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Research Article

NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020; RESTRUCTURING OF EDUCATION SYSTEM WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

A paradigm shift is proposed in Indian Education system under National Educational Policy 2020 and strengthening of early childhood care and education is one of the key features of the policy. In an effort to reform the educational process as per the demand of contemporary times the concepts like foundational literacy and numeracy are being introduced. The promotion of regional language is also an attempt to reduce the burden of students and facilitate learning to its maximum extent. Training of teachers is also an important component under policy so that a trained taskforce can be created to impart high quality early childhood education.

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INTRODUCTION

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recognizes the critical importance of early childhood education and highlights its significance in the overall development of children. The policy emphasizes the need to provide quality early childhood education to every child, as it lays the foundation for lifelong learning, holistic development, and societal well-being. Early childhood education also holds immense importance in the life of individuals as it plays a vital role in school readiness, socialization, emotional well-being, equity, inclusion, and fostering a lifelong love for learning. By recognizing the significance of early childhood education, NEP 2020 emphasizes the need to provide quality early education programs that lay the groundwork for children's future success and contribute to the overall well-being of individuals and society.

Importance of Quality-Based Early Childhood Care and Education

Early child education and care has always been considered an area of paramount importance in the field of education. Various Western and Indian educational philosophers have proposed different notions to promote stimulation for learning and value-based education among children. Further the different teaching methods were proposed and adopted by school systems from time to time to provide quality-based early childhood care and

education worldwide, the Nursery school system, Kindergarten, Montessori etc., to name a few. The private education of India is dominated by these educational philosophies, however, the concept of Anganwadi and Balwadi has been introduced in the government education system to cater to the educational needs of the early childhood age group.

As far as the importance of quality-based early education and care is concerned the findings of various researches highlight that high-quality early childhood education, not only helps in building a foundation for school readiness but it also helps in cultivating interest in education. Montie *et al.*, (2005) conducted a longitudinal study to observe the impact of high-quality early childhood education. Findings showed that the participants who received high-quality early childhood education had higher educational attainment, better employment outcome, and were less engaged in criminal activities as compared to the children who did not receive high-quality early childhood education. In a similar study Campbell *et al.*, (2012) also found that high-quality early childhood education is associated with better cognitive abilities, higher academic achievement, better socio-economic status, and less involvement in criminal activities. Likewise, most of the research concerning the field of early childhood care and education stresses the need for good quality education in the foundational to inculcate the love for learning among children instead of a love for grades.

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Early Childhood Education in National Education Policy, 2020
The National Education Policy 2020 of India is emphasizing upon restructuring of the entire education system of the country starting from pre-primary education to the Doctorate degree programme. It is noteworthy to mention that the area of early childhood care and education has been brought to the limelight in the policy with a special focus on school readiness, foundational literacy and numeracy, empowerment of Anganwadis, training of pre-school teachers, sensitization of parents and restructuring of curriculum. Further, the promotion of regional languages and indigenous educational systems are also the key features of the NEP, 2020.

As envisioned in the policy that education is a very powerful tool for social mobility. So to ensure that every child will have equal access to education, the concept of inclusive education is also being promoted for children with disabilities. Under this, the children with disabilities will get the opportunity to study with non-disabled children in the regular school system with necessary modifications in the physical environment of the schools. Inclusion of children with disabilities will not only prepare the children with disabilities for future challenges but the non-disabled children will also learn to accept the children with disabilities in the longer run as they are the part of their life since childhood. The idea of peer tutoring is also coined in the case of children with disabilities in the inclusive setting, which again can be very helpful in the social development of children at the school level.

CONCLUSION

Early childhood care and education is the first and foremost step in the process of education as the research-based evidence shows that a quality early childhood education lays the foundation for good academic achievement, and cognitive, social, and emotional skills among children. In India, several initiatives have been taken by the government from time to time to impart quality education among children but the area of early childhood care and education has never been the prime focus prior to NEP 2020. However, in NEP 2020 special emphasis is given to the area starting with the restructuring of the curriculum, promoting regional languages, introducing the concept of foundational literacy and numeracy, school readiness, and indigenous knowledge system. Inclusive education for children with disabilities is also promoted in the policy. To achieve these goals the capacity building of teachers and sensitization of parents is also proposed so that they can also participate in the process as important stakeholders.

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