



## ISSUES AND DIRECTIONS IN ECCE

Early childhood is a significant period which sets the base for later learning and development. During this time, the experiences and opportunities provided to children influence their development, especially that of the brain. So, ensuring access to quality and equitable early care and education becomes imperative.

The Incheon Declaration for Education 2030 also encourages the provision of at least one year of free and compulsory quality preschool education for all children. With this view, access to equitable and early investment in quality Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) services and programmes became vital in India. The initiatives taken by the Government of India clearly reflect the influence of and adherence to this global ECCE commitment. Recently, an all India educational survey conducted by the NCERT and NUEPA indicate the constant increase in the accessibility of ECCE services to all children. However, the surveys reveal that the quality of ECCE is at risk especially the education component for the age group of three to six years. The reasons behind them are the lack of age and developmentally appropriate curriculum, facilities, infrastructure, teaching learning material, resources, funds, qualified and trained teachers, standard assessment system, and convergence. Apart from this, predominance of formal teaching and rote memorization, inadequate attention to classroom arrangement and display, ignorance of age and developmental needs and capabilities of children, lack of community ownership, lack of hygienic and healthy habits etc. are critical issues. These need to be attended to and rectified at individual, institutional and government levels.



### LEARNING OUTCOMES

After studying this lesson, you will be able to:

- explain the issues in ECCE; and
- discuss the directions to address the issues in ECCE.

## 5.1 ISSUES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION

There are some critical issues which are not appropriately addressed, may be because we have compromised with the quality standards for ECCE both at the individual or the government level. These are not being addressed during planning, implementation and monitoring of the ECCE programmes. Let us study some of these issues in detail:

### 5.1.1 Process of Admission

There is not much clarity and transparency on the process of admission of children in ECCE centres in terms of date of admission, age for admission and correct admission procedure. It is observed that children are also being enrolled in preschools through formal tests especially in metropolitan and other big cities. This is being practiced perhaps due to the large number of applicants seeking admission in preschools. Such practices lead to rejection of children which may destroy their self-confidence and self-esteem at this tender age.

### 5.1.2 Infrastructure, Material and Classroom Environment

ECCE centres are lacking in age and developmentally appropriate equipment and play materials. Mostly, these are inadequate for the number of children enrolled in ECCE centres. The play material provided does not meet the criteria prescribed and are also not well maintained. In some cases, these materials are not safe and are not even appropriately used by the teachers. Apart from this, the classroom environment does not provide opportunities to the children to manipulate and explore the material for learning.

### 5.1.3 Teachers

Qualified and well - trained teachers are vital for the successful implementation of an ECCE programme. Issues with the teachers pertain to their qualification, appointment, salary and training/ capacity building. There are variations in the qualification of ECCE teachers appointed. They may be possessing Nursery Teachers Training (NTT) or Bachelors in Education (B.Ed.). Pre-service training courses such as NTT, diploma/ certificate courses are being run by the unregulated institutions mushrooming everywhere. Similarly, some regulated institutes are running various types of ECCE/NTT courses of varied duration not recognized by the appropriate authority. In-service training of teachers is one of the vital but neglected and underdeveloped area in the whole country. There are no provisions for capacity building of in-service ECCE teachers to help keep them abreast with the latest developments mainly with regard to the use of technology and teaching learning process.

Also, there are variations in pay norms for ECCE teachers and most are under-



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paid. Most of the ECCE centres are overcrowded and have only one teacher in each class.

#### 5.1.4 Teaching Learning Process

Teaching learning process in ECCE centres must be play and activity based. However, most centres adopt formal teaching methods, especially in the private sectors. Such methods provide very less scope for children to ask questions, experiment, explore and participate. Thus, making children only a passive recipient of information being provided by the teacher curbs their imagination and creative thinking skills.

Children learn best in their mother tongue. Despite knowing this, most ECCE centres use English to teach and interact with children. Due to this, children hardly find the opportunity to interact and express themselves freely.

Huge, boring and age- inappropriate homework provided by the preschools that burdens children is another significant issue. Children become pressurised and this practice robs the freedom of a child at home. Sometimes, this pressure is transferred to the parents as well.

Most ECCE centres do not follow appropriate assessment procedures for assessing children and their progress is invariably recorded through standardized tests and interviews.

#### 5.1.5 The Curriculum

The curriculum consists of all kinds of experiences planned to be organised for young children keeping in mind their characteristics, needs and development. Presently, there is no set curriculum for ECCE. However, Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) has developed a curriculum framework for ECCE which places children at the centre of teaching learning process and has suggested the play way approach for organising learning experiences of young children. Despite the availability of such guidelines, most ECCE centres are still struggling to align their pedagogy with this curriculum framework.

#### 5.1.6 Inclusion and Gender Equality

Inclusion and gender equality are issues which need to be addressed at an early stage of life. An inclusive preschool environment consists of an equitable and respectable environment for all children despite the existing differences among them. This kind of environment is essential for children to develop positive self-identities and a sense of belongingness. Also, formation of gender identity develops during the early childhood period. The teachers are generally not aware or trained to handle gender and inclusion issues during this period.



Concerted efforts at the government level and at the level of the ECCE centre are required to build an accessible and respectful environment for all children.

### 5.1.7 Administrative/ Management Issues

Administrative/ management issues are critical to the development and sustainability of an ECCE centre. These issues encompass the following:

- Monitoring and Supervision:** Monitoring and supervision system is most important aspect of the management/administration of an ECCE centre. However, it is also one of the weakest dimensions of ECCE programmes. There is no clear monitoring and supervision mechanism for ensuring the quality of ECCE centres at macro and micro level. The stakeholders such as teachers, parents, policy makers, educational planners and administrators are not aware of these mechanisms and their role at different levels. Hence, they are not able to contribute to the provision of quality ECCE centres.
- Regulatory Framework:** In order to ensure the quality of existing ECCE centres and to prevent mushrooming of unregulated ECCE centres, which do not meet the minimum standards of quality ECCE, a robust regulatory framework is imperative. However, there is no well-defined regulatory framework available both at the national and the state level. Some states have developed their state specific regulatory framework which may not be applicable in the context of other states. However, it is encouraging to know that the MWCD has constituted National ECCE Council though not functional but it is a step in the right direction.
- Convergence/Coordination:** There is a lack of a strong and consistent convergence/ coordination between governments leading to uncertainty about their roles and responsibilities. Similarly, different ministries and institutions address different needs of the children related to their education, care, health and safety. Thus, there is a strong need to build a strong and consistent convergence and coordination between institutions, concerned ministries and governments for different programmes and services for children.



### INTEXT QUESTIONS 5.1

Match column A with column B

Column A	Column B
(i) Convergence/coordination	a) Qualified and trained
(ii) Play materials	b) Play and activity based



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- |                                 |                               |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| (iii) Teaching learning process | c) Quality ECCE programmes    |
| (iv) Regulatory framework       | d) Adequate                   |
| (v) ECCE teachers               | e) Ministries and Governments |



### ACTIVITY 5.1

Discuss with parents in your neighborhood the issues and challenges being faced by them with respect to the education of their young children.

## 5.2 DIRECTIONS TO RESOLVE ISSUES

Till now, we have discussed some of the issues pertaining to various aspects of ECCE. Though these issues exist, it is possible to address them through combined efforts of all the stakeholders. These efforts will ensure accessibility of quality ECCE programmes to all children. In this context, some guidelines are given below as workable solutions to address the above mentioned issues.

### 5.2.1 Process of Admission

The date of admission, age of admission and process of enrolling children in a preschool differ from state to state. However, children are ready to enter a preschool programme on completion of three years of age by 31 March of an academic year. That is when children can handle anxiety of separation from family, develop some verbal competence, communicate basic needs and are toilet trained.

Further, there should be no use of evaluation/ interview/ interaction of children and parents at the time of admission as assessment tool for entry in a preschool. In order to save young children from the anxiety created through such tests, it is imperative to abolish the admission test. Some alternative methods such as first come first served basis or a randomized lottery system may be used for enrolling children.

Admission to children should not be denied on the grounds of religion, region, caste, race, sex, disability and socio-economic status of the family. Preference should be given to children living in the neighborhood.

### 5.2.2 Infrastructure, Material and Classroom Environment

The preschool centres must ensure safe and adequate indoor and outdoor space. A minimum of 300/450 sq. meters of outdoor space and 35 sq meters indoor space should be provided for a group of 25 children. The space must be



equipped with adequate number of age and developmentally appropriate teaching learning material. It should have adequate light, ventilation, safe drinking water, clean and child- friendly toilets. Provision of activity areas such as dolls, science, dance/ music, art etc. should be made. All these facilities should also accommodate children with disabilities.

### 5.2.3 Teachers, Qualification, Capacity Building and Salary

A teacher who has passed class XII and has a two year diploma in preschool education recognized by the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) must be appointed as a preschool teacher. All State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERTs) and District Institute of Education and Training (DIETs) must start pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes in all the states/ UTs. During their capacity building, teachers must be oriented about new developments and initiatives in ECCE.

The Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) is a statutory body established by the Government of India on 17 August, 1995. Its mandate is to develop and maintain the quality of teacher education system in the country, mainly through, regulation and maintenance of norms and standards. It has developed the curriculum for two years Diploma in Preschool Education (DPSE) and related norms and standards to regulate them.

The pay norms of ECCE teachers may be reviewed. The teachers must be paid well to attract committed and talented teachers. The salary of preschool teachers may be made at par with the salary of primary school teachers.

Maintaining teacher-child ratio is very important at preschool level because young children need more attention from adults. A fair teacher-child ratio contributes to better interaction between teacher and children. Thus, an appropriate teacher- child ratio i.e at least one teacher with a helper for 20-25 children of ages three to six years must be maintained.

### 5.2.4 Teaching Learning Process

#### a. Creating learning environment

A conducive classroom environment catering to the needs and interest of young children is an important factor leading to their engagement in the ECCE programmes and activities. Therefore, it is vital to pay attention to classroom environment and setting. Different activity areas must be designed in a way so as to provide ample opportunities to the children to explore the areas of their interest on a regular basis. Arrange the spaces to allow children to work individually, in small groups, or in large groups. Make sure that all equipment



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and materials in classroom are functional, easily accessible and safe. The classroom setting must promote interaction and encourage children to share, cooperate and help each other.

### **b. Method of teaching and instruction**

All the teaching learning process should be child-centred. The preschools must avoid formal system of teaching learning and thus should discourage rote memorisation. The learning experiences must be built around play, activities, experimentation and exploration. Children should be actively engaged in the process of learning. Children should be given ample opportunities to satisfy their curiosity and nurture their creativity, while teachers need to plan age and developmentally appropriate activities and material to facilitate learning.

### **c. Language of instruction**

Language of instruction in an ECCE centre must be the mother tongue. If there are children who speak mother tongue or the local dialect, the teacher must allow the use of as many languages as possible. This would help children express themselves, participate and learn from each other.

While promoting the mother tongue, teachers should provide exposure to school language to prepare children for later schooling. Hence, children should be encouraged to be proficient in their home language or mother tongue first, and then the school language may be introduced.

### **d. Homework**

Any kind of homework, especially written work, must be discouraged at the preschool level and at the early primary stage (classes I and II). However, children may be given some of the activities to do at home in consonance with the activities already done in the preschool to reinforce learning. Parents who demand homework must be made aware of the adverse effects of homework on children.

### **e. Assessment**

Children's progress should be assessed in a non-threatening manner on a regular and comprehensive basis through daily observation, play activities, interactions and anecdotes. These must be recorded or documented regularly. The assessment should be formative with a view to reinforce and enable the child to develop optimally. No child should be subjected to any formal tests or examinations, either written or oral. Assessment shall also be used for early identification and diagnosis of disabilities or developmental challenges in children.





### 5.2.5 Curriculum

The curriculum must provide age- and- developmentally appropriate learning experiences and opportunities to children so that they can understand themselves and the environment, think critically and solve their day-to-day problems. The curriculum must be play- based, ensure continuous learning, provide opportunities for interaction, ensure involvement of children and promote use of indigenous material; and offer pedagogy covering all domains of development. It should also respect the uniqueness, diversity of experiences and local-specific contexts of children. In the curriculum, the emphasis must be given on concrete experiences through interaction with and exploration of the environment, both physical and socio-cultural.

### 5.2.6 Inclusion and Gender Equality

Diversity in the classroom must be respected to promote equality. Efforts should be made to facilitate education of children with special needs. The preschool environment should be made accessible in terms of infrastructure and provision of required teaching learning material. Early diagnosis of any developmental delay in children is essential. Hence, the preschool administration may carry out the early developmental screening of all children so that timely intervention may be provided.

Preschool can also be a better place to break the gender stereotypes by providing inclusive and gender sensitive curriculum. Teachers should demonstrate equal and appropriate expectations from boys and girls. They should give equal attention and respect to them, and also promote equal opportunities. Play and other activities should be free of gender bias.

### 5.2.7 Administrative/ Management

#### a. Monitoring and supervision

Monitoring and supervision must focus on finding out the issues concerning ECCE and devising solutions to the identified problems. With the help of a strong monitoring mechanism, the aim of early childhood education can be realized to an extent. Here, the role of the head of the centre, supervisors and the School Management Committee (SMC) is crucial especially, where the ECCE centre is attached to the formal school. Thus, a robust system of monitoring and supervision must be developed and implemented at the national and state level to bring changes at the grassroot level.

#### b. Regulation

Regulation is one of the important ways to ensure the quality of ECCE centres.





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A standard regulatory mechanism for institutions offering ECCE programmes and teacher training is vital. This can be done by the constitution of a dedicated agency to monitor implementation of standards and by developing assessment tool for measuring standards. This can also be fostered by making the National ECCE Council formulated by the MWCD, fully functional. It is important to note that, the responsibility of developing and implementing learning standards and a regulatory framework lies with the government.

### c. Convergence/ coordination

The Government must work to build a strong and consistent convergence with different programmes, institutions and concerned Ministries to address multiple needs of children such as education, health, nutrition, safety and protection. For this purpose, different organisations and Ministries as per their nature of work must coordinate in terms of administrative, health, capacity building and monitoring/ supervision related functions.



### INTEXT QUESTIONS 5.2

1. Fill in the blanks:
  - (a) Children are ready to enter a preschool programme when they are able to \_\_\_\_\_.
  - (b) A minimum of \_\_\_\_sq meters indoor space should be provided for a group of \_\_\_\_ children.
  - (c) Diploma in Preschool Education must be recognized by the \_\_\_\_\_.
  - (d) Children learn best in their \_\_\_\_\_ tongue.
  - (e) The early childhood curriculum must provide \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ appropriate learning experiences.
2. State whether the following statements are true or false:
  - (a) Teachers should demonstrate equal and appropriate expectations from boys and girls.
  - (b) Government must discourage convergence with different programmes, institutions and concerned Ministries.
  - (c) Young children should be subjected to written or oral tests and examinations.
  - (d) Teachers should pay less attention to the classroom environment.



### ACTIVITY 5.2

Explore the Internet and find out the names of different Ministries working for the care and education of young children.



### WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

In this lesson, you have learnt:

- Issues related to:
  - admission process
  - infrastructure and classroom environment
  - teachers
  - teaching learning process
  - curriculum
  - inclusion and gender
  - administration
- Directions to resolve above-mentioned issues at the individual and institutional level.



### TERMINAL EXERCISE

1. Discuss briefly the prevalent issues in ECCE.
2. Suggest ways to resolve the prevalent issues in ECCE.
3. Describe the administrative issues in ECCE and the strategies to address them.
4. Discuss the issues related to the teaching learning process in ECCE.



### ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

#### 5.1

- (i) e)
- (ii) d)
- (iii) b)
- (iv) c)
- (v) a)

#### 5.2

1. (a) tackle separation anxiety from family/ developed some verbal competence/ communicates basic needs/ toilet trained



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- (b) 35, 25
- (c) NCTE
- (d) mother
- (e) age, developmentally

2. (a) True
- (b) False
- (c) False
- (d) False

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