

Early Childhood Care and Development: A Holistic Approach

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ABSTRACT

Children's physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development during their formative years is greatly influenced by Early Childhood Development and Care (ECDC). The early childhood period, generally from birth to six years, is considered the most critical stage for brain development and learning. This research paper aims to examine the significance of effective early childhood development and care in fostering holistic growth and preparing children for future educational and social experiences. The study highlights the importance of providing a nurturing, stimulating, and safe environment both at home and in educational institutions. It emphasizes the role of parents, caregivers, and teachers in supporting children's development through activities such as play-based learning, communication, health care, nutrition, physical activities, and creative expression. Still, the paper discusses the need for trained and compassionate educators who can understand the diverse needs of young learners and promote inclusive learning environments. Effective early childhood care also includes the development of social skills, moral values, and positive behaviour among children. The study relies on the current framework of early childhood development and care using secondary sources, including books, research articles, government reports, and educational programs. According to the research, children's long-term wellbeing and preparedness for formal education are greatly enhanced by high-quality early childhood programs. Therefore, laying a solid basis for lifetime learning and the advancement of society as a whole requires bolstering early childhood development and care services.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Early Childhood Care and Education, Pre-schools, Skills, Students.

Introduction

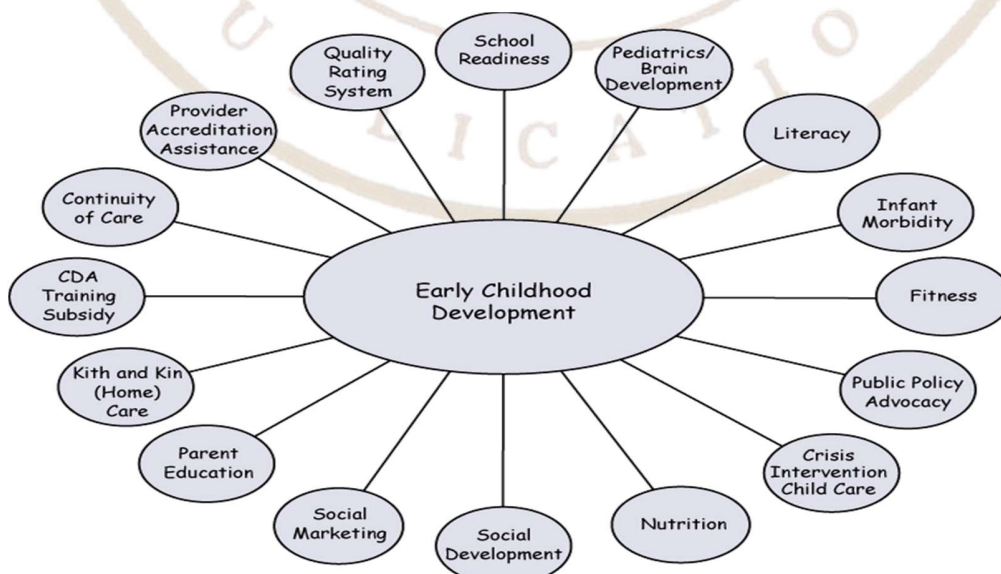
The years up until the age of eight are referred to as early childhood. Early childhood education is therefore given special attention till the child is eight years old. As a result, the kid can move from playgroup to pre-primary and from pre-primary to primary school with ease. The majority of early childhood education is delivered in a structured way. The program's participants, including the preschool teachers, must conduct themselves in an exhaustive and methodical manner. It must be effectively formatted and indicated. The term "care" is crucial in this situation. When imparting knowledge, comprehension, or information to students. Teachers need to embrace the traits of caring and concern because preschoolers are young, they require special attention in several areas, including education, play, health, emotional support, diet, and psychoanalysis. These are critical to the child's overall development. (*National Early Childhood Care and Education Policy (2013)*) Facilitating pupils' effective growth and development is the main objective of early childhood education. It establishes the foundation for the students' education, allowing them to successfully develop their talents and abilities from an early age. Early childhood care and education also provide information and knowledge to the students' families and communities in order to assist their effective growth and development. Play is the first step in learning in early childhood

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settings. Teachers guide kids to the next stage, where they learn to draw and color, which ignites their interest in art, as soon as they begin to love play activities. (Ministry of Women and Child Development. (1975). At the following level, students learn academic concepts such as numbers and alphabets. The field of education is broad. Abilities, knowledge, dispositions, routines, communication, mental powers, wisdom, perceptiveness, morality, and integrity are all included. These components are essential to pupils' growth and mental development. Students must be sufficiently prepared in order to enroll in the formal education system. Students must have a solid understanding of academic subjects in order to successfully adjust to the teaching-learning techniques used by their teachers and enhance their performance in order to apply for admission to formal education institutions. Early childhood education efficiently facilitates learning and education. (Fadlillah, M. 2019)

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

The Value of Early Childhood Education (ECE) is considered to be very significant. Regardless of their background or occupation, everyone in the community is aware of this. It is believed that a person's first three years of life are crucial. The connections that will enable the youngster to progress are now being made. Regardless of their educational background, parents need to understand how to apply the processes of growth and development and recognize the value of education. Once they are familiar with various approaches to child development, they will be able to contribute significantly. Parents are primarily responsible for their children's growth and development, and they have a lot of duty and commitment in this area. Until the age of three, children are attached to their moms and depend on them for all duties and responsibilities (Warren, 2007). Children begin to understand that there is a world outside of their home that they need to learn about by the time they are four years old. ECE helps students develop their talents and become more capable thinkers. A person's social needs begin to grow as they get older. ECE is crucial since it offers information and knowledge that is centred on a person's overall growth. This subject of study has benefited from the contributions of numerous scholars, researchers, educators, and economists. People and organizations that have taken an intense interest in this field and are enthusiastic about it have strived to make progress. Given that early childhood education plays a major role in the formation of future citizens, the issues surrounding economic growth and productivity have been cause for concern. (Calman & Whelan, 2005).



GOAL OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Improvement of students' academic learning in areas such as oral communication, reading, writing, numeracy, critical thinking, problem-solving, logical reasoning, organizing, and work assignment planning. Students are trained in these areas from the start so they can hone these skills as they get older. When kids are young, they usually get assistance from their parents, teachers, or peers when they have to make choices or are having trouble understanding a certain concept. Academic learning starts at the ECE level since students must make their own decisions after they enroll in higher education institutions. Pupils are taught that learning is an idea that they will need to pursue throughout their lives. (Rao, N., & Sun, J. 2017). Academic learning is one aspect of learning. One of the major variables is the development of awareness of standards, norms, values, and principles.

These are essential for fostering connections and fruitful interactions with others. An individual must have honesty, wisdom, and integrity regardless of their educational background. These attributes help people build robust social networks and great job opportunities. Technology use is encouraged, and research indicates that students find it enjoyable to use it for learning. Preschool teachers typically utilize computers to show pupils pictures of different objects, teach them how to draw and color shapes, and show them movies about it so they can enjoy learning. (Sagala, A. C. D., & Khasanah, I. 2015) When lesson planning is done on computers, students soon become accustomed to using technology, even though they may not feel comfortable doing so at first. Learning cannot take place in a vacuum in order to enhance comprehension and learning. In addition to their families, students must engage socially with teachers, other students, and school staff. Developing appropriate relationships and language with instructors and fellow students is essential. By practicing the values of decency, civility, and politeness, this can be accomplished. Encouraging students to work as a team is an important component that needs support. Preschoolers can get into trouble and hurt each other. (Sharma, S., & Kumar, P. 2019).

EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION (ECCE)

The three educational substages are from birth to age two, from age three to age five, and from age six to age eight. Depending on their age, students are placed in various educational institutions. Put another way, a student's enrolment in a school is significantly influenced by their age. When a student is pursuing preschool education, their growth and development take place in an operational manner. At this stage, it's common to assume that the student's newly acquired skills and knowledge will endure the remainder of his life. Early childhood education (ECCE) aims to help children attain their full potential via general development, support moms and girls, and prepare them for school. The main emphasis has been on play as the basis for learning, art as the basis for education, identifying the distinctive qualities of students' thinking abilities, emphasizing experience over expertise, combining formal and informal interactions, and blending textual concepts with cultural elements. Textual concepts should include both basic literacy and numeracy using locally available materials like colours, stationary, arts, and knowledge, and developmentally appropriate practice. (Ministry of Human Resource Development. 2018).

Policies and programs being developed in India provide six goals for early childhood care and education. Gender, childhood, adolescence, adult learning, and educational quality are the areas that have been taken into consideration.

The Dakar Framework of Action is attempting to define the objectives in the field of early childhood education that must be met by 2015. (Sankar and Kaul, 2009). The topics that will be covered are primary education, literacy objectives, gender quality, and quality problems. The following are the stated primary objectives:

- Since children from underprivileged, marginalized, and socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds typically cannot access high-quality educational opportunities, it is essential to provide to enhance their education and safeguard their future. Since financial difficulties are thought to be one of the main obstacles preventing students from completing their education, steps should be taken to provide them with financial support.
- It is imperative to guarantee that children from underprivileged, marginalized, and socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds have access to basic education, particularly of high quality.
- Because members of disadvantaged and marginalized groups typically lack formal education, educational institutions and training centres have been established in rural areas to assist in improving their learning.
- By 2015, adult education ought to have improved by at least 50%, with a concentration on women. Additionally, plans would be developed to provide basic and ongoing adult literacy programs.
- Equal opportunity must be provided, and no one should be subjected to discrimination in educational institutions on the grounds of gender, religion, ethnicity, caste, creed, race, or occupation. Women's rights and needs must be given particular attention, and they must receive high-quality education. Teaching a woman entails teaching the country as a whole.
- It is essential that students receive instruction in every subject at educational institutions. Math, science, social science, languages, nutrition, arts & crafts, physical exercise, artistic expression, music, dance, and sports are a few of them. Improving one's talents and abilities in all relevant areas is essential for an individual's overall growth and development. (Kent, J., & Moran, M. 2019).

SCHEMES, POLICIES, AND ORGANISATIONS THAT PROMOTE ECE

People think that learning is an ongoing process that occurs from birth to death. Many international organizations that have concentrated on personal growth and education, such as the Framework for Action, the World Summit (1990), and the World Declaration on Education for All, have aimed to address fundamental learning needs. The main objective of all the groups is to enhance early childhood education (ECE) by involving parents, educational institutions, and the community. Five main goals have been set forth in the Delhi Declaration

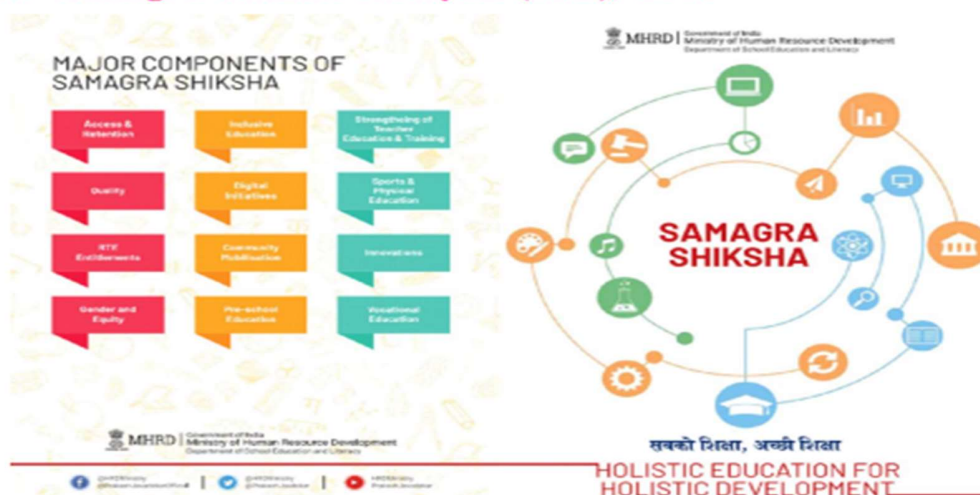
and Framework of Action. These include closing the gender gap, raising educational standards, adult education, life skills programs, and free and required elementary education. (WCD, 2023).

Scheme/Policy	Year Launched	Target Group	Key Features	Implementing Agency
Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)	1975	Children (0–6 years), pregnant & lactating women	Supplementary nutrition, health check-ups, immunization, preschool non-formal education, referral services	Ministry of Women & Child Development
Anganwadi Services (part of ICDS)	Expanded over time	Children (0–6 years)	Anganwadi centres provide nutrition, health, and early learning	State Governments under ICDS framework
National Nutrition Mission (POSHAN Abhiyaan)	2018	Children (0–6 years), adolescent girls, pregnant & lactating women	Reduce stunting, undernutrition, anemia; promote growth monitoring and behavior change	Ministry of Women & Child Development
National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 – ECCE	2020	Children (3–8 years)	Universal access to quality ECCE; activity-based learning; focus on literacy, numeracy, socio-emotional skills	Ministry of Education
Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme	2006 (revamped later)	Children (0–6 years) of working mothers	Day-care facilities, nutrition, health care, and early education	Central Social Welfare Board
Mid-Day Meal Scheme (Pre-primary extension in some states)	1995 (primary focus, extended later)	Children in schools (including some ECCE centres)	Nutritional support to improve learning outcomes	Ministry of Education
UNICEF-supported Early Childhood Development Programs	Ongoing	Children (0–8 years)	Technical support, training modules, responsive parenting, COVID-19 adaptations	UNICEF in partnership with Govt. of India

According to the Indian Constitution, all children in the country must get free and compulsory education up until the age of 14. A top-notch education is a fundamental entitlement for every child. For instance, child care-focused services have made accommodations for the assistance that working women in unorganized industries require. The childcare services will boost women's productivity and provide them with the information they need

to understand children's development. They will be able to represent complete collaboration in the political and social domains. A National Plan of Action pertaining to children was introduced in 1992. This plan's main objective was to guarantee the growth of ECCE services. *Mohanty, S. P. (2014)*. Based on the notion that early childhood education and care were essential to children's survival, development, and growth, the National Charter on Children was introduced on February 9, 2004. In order to address several aspects such as care, health, nutrition, education, and nourishment, the National Plan of Action for Children was created in 2005.

4.3.7 Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), 2018



Source: NIOS

Developing strategies and objectives that will motivate children to engage in educational activities is crucial. In remote areas, initiatives to ensure preschoolers' growth and development have been launched. The Family and Child Welfare program's main objectives were to ensure students' growth and well-being as well as to inform and reinforce the family's role in improving children's lives and fostering community. The public, commercial, and non-governmental sectors provide the majority of early childhood education in India (*WCD, 2007*). Early childhood education (ECE) programs are provided by volunteer or non-governmental organizations with funding from national and international aid organizations, trusts, and local and denominational organizations. This help mostly falls under the area of financial support. Additionally, these groups operate in economically and socially deprived areas. Migrant workers, indigenous populations, and victims of natural catastrophes are among the groups more vulnerable to challenging situations. NGOs and volunteer organizations get involved in assisting these situations and the areas they are in. (*Bose, K. 2010*).

GAPS AND NEGLECTED AREAS

It has been observed that excluding early childhood education from the list of essential rights keeps many kids from getting an education, which may lead to a rise in school dropout rates. The National Policy on Education, 1986 initiative has been implemented. The Programme of Action (1992) was implemented with the intention of implementing the NPE recommendations. A few daycare centers have been set up to give girls a basic

education, mostly to assist them in their studies and relieve them of the responsibility of caring for their younger siblings. Women who have an education can efficiently contribute to upholding the level of living for their family. (Brodie, K. 2018). When implementing the state-specific profiles of early childhood education, information on particular indicators is required, including target-setting, policies and directives, stakeholder participation, national and international development partners, monitoring and evaluation, assessment of the efficacy of early childhood education, adoption of intervention strategies, implementing agencies, and resource inputs in the form of tangible programs and services and financial infrastructure. In both urban and rural societies, there are groups of people who do not have access to educational possibilities. Because of the establishment of organizations, legislation, and programs, people now have access to educational opportunities. (Rohita, R., Fitria, N., & Nurfadilah, N. 2016)

In the public sector, where early childhood education has not yet reached a high level, there is still opportunity for improvement. Organizations like NCERT, NIEPA, and NIPCCD would need to be involved in the formation of the roles and conceptions of ECE institutions in the areas of education, infrastructure, administration, staffing, and training. Depending on the roles and standards that various organizations are using, all of these attributes can be applied to other ECE areas. Teachers in this field usually work on an honors basis and have poor working conditions. The minimum wage and working conditions for employees were not included in the law's formulation. Workers in NGOs and the business sector also go through. (Saripudin, A., & Beni, H. 2025). A number of graduate and post-graduate programs, such as Nursery Teachers Training (NTT), have been established and developed to offer expertise and information to individuals interested in pursuing employment in this field.

The general public believes that preschool concepts are easy enough for teachers to teach students without any specialized training. Preschool teachers need to be friendly and sympathetic. on the curriculum, appropriate rules and procedures on the plans and curriculum that must be developed have been established. There are significant differences between what is really done or put into effect and what has been said or advised. Preschools in the private sector give priority to the instructional components. (Ministry of Human Resource Development. 1995). It is essential to consider the activities, functions, and practices in order to make early childhood education (ECE) a well-developed, methodical, orderly, productive, and enjoyable experience. Pupils shouldn't feel that the school's environment is in danger and should enjoy going to class. The following are the four developmental domains that comprise early childhood education (ECE). (Early Childhood Education and Care, 2012).

- ❖ **Physical Development:** Throughout the first stage, children's physical development happens quickly. The development of large motor skills, such as crawling, walking, and running, happens simultaneously. Fine motor skills, or simultaneous hand-eye coordination, come next. Physical development is a broad subject that affects the formation of new personality traits as well as the development of fine and gross motor skills. Changes in height, weight, hair, and other physical characteristics are indicators of physical development.
- ❖ **Social Development:** Social development takes place in the first five years of life. Among other things, it entails communicating, sharing, and exchanging with people. Put another way, it means stepping into the social realm. Children begin to understand that there is a world outside their home that they need to learn about by the time they are three or four years old. In addition to academic areas, preschool enrolment teaches kids how to make friends and develop their communication abilities. Social development is one

of the most crucial aspects. People can have more productive lives by interacting socially and communicating well with others. Everyone should socialize with others, but this is especially true for persons in their age group.

- ❖ **Emotional Development:** Students begin to develop self-worth and confidence during the formative years. At this stage, students learn how to express a variety of emotions, such as fear, anger, sadness, happiness, curiosity, and excitement. When a person is growing emotionally, parents at home and teachers at school educate them about the benefits and drawbacks of experiencing particular emotions. For instance, it is inappropriate to get angry over little issues; on the other hand, it is normal to remain composed when faced with challenges. Adults must appropriately nudge young students when they grow irritated and sad over trivial matters.
- ❖ **Cognitive Development:** Cognitive development is the term used to describe an individual's intellectual evolution. In addition to what they see and experience, young students attempt to learn through play and socialization activities. They expand their knowledge and comprehension in a variety of areas, including languages, extracurricular activities, science, math, social science, arts and crafts, and physical activities. Young pupils are supposed to have sharp minds and have an easy time grasping information. After learning something, children can incorporate it into their mental models and remember it later. It is the responsibility of both parents and teachers to ensure that their kids are ready for any tests that will be administered in class. (Wulandari, H., Supriyati, Y., & Jalal, F. 2018).
- ❖ **Extracurricular Activities:** Extracurricular activities are highly regarded at all educational levels, not only in early childhood education. These are important since they develop children's abilities and skills while also encouraging their inventiveness. Since they enjoy learning, participating in these activities piques their curiosity and excitement. These exercises sharpen the pupils' minds. Preschools now offer a wide range of extracurricular activities, such as role plays, water sports, games, taekwondo, playing musical instruments, various dance styles, etc. Preschoolers are usually more interested in participating in these activities than they are in acquiring academic subjects.
- ❖ **School Environmental Conditions:** The educational climate must be peaceful and tranquil. This is primarily the result of the principals, employees, and teachers creating appropriate language and connections. They should avoid conflicts and contentious circumstances and communicate with each other in an amicable manner. Students enjoy going to class and take an active role in their education when the learning environment satisfies their needs and requirements. Nonetheless, when the educational setting is appropriate, teachers are likewise motivated to fulfil their duties and find fulfilment in their work. The numerous categories of preschool resources are listed below (Education Corner, 2005). projects. (Siagian, N., & Adriany, V. 2020)
- ❖ **Printable Activities:** These are computer-based or paper-based activities. Printouts are available, just as they are when soft copies are produced on PCs. Printable activities include cutting and pasting objects and papers, coloring pages according to the numbers, scribbling, and drawing, as well as coloring on papers and objects.
- ❖ **Consult the preschool instructor:** In the classroom, children typically experience feelings of vulnerability and shyness. It is important to motivate children to engage with teachers and other pupils and to have greater self-confidence. To enhance their learning, individuals ought to pose inquiries.

- ❖ **Infrastructure and Facilities:** Since some preschoolers struggle with learning disabilities and other issues, infrastructure, civic amenities, and facilities must be promoted.
- ❖ **Curriculum:** The subjects covered in the preschool curriculum include alphabets, numbers, shapes, colours, games, art and crafts, drawing, painting, stories, rhymes, poems, thematic modules, and book reviews.
- ❖ **Technology:** In the modern world, technology is now a necessary component of education. Technology is utilized by staff members and teachers not only for creating lesson plans, curricula, and instructional methods but also for giving pupils instructions and information. It is also occasionally used to screen students' performances and cartoon movies.
- ❖ **Evaluation Processes:** As part of the evaluation process, students' performance on assignments, tests, and competitions or workshops is usually rated. Teachers feel good about the way they are teaching when they give positive reinforcement to students who perform well. On the other hand, when students fall short of expectations and receive passing grades, teachers need to modify their teaching-learning tactics and encourage them to concentrate on their studies.
- ❖ **Activities:** – There are organization of various activities, which not only enhance learning but also stimulate the mindsets of the students. Some of the activities include, finger plays, snack recipes, art ideas, work sheets, activity guides, and so forth. In most cases, these are related to arts and crafts. Through the performance of arts and crafts, the students obtain information regarding academic concepts.
- ❖ **Interactive Abilities:** Students typically do not significantly improve their communication abilities in preschool. They are either fun, reclusive, or feel vulnerable. Students that are introverted should be encouraged to compete in speaking competitions. For example, poetry, rhyming, singing, dance, role-playing, and other competitions. It is seen to be extremely important for students to build their interaction skills.

EARLY CHILDHOOD STANDARDS

Standards are referred to as an essential first stage in the development of an operational preschool curriculum since they offer a preset timeframe for the teaching-learning processes. Because they acknowledge the links between learning and emotional, social, cognitive, and physical development, the Illinois Early Learning Standards are important. They provide a basis for reflective instructors who create experiences that enhance students' comprehension, just like other high-quality standards. The main objective of the ECE standards is to motivate teachers to have adequate knowledge as they must be fully conversant with their lesson plans. (Henderson, 2004). Preschoolers are not required to exhibit efficiency in their performance at the same time and level when teaching academic topics, colouring, painting, and drawing. Students typically need some time to understand concepts. They may improve if colouring exercises are offered regularly over the course of four or five classes.

For children to grow and develop effectively, teachers, principals, and other pre-school staff members must be adequately informed on the qualities and practices that are required. It is important to ensure that pupils' learning is useful as long as they apply what they have learnt effectively. The idea of play is seen to be essential to the process of development. Students receive age-appropriate playthings during the early childhood stage. As they get older, they are given increasingly advanced games. Students should be encouraged to engage in a range

of activities and functions, socialize, and explore objects both within and outside the home in order to develop an understanding of the environment. Parents and teachers need to learn how to interact with each other because they are both involved in the child's education and growth. They should work together. Parents should know why they are sending their kids to preschool as well as the goals and objectives of preschool education. The purpose of all the effort and resources devoted to education and child development is something parents need to know. (Nongko, P. A., Bundu, P., & Rauf, B. A. 2025).

CONCLUSION

Early childhood education (ECE) is regarded as crucial both in India and globally. The primary objective of the policies, initiatives, and programs put in place in India is to increase efficiency, competency, and expertise in this profession. Preschools with cutting-edge facilities, infrastructure, instructional methodologies, and innovative and cutting-edge teaching techniques have been constructed in metropolitan regions in the modern era. However, pre-schools and rural schools need to be developed. The government has backed initiatives like ICDS, ECCE Policy 2013, NEP 2020, and others to bring about change in this field. This discipline has advanced as a result of the development of concepts, ideas, themes, standards, strategies, and methodologies. To effect change, it is essential to comprehend the aims, purposes, and importance of early childhood education. Parents have a responsibility to be well educated since they are the ones who invest the most time and effort in their children's development. Parents use their money to pay for their children's education in addition to other necessities. In conclusion, as children will be the nation's future citizens, their successful growth and development will actively contribute to the improvement of not only their families but also society and the country as a whole.

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