Early Childhood Care and Education Policy as promised by the National Education Policy 2020 of India: Issues and challenges

During the last four decades, the Indian social structure has seen a dramatic change in its structure. More awareness was observed among citizens about the importance of early childhood care and education, and as a result, the government of India introduced Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in its National Education Policy 2020. Including ECCE in National Education Policy will change the school education system in India. Before NEP 2020, ECCE was not part of education; instead, it was a part of the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) primarily conducted through Anganwadi Centres (AWCs). As ECCE has now become a part of the National Education Policy, there are several challenges ahead. This article highlights several challenges towards the implementation of ECCE in India. It was identified that immediate appointment of Anganwadi (AW) helpers and Anganwadi workers, including at least one teacher trained in ECCE at all AWCs, are immediately required. In addition, the training of existing workforce at AWCs along with an orientation of Early Childhood Care and Special Education (ECSE) and early intervention, ensuring the inclusion of children with disabilities and inclusion of children from Socio-Economic Disadvantaged Groups (SEDG’s), the problem with creating a trained workforce for ECCE and developing curriculum for ECCE are significant challenges towards implementation of ECCE which needs urgent attention for effective implementation.

Keywords: ECCE, Inclusion, NEP2020, ECSE, Early Intervention

Early Childhood Care and Education Policy as promised by the National Education Policy 2020 of India: Issues and challenges

Early childhood education can be understood as the theory and practice of educating young children (Farquhar & White, 2014). In other words, ECCE consists of services for children under compulsory school age, including elements of both physical care and education (Kamerman, 2007). Early childhood is a unique experience free from all the worries, and it has been regarded as very important in the life (“EFA Global Monitoring Report,” 2014) of an individual as it shapes the future adult. As Myers (2004) noted, “early years -- when the brain matures, when we first learn to walk and talk, when self-control begins and when the first social relationships are formed – must be regarded as important (Myers, 2004)”. Early childhood provides richer experiences that never return. There are learning with plays and fun during early years (Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008), and everyone wishes to return once more to early childhood. It is a foundation stone of entire life. It shapes the personality of a child. It is an age of play and learns with lots of fun. The child
explores everything with the same degree of curiosity and tries to gain experiences.

Early childhood provides a sturdy base for lifelong learning. It is the beginning of simple logical power and thinking through learning various languages and accents simultaneously. The development during this age is greatly affected by psychosocial and biological factors and by genetic inheritance, too (Granatham-McGregor et al., 2007). Early childhood is critical for cognitive learning (Vallotton & Fischer, 2008), thinking, reasoning, or problem solving, and is also critical for social learning. In addition, some researchers and educators found it a base of scientific thinking and advocates science curriculum (Eshach & Fried, 2005) and mathematics curriculum (Gopnik, 2012; Sarama & Clements, 2009) for early childhood. Even in the research studies, it was observed that tiny tots were both interested in and able to learn many aspects of robotics, programming, and computational thinking (Bers et al., 2014). Recent studies also observed that vital resources related to one's executive functioning during early childhood were strongly related to fundamental reasoning skills in later life (Richland & Burchinal, 2013). Some studies reported early childhood care and education as a foundation of adult health and productivity which take shape very early in life (Black & Hurley, 2014). In addition to these, the years from birth to age five years are viewed as a very pivotal period for developing the basics for thinking, behaving, and emotional well-being (Bakken et al., 2017) and it has also been reported that inequalities between and within populations have origins in adverse early experiences and early psychosocial experiences affect brain development (Walker et al., 2011). Alcott et al. (2020) found that a growing evidence base highlights the value of high-quality early childhood education (ECCE) to children's cognitive and social development. Early childhood is a vibrant age and lack of exposure during early childhood has severe consequences in later learning (Bennett, 1993).

Even if it is universally accepted that early childhood matters (Bakken et al., 2017; Davis et al., 2021; Zonji, 2018) and is very important in shaping an individual's later life, the scientific community differs slightly on the issue of age range of early childhood. United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (UNESCO) defines it as the period from birth to eight years old (Kim & Umayahara, 2010), and it is a time of notable growth with brain development at its peak. During this stage, children are highly influenced by the environment and the people that surround them. It is estimated by UNICEF that there are approximately 20 million children, between the ages of 3-6 years, not attending any preschool in India. This was primarily because of lack of appropriate policies in place, lack of basic infrastructure, qualified early childhood educators and appropriate learning materials. Prior to the announcement of the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP, 2020) there was no policy in place in India for early childhood care and education except Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) which has been continued since 1975 covering broad aspects of maternal and child health including pregnancy care, delivery care, and post-delivery care of women particularly intended to
rural women and ECCE is a part of it. Although there was no policy for early childhood education in India but growth of play schools was very high during last two decades managed by private entities. These play schools mushroomed mostly in urban areas with varying fee structures. Due to lack of policy for early childhood education prior to 2020, some private accreditation bodies also emerged and during last two decades early childhood education was being carried out by private players like a gobbledygook in India.

Objectives of the study:

Early Childhood Care and Education has been given prominence in the Education 2030 agenda and in particular in target 4.2 of Sustainable Development Goal-4 (SDG-4), which aimed at ensuring access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education so that children belonging to early childhood are ready for primary education by 2030. Now in a right-based society where education is a fundamental right of each child regardless of caste, race, ethnicity, gender, disability, or any other possible form of discrimination. The global community is highly concerned and responsible for utilizing a child's full potential to ensure overall holistic development of children as education has become their right and for equitable, inclusive education and sustainable progress of societies (Chan, 2013). In order to achieve this, it has been included in Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) agenda to provide equitable and inclusive education to all children across the globe.

Considering the importance of the early years of life, gradually, many countries of the world have been focusing on providing early childhood care and education, and it has taken place in government's economic and social policymaking and gradually assumed an increasingly formative role in the way the child and family can be conceptualized in future societies (Farquhar & White, 2014).

During the last four decades, the Indian social structure has also seen a dramatic change in its structure. Parents became more and more aware of the importance of early childhood care and education, and as a result, the beginning of the 21st century saw the mushrooming culture of Kinder Garten schools, playschools, Montessori schools. Tiny tots are enrolling from an as early age of 2 years. In addition, Indian culture saw growth in crutches mostly limited to metro cities where both the child's parents are working. Before National Education Policy 2020, there was no such rule governing these early childhood care and education centers, and thus these schools meant for children under six years of age enjoyed autonomy and freedom in terms of curriculum, school fee, and own rules of administration. The changes in India's social and economic structure have intensified the need for universal early childhood education (Pattnaik, 1996).

The objective of this study is to present a critical analysis of provisions made for Early Childhood Care and Education in India in the National Education Policy 2020 and to identify possible challenges towards implementation of Early Childhood Care and Education related policy in line
with National Education Policy 2020 as for the first time, ECCE has been included and made a part of National Education Policy.

Method: Literature survey on ECCE, analysis of provisions made for ECCE in NEP 2020, and analysis of data available on ECCE in India have been taken into account to carry out the study. The primary source of data taken for the study is the information provided by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, which has been implementing the country's only early childhood care and education program under the banner of ICDS (Integrated Child Development Scheme) since 1975. No early childhood care and education program has been implemented in India other than ICDS programs in which there was no involvement of the Ministry of Education.

Discussions:

After three and a half decades of independence, the Ministry of Education (MoE), Government of India (GoI) made a significant change in its education system, introduced in 1986 when the New Education Policy 1986 was implemented. Considering the societal demand and global developments, the Kothari Commission recommended some fundamental changes in New Education Policy 1986. It was the first-ever significant change in the school education system structure, which continued until the National Education Policy 2020.

The new policy of education 1986, based upon the recommendation of the Kothari Commission, made schooling a 10+2 (12 years of schooling) structure. Although the importance of early childhood care and education was recognized by the policy of 1986. However, formal schooling was recommended from 6 years of age, unlike national education policy 2020, which considered the beginning of formal education from 3 years as given in Figure-1.

Recently Government of India paid attention to and realized the relative importance of early childhood care and education and therefore given ECCE an important place in the National Education Policy 2020. It is a welcoming step of the government, but implementing the ECCE across the country by 2030 is not easy, whereas the Government of India has launched its National Education Policy 2020 with a very theoretical perspective.

It was the historical date 29th July 2020 when India's union cabinet of parliament approved the National Education Policy 2020, which replaced the 34-year-old National Policy on Education (NPE),1986 (PIB, 2020). As per the report of the Government of India, this National Education Policy 2020 was prepared with consultation of several stakeholders of education, which involved over 2 lakh suggestions from 2.5 lakhs Gram Panchayats, 6600 Blocks & 676 Districts which were taken during 2015-2020 (PIB, 2020). This new education policy has assumed to bring a revolutionary change in education in India at all levels in general and at school level in particular because it has changed the structure of the schooling system. Earlier in India, the schooling system was of 10+2 system means to say a child needs to attend ten years up to class tenth starting of formal schooling from the age six years up to 16 years for integrated primary and secondary course and then two years was given for a senior secondary course (Figure-1).
As illustrated in figure 2, now it has been made a new 5+3+3+4 (First five years starting from age 3 in early childhood care and education, following three years as a primary class, further next three years as an upper primary class following four years for secondary and senior secondary class. The curricular structure corresponds to ages 3-8 years, 8-11 years, and 11-14 years. Further, it has been clarified that the NEP 2020 aims to achieve 100% Gross Enrolment by 2030 and about two crore children will be brought back to school, and the open schooling will be strengthened (NEP, 2020). Other significant features to be covered under the newly implemented Education Policy for India are providing education up to grade 5th in the child's mother tongue and holistic development (NEP, 2020).

In order to achieve this paradigm shift in the school education system, as NEP 2020 proposed

"a National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE) 2021, will be formulated by the NCTE in consultation with National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and qualification of teacher will be gradually shifted from two years to four years integrated program in teacher education by 2030 (NEP, 2020)."

The big challenge in the implementation of NEP 2020, the Government of India has to face is the implementation of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme for children from 3 to 6 years. At present primary schools are not ready to implement this program due to lack of infrastructure, lack of workforce, lack of basic amenities, and lack of teaching-learning materials required to implement ECCE. Before discussing challenges towards achieving 100% GER by 2030 and implementing ECCE programs, it is pertinent to discuss the existing Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme.

An overview of the existing mechanism of government for implementation of ECCE:

In the present scenario Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) covers the ECCE program. ICDS program mainly relies on Anganwadi centers (AWCs) across the country. ICDS program is a centrally sponsored program. It is being implemented throughout the country by joint efforts of the Ministry of Women and Child Development and Ministry of Human Resource Development (now Ministry of Education) of the Government of India. The history of the ICDS program could be traced back to the early 80's when it was started for holistic development of children and formally the scheme was launched on 2nd October, 1975 and since then, the scheme has continued till date. Its objectives are to improve children's nutritional and health status, including their mothers and the expectant mothers, and it mainly operates through Anganwadi centers (AWCs) throughout the county. Each Anganwadi center is run by an Anganwadi worker supported by a helper. The Anganwadi program is not a dedicated program for ECCE instead, its beneficiaries include expectant mothers, nourishing mothers, and children and adolescent girls. It can be understood under a broad umbrella of child and maternal reproductive health programme. As observed by Yong (1996)
integrated programs in early child development can do much to prevent malnutrition, stunted cognitive development, and insufficient preparation for school (Young, 1996).

Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme is a flagship scheme of the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) covering 33 Blocks as a project with 4891 Angan Wadi Centres (AWCs) (MWCD, n.d.-c). With the success of these projects, it was further expanded to 7076 Projects and around 14 lakh AWCs working across the country. As per the information available over MWCD website, as of 31st March 2015, there were 13.46 lakh functional AWCs (MWCD, n.d.-c) serving children below six years of age. Through the ICDS scheme, a wide range of services are being offered, including six services: Supplementary Nutrition, Pre-school non-formal education, Nutrition & health education, Immunization, Health check-ups, and Referral services. The scheme is being implemented through inter-ministerial collaboration as Immunization, Health check-ups, and Referral are coordinated by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare through the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) and another country's health system. An ICDS team of each district level project includes the Anganwadi Workers, Anganwadi Helpers, Supervisors, Child Development Project Officers (CDPOs), and District Programme Officers (DPOs). An 'Anganwadi Worker is a woman selected from the local community as a local woman can mobilize support quickly and may provide better care to children of that community. She may extend her support for better care of young children, girls and women. As per the data available as of 31st March 2015, out of 12.15 lakh AWCs/mini-AWCs, about 81.19% AWCs are running from the pucca buildings and the remaining 18.81% from kutcha buildings; 30.62% running from government owned buildings; 21.62% running from school premises; 4.54% running from Panchayat buildings; 32.56% running from rented including 5.90% from AWWs/AWHs house; 9.79% running from others; 0.87% running from open space. 65.91% AWCs have drinking water facilities within the premises, and 50.01% AWCs have toilet facilities (MWCD, n.d.-c).

Figure-3 reveals that as per census 2011, out of these 15.87 crore children below the age of 6 years, 74% of the children (0-6 years) live in rural areas, whereas only 26% of children reside in urban areas, but the rural population constitutes 69% of the total population of India as compared to 31% of the urban population.

If one looks at the figure-4 available workforce at existing Anganwadi centers, there are 1399697 sanctioned posts across the country for Anganwadi workers, and to assist those workers, sanctioned posts of 12822847 Anganwadi helpers are there. Each Anganwadi center has two staff members. One is an Anganwadi worker, and the other is an Anganwadi helper. This data yields 97080, i.e., around one lac Anganwadi workers must be appointed immediately against the sanctioned post. Similarly, 97893, i.e., about 100000 vacant posts are there for Anganwadi helpers against sanctioned posts before implementation of NEP 2020 for quality ECCE. The data yields that about 200000 Anganwadi centers are operating with single staff, either with
Anganwadi workers or with Anganwadi helpers. It further suggests that around 7% of Anganwadi workers' seats and helpers' seats are still vacant. If we calculate the ratio of children and the sanctioned post of Anganwadi workers, the current ratio is around 123:1, and the ratio of the eligible population with existing Anganwadi workers is about 135:1. The total number of Anganwadi workers and helpers currently working and the sanctioned post is given in Table 1.

Figure 1 explains the post sanctioned vs. post filled with Anganwadi workers (AWCs) (in Lakh) as per the report of Press Information Bureau Government of India Delhi, 12th July 2019

Figure 2 Post sanctioned vs. post filled with Anganwadi helpers (in Lakh) as per the report of PIB Delhi, 12th July 2019

The new National Education Policy 2020 plans to implement the ECCE programme through the network of Anganwadi centers, as section 1.5 of National Education Policy 2020 of the Government of India envisages that

“For universal access to ECCE, 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. Children in Anganwadi Centres shall take activity-filled tours and meet the teachers and students of their local primary schools to make the transition from Anganwadi Centres to primary schools a smooth one. 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 programs and vice versa”.

Further about the implementation of ECCE through Anganwadi centers, NEP 2020 plans

“To prepare an initial cadre of high-quality ECCE teachers in Anganwadis, current Anganwadi workers/teachers will be trained through a systematic effort in accordance with the curricular/pedagogical framework developed by NCERT. Anganwadi workers/teachers with qualifications of 10+2 and above shall be given a 6-month certificate program 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. These programs may be 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 (NEP, 2020).”

As a measure to achieve universalization of early childhood care and education, the National Education Policy commits further that universal 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 (NEP, 2020, pp-7). NEP 2020 assures the implementation of the policy by developing a National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for
Early Childhood Care and Education (NCPFECCE) for children up to the age of 8 years divided into two parts, one for children up to 3 years of age and the other for kids 3–8-year-olds which will serve as a guide both for parents and early childhood care and education institutions (NEP, 2020). As previously, early childhood care and education were not part of the school curriculum the policy has planned to implement it in a phased manner. Further, it mentions that priority will be given to districts and locations that are particularly socio-economically disadvantaged.

Challenges towards Implementation of ECCE in India:

As the research article has been focused on challenges towards implementing the ECCE program in India as promised in NEP 2020, the analysis of challenges ahead has been mentioned in the following paragraphs.

Immediate appointment of Anganwadi helpers and Anganwadi workers:
The first challenge of the Government of India is to fill around two lakhs of the sanctioned post at existing Aanganwadi centers, which is not an easy task. The budget needs to be allocated for this and will be time-consuming. Furthermore, the existing workforce is not sufficient to foster the needs of the eligible population. Instead, an entire system needs to be restructured in the context of the eligible population, and more staff is needed accordingly. Rural areas need to be focused on as the population of children is higher in rural areas than in urban ones.

Including one teacher trained in ECCE at All Anganwadis: There is no teacher at Aanganwadi centers in the present structure. If govt. has to focus on quality ECCE, at least one teacher trained in ECCE to be appointed at each Aanganwadi center and thus it requires about 15 lakh teachers to be appointed at existing centers trained in ECCE which is a marathon task, and it needs at least five years if 3 lakh teachers are appointed each year.

Training of existing workforce at Anganwadi in ECCE along with an orientation of ECSE and EI: At present most of the staff at Aanganwadi centers (AWCs) are not trained even in early childhood care and education as AWCs were working under ICDS scheme, which was mainly focused on health promotion and not towards education. Early childhood care and education are now included in the policy. Thus, there is an urgent need to appoint trained staff and provide training to the existing staff. As NEP 2020 plans for it, current Anganwadi workers/teachers will be given training aligned with the framework developed by NCERT (NEP, 2020). A six-month program in ECCE is proposed for those with senior secondary qualifications and a one-year diploma for those with lower qualifications. These in-service training will be provided in blended mode and will be mentored by the Cluster Resource Centres of the School Education Department, which will provide face-to-face contact classes. At first glance, it seems an easy task, but that is not the case. Providing training in ECCE for such a high number of trainees will require careful planning to ensure quality training; otherwise, the efforts will go in vain.

Ensuring inclusion of children with disabilities and children from SEDG's: The national education policy 2020 of India has a prime focus on the education...
of children with disabilities, but at Anganwadi centers (AWCs), there is no specific provision of early stimulation, early intervention, or early childhood special education. National Education Policy 2020 of India has promised inclusive education at all levels, either school education level or higher education level but made provisions for ECCE and not for early childhood care and special education and early intervention needed for children with disabilities. In the absence of appropriate provisions of ECSE and Early intervention services at Aangawadi centers or primary schools, the effective implementation of ECCE will not work, and children belonging to the disability category or SEDG's will continue to be out of the mainstream and marginalized. The government needs to focus on early childhood care and special education along with ECCE. The easiest solution is to appoint special educators to all the primary schools to identify disabilities, early intervention, and early referral. Staff and materials related to early stimulation and provision of early intervention at each Anganwadi center is essential for the effective implementation of NEP 2020.

India is home to the largest child population in the world. The constitution of India guarantees fundamental rights to all children in the country and empowers the State to make special provisions for children. The Census 2011 showed that 20.42 lakhs children aged 0-6 years are disabled in India, which constitutes 1.24% of all 0-6 years age group children. The NEP 2020 affirms that it is in complete consonance with the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 and accepts it is all provisions but making things more complex neither of these talks about early intervention services, which are very important for improvement in a child with disability. The government dilutes the focus towards disability by introducing a common term for all Socio-Economic Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs). In our opinion, children with disabilities or developmental delays should be given specific attention as having a diverse group in itself. In order to make all ECCE centers inclusive one, early intervention services also required and further acts and rules to be formulated to foster the need of children with developmental delays otherwise universalization of early childhood care and education will only be a daydream.

Early childhood care and education (ECCE) differs from early childhood care and special education (ECSE) in many aspects. An ECCE institution does not need early identification and screening tools and trained staff in identification and screening, whereas an ECSE center requires such facilities and specially trained staff. An ECCE center needs curriculum, activities, and materials to facilitate early cognitive socio-emotional development.

In contrast, an ECSE center needs a specific curriculum, activities, materials, and specially trained staff in early childhood care and special education to overcome the effects of developmental delays on the children at risk. It is also doubtful that a one-year diploma or six-month certificate course in ECCE either through regular or open and distance learning mode will cover various aspects of ECSE well enough. Millennium Development Goals can only be achieved by ensuring quality ECCE and ECSE program for completion of primary schooling of the eligible population and this purpose, governments
and civil society need to have a cost-effective ECCE programme (Engle et al., 2007).

Challenges towards early intervention services:

An early intervention service does not include early childhood care and education. Rather, it begins with several screening and identification procedures, early stimulation exercises and activities, and includes several other aspects like comprehensive therapies as per the individual child's need: physiotherapy, occupational therapy, or any other such therapies. In addition to all these, early intervention services require the provision of assistive and adaptive devices, several need-based medical and surgical interventions, parental training, guidance, counseling, and family support plans. The Associations of People with Disabilities have estimated it, India (APD India, n.d.), 2020 that according to the 2011 disability census in India, 7.01% of children aged 0-6 years have some disability. The figure will now be very high after Census 2021 because RPWD Act 2016 has been enacted covering 21 conditions as a disability instead of seven conditions as mentioned in the PwD Act 1995.

Problem with creating a trained workforce for ECCE

The knowledge, work experience, pedagogical skills of workforce involved in early childhood workers are the determinants of a successful and effective ECCE as well as an ECSE program (Sheridan et al., 2009). The task of teacher's training for ECCE is not so easy (Al-Hassan, 2020; Fadlillah et al., 2020; MoHFW, 2020; Soekmono, 2017), although commitments have been made in the policy to utilize online as well as open and distance learning systems for it. On the issue of how the early childhood care and education will be implemented, the NEP 2020 responds that it shall be delivered through a fourfold system: (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, and all of these institutions would recruit workers/teachers specially trained in the curriculum and pedagogy of ECCE (NEP, 2020). As far as teacher training in ECCE is concerned, there is a plan of several certificates and diploma courses through open and distance learning / online mode. Commitments have been made to ensure that implementation of early childhood care and education curriculum will be carried out jointly by the Ministry of HRD (Now Ministry of Education), Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (HFW), and the Ministry of Tribal Affairs. Coordination between ministries is an essential component, but most of the ECCE program in India is governed through Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), which includes many health-related services with a smaller number of ECCE experts involved in planning primarily health professionals are associated with it. Coordination between ministries will improve the quality of the ECCE program in India, but this is also not an easy task due to administrative difficulties.

Developing curriculum for ECCE: The development of curriculum for ECCE in India is also not an easy task as it involves a blend of age-appropriate,
culture-specific, pleasurable, and nourishing activities with sufficient materials. ECCE curriculum theory and practice is a debatable issue worldwide (Wood & Hedges, 2016); however, it is expected that the NCERT having very long experience and expertise, will develop a balanced ECCE curriculum. Before including the ECCE in National Education Policy 2020 by the ministry of education in India, the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) announced an Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) policy on 27th September 2013 (MWCD, n.d.-b) followed by a National Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (MWCD, n.d.-a) which focused more on children health than education. In further developments, the National Education Policy 2020, section 1.3 states that

"National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (NCPFECCE) 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 (NEP 2020)"

This suggests that a new ECCE curricular framework is to be developed shortly other than the Ministry of Women and Child framework. The responsibility has been shifted to the National Council of Educational Research and Training, and ECCE became a part of the Ministry of Education. There are chances of clashes among ministries upon the curriculum and upon implementation of ECCE until proper coordination has been made to create a holistic curriculum in collaboration with different ministries.

At first glance, the National Education Policy 2020 of India looks pretty consistent with World’s Education agenda, and for the first time, efforts have been made to integrate ECCE in the national education policy. However, its practical implementation matters and the practical implementation needs a careful watch on the existing mechanism, strengthening them, creating new infrastructure, providing in-service training, and appointing trained staff, which will be significant challenges ahead. Making the ECCE program inclusive will need its implementation consistent with the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016. Then, only will it be able to create an inclusive society as promised.

References


Figure 3. Old structure of school education in India prior to 2020

10 Years of Schooling (6 Years - 16 Years)
(Formal schooling starts from 6 years)

Figure 4. New proposed structure of school education in NEP 2020

Secondary
4 Years
Classes: 9th-12th
Ages 14-18 Years

Middle
3 Years
Classes 6th-8th
Ages 11-14 Years

Preparatory
3 Years
Classes 3rd-5th
Ages 8-11 Years

Foundational
2 Years
Classes 1-2
Ages 5-6 Years

Balwatika

Ages 3-5 Years

10 Years of Schooling (6 Years - 16 Years)
(Formal schooling starts from 6 years)
**Figure 3.** Number of children below 6 years eligible for ECCE Census 2011 and Census 2001 comparison

![Bar chart showing the number of children below 6 years (crores) in India for 2001 and 2011. Year 2001 has 16.45 crores and Year 2011 has 15.87 crores.](image)

**Figure 5.** Children of 0-6 years in India as per their geographical location

![Pie chart showing the distribution of children (0-6) in India by geographical location. Rural children are represented with a dotted line and Urban children with a solid line.](image)
Figure 6. Post sanctioned vs Post filled of Anganbadi workers (in Lakh) as per the report of PIB Delhi, 12th July 2019

![Bar chart showing the comparison between posts sanctioned vs in position Aanganbadi workers as of 12 July 2019 (in Lakh) (PIB India).]

Figure 7. Post sanctioned vs Post filled of Anganbadi helpers (in Lakh) as per the report of PIB Delhi, 12th July 2019

![Bar chart showing the comparison between posts sanctioned vs in position Aanganbadi helpers as of 12 July 2019 (in Lakh) (PIB India).]
Figure 7.

Status of drinking water facility and toilet facility at ICDS centers

- ICDS Centers without drinking water: 34%
- ICDS Centers without toilets: 50%