



Early childhood care and Education - A National Policy

Dr. Neeta Deshmukh
Asst. Prof. Home Science
DAVV MSD Girls College,
Indore, Madhya Pradesh, India

Abstract

The first six of life are critical year of human life since the rate of development in these years is more rapid than at any other stage of development, Global brain research also informs us about the significance of early years of brain development. Early childhood care and education (ECCE) makes a positive contribution to children's long term development and learning by facilitating an enabling and stimulating environment in these foundation stages of lifelong learning.

Introduction

India has 158.7 million children in the 0.6 years age group (census 2011) and the challenges of catering to this important segment of population for ensuring the holistic development of children in the country are well acknowledged.

the national early childhood care and education (ECCE) policy reaffirms the commitment of the government of India to provide integrated services for Holistic development of all children along the continuum, from the period to six year of age. The policy lays down the way forward for a comprehensive approach towards ensuring a sound foundation for survival, growth and development of child with focus on care and early learning for every child.

Objectives of ECCE policy

1 Facilitate comprehensive childcare supports. Infrastructure and services aimed at holistic well being of children and responsive to their developmental needs along the continuum of care from conception to age six.

2 Universalize and reinforce ECCE and ensure adaptive strategies for inclusion of all children with specific attention to vulnerable children.

3 Engage capable human resources and build their capacity to enhance and develop quality services for children and their families.

4 Raise awareness and create common understanding about the significance of ECCE.

5 Enhance scope for over all personality development.

Need for the Policy

1 Social Context

India has a tradition of valuing the early years of child's life and rich a heritage of practices for stimulating development and inculcating "Sanskaras" or basic values and social skill in children. However there have been changes in the family as well as social context in the last few decades. Besides there is a globally emerging realization of the importance of early years.

2 Policy Context

A) The government of India recognized the significance of ECCE, through the amended article 45 of Indian constitution which directs that "the state shall Endeavour to provide ECCE for all children until they complete the age of 6 years.

B) The right of children to free and compulsory education Act (RTE) which come into effect from April 1 2010 has also addressed ECCE under section 11 of the act which states with a view 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 years. ECCE has received attention in the National Policy for children (1974) consequent to which the integrated child



development services (ICDS) was initiated on a pilot basis in 1975 with the objective of laying the foundation for holistic and integrated development of child.

National policy nutrition (1993) has also recommended interventions for child care and nutrition during early childhood. The national Health policy (2002) and National plan of Action for children (2005) along with position paper on ECCE in the National curriculum Framework (2005) have also been supportive policy initiatives for early childhood.

Programmer Context

ECCE services are delivered through public, private and nongovernmental service providers.

The public channel is the largest provider of ECCE services, historically through integrated child development services (ICS3) which is the world's largest programmer mended to provide ECCE.

The Rajiv Gandhi National crèche scheme for working mothers offers care and education services for children below 6 years of age and figures for 2011-12 indicate that a total of 23,785 crèches (MWCD) Annual Report 201112 are operational across the county. Statutory crèche services include crèches legally mandated under laws and act such as a The mines act 1952(b) Factories (Amendment Act 1987 c) plantations labor Act (1951 d) building and other construction worker's Act 1996. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (2005).

There is a need to harmonies the activities of all these service provides, in accordance with service delivery norms, standards and regulations. The primary responsibility for this lies with the Government.

Key Areas of the policy

The policy focuses on the following key areas to achieve the objectives-

A) Access with equity and inclusion in programmers and interventions across service providers.

B) Improving quality (minimum specifications quality standards regulations, curriculum play and learning material programmer assessment and child assessment)

C) Strengthened capacity (institutions, personnel, families and communities).

D) Monitoring and Supervision

E) Research and documentation

F) Advocacy and awareness generation.

G) Convergence and coordination among policies and programmers.

H) Institutional and Implementation arrangements (ECCE cell, National ECCE council, plans of action).

Strengthening Capacity

In view of the huge gap in the availability of trained human resource the government shall develop a proactive plan for strengthening existing training institutes for early childhood development like National institute for public corporation and child development (NIPCCD), including its Regional centers and its outreach institutes like Anganwadi workers training centers (AWTCs), Middle Level Training Centers (MLTCs) and establishing new ones wherever necessary, within a stipulated time frame. Similarly, other institutes like National council for Educational Research And Training (NCERT), District institute of education and Training (DIETs) etc.

Research Evaluation and Documentation- Link between policy, research and practice well be strengthened funds will be allocated for substantive research in the area of early childhood including longitudinal studies tracking children from the earliest years.

Institutional and Implementation Arrangements- The nodal ministry for overseeing the ECCE programmer and services will be the ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) along with its state level counterpart departments.

Increased Investment towards Early childhood care and education-Evidence indicates highest rate of return on investments made to improve child well



being in the early years of childhood. Government commits to increase the aggregate spending on quality ECCE interventions.

Early childhood (from conception to 6 years) and ECCE budgeting would serve as an important dimension to assess investment in early year. The exercise of disaggregated child budgeting for early childhood may be carried out regularly so as to take stock of investments for children and to identify gaps in resource investment and utilization. This would also assess child development outcomes.

References

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