ECCE is novel and futuristic as it takes into account the importance of the first 1000 days in a person's life. It will definitely help to bridge the gap between the entry behaviour and terminal behaviour of the learners.

### **4.1. Socio-Economic Perspectives of ECCE**

Why do we invest much time and money in ECCE? A thorough analysis of NPE, 2020 reveals that “investment in ECCE gives the best chance for children to grow up into good, moral, thoughtful, creative, empathetic, and productive human beings.” It also has the capacity to give all children access to education in an engaging and holistic way and thereby they are able to participate and get benefitted from the educational system throughout their lives. ECCE equalises the gap between privileged and underprivileged. By considering all these, it is suggested that India should invest in ECCE to develop the cognitive skills of the learners, to acquire good learning outcomes and to equality, justice, employability and prosperity. The nature of preschool education determines the vocational life of the learner and the income she or he is going to generate in the future. Providing good quality ECCE reduces unemployment, crime, and other social evils.

#### **4.2. Salient Features of ECCE as per National Education Policy, 2020**

In the draft of NEP, 2020 priorities have been given to areas such as health and nutrition of both the mother and the child before 3 years of age. It also stresses the need for cognitive and emotional stimulation given to the child in the form of talking, playing, moving, listening to music, etc. The child should also get the awareness of basic skills such as language skills, arithmetic skills, and problem-solving skills. NEP stresses the importance of continuous healthcare and nutrition for children in the age group of 3-6. Other major highlights of ECCE are developing self-help skills, motor skills, and cleanliness, dealing with the child's anxiety, interacting with one's peers, moral and physical development, effective communication with parents and others, task completion, and forming good habits. Guided play-based education, in groups and individually, will be beneficial for the development of cooperation, teamwork, social interaction, compassion, equity, inclusiveness, communication, cultural appreciation, playfulness, curiosity, creativity, etc. In addition to 3 Rs, ECCE focuses on giving training in drawing/painting, sports and games, puzzles, visual art, craft, drama, puppetry, and music, etc.

Age 3-8, is considered the ‘Foundational Stage’ and children are required to have access to flexible, multifaceted and discovery-based education. In India, early childhood education is mainly delivered through Anganwadis and pre-schools, run mainly by the government, NGOs and other private organisations. Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) is one of the major schemes by the Government of India that has proved its mark in the area of healthcare for mothers and infants. Its focus area is critical nutrition and health awareness, immunisation, basic health check-ups, and referrals and connections to local public health systems.

The new policy on education highlights the shortcomings of the existing Anganwadi system in ECCE. Lack of proper infrastructure facilities, accommodating children in the age range of 2-4 than the critical 4-6 year age range, lack of trained teachers, inappropriate curriculum, etc. are the few challenges associated with providing ECCE. The Policy noticed that it is high time to develop an outstanding curricular and pedagogical framework for early childhood education by NCERT in line with the above guidelines, which would be delivered through a most sophisticated system of early childhood educational institutions. A learning-friendly environment that is conducive to learning is recommended in the policy. A committee of experts will be formed by the State and the physical environment will be welcoming with fine access to clean and well-lit classrooms, drinking water, and toilet facilities.

A quality regulation system will be instituted which will consider all types of pre-school education - private, public, and philanthropic – so as to check essential quality standards. Well-informed stakeholders will be able to compare ECCE and other formal education practices and realise its importance in a child's lifelong learning and development. Large propaganda through public messages, media campaigns, etc. helps in direct communication between parents and authorities.

#### **4.3 .Pedagogical Framework as Envisioned by NEP**

The major suggestions by NEP in relation to the curricular framework are

1. Including the rich traditional experiences of India in the form of art, stories, poetry, songs etc. to impart a sense of local relevance and identity.
2. The traditional roles played by families in a child's life should be strongly highlighted.
3. Another suggestion is to include ECCE in RTE act so as to reinforce the public commitment in quality early childhood care and education for all children. The 86<sup>th</sup> Constitutional amendment provided scope for universalisation of ECCE as it is entrusted to State government.
4. The Framework will consist of two parts: a. The first part will be dedicated for 0-3 years olds where the target groups are parents and Anganwadi teachers/workers. The focus area of the framework will be on

giving appropriate cognitive stimulation for infants, developing low-cost learning aids etc. b. The second part will be meant for 3-8-year-olds (Foundational Stage) and for the parents, Anganwadi teachers and students belonging to grades 1 and 2.

5. A major part of the curriculum is focusing on developing multilingual skills in children as the children learn the language fast during 0-3 years
6. In addition to this, a four- pronged approach is suggested in the new curricular framework:
  - a) Strengthening and expansion of the Anganwadi system: It should be ensured that there is at least one worker at every Anganwadi so as to train the infants in cognitive stimulation and provide multilevel education Each Anganwadi will be provided with quality learning aids for early childhood education. Anganwadi Centres will be quality learning support centres where every mother and child will have easy access and it will be able to provide necessary assistance related to health and nutrition.
  - b) Co-locating Angawadis with primary schools:Co-locating Anganwadis with existing primary schools is considered a major factor in planning the location for new Anganwadis and it will be helpful to parents and children as the children get an opportunity to learn in a cohesive educational environment with their siblings and peers at primary schools. This system will be able to promote strong school-community relationships.
  - c) Co-locating pre-schools with primary schools where possible:Pre-school facilities will be added to existing or new primary schools and they will be supported by a package of health, nutrition, and growth-monitoring services, especially for the preschool students. And the necessary requirements will be fulfilled by neighbourhood Anganwadis in case of necessity.
  - d) Building stand-alone pre-schools:It is suggested to set up high-quality stand-alone pre-schools in the areas where existing Anganwadis and primary schools lack the educational requirements for the infants. One of the essential criteria of such pre-schools is that they would be supported by the health, nutrition, and growth-monitoring facilities.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The first stage of Universalising Education begins with Elementary education. In India, it is a fundamental right under Article 21-A, and Article 45 under Directive Principles of State Policy. Giving due attention to early childhood care and education helps to develop the integrated personality of the learner. It provides an optimal learning environment to the child which is inclusive in nature. The ICT integrated curricular framework developed by NCERT helps teachers to give high-quality education to the target group. An experiential approach to learning ensured by NEP will help the learners to get real-life training.

## 6. REFERENCES

1. Draft National Education Policy 2019. Committee for Draft National Education Policy, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. [https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/Draft\\_NEP\\_2019\\_EN\\_Revised.pdf](https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/Draft_NEP_2019_EN_Revised.pdf).
2. Government of India. (n.d.). *Constitution of India*. Retrieved April 5, 2022, from <https://legislative.gov.in/sites/default/files/COI.pdf>
3. Government of India. (2020). National Education Policy 2020. Ministry of Human Resource Development. [https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/NEP\\_Final\\_English\\_0.pdf](https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf).
4. Govt. of India (1968). National Policy on Education,1968 [https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/document-reports/NPE-1968.pdf](https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/document-reports/NPE-1968.pdf).
5. Kwatra, P. (2020, October 27). NEP 2020: Impact of National Education Policy on Preschools. *Hindustan Times*. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/education/nep-2020-impact-of-national-education-policy-on-preschools>
6. Newton Schools Blog. (2020). *National Education Policy: Early Childhood Care & Education*. <https://newtonschools.in/national-education-policy/>
7. Nimkar, N. (2020, December 9). *The Devil is in the Details*. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://idronline.org/nep-2020-and-early-childhood-education/>
8. *Part IV- Directive Principles of State Policy*. (n.d.). Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. Retrieved April 5, 2022, from <https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/pdf1/Part4.pdf>