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Research Paper

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) under NEP 2020: Prospects and Problems in Nagaland

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Abstract

Ministry of Education emphasizes education for empowerment, holistic development, critical thinking, and nation-building, focusing on creating skilled, innovative humans, promoting lifelong learning (reskilling/upskilling), and leveraging technology, all stemming from core values like curiosity and character development. Education is essential for fostering the development of our society. "Education is fundamental for achieving full human potential, developing an equitable and just society and promoting national development" (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020). In the 21st century, an important reformation in the field of education is the introduction of National Education Policy 2020. From several researches, it has been found that prior to 6 years of age over 85% of a child's cumulative brain development happens (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020). Recognizing this fact, NEP 2020 has brought a modified 5+3+3+4. In this paper, Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) will be discussed and implantation across Nagaland in relation to National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), including the importance of toys in childhood and how they can be used in the learning experiences of the children the period of early education.

Keywords: NEP 2020, Nagaland State Education, Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), Universal Provision.



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1 INTRODUCTION

Education is a most crucial tool for a country to accomplish its aims and objectives, such as economic growth and development, equitable wealth and income distribution, the eradication of unemployment and poverty, etc. Given the significance of education in a nation's socioeconomic and political development, any government, whether in a developed or developing nation, should prioritize educating all citizens. Since our constitution was adopted in 1950, basic education has been the main focus. Up until the age of 14, all Indian children are guaranteed free and compulsory education under the country's constitution. The primary education was prioritized within elementary education. Nevertheless, the District Elementary Education Program (DPEP) was limited to the elementary level before being expanded to the upper primary level. Once more, the entire field of basic education—that is, primary and upper primary education—has been covered under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). The goal of universal primary education remains unattainable despite all efforts, including increased government and corporate investment in

education as well as a rise in the number of schools and instructors. Nagaland is the 16th state in North East India, with effect from 1st December 1963, bordered by Assam to the west, Arunachal Pradesh and part of Assam to the north, Burma to the east, and Manipur to the south. Kohima is its capital, and Dimapur is the largest city, which is considered as commercial capital of Nagaland.

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) under NEP 2020 is a transformative step toward building a strong educational foundation in Nagaland. While it promises holistic child development, linguistic inclusion, and long-term socio-economic growth, its success is constrained by infrastructure deficits, teacher shortages, language diversity, and parental awareness issues. A flexible, locally adapted, and community-supported approach is crucial for achieving the goals of ECCE in Nagaland. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) refers to the holistic development of children from 3 to 8 years—covering physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and moral development. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recognizes ECCE as the foundation of lifelong learning and makes it a top national priority for universalization. In a state like Nagaland, with its tribal diversity, difficult terrain, scattered population, and linguistic plurality, ECCE holds immense promise but also faces serious challenges.

2 ECCE Provisions under NEP 2020

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 gives top priority to Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) and recognizes it as the foundation of lifelong learning and development. The major provisions are as follows:

2.1 Universal access to quality ECCE for all children (age 3–6)

The Universal access to quality Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) for children aged 3–6 years is a key priority of NEP 2020. In Nagaland, this means ensuring that every child, including those in remote and rural tribal areas, has access to safe, inclusive, and stimulating early learning environments through Anganwadi centres, pre-primary sections in schools, and community-based centres. Quality ECCE in this stage focuses on play-based learning, language development in the mother tongue, basic numeracy, health, nutrition, and social skills. However, achieving universal access in Nagaland faces challenges such as difficult terrain, scattered settlements, a shortage of trained ECCE workers, inadequate infrastructure, and limited learning materials in local languages. With proper government support, community involvement, teacher training, and infrastructure development, universal quality ECCE can significantly strengthen the foundation of education in the state.

2.2 Foundational Stage (3–8 years) under the 5+3+3+4 system

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 introduces a new 5+3+3+4 curricular structure, in which the Foundational Stage (3–8 years) is considered the most crucial phase of learning. In Nagaland, this stage includes three years of pre-school education (ages 3–6) through Anganwadi centres and pre-primary schools, followed by Classes 1 and 2 (ages 6–8) in formal schools. The focus of this stage is on play-based, activity-based, and experiential learning rather than rote memorization. It emphasizes the development of language, basic literacy, numeracy, physical, social, emotional, and moral skills in a joyful and stress-free environment. For Nagaland, this reform is especially important because many children are first-generation learners and come from linguistically diverse backgrounds. However, effective implementation requires well-trained teachers, child-friendly infrastructure, integration of Anganwadi with primary schools, and availability of learning materials in local languages. If implemented properly, the Foundational Stage can lay a strong educational foundation for children in Nagaland.

2.3 Play-based, activity-based, and discovery-oriented learning

Under NEP 2020, play-based, activity-based, and discovery-oriented learning forms the foundation of early education, and this approach is highly suitable for Nagaland's social, cultural, and natural environment. Children in Nagaland learn effectively through local games, folk songs, storytelling, nature walks, farming-related activities, and community interactions. Activity-based learning helps them develop language, numeracy, motor skills, cooperation, and creativity joyfully. Discovery-oriented learning encourages children to explore their surroundings, such as forests, rivers, plants, and animals, thereby strengthening curiosity, observation, and scientific thinking. This child-centred approach also respects

tribal culture and indigenous knowledge systems. However, successful implementation in Nagaland requires proper teacher training, adequate teaching-learning materials, and community participation. When implemented effectively, this approach can greatly improve early learning outcomes and reduce the fear of schooling among young children in Nagaland.

2.4 Mother tongue / local language as the medium of instruction

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 strongly recommends the use of the mother tongue or local language as the medium of instruction at least up to Class 5, and preferably till Class 8. In Nagaland, this provision is especially significant because children grow up speaking diverse tribal languages such as Ao, Angami, Sumi, Lotha, Konyak, Chakhesang, and many others. Teaching in the mother tongue helps young children understand concepts better, express themselves freely, develop confidence, and learn faster, as it connects school learning with their home environment. It also plays a crucial role in the preservation of tribal identity, culture, and indigenous knowledge. However, implementation in Nagaland faces several challenges, such as the absence of a single common language, a shortage of trained teachers in local languages, a lack of textbooks and learning materials in tribal languages, mixed-language classrooms, and strong parental preference for English-medium education. To overcome these issues, a flexible multilingual education model is required, where the mother tongue is used at the foundational stage, with a gradual transition to English as a link language. Community participation, teacher training in local languages, and development of bilingual textbooks are essential for the successful implementation of this policy in Nagaland.

2.5 Integration of Anganwadi centres with primary schools

The integration of Anganwadi centres with primary schools is a major reform proposed under NEP 2020 to strengthen the Foundational Stage (3–8 years) of education. In Nagaland, this integration aims to ensure a smooth transition from pre-school (Anganwadi) to formal schooling (Classes 1 and 2), providing continuity in learning, care, and support for young children. Through this integration, Anganwadi centres will function not only as nutrition and health centres but also as early learning hubs aligned with school curriculum and pedagogy.

This integration is particularly important in Nagaland's rural and remote villages, where Anganwadis often serve as the only early childhood education centres. Close coordination between Anganwadi workers and primary school teachers will help in sharing child progress records, planning age-appropriate activities, and ensuring holistic development. However, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, shortage of trained ECCE teachers, lack of common academic planning, and administrative coordination between departments may affect smooth implementation. With proper planning, training, and community involvement, the integration of Anganwadi centres with primary schools can significantly improve school readiness, learning continuity, and child development outcomes in Nagaland.

2.6 Training and professional development of Anganwadi workers

Under NEP 2020, the training and continuous professional development of Anganwadi workers are considered essential for the successful implementation of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). In Nagaland, Anganwadi workers play a crucial role in providing early learning, nutrition, and health support to children in rural and remote areas. NEP 2020 emphasizes that Anganwadi workers should be trained in child psychology, play-based pedagogy, early literacy and numeracy, classroom management, health and nutrition education, and the use of local language in teaching.

Regular in-service training, refresher courses, and capacity-building programmes through SCERT, DIETs, and other training institutions are necessary to upgrade their skills. However, in Nagaland, challenges such as limited access to training centres, language barriers, digital illiteracy, heavy workload, and low honorarium affect the quality of professional development. By providing systematic training, better incentives, digital support, and local-language-based training modules, Anganwadi workers can become confident and skilled ECCE educators, thereby significantly improving the quality of early childhood education in the state.

2.7 Development of a National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for ECCE (NCPFECCE)

The National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (NCPFECCE) was developed under the guidance of NEP 2020 to provide a common national framework for curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment for children aged 3–8 years. In Nagaland, the implementation of NCPFECCE aims to bring uniform quality, child-centred pedagogy, and holistic development across Anganwadi centres, pre-primary schools, and Classes 1 and 2.

The framework emphasizes play-based, activity-based, and discovery-oriented learning, integration of health, nutrition, and education, and the use of mother tongue/local language as the medium of instruction. For Nagaland, NCPFECCE also provides scope for the inclusion of local culture, tribal traditions, indigenous knowledge, folk songs, stories, and community practices in early childhood education. However, its implementation faces challenges such as a lack of trained ECCE educators, inadequate infrastructure, a shortage of localized learning materials, and linguistic diversity. With proper teacher training, adaptation of curriculum to local context, community participation, and government support, NCPFECCE can play a transformative role in strengthening the foundational learning stage in Nagaland.

3 Problems and Challenges of ECCE Implementation in Nagaland

(a) Geographical and Infrastructural Challenges

- Many villages are:
 1. Remote
 2. Hilly
 3. Difficult to access
- Problems include:
 1. Poor school buildings
 2. Lack of toilets, drinking water, and electricity
 3. Inadequate play and learning materials

(b) Shortage of Trained ECCE Teachers

- Most Anganwadi workers lack professional ECCE training.
- Limited access to:
 1. Regular in-service training
 2. Digital training platforms
- Language barrier during training for many workers.

(c) Language Diversity and Medium of Instruction

- Nagaland has many tribal languages, but:
 1. No single common mother tongue
 2. Lack of textbooks and TLMs in local languages
 3. Mixed-language classrooms are common
- Parents often prefer English-medium education, creating conflict with NEP recommendations.

(d) Low Awareness among Parents

- Many parents:
 1. Do not understand the importance of ECCE
 2. See pre-school as only a childcare centre
- Irregular attendance of children is common in rural areas.

(e) Digital Divide

NEP encourages digital support for ECCE, but:

1. Internet connectivity is poor in many areas
2. Lack of smartphones, tablets, and electricity
3. Low digital literacy of Anganwadi workers

(f) Financial and Administrative Constraints

- Limited state budget for:
 1. Infrastructure improvement
 2. Teaching-learning materials
 3. Nutrition and healthcare
- Weak coordination among:
 1. School Education Department
 2. Social Welfare Department
 3. Health Department

4 Language Issues in ECCE in Nagaland

- Children speak tribal dialects at home, but schooling often begins in English.
- This leads to:
 1. Learning difficulties
 2. Fear and low confidence
- Lack of standardized scripts, dictionaries, and reading materials in many Naga languages.
- Shortage of teachers fluent in both the local language and pedagogy.

5 Suggestions for Effective Implementation of ECCE in Nagaland

The Effective implementation of ECCE in Nagaland requires strengthening Anganwadi infrastructure with safe buildings, clean water, toilets, and play materials, along with regular training and professional development of Anganwadi workers in child psychology, play-based pedagogy, early literacy and numeracy, and health and nutrition. The use of mother tongue and local culture in teaching through folk songs, stories, and community activities should be promoted to ensure better learning and cultural relevance. Anganwadi centres must be academically integrated with nearby primary schools for smooth transition to formal schooling, while active community and parent participation through village committees, churches, and NGOs should be encouraged. Improved honorarium, job security, and incentives for Anganwadi workers will increase motivation, and digital tools should be used for monitoring, training, and child tracking. Finally, strong coordination among the education, health, and social welfare departments, with special focus on remote and tribal areas, is essential to ensure holistic development and universal access to quality ECCE in Nagaland.

Conclusion

ECCE under NEP 2020 offers a golden opportunity to strengthen the foundation of education in Nagaland. It can enhance learning outcomes, reduce inequalities, preserve tribal languages, and promote holistic development. However, geographical isolation, language diversity, lack of trained manpower, infrastructure gaps, and limited awareness pose serious challenges. For successful implementation, community-driven, culturally responsive, and flexible strategies are essential.

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