

NEP 2020: Enhancing Preschool Health and Well-Being in India

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 outlines a comprehensive approach to preschool education that integrates multiple dimensions of child health and well-being. Basu and Santra (2023) describe the policy's focus on physical development, nutrition, and emotional, social, and mental growth. Gandhi (2021) and Meitei et al. (2024) detail NEP 2020's attention to early brain development and the promotion of play-based, experiential learning that fosters social and emotional skills. Parmar et al. (2024) note that physical literacy is advanced as a means to support inclusive education.

Studies also indicate challenges in reaching these aims. Mahanta and Saikia (2024) report that inadequate infrastructure and irregular supplies of food and medical resources in Anganwadi Centres hinder effective implementation. Rao et al. (2021) advocate for dedicated budget allocations, teacher training, and monitoring systems to secure equitable access and quality. Together, these studies show that NEP 2020 emphasizes a holistic and integrated model of preschool care that attends to physical, nutritional, mental, and social-emotional aspects, while implementation hurdles remain.

Keywords: 1. NEP (2020), 2. ECCE, 3. Health and Well-being, 4. Preschool

INTRODUCTION

The first six years of a child's life are globally recognized as the most critical years of lifelong development since the pace of development during these years is extremely rapid. National Education Policy 2020 firmly recognizes the importance of quality Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) and clearly states that "Over 85% of a child's cumulative brain development occurs before the age of 6, indicating the critical importance of appropriate care and stimulation of the brain in the early years to ensure healthy brain development and growth". Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) plays a crucial role in shaping children's developmental trajectories, particularly in their formative years. India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a significant shift towards comprehensive early childhood development, emphasizing multiple dimensions of child well-being Basu and Santra, 2023. The policy focuses on integrating physical, mental, social, and emotional development within the preschool education framework Gandhi, 2021. Despite these ambitious goals, implementation challenges persist, particularly in resource allocation and infrastructure development Mahanta and Saikia, 2024.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for understanding ECCE under NEP 2020 encompasses several interconnected components:

Holistic Development Approach:

Physical and nutritional well-being, Mental and emotional development Social and cognitive growth Basu

and Santra, 2023

Pedagogical Foundation:

Play-based learning, Experiential education, Activity-cantered approaches Meitei et al., 2024

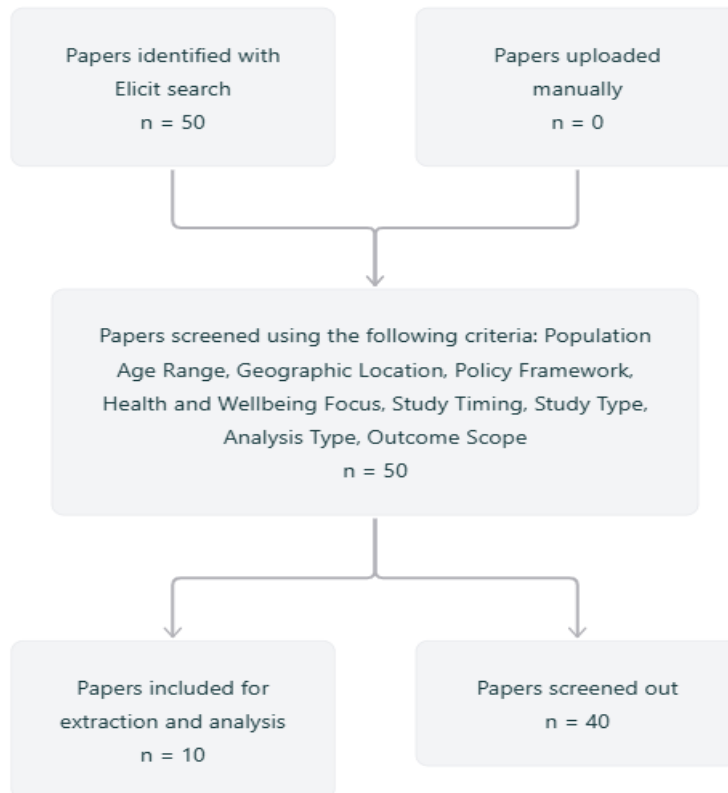
Implementation Structure:

Integration with Anganwadi system, Resource allocation mechanisms, Monitoring and evaluation systems Rao et al., 2021

Support Systems: Infrastructure requirements, Teacher training and development, Learning environment considerations Mahanta and Saikia, 2024

This framework emphasizes the interconnectedness of health, education, and well-being in early childhood development, while acknowledging the practical challenges in implementation Rao et al., 2021. The success of this framework depends on effective coordination between various stakeholders and adequate resource allocation to support comprehensive child development programs Mahanta and Saikia, 2024.

METHODS



Paper search

Using the research question “How does the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasize the health and well-being of preschool children in India?”, the researcher searched over 126 million academic papers from the semantic scholar corpus. We retrieved the 50 papers most relevant to the query.

Screening

The researcher screened papers that met these criteria:

- **Population Age Range:** Does the study focus on preschool children aged 3-6 years?
- **Geographic Location:** Was the study conducted in India?

- **Policy Framework:** Does the study analyze or address NEP 2020's provisions related to early childhood care and education?
- **Health and Wellbeing Focus:** Does the study examine health and/or wellbeing components in early childhood education?
- **Study Timing:** Was the study conducted or published after the introduction of NEP 2020?
- **Study Type:** Is the study a research-based work (empirical research, systematic review, or policy analysis paper)?
- **Analysis Type:** Does the study include substantive analysis (not just opinion or commentary)?
- **Outcome Scope:** Does the study include health/wellbeing outcomes (not exclusively academic outcomes)?

The researcher considered all screening questions together and made a holistic judgement about whether to screen in each paper.

DATA EXTRACTION

The researcher asked a large language model to extract each data column below from each paper. We gave the model the extraction instructions shown below for each column.

Study Design:

Identify the type of study design used:

- Qualitative study
- Theoretical/Policy analysis
- Descriptive study
- Review article

Locate this information primarily in the methods or introduction section. If the design is not explicitly stated, infer from the study's methodology and approach. If uncertain, note "Design unclear" and provide a brief explanation of why.

Focus on Health and Well-being:

Extract specific aspects of health and well-being addressed in the study related to preschool children:

- Mental health
- Physical health
- Nutritional aspects
- Social-emotional development
- Psychological well-being

Carefully review the full text, focusing on sections discussing child health. List all relevant dimensions mentioned, using direct quotes where possible. If no specific health dimensions are discussed, note "No explicit health focus identified".

NEP 2020 Interpretation:

Identify how the study interprets or discusses the National Education Policy 2020 in relation to preschool children's health:

- Direct policy references
- Specific policy provisions cited
- Implications for child health and well-being

Locate information in introduction, discussion, or policy analysis sections. If no direct reference to NEP

2020 is found, note “No explicit NEP 2020 discussion”. Capture verbatim quotes that demonstrate policy interpretation if available.

Preschool Age Range:

Extract the specific age range for preschool children discussed in the study:

- Exact age range mentioned
- Alignment with NEP 2020’s foundational stage definition (3-8 years)

Check methods, introduction, or participant description sections. If multiple age ranges are mentioned, list all. If no specific age range is provided, note “Age range not specified”.

Recommended Interventions:

List any specific interventions or recommendations for improving preschool children’s health:

- Specific health promotion strategies
- Prevention approaches
- Educational interventions
- Policy recommendations

Review discussion, conclusion, and recommendations sections. Capture verbatim recommendations where possible. If no specific interventions are suggested, note “No interventions recommended”.

Table 1 Extracted Data from researches on NEP 2020

Study	Study Focus	Research Design	Geographic Scope	Key Findings	Full-Text Retrieved
Basu and Santra, 2023	Impact of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)	Qualitative study	India (general)	Authors report that NEP 2020 emphasizes quality and excellence in ECCE, covering nutrition, health, social, mental, moral, physical, emotional, and educational development	No
Gandhi, 2021	Review of NEP 2020 features for pre-school education	Review article	India (general)	Authors report that NEP 2020 emphasizes quality and excellence in	Yes

				ECCE, covering nutrition, health, social, mental, moral, physical, emotional, and educational development	
Mahanta and Saikia, 2024	Challenges in implementing ECCE in Anganwadi Centres	Descriptive study	Rangia Sub District, Kamrup District, Assam	Authors identify challenges including inadequate infrastructure, lack of essential classroom materials, and irregular supplies of food and medical resources	Yes
Meitei et al., 2024	Practical pedagogical approaches for ECCE	Review article	India (general)	Authors explore practical pedagogical approaches aligning with NEP 2020, emphasizing play-based and experiential learning	Yes
Pandey, 2024	Impact of National Curricular and Pedagogical	Theoretical/Policy analysis	India (general)	Author discusses NEP 2020's emphasis on universalizing	No

	Framework for ECCE			ECCE and modifying curriculum structures	
Parmar et al., 2024	Physical literacy as a catalyst for inclusive education	Theoretical/Policy analysis	India (general)	Authors examine physical literacy as a means to promote inclusive education in line with NEP 2020	No
Rahaman et al., 2024	Overview of ECCE policies and schemes	Review article	India (general)	Authors review various policies and schemes for ECCE in India, including NEP 2020	No
Rao et al., 2021	Equitable access to quality preschool education	Theoretical/Policy analysis	India (general)	Authors analyze NEP 2020's role in ensuring equitable access to quality preschool education	No
Shastri, 2009	Promotion and prevention in child mental health	Theoretical/Policy analysis	India (general)	Author focuses on mental health promotion and prevention in children, but we didn't find explicit discussion of	No

				NEP 2020 in the abstract	
Singh and Mukherjee, 2019	Effect of preschool education on cognitive achievement and subjective well-being	Descriptive study	India (general)	Authors examine the effect of preschool education on cognitive achievement and subjective well-being, but we didn't find explicit discussion of NEP 2020 in the abstract	No

ANALYSIS OF STUDY CHARACTERISTICS

Research Design:

- 4 studies using theoretical/policy analysis
- 3 review articles
- 2 descriptive studies
- 1 qualitative study

The predominance of theoretical/policy analyses and review articles suggests a focus on conceptual understanding and policy implications rather than empirical evidence.

Geographic Scope:

- 9 studies focused on India in general
- 1 study focused on a specific region (Rangia Sub District, Kamrup District, Assam)

Study Focus:

- 2 studies focusing on the impact of NEP 2020
- 8 studies with unique focuses, including:
 - Implementation challenges
 - Pedagogical approaches
 - Policy impact
 - Inclusive education
 - Policy overview
 - Equity in education
 - Child mental health
 - Preschool education impact

Publication Years:

- 8 out of 10 studies were published in 2021 or later
- 2 earlier studies from 2009 and 2019

The researcher didn't find mention of any experimental or quasi-experimental studies in the available full texts or abstracts of these papers.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Health-Related Policy Provisions

Physical Health Initiatives

- Basu and Santra (2023) report that NEP 2020 covers physical development as part of its holistic approach to ECCE.
- Parmar et al. (2024) examine the role of physical literacy in promoting inclusive education, aligning with NEP 2020's objectives.
- This focus on physical activity and development is presented as a means to enhance overall child well-being and promote equitable access to education.

Nutritional Guidelines

- Basu and Santra (2023) mention nutrition as a component of ECCE in NEP 2020.
- We didn't find extensive discussion of specific nutritional guidelines in the available full texts or abstracts of the reviewed studies.
- Mahanta and Saikia (2024) note challenges in the regular supply of food resources in Anganwadi Centres, highlighting potential gaps in implementing nutritional aspects of the policy.

Healthcare Integration

- The integration of healthcare within ECCE is not prominently featured in the reviewed studies.
- Mahanta and Saikia (2024) mention irregular supplies of medical resources as a challenge in implementing ECCE, suggesting that healthcare integration may require further attention in policy implementation.

Well-being Components

Mental Health Considerations

- Basu and Santra (2023) include mental development in their discussion of NEP 2020's comprehensive approach to ECCE.
- Shastri (2009), while not directly discussing NEP 2020, emphasizes the importance of mental health promotion and prevention in early childhood, which aligns with the policy's holistic approach.

Social-Emotional Development

- Basu and Santra (2023) highlight social and emotional development as part of NEP 2020's focus.
- Meitei et al. (2024) discuss the importance of play-based and experiential learning approaches, which can contribute to social-emotional development.

Learning Environment Requirements

- Meitei et al. (2024) explore practical pedagogical approaches aligned with NEP 2020, focusing on flexible, multi-faceted, play-based, and activity-based learning.
- Gandhi (2021) notes the policy's emphasis on inclusive education and the importance of early brain development.

Implementation Framework

Integration with Anganwadi System

- Mahanta and Saikia (2024) provide insights into the challenges faced by Anganwadi Centres in implementing ECCE as outlined by NEP 2020, highlighting issues such as inadequate infrastructure and resource shortages.

Resource Allocation

- Rao et al. (2021) discuss the need for increased budget allocations to preschool education to support professional development and enhance the early childhood system.
- Mahanta and Saikia (2024) identify resource constraints as a significant challenge in policy implementation.

Monitoring Mechanisms

- Rao et al. (2021) recommend:
- Use of technology for monitoring the functioning of Anganwadi Centers
- Establishing a regulatory and accreditation system for all preschool programs

Table 2 Data Analysis on NEP 2020

Policy Component	Implementation Strategy	Resource Requirements	Expected Outcomes
Physical Health	Integration of physical literacy and activity-based learning	Infrastructure for physical activities, trained educators	Improved physical development, inclusive education
Nutrition	Regular supply of nutritious food in Anganwadi Centres	Consistent food resources, storage facilities	Better nutritional status of preschool children
Mental Health	Incorporation of mental health promotion in ECCE curriculum	Trained mental health professionals, educational materials	Enhanced psychological well-being of children
Social-Emotional Development	Implementation of play-based and experiential learning approaches	Implementation of play-based and experiential learning approaches	Improved social skills and emotional regulation
Learning Environment	Creation of flexible, multi-faceted learning spaces	Infrastructure upgrades, diverse learning materials	Stimulating and inclusive learning environments
Anganwadi Integration	Strengthening and upgrading existing Anganwadi Centres	Infrastructure improvements, resource allocation	Enhanced quality of ECCE delivery
Resource Allocation	Increased budget allocations for ECCE	Substantial financial investment	Improved overall quality of preschool education
Monitoring Mechanisms	Establishment of regulatory and accreditation systems	Technology for monitoring, trained inspectors	Consistent quality assurance across ECCE programs
Teacher Training	Establishment of regulatory and accreditation systems	Training resources, expert trainers	Enhanced teaching quality and pedagogical practices
Inclusive Education	Implementation of strategies to address diverse learning needs	Specialized resources, trained staff	Equitable access to quality ECCE for all children

Analysis of Implementation Strategies:

- 10 different implementation strategies, each mentioned once in the table
- Strategies range from activity-based learning and curriculum integration to upgrading centres and establishing regulatory systems

Resource Requirements:

- Infrastructure and trained educators/staff are the most frequently mentioned resource requirements, appearing in 3 and 4 policy components respectively
- Other resources include:
 - Educational and learning materials
 - Financial investments
 - Specialized resources for monitoring and training

Expected Outcomes:

- Improved ECCE quality is the most common expected outcome, mentioned in 2 policy components
- Other outcomes include:
 - Physical development
 - Inclusive education
 - Nutritional status
 - Various aspects of child development (psychological, social, emotional)
- Diverse range of expected outcomes, with most appearing only once in the table

Table 2 presents a comprehensive approach to early childhood care and education policy, covering various aspects from physical health to inclusive education. Each policy component has unique implementation strategies and resource requirements, but many share similar expected outcomes related to improving the quality and accessibility of ECCE.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS**Infrastructure Limitations****Challenges:**

- Mahanta and Saikia (2024) identify inadequate infrastructure as a key issue in Anganwadi Centres

Proposed solutions:

- Infrastructure upgrades (Meitei et al., 2024)
- Creation of stimulating learning environments (Meitei et al., 2024)

Resource Constraints**Challenges:**

- Shortages of essential classroom materials (Mahanta and Saikia, 2024)
- Irregular supplies (Mahanta and Saikia, 2024)

Proposed solutions:

- Increased budget allocations (Rao et al., 2021)
- Better resource allocation strategies

Capacity Building Needs**Challenges:**

- Need for well-trained teachers (Gandhi, 2021)
- Ongoing training requirements (Gandhi, 2021)

Proposed solutions:

- Enhancing teacher professional development (Meitei et al., 2024)
- Implementing pedagogical approaches outlined in NEP 2020 (Meitei et al., 2024)

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