



ISSN 2278 – 0211 (Online)

Right to Education (RTE) in Context with Pre-schooling (ECCE)

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Abstract:

The Indian Landscape saw significant developments during the 11th plan. There was a surge in school enrollments and gender and social category gap in enrollments narrowed considerably.

The most significant development, however was that article 21-A, inserted in the constitution of India through the constitution (86th Amendment) Act, 2002 to make elementary education as fundamental right and its consequential legislation, the right of children to free and compulsory education (RTE) Act 2009 become operative on 1st April 2010. The chapter V of RTE Act enumerates terms and norms, adequate teacher student ratio mother tongue as medium of instruction, development of various skills in child, good infrastructure in school and pre-schooling etc. These can be achieved only when the school education system as a whole works responsibly.

The National Policy of Education, 1986/92 as acknowledged Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) for children 3-5 years. ECCE is visualized as an integrated, holistic programme for children who include provisions of education, care, health and nutrition. It has the positive effect of children's retention and attendance. It can therefore serve as a very effective investment for realizing the vision of RTE. Therefore it is imperative to assess the status of implementation of RTE Act in context with ECCE, its practical constraints, concerns and challenges.

Keywords: Right to Education, Early childhood Education, Preschooling.

1. Introduction

The primary aim of Government of India is to provide free and compulsory Education between the ages of 6 to 14 years. It could be achieved by providing enrollment, access, retention and quality Education. Recently ASER (Annual School Education Report) 2014, 10th survey report has revealed that only 20 to 25 percent of 3 R'S have achieved through out India. The experts feel that there is some missing link, majority of them said that the pre schooling system is not properly focused by Govt. of India. The RTE Act 2009 has also not pronounced any responsibility to Central Government to take steps for the betterment of pre schooling. Hence this topic has greater significations to discuss the issues of pre schooling in India.

2. Objectives of the Theme

- To understand the concept of pre-schooling.
- To examine the provisions of Right to Education Act in the present context of ECCE.
- To study the implementation of Right to Education Act in relation with pre-schooling.
- To discuss various problems and issues related to pre-schooling.
- To study the monitoring, evaluation and convergence for the effective implementation of RTE in context with ECCE.

Introduction of Preschool Education:

The National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) policy reaffirms the commitment of GOI to provide integrated services for holistic development of all children along the continuum from the prenatal to six years of age. The policy lays down the way forward for a comprehensive approach towards ensuring a sound foundation, with focus on early learning for every Indian child.

3. Preamble

According to the draft national early childhood care and education policy refers early childhood to the first 6 years of life. This is acknowledged as the most crucial period when the rate of development is very high and foundations are laid for cumulative lifelong learning and human development. There is growing scientific evidence the development of the brain in the early years is a pathway that affects physical growth and mental health, learning and behavior throughout the life cycle.

4. Definition of ECCE

For the purpose of this policy and the actions their under. ECCE refers to programs and provisions for children from Prenatal to six years of age which cater the needs of a child in all domains of development i.e., Physical, motor, language, cognitive, social, emotional, creative and aesthetic appreciation and ensure synergy with help and nutrition aspects. This would cover developmental priorities for each sub-stage with in the continuum i.e., care, early stimulation/interaction needs for children below three years and developmentally appropriate preschool education for 3 to 6 year olds with a more structured and planned school readiness component for 5 to 6 year olds.

This policy is thus applicable to all early childhood care and education programs related services in public, private and voluntary sectors in all setting across regions that are offered to children under six years. These services could go by the nomenclature of Anganwadis, Crèches, play groups/schools, preschools, nursery schools, kindergartens, preparatory schools, Balwadi, home based care etc., and purpose to catch the needs of children from prenatal to six years.

5. Provision of RTE in Relation with ECCE

The right of children to free and compulsory education act (RTE-2009) which came into effect form 1st April, 2010 has also addressed ECCE under section 11 of the act which states “with a view to prepare children above 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. The appropriate government may make necessary arrangements for providing free preschool education for such children.”

6. Preschool Education in the 11th Plan

There have been some significant developments in the course of the 11th plan which have implications for preschool education. In 2006 at the policy level the subject of ECCE in the business allocation rules was shifted in GOI from MHRD to MWCD (Ministry of Woman and Child Development). Subsequently a major landmark in the last few years has been the enactment of RTE act which came into effect from 1st April, 2010.

7. Current Status of Preschool Education in India

Over the course of the 11th plan there has been a quantum jump in preschool enrollment from 21% in 2005 to 47% in 2010 (UNESCO-2010). More recent ASER data (2010) indicates that 83.6% of three to six years olds in the rural areas are enrolled in some or the other preschool program including in the private schools. This is because to some extent this may be attributed to the rapid expansion of the integrated child development services (ICDS) and its Universalisation and alongside to the rapidly expanding private provisions even in tribal and rural areas across many states.

In addition to this under the Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche scheme 22,038 crèches have been sanctioned by the GOI (MWCD-2011). SSA also supports 14,235 ECCE centres in non ICDS areas which cover approximately 4,86,605 children across the country in addition to this 11,367 ECCE centre in EBBS covering 92,523 children under the NPEGEL program as per June, 2011 report.

8. Analysis of Issues Concerns in Implementation of Preschool Education

While preschool enrollments have increased over the years, issues of quality, equity and capacity continue to be significant. The overriding concern is that a large number of children may be coming into primary schools without attending preschool or attending but not getting adequate preparation for the primary curriculum in terms of school readiness. Hence this situation invites an analysis of what are the issues that have lead to this status of preschool education.

9. Some Significant Issues are as Follows

1. Lack of appreciation and awareness at the public sector of the need for age appropriate interventions for children with in each sub-stage of early childhood in terms of growing needs and capacities.
2. Inadequate priority to preschool education in ICDS resulting in its perception universally as a nutrition program.
3. Absence of any guidelines, resource materials are standards of quality in preschool education which has to lead to a minimalist approach in public sector program and a laissez faire situation in private sector provision with developmentally in appropriate practices by way of downward extension of primary education.
4. Lack of institutional capacity in Preschool education.
5. Complete absence of MIS or data base on ECCE.
6. A major factors responsible for the issues persisting are that there has so far been no centrally sponsored scheme and dedicated funding for preschool education.

10. Recommendation in the 12 Five Years Plan

1. A major shift in the 12 five year plan is to extent RTE entitlement downwards to include the preschool stage of education.
2. It is recommended that preschool education for 4 to 6 years old should be brought into the fold of primary education as a school readiness program for children prior to their entering grade one.
3. All the states will be recommended to shift the age of entry to the grade one uniformly at the six years to aligned RTE stipulation.

4. Every primary school will have a pre-primary section for four to six years olds for which adequate resources will be apportioned to be able to provide a sound developmentally appropriate school readiness program of acceptable quality to children.
5. School readiness refers to certain cognitive and linguistic concepts and skills as well as positive disposition towards learning through play and activity and prepares the child to learn 3Rs more effectively. Later in their primary grades.
6. The concept of early learning unit will be introduced which would bring together the preprimary and early primary grades into an integrated units.
7. The NCERT model curriculum for diploma in ECE teacher education already reflects the integrated concepts as it covers teacher preparation for both preschool grade 1 and 2 in its scope.
8. The preschool education component will be included under SSA/RTE as a separate component with in a specific budget line which would within the ambit of the RTE.

11. Details of Intervention Recommended for Preschool

1. A regular teacher trained in preprimary education, school readiness and early literacy will be required.
2. Classroom for 25 children will be provided with adequate space, ventilation and storage facility for transacting activity based curriculum.
3. Appropriate toilets for small children and a separate secured outdoor space will be provided.
4. Learning materials, sitting mats, display arrangement, small work tables and few thematic activity corners should be provided.
5. Play way learning material will be provided.
6. Story books and activity books should be provided.
7. Audio visual equipment for language learning, rhymes and storytelling.
8. Midday meal and health care facility.
9. Transport and escort facility may be provided.
10. Training and continuous onside support and professional development of the educational stakeholders following will be supported.
11. Advocacy: A critical intervention in the context of preschool education will be the need to reach out to all stake holders including parents, community members, administrative personal and policy makers.
12. In NCERT, SCERT early learning curriculum and training units will be created strengthen and resources provided.
13. Monitoring and evaluation indicates will be developed and finalized and included in DISE system to cover and collect data on this stage of education as well in a meaningful and systematic manner.
14. Convergence: given that preschool education is located in the larger domain of ECCE, it will be important to develop in collaboration with MWCD and other related sectors effective mechanism for convergence in the planning and implementation of the programs.

12. Conclusion

As we know ECCE is visualized as an integrated holistic program for children include provisions of education, care, health and nutrition and it has the positive effect of children's retention and attendance. Whatever interventions we are providing for the achievement of quality education it is imparative to build a strong foundation for the learning. Hence The government of India has to focus and provide aide financially and institutionally to the domain of ECCE for the betterment of quality education through the ECCE in a meaningful and systematic manner.

13. References

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