

# Implementation of National Education Policy in Preschool Education: A Sustainable Development Strategy

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**Abstract**—The Sustainable Development Goal-4 (SDG-4), which India adopted in 2015, aspires to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” by the year 2030 (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2015). It is a reflection of the global education development agenda. To promote healthy brain development and growth, it is crucial to provide the right care and stimulation for the brain in the early years. Over 85% of a child’s cumulative brain development happens before the age of six (Burger, 2010). The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP-2020) in India places a significant emphasis on Early Childhood Care and Education. A five-year foundational stage of education is envisioned in NEP 2020, which encompasses three years of preschool education and the first two years of primary school (Ministry of Human Resources Development, 2020). Prior educational policies in India have mostly dealt with access and equity concerns in their implementation. A considerable involvement over the preceding policy of 1986, “The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009” laid the constitutional framework for achieving universal basic education. This policy (NEP-2020) correctly addresses the unfinished tasks of the National Policy on Education from 1986, as modified in 1992. This study is based on the secondary data and provides a review analysis of the National Education Policy 2020. The purpose of this study is to provide and understanding of the NEP-2020 implementation policy as it relates to preschool education and its importance from a long-term viewpoint. The study concluded that the NEP-2020 represents a substantial advancement for ECCE in India. It’s essential to keep an eye on how NEP-2020 is being put into practice and to guarantee that all children have access to high-quality preschool education

**Index Terms**—NEP, ECCE, Preschool Education, Sustainable Development.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Preschool education in India is the term used to describe instruction for young children ages three to six. It is a critical period in a child’s growth since it creates the foundation for their future learning and achievement. Children gain advantages in the development of their physical, emotional, social, and cognitive abilities. To make ECCE a constitutional requirement, the Indian government added the amended Article 45 of the Constitution Act of 2002, which states, “The State shall endeavour to provide Early Childhood Care and Education for all children until they complete the age of six year” (Government of India, 2002). The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE) become operative on April, 2010. As stated in the Act, “The appropriate government may make necessary arrangements for providing free preschool education for such children to prepare children above the age of three years for elementary education and to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six year” (Government of India, 2009). Furthermore, “By 2030, all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education” (Goal-4 of the Sustainable Development Goals) (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2015). The National Education policy (NEP) 2020 recognizes the importance of preschool education and prioritizes it in India’s educational System in order to accomplish this goal. The NEP proposes a universal pre-primary education system that will provide all children with access to high-quality preschool instruction, as well as a new 5+3+3+4 curricular structure that includes three years

of pre-primary education (Ministry of Human Resources Development, 2020). This means that all children must complete three years of preschool before entering Grade-One.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyse the previous policies of education in the context of preschool education in India.
2. To study the National Education Policy 2020 in the context of preschool education.
3. To highlight the challenges of implementing NEP 2020 in preschool education.
4. To provide suggestions for the implantation of NEP 2020 in preschool education.

## II. METHODOLOGY

The available secondary data on preschool education served as the foundation of this study. The National policy on Education 1986, The Right to Education Act, The Early Childhood Care and Education Act of 2013, and the National Education Policy of 2020 are among policies that are reviewed and analyzed in the study's framework of preschool education.

Background

National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986

For benefit of all the country's citizens, the Indian government created the National Policy on Education in 1986. The strategy prioritizes the early childhood population's overall development and considers ECCE as a key element of nation's basic education system. Also, the policy believes that ECCE is crucial for the development of human resources (Government of India, 1986). It emphasises promoting ECCE program that is play-based and child-centred. This deters the usage of formal methods and early implementation of the 3Rs (Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic) (Government of India, 1986). It also encourages citizens to participate in ECCE programs. Additionally, the significance of community involvement has been emphasized in this policy. It has been mentioned that the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) and ECCE programs need to be connected. It has been suggested that a modular evolution would be desirable to fully transform the former into a later institution. There is also a commitment to setting up additional, various kinds of daycare facilities. The policy is especially concerned with the early care and stimulation needs of children who belong to the poverty groups. Overall,

the NPE of 1986 has positively impacted preschool education in India. However, there is still a need to expand access to preschool education, and improve the quality of preschool education in the country.

Preschool Education in Integrated Child Development Services

The Government of India launched the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) initiative in 1975 with the main goal of promoting comprehensive maternal health and child well-being (Reetu, Renu, & Adarsh, 2017). The ICDS emphasises inclusivity by focusing on underserved and marginalized communities to reduce disparities in child development outcomes. It is carried out in collaboration with various stakeholders, including the state-level departments in the field of health, education, and social welfare and the national Ministry of Women and Child Development. An array of services, including preschool education, are offered to young children in India through the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) program. A network of community-based Anganwadi facilities, which offer a range of services to children and their mothers, is used to carry out the ICDS program. Early childhood education is the key element of ICDS. Especially in isolated and socioeconomically underdeveloped communities, it attempts to give children the preparation they need for elementary school. The preschool curriculum in Anganwadi centres is play-based and covers a variety of issues, which include language and literacy development, numeracy development, creative development, physical development, and socio-emotional development. Preschool education at Anganwadi centres is delivered by Anganwadi Workers, trained in early childhood education. Anganwadi Workers use various teaching methods and activities to promote children's learning and development. According to National Family and Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2021), the percentage of children who received any service from Anganwadi centre in India is 67.5% (56.1% from urban and 71.8% from rural). The percentage of children who received preschool education through an Anganwadi centre is 51.0% (40.7% from urban and 54.9% from rural) (International Institute of Population Science (IIPS) & ICF, 2021).

Right to Education

All countries rely on education to reside; they would be unable to function without it. Consequently,

education is the foundation of the nation. It is essential to a democracy's general development and smooth functioning. Political stability, social progress, and economic growth are all supported by this social pillar. After home, food, and clothes, education is fourth essential need for individual's survival. Some key provisions were added to the constitution by 86<sup>th</sup> Amendment Act Of 2002 to make it clearer that children aged 6 to 14 have a basic right to free and compulsory education (Government of India, 2002). Some key provision of the Indian constitution regarding preschool education are:

- I. Article 21(A)- This article states "The state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children between the age of 6 and 14 through a law that it may determine" (Government of India, 1986).
- II. Article 45- Under the Directive Principles of State Policy, the article 45 states that "The state shall endeavour to provide, within ten years from the commencement of this constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years."
- III. Article 51A(k)- Added after the 86<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act 2002, the article 51A(k) directs that it is the "Duty of the parent or guardian to provide opportunities for education to his/her child, as the case may be, between the age of six and fourteen years." (Government of India, 1986).

Early Childhood Care and Education Policy (2013)

With the adoption of the National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy 2013, the Indian government reaffirmed its commitment to establishing contextualized, inclusive, and egalitarian opportunities for promoting the optimal development and active learning capacity of all children under the age of six (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2013). ECCE is covered by section 11 of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE), which went into effect on April 1, 2010 (Government of India, 2009). This section states that the appropriate government may make the necessary arrangement to provide free early childhood care and education for all children between the ages of three and six.

Vision of the ECCE Policy

The vision of this ECCE has been mentioned under section 4 in the document of ECCE Policy, 2013. The

vision of the policy is "to achieve holistic development and active learning and contextualized opportunities for laying the foundation and attaining full potential" (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2013).

### III. KEY FEATURES OF ECCE POLICY

The key features of the National Early Childhood Care and Education Policy 2013, are as follows;

- **Holistic Development:** The Policy Places a strong emphasis on children's whole development. It encompasses the social, emotional, and physical development of children.
- **Universalization:** It seeks to give all children, including those from underprivileged and marginalized groups, universal access to high-quality, free and required early childhood education.
- **Play-based Learning:** The ECCE framework is designed to be flexible and play-based learning. It is the reflection of "Learn While Playing".
- **Parental and Community Involvement:** It encourages the active involvement of parents and caregivers and ensures community participation in ECCE programs.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** The Policy aims to evaluate the efficacy and quality of ECCE programs by putting in place a strong monitoring and evaluation system.
- **Public-Private Partnership:** The government may collaborate on certain time bond projects with a variety of stakeholders, such as the community, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and private service providers, while maintaining certain standards and guidelines in order to accomplish the goals of the policy and aid its initiatives.

National education policy (NEP) 2020

Along with a number of other measures to improve the educational system, the government of India implemented a New Education Policy in 2020. Under the direction of Dr. K. Kasturirangan, the former head of the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO), the government of India revealed the new education policy for 2020 based on the committee's recommendation (Ministry of Human Resources Development, 2020). The 1986 Education Policy has been replaced by this one. The New Education Policy

2020 places a strong emphasis on children's overall development. On the plus side, NEP 2020 offers strong foundational education, equity, and quality in the sphere of education. The needs of the present generation have caused education to become more flexible and multidisciplinary. The NEP 2020 prioritizes early childhood care and education (ECCE) and segments for higher education.

#### School Education in NEP 2020

The children below six years of age were not covered in the 10+2 structure of previous education policies. In the NEP 2020, the extant 10+2 structure in school education will be modified with a new pedagogical and curricular restructuring of 5+3+3+4 covering the age group 3-18 years. In the new 5+3+3+4 structure, a strong base of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) from age 3 is also included, which is aimed at promoting better overall learning, development, and well-being. The first five years of the foundational stage will consist of flexible, play/activity-based learning and curriculum and pedagogy of ECCE. In this regard, the foundational stage will be covered in two parts i.e., 3 years of Anganwadi/pre-school and 2 years of primary school in grades(class) 1 & 2 (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020).

### IV. KEY FEATURES OF NEP 2020 IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

#### I. The Foundation of Learning

It is mentioned in the guidelines of NEP 2020 that NCERT will create two portions of the National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (NCPFECCE) for children up to the age of eight: a sub-framework for children ages 0-3 and a sub-framework for children ages three to eight. The ECCE shall be delivered in a phase manner through (a) Stand-alone Anganwadis; (b) Anganwadis co-located with primary schools; (c) Pre-primary schools covering at least 5 to 6 years; and (d) Stand-alone preschools (Ministry of Human Resources Development, 2020). The Anganwadi Centers will also be strengthened with high-quality infrastructure and well-trained Anganwadi workers/teachers. The children under the age of five years will be moved to a "Preparatory Class" or "Balvatika" (that is, before class 1). The learning in this phase shall be based on play-based learning, and

the Mid-Day-Meal (MDM) program shall also be extended to the preparatory class.

#### II. Foundational Literacy and Numeracy

Proficiency in reading, writing, and basic arithmetic operations is an essential starting point for all subsequent education and lifelong learning. The NEP 2020 guidelines have given priority to achieving universal foundational literacy and numeracy in primary school by 2025. For this purpose, the first attention will be given to employing local teachers who are familiar with local languages, especially in disadvantaged areas. An interim 3-month play-based "School Preparation Module" based around the learning of alphabets, sounds, words, colors, shapes, and numbers, as well as opportunities for peer and parent collaboration, will be created by NCERT and SCERTs for all Grade 1 students to guarantee that every student is prepared for school. The Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing (DIKSHA), a national collection of excellent resources on basic literacy and numeracy will be made available. In addition, states may establish innovative models and programs for peer-tutoring and volunteer activities in the communities to support learners and promote foundational literacy and numeracy. The public and school libraries will be established with high-quality books (translated into all local languages) (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020).

#### III. Mitigating School Dropout Rates

Initiatives like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (now the Samagra Shiksha) and the Right to Education Act have made a remarkable stride in attaining universal enrolment in elementary education. The recent data of the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) 2017-18 highlights the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of the children in different Grades. It indicates the GER of 90.9% for Grades 6-8, 79.3% for Grades 9-10, and 56.5% for Grades 11-12. The NEP 2020 prioritizes achieving the 100% Gross Enrolment Ratio in preschool to secondary level by 2030 by bringing these dropout children back into school education (Ministry of Human Resources Development, 2020). This can be achieved by two initiatives; the first is to provide effective and sufficient infrastructure, and the second is to provide equitable and quality education for all.

#### IV. Curriculum and Pedagogy in Schools

The New Education Policy 2020 envisions that learning should be Holistic, Integrated, Enjoyable, and

Engaging. For this, the strategy for the curriculum and pedagogy in school education will be covered in these manners;

- **Restructuring school curriculum and pedagogy:** The new 5+3+3+4 structure will be designed for school education covering the age ranges of 3-8, 8-11, 11- 14, and 14-18 respectively. The new school structure will be covered in five stages; The Foundational Stage covers two parts (3 years of Anganwadi/preschool and 2 years of primary school in Grades 1-2), the Preparatory Stage (Grades 3-5, covering ages 8-11), Middle Stage (Grades 6-8, covering ages 11-14), and Secondary Stage (Grades 9-12, covering ages 14-18) (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020).
- **Holistic Development:** The new structure will cover the holistic and overall development of children. This includes the physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal skills of the children.
- **Reduce Curriculum Content:** The curriculum content will be reduced to a new structure for the holistic development of children. Learning should be play- based and experiential-based.
- **Experiential Learning:** Experiential learning will be adopted in all stages, including, arts-integration, sports integration, story-telling, and other experience-based learning.
- **Multilingualism:** The medium of learning at least Grade 5 starting from Grade 1 will be in the mother tongue or home language of the children. The three- language formula will be continued the same as the previous education policy. Additionally, the multilingual learning will include one of the classical languages and literature of India (such as Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, etc.) and one of the other foreign languages such as English, French, Korean, Japanese, etc. The Indian Sign Language (ISL) will also be standardized at the National level (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020).

These all are the key features of the New Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) in the context of preschool education. Some challenges may occur to implementing NEP 2020 in Preschool Education.

Challenges to Implementing NEP 2020 in Preschool Education

- **Infrastructure Facility:** The present Anganwadi Centers are not designed following NEP 2020. There is a need to develop these Anganwadi Centers for implementing ECCE, especially in rural areas.
- **Lack of Awareness:** This is the major problem in our society that people are not aware of Early Childhood Care and Education Policy. The policy is not only for the education of the children but also for the holistic development of the children which includes physical, cognitive, interpersonal, social, and others.
- **Language Barriers:** Several students have different mother tongues in a classroom. So, it is very difficult to teach every student in their language. It is also difficult to employ different language teachers at the time.
- **Training and Supportive Supervision:** The current personnel present at the Anganwadi Centers are not well-trained to implement NEP in ECCE. So, focused training and support are needed for the Anganwadi Workers/Teachers regarding ECCE and the curriculum framework of NEP 2020.
- **Universalization of Education:** The RTE Act is focused on the 6 to 14 years age group while NEP 2020 is designed for the 3 to 18 years age group children. It isn't easy to universalize education without the RTE Act.
- **Problems of Anganwadi Workers:** The Anganwadi Workers are overburdened with health and nutritional programs and this ECCE of NEP 2020 also relies on these ground-level workers. This is unfair to these workers because they are not recognized as a formal employee and their salaries are very low compared to other personnel.

Suggestions to Implement NEP 2020 in Preschool Education

- The infrastructure of the Anganwadi Centers should be designed and developed to focus on children's safety, health, and happiness.
- The teachers should be aware of the new curriculum framework and be well- trained in ECCE policy.

- The parents also play a vital role in the development of their children. It is mandatory to involve parents in childhood care practices, nutritional education, early education, etc.
- The training programs, workshops, and other awareness campaigns regarding ECCE should be organized by the trained personnel for the involvement of the community.
- Coordinating and convergent activities amongst ministries, addressing many aspects of health, and early education should be developed.
- It would be necessary for governments to develop and disseminate multi-year plans rather than annual plans to allow them to adopt a comprehensive, long-term strategy to enhance basic learning outcomes. States would get flexible funding from the mission depending on the plans they submit.

#### V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the NEP 2020 plays a vital role in the improvement of Early Childhood Care and Education in preschool education. The policy is designed to focus on the holistic and overall development of the children. The new school education structure (5+3+3+4) is designed in favor of the needs and importance of the children ages 3 to 18 years. The policy also highlights the disadvantaged community children and their development. Therefore, early childhood education (ECCE) is essential to the growth of an individual and has a big impact on both the country and the individual's later years. ECCE exists only to support children in living their lives.

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