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A STUDY ON POST-COVID EFFECT ON EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE & EDUCATION

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Abstract

Education is a basic fundamental requirement for the progress & development of children as well as society. According to Harvard University Center on Development in the early year are important pre-requisites for success in school & later at work & in the community. Children in the early years need responsive care, adequate nutrition, stimulation & protection to develop society, emotionally & cognitively. So, the study aimed to analyze the post-covid effect on early childhood care & education. This type of research is a qualitative research type, in which discussed about the post-covid challenges that children have faced & also addressing the future opportunities for shaping the children's education & care.

Keywords: *Post-Covid, Early childhood Care, Education*

Introduction

The worldwide covid-19 pandemic caused by the Novel corona virus has affected all including children. It has had a devastating effect on the education of children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to monumental changes in education worldwide. According to UNESCO (2020), precautions and policies aimed at curbing the spread of the disease have disrupted the learning experiences of over 1.5 billion students worldwide, constituting nearly 90% of the global student population across 165 countries. Early childhood education and early childhood educators are a need for children, households, agencies, & the economy as a whole. Public investment in childcare is a funding within the health & wealth of the whole society. Covid-19 has profoundly influenced early childhood education & the educators who work with kids at some point of this vital duration of some improvement. Although childcare carriers have played a key function in supporting other important industries during the disaster, maximum have suffered, & lots of have shut down. COVID-19's impact on early childhood education includes temporary shutdowns for many. Declining enrollment, Insufficient authorities funds, Limited crucial resources. It is hampering the study of children. Many childcare providers operate on slim profit margins even in the best of times, posing a significant challenge to staying financially afloat during the coronavirus pandemic.

Significance of the Study: As a researcher the main purpose of choosing this topic The Post-Covid Effect on Early Childhood Education was to know the problems of education & care for children that they faced in post-covid situation. The significance of early childhood care and education (ECCE) has always been notable, and its importance has been further underscored in the post-COVID-19 world. The pandemic has had profound effects on economies, societies, & education systems worldwide, & ECCE plays an ultimate role in addressing several key challenges and opportunities in this new context.

Objectives of the Study: The current study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- 1) To know the present post-covid status of childhood care & education.
- 2) To identify the problems that the children faced in their care & education.
- 3) To know the role of ECCE for children's development.
- 4) To know the current status of Early Childhood Education in India.

Methodology: The paper is descriptive analytical & qualitative in nature because data collection fully depending on previously published documents, like books, thesis, journals etc. This paper attempts to analyze the problem & solution of ECCE program & the information used in it is purely from secondary sources according to the needs of the study.

Challenges of Early Childhood Care & Education (ECCE)

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) plays a crucial role in a child's development, but it also faces various challenges and problems that need attention & solutions. Here are some common problems associated with ECCE:

- Not all children have equal access to quality ECCE services. Children from marginalized communities, rural areas, or low-income families often lack access to early education opportunities, leading to disparities in school readiness.
- The quality of ECCE programs can vary widely. In some cases, programs lack trained teachers, appropriate learning materials, and a child-centered curriculum. Ensuring high-quality early education is essential for optimal child development.
- ECCE teachers often receive lower salaries compared to their counterparts in primary and secondary education. This can lead to a shortage of qualified and motivated educators in the field.
- Developing an age-appropriate and effective curriculum for young children is a challenge. The curriculum should focus on holistic development, including cognitive, social, emotional, and physical aspects.
- Assessing the progress and development of young children can be challenging. Finding appropriate assessment tools and methods that are developmentally appropriate and culturally sensitive is crucial.
- Engaging parents in their child's early education can be difficult, especially for parents with limited time or resources. Building strong partnerships between parents and educators is vital for a child's success.
- Many ECCE centers lack proper infrastructure and facilities, including safe and stimulating learning environments. Inadequate facilities can hinder the learning and development of young children.
- Ensuring that ECCE programs are inclusive of children with disabilities or special needs can be a significant challenge. Adapting teaching methods and providing necessary support services is essential.
- Malnutrition and health issues can create an obstacles for a child's ability to learn and develop. Access to nutritious healthy meals and healthcare services is crucial for the well-being of children in ECCE programs.
- Adequate government funding & supportive measures are necessary to address the challenges in ECCE. In some regions, a lack of political help & funding can hinder the expansion and improvement of early education services.
- Ensuring that ECCE programs in respect and incorporate the cultural backgrounds & languages of the children they serve is essential for them to creating a positive learning environment.
- Smooth transitions from ECCE to primary education are vital for a child's continuous development. Coordination between ECCE providers and primary schools can be a challenge also.

Several Key Considerations & Changes are Likely to Shape the Future of Early Childhood Care & Education (ECCE) in Post-Covid Era

According to challenges of ECCE there are some considerations & changes likely to shape the future of ECCE are as follows:

- **Health & Security Protocols:** In the post covid stage, continued emphasis on health and security measures, such as regular sanitization, mask-wearing, and social distancing, to prevent the spread of infections in the schools, colleges & universities.
- **Hybrid Learning Models:** Integration of technology and online learning tools to support hybrid learning models in the schools that combine in-person and virtual instruction, allowing for more flexibility & adaptability in case of future disruptions.
- **Teacher Training and Preparedness:** Enhanced training & professional development for ECCE educators to ensure that they are equipped to handle health crises and adapt their teaching methods to diverse classrooms or other learning environments.
- **Mental Health & Well-being:** A focus on the mental health and well-being are also of both children & educators, recognizing the emotional task of the post-pandemic period & the need for emotional support.
- **Reducing Learning Loss:** Tailored interventions and catch-up programs to address any learning loss experienced by the young children during covid-19 lockdowns and disruptions in regular ECCE services.
- **Parental Involvement in Child's Learning:** More strengthening the partnership between parents and educators, with a greater emphasis on involving parents in their child's learning process and keeping them informed about their child's progress.
- **Inclusive Education:** Ensuring that the ECCE programs are inclusive and accessible to all children, regardless of their socio-economic background or physical, emotional & cognitive abilities.
- **Public Funding and Investment for ECCE:** Increased public funding & investment in ECCE services to support accessibility, flexibility & affordability, recognizing the importance of early childhood education for child development and future success.
- **Digital Literacy:** Promoting more digital literacy among young children, parents & educators to effectively utilize technology for learning and teaching.
- **Research and Data Collection:** Ongoing research and data collection to monitor the impact of the pandemic on early childhood development and education and to inform evidence-based policies and practices.
- **Flexibility and Adaptability:** Developing flexible curriculum and learning materials & environment that can easily adapt to changing circumstances & to meet the diverse needs of young learners.
- **Collaboration and Communication:** To improved communication and collaboration among ECCE providers, government agencies, healthcare professionals, and community organizations to respond effectively for future health crises of children.
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Role of Early Childhood Care & Education (ECCE) in Child's Education in Post-Covid Situation

- **Early Development & Learning:** Early childhood is a critical period for brain development and learning for children. High-quality ECCE programs can provide children with the foundation for future success in school and life by promoting cognitive, social, & emotional development.

- **Closing Learning Gaps:** The pandemic disrupted traditional education, leading to learning gaps among children. ECCE programs can help mitigate these gaps by providing targeted support to children who may have fallen behind during the pandemic.
- **Supporting Parents and Families:** ECCE programs provide valuable support to parents and families by offering resources, guidance, and a structured learning environment for young children. This can be especially important for families who struggled with remote learning during the pandemic.
- **Socialization & Emotional Well-being:** ECCE settings provide opportunities for children to socialize, build relationships, and develop important social and emotional skills. This is crucial in a post-pandemic world where isolation and mental health concerns have been prevalent.
- **Equity and Inclusion:** The pandemic highlighted existing disparities in access to education and resources. Focusing on ECCE can help address these inequalities by ensuring that all children, regardless of their socio-economic background, have access to high-quality early learning experiences.
- **Preparing the Workforce:** ECCE also plays a role in preparing the future workforce. Well-educated and skilled individuals in the ECCE sector are essential to providing quality care and education for young children, which, in turn, supports parents' ability to participate in the workforce.
- **Public Health and Safety:** ECCE settings can implement health and safety measures that teach young children good hygiene practices, potentially reducing the spread of infectious diseases, including future outbreaks.
- **Resilience and Adaptability:** ECCE programs can teach young children essential life skills such as adaptability, problem-solving, and resilience, which are valuable in a world that may continue to face unexpected challenges.
- **Innovation and Technology Integration:** The pandemic accelerated the adoption of technology in education. ECCE can benefit from innovative approaches and technologies to provide high-quality learning experiences, even in remote or hybrid settings.
- **Global Competition:** A strong ECCE system can contribute to the development of a highly skilled and competitive workforce, which is essential for a nation's long-term economic success.

Status of Early Childhood Education in India

The developmental needs of a children in this stage i.e. among 3-6 years are multisectoral, regarding elements like nutrients, fitness, safety, health care and play based schooling. Recognizing its importance, the Government of India commenced ICDS – Integrated Child Development Services scheme, which offers a bundle of 6 services, together with early adolescence care, development and education to almost 1/2 of India's 160 million children (0-6 years) these days.

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is furnished on the Anganwadi Centers (AWC) via Anganwadi employees (AWW). ECE is not purported to be a downward extension of formal training, however an aggregate of play-primarily based mastering using easy toys & charts, singing, storytelling & some quantity of physical interest.

Anganwadi Centers (AWCs) continue to be the primary providers of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in India. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused critical breakage to the whole ICDS device. A number of specialists have started to signal how, within the current status, we should now not lose sight of infant nutrition, but till now, the thing of early adolescence education has regrettably obtained less interest.

The purpose at the back of ECE is faculty preparedness, i.e., to equip children among three-6 years with appropriate cognitive and sensorimotor talents earlier than they progress to formal schooling. ECE specialists opine that youngsters who do no longer receive the good enough stimuli up-till the age of six,

do no longer attain the overall ability in their mind. This is an irreversible technique i.e. if that time-length is over, there may be no way of redeeming it.

Apart from ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services), pre-schools operated by authorities, NGOs, and private institutions also contribute to offering Early Childhood Education (ECE) in India. There is no set of curriculum or method for Early Childhood Education (ECE) and all vendors follow their own standards. Many of these ECE centers have shortcomings, like excessive toddler-instructor ratio, beside the point pedagogical practices (most commonly using formal education in region of encouraged ECE modes of teaching) and being non-inclusive. Despite those problems, a big majority of youngsters between a while 3-6 had been receiving some form pre-faculty schooling before the current disaster struck.

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly disrupted Early Childhood Education (ECE) for various reasons. As soon as the pandemic hit, the ubiquitous AWWs, present in about 13 lakh Anganwadi centers across India were given Covid-19 awareness training. They have been engaged in conducting IEC (information, education and communication) campaigns on precautions like masks and hand hygiene, which extremely crucial, ended up diverting them from their core job. Other providers of Early Childhood Education (ECE), such as government pre-schools, NGOs, and private schools, have closed their doors during the pandemic, with only a few of them transitioning to online classes. Some private schools, despite the closure, continue to charge full fees, providing books and syllabi and placing the responsibility of teaching on parents. This situation has left all children, regardless of their economic status or geographical location, facing significant challenges.

Key Policies Shaping Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in India include

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in India has been a focal point for policymakers, recognizing the critical importance of the formative years in a child's development. Several prominent policies have been implemented to enhance the provision of ECCE in the country. Here are some key policies and their relevance in the present context:

⇒ The policy on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) at the national level, enacted in 2013

This policy aims to provide a comprehensive framework for the holistic development of children up to six years of age. It outlines the importance of providing a stimulating and nurturing environment that supports physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development. It emphasizes the role of families and communities in early childhood care and education. It's also emphasizes the importance of quality early learning experiences, health, nutrition, and parental education. In the present context, this policy remains relevant as it sets the foundation for subsequent initiatives and programs in the ECCE sector.

⇒ Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)

ICDS is one of the world's largest and most unique outreach programs for early childhood services. It includes the provision of supplementary nutrition, immunization, and health check-ups alongside early education. The program's relevance persists as it addresses not only educational but also health and nutritional needs of young children.

⇒ Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) along with the Right to Education (RTE) Act

While these policies primarily focus on elementary education, they indirectly impact ECCE by emphasizing the importance of a child's right to education. The RTE Act ensures free and compulsory education for children aged 6 to 14 years, indirectly influencing the continuity and quality of early childhood education.

⇒ **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**

The NEP 2020 envisions the holistic development of learners from an early age. It emphasizes the importance of foundational literacy and numeracy, which aligns with the goals of ECCE. The policy promotes flexibility in the choice of languages and encourages the integration of play-based learning methods in the early years of schooling.

⇒ **Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK)**

RBSK focuses on child health screening and early intervention services. While not exclusively an ECCE policy, its relevance lies in identifying and addressing health issues in the early years, contributing to the overall well-being and readiness of children for educational experiences.

⇒ **Anganwadi Services Scheme**

The Anganwadi scheme is integral to the provision of ECCE services in India. It encompasses preschool education, health care, and nutrition. The scheme continues to be relevant in the present context, acting as a crucial platform for reaching children in the early years and supporting their holistic development.

In the present context, these policies remain relevant as they form the framework for the ongoing efforts to enhance the quality and accessibility of early childhood care and education in India. As the landscape evolves, policymakers may need to revisit and adapt these policies to address emerging challenges and align with evolving educational paradigms.

Conclusion

Addressing the problems in ECCE requires collaboration among governments, educators, parents, and communities. Investment in early childhood education and a commitment to providing equitable access to quality programs are essential steps toward ensuring the well-being and development of young children.

In conclusion, the early childhood care and education in the post-covid-19 era lies in its ability to address the challenges brought about by the pandemic while also offering opportunities for building a more equitable, resilient, and educated society. Investing in high-quality ECCE programs is not only an investment in the well-being of young children but also in the future of society, communities and nations.

In a post-covid situation, the key goal is to create a resilient and adaptable ECCE system that prioritizes the health, well-being, and learning outcomes of young children while preparing them for a rapidly changing world. This will require a collaborative effort from governments, educators, parents, and communities to ensure that early childhood care and education remains a strong foundation for lifelong learning and development.

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