

RESEARCH NOTE

Early childhood care and education in India: a contextual analysis

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The Constitution of India envisages that early childhood care and education (ECCE) should be made available to the children up to the age of 6 Years. This Early childhood care and education (ECCE) was incorporated in the Constitution of India by 86th Constitutional amendment in the year 2002. Now this concept of ECCE is in the Directive Principle of State Policy in Chapter IV of the Constitution of India. The Constitution of India under its article 45 inculcated the provision of free and compulsory education up to the age of 14. Then after it gets its constitutional status under article 21 (A) which is incorporated in part III of Indian Constitution by the virtue of 86th Constitutional amendment. Thus, there is need to have a statutory back up to the provision of ECCE in article 45. ECCE, being a broader area of activity covers the physical, intellectual as well as psychological development of the child. Right of the Children for Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 is unique one under which the ECCE is coming. Being a key concept for the successful transition of the child from pre-primary to primary education, ECCE is overlooked by the states. It defuses the perennial root cause for the failure of primary education in India as it has enough potential to prepare the children to attend primary education in the subsequent stage. In view of the significant role of ECCE in realising the rights of the children, there is a need to provide a statutory back up to the provision of the ECCE in India so that it can be realised in a right based

legal frame work.

By giving a statutory back up to the ECCE, it will be an enabling condition to secure access to primary education as zero to 6 years of age of the child's life is considered as the most crucial one for the all round development of the child. It is therefore, the need of the hour to widen the scope of ECCE for the betterment of the child's physical, social as well as Psychological development. The section 11 of the Right of the Children for Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 has strictly instructed the states to implement the Pre School provisions in their concerned State rules and implement them properly but it is all in vain.

Early childhood care and education refers to programmes intended to provide care for children until they complete 6 years of age. It includes all round development of the child including cognitive development, language development, and social development, psycho-motor development etc. It is an opportunity for the readiness of the children to attend the formal (primary) education. Thus, it focuses the importance of pre-primary education and care environment where health and nutrition are given adequate attention which contains the root things of early childhood care and education.

The concept of ECCE is understood as an integrated package of measures laid by the Government of India for the fulfillment of the young children.

These rights are recognized by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child (UNCRC) which the Government of India ratified in 1992. The United Nations Convention on the rights of the child given maximum emphasis that early childhood care and education has its root in a rights based approach to the system of service for the young children especially the children from the age group of 3-6 years.

Thus, the Government should address the rights of the children in a holistic way so that their rights to education, health, nutrition, protection, affection etc. Early childhood care and education combines the elements from the field of child development, early childhood education, stimulation, health, nutrition, community development, parent education etc.

Significance of ECCE :

Early childhood care and education encompasses a variety of services relating to health, nutrition, education, health check up, immunization etc as all these are essential for all round development of the children. The early childhood care and education (pre-primary education) containing health, nutrition, education should be given adequate attention.

The national policy on education has given maximum emphasis upon ECCE. As per national policy on education, ECCE is important to inculcate in the means of human resource development. It has also recommended for strengthening the ECCE as an important aspect of human development and will help in ensuring universalisation of Elementary education. Looking in to different aspects, a legal status should be given to ECCE as a result of which the mission, vision and goal can be realised properly.

Early childhood can be considered as the basis or the foundation in human life. At this stage, the foundation to adult life is laid where the personality and character of a child gets moulded. Research finds that, about 80 per cent of the personality characteristics observable in men or women develop during the early childhood years. According to the brain cells, which affect the whole life of a man or woman, are developed before the end of five years during Early childhood. It has also been revealed that quality development of at about 60 per cent of his intelligence is developed during these years. At the end of early childhood, a child will acquire language skills and also skills such as walking, jumping, playing and to live "alone" doing his work by himself. Accordingly the early childhood is significant as a critical stage, which cannot be compared to any other stage in life as it lays the foundation for aspects of human life.

According to new research in the fields of education and Psychology mal-nutrition, under-development and poor health contributes to backwardness in learning and low

intelligence during formal schooling. It is therefore necessary to provide a child in the early childhood years not only the required nutrition and adequate health facilities but also care, love, protection, enthusiasm, pleasant-ness and a favorable social environment. Educational psychologists have indicated that the child who does not receive these basic requirements will not have opportunity to develop their personality and at a later stage in their life will be subjected to various mental ailments, in addition to grade repetition, and backwardness in learning which would be difficult to avoid. At the International Conference on "Education for All" held in 1990 the meaning of the two words "Basic Education" was broadened to include the educational needs in the Early Childhood years and as such, according to the Work Plan adopted at this Conference, the pre conditions of Quality Development, equality, and efficiency have been accepted.

Why ECCE is essential :

Since 1990, the UNCRC, ECCE implies a comprehensive service meant for holistic development of the child before 6 years, the period when the child is ready for going to receive primary education. Behavioural and scientific research proves that the initial development of the brain takes place during the first few years of the life. The essentiality of early childhood Care and education for the inclusion in the Constitution of India from Directive principles of State policy to Fundamental Rights category.

The World Declaration on Education for All (UNESCO) in 1990 also agreed up on this. In spite of the Constitutional recognition to Early Childhood Care and Education right through 86th Constitutional amendment, the goal of ECCE is still a far cry. On the other hand ECCE which is coming under the directive principle of state policy is non-justifiable in nature. Thus, it shall be the duty of the state to place it under fundamental rights category.

As three to six years of age in every child's life is crucial period and he picks up every things during this stage and observe it accordingly. ECCE should to ascertain a legal status in India under Article 45 of Indian Constitution in conformity with UNCRC. It should discover the laws, policies and plan of action prepared by the Govt. of India in relation to ECCE and to explore the present legal status. Maximum development takes place during this period, thus proper care and service will be provided during pre-school period, a child will develop in all aspect be it physical, mental or, psychological.

This will lead to decrease the retention and drop out rate. It confirms that early development of the child takes place in the first few years of the child. It enhances social, psychological, physical, emotional, language development and cognitive development of the child. It was accepted in the World Declaration on Education for all (UNESCO) in

the year 1990. The importance of early childhood care and education was felt in India when India ratified the Convention of the Rights of the child.

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