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REIMAGINING CURRICULAR GOALS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AS THE PANCHAKOSHA: A REFLECTIVE ANALYSIS IN LIGHT OF NEP 2020 AND SDG 4

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Abstract

India possesses a rich tradition of stimulating all-round development for children, including younger ones, within families and communities as well as in educational institutions. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), which has been an integral part of the Indian tradition, focuses on the whole child. NEP 2020 and NCFFS 2022 have considered one of the concepts of Indian tradition called Panchakosha of the Taittiriya Upanishad very important in the present school education system, especially in ECCE. The nurturing of five layers called Annamaya kosha, Pranamaya kosha, Manomaya kosha, Vijnanamaya kosha, and Anadamaya kosha is very important for the holistic development of the child. This article explores and reflects upon the thirteen goals of NCFFS 2022 for ECE (Early Childhood Education) as the Panchakosha. Additionally, the different activities for the five layers were identified respectively to explain their importance in nourishing a child and directing towards the attainment of the development of the domains of cognitive development, socio-emotional-ethical development, cultural/artistic development, physical development, development of communication skills, and early literacy & numeracy to the fullest, which is in tune with Targets 4.2 and 4.7 of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). Therefore, the article supports embracing the concept of Panchakosha in ECE.

Keywords: *Early Childhood Education; NEP 2020; NCFFS 2022; Panchakosha; SDG 4*

Introduction

National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) is the Indian educational policy guided by five pillars of access, equity, quality, affordability and accountability. It specifies that the goal of Early Childhood Care and Education should encompass physical development, cognitive development, socio-emotional-ethical development, cultural/artistic development, development of communication, and early literacy & numeracy (Ministry of Education, 2022). To attain the vision of NEP 2020, the National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage (NCFFS) 2022 was developed to enable its implementation. This framework aided the positive transformation in the curriculum for the school education system, including ECCE.

Even Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG) has emphasised access to quality early childhood education by 2030 in target 4.2 so that these young minds become ready for primary education (Tekin, 2019).

The idea of holistic and multidimensional development of children as stated in NEP 2020, "the integrated development of children, including their physical, mental, and spiritual well-being," aligns with the concept of Panchakosha Vikas of the Indian Knowledge System.

According to the Taittiriya Upanishad, the five layers of human existence are known as the Panchakosha. These are namely, Annamaya kosha, Pranamaya kosha, Manomaya kosha, Vijnanamaya kosha, and Anandamaya kosha. A brief detail of these koshas is explained below:

1. **Anandamaya kosha**: This is the first layer, which deals with the physical body. It includes nutrition, health and fitness. Healthy food habits, physical exercises, and proper hygiene are necessary to develop this layer to the fullest.
2. **Pranamaya kosha**: The second layer deals with life energy, emphasising the development of energy and emotional aspects of a human. When the first layer is developed fully, only then can a human enter this second layer.
3. **Manomaya kosha**: This layer is the mental sheath where thoughts, perceptions, emotions and other psychological aspects are involved. The development of this third layer leads to the development of the mind and its functioning. The five sensory organs constitute this layer.
4. **Vijnanamaya kosha**: The intellectual body is the fourth layer. It focuses on the development of knowledge and wisdom, leading to critical thinking and creativity. In developing this layer, humans make conscious decisions.

5. **Anandamaya kosha**: This is the last and judicious layer, known as the blissful stage, emphasising the development of joy. The interconnection of inner joy with the blissful body is dealt with here. Inner satisfaction is one of the characteristics of this layer.

The interconnectedness and full development of these layers lead to a whole child, as shown in Figure 1.

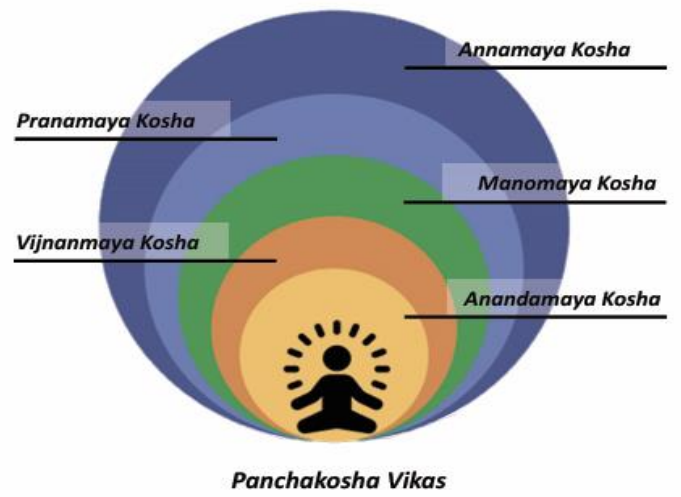


Figure 1. The five layers of Panchakosha Source: NCF-SE 2023

Literature Review

It is important to incorporate Panchakosha theory for nurturing the holistic growth of children through practical application by aligning with Eastern and Western educational philosophies (Chapagain, 2025) because integrating it into various disciplines would promote academic achievement as well as student well-being due to its comprehensive and inclusive nature (Nag & Majhi, 2025). Research on Panchakosha at the early childhood level revealed that certain factors like curriculum development, teacher training, integration of technology, maintaining sustainability, and the involvement of parents are prime for implementing Panchakosha at the preschool level (Ashokkumar Baldevbhai Prajapati, 2025). Another study by Madhu and Atchayasree (2025) on analysing the NCERT mathematics books from class 1-12 pointed out how the National Curriculum Framework for Secondary Education (NCFSE) 2023 operationalised the holistic vision with the Panchakosha model in mathematics education to enhance NEP 2020's vision. This was also supported by another case study carried out by Malhotra and Kaushal (2024), which highlighted the flexible and low-cost nature of integrating Panchakosha, which in turn made the classroom a living and dynamic place for holistic development. Supplementarily, the effectiveness of Panchakosha-based activity for pre-primary students was seen to be positive on the development of the children (Panchal et al. 2023). Therefore, the relevance of Panchakosha in Early Childhood Education could not be denied.

Objectives

The literature review pointed out the different aspects of the benefits and integration of the Panchakosha into the present education system. However, less has been explored in the area of Early Childhood Education (children aged 5 years studying in Balavatika) and its importance in NEP 2020 in terms of Panchakosha theory. Considering this as the research gap, the following objectives formed the basis of this article.

1. To analyse the curriculum goals of NCFFS 2022 in the light of the Panchakosha Framework.
2. To explore the importance of integration of Panchakosha into the curriculum of Early Childhood Education.

Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature, with data mainly from secondary sources. The researcher conducted a reflective analysis of the 13 curricular goals associated with the domains of development as described in the National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage (NCFFS) 2022.

Analysis and Discussion

Even the NCFFS 2022 has highlighted Panchakosha Vikas as the five-fold development of the child in the layers of Annamaya kosha (Physical layer), Pranamaya kosha (life force energy layer), Manomaya kosha (Mind layer), Vijnanamaya kosha (Intellectual layer), and Anandamaya kosha (Inner layer). NCFFS 2022, as a supporting document, incorporated the multiple aspects of a child to interpret Panchakosha from the educational context. It has designed the curricular goals, the competencies and learning outcomes associated with the domains of development (Physical Development, Socio-Emotional and Ethical Development, Cognitive Development, Language and Literacy Development, and Aesthetic & Cultural Development) for Balavatika (5 years) students in a very capable way of nurturing learners through joyful learning, not just for academic success but for holistic development.

Table 1. Distribution of the 13 curricular goals into the five koshas

Sl no.	Koshas of the Panchakosha framework	Curricular goals
1	Annamaya	CG1 focuses on the development of healthy and safe habits. CG3 focuses on the development of a fit and flexible body.
2	Pranamaya	CG2 targets developing sharpness in sensorial perceptions.
3	Manomaya	CG4 points to developing emotional intelligence CG12 focuses on developing abilities and sensibilities in visual and performing arts.
4	Vijnanamaya	CG5 targets the development of a positive attitude towards service or 'Seva'. CG6 aims at positive regard for nature. CG7 aims to develop the skill of observation and logical thinking. CG8 centres on developing mathematical skills of understanding quantities, shapes, and measures. CG9 targets the development of effective communication skills in two languages. CG10 focuses on developing fluency in reading and writing in Language 1 (mother tongue/ local language/ regional language). CG1 stresses the ability to read and write in Language 2.
5	Anandamaya	CG13 focuses on engaging actively in learning environments like a school classroom.

Some of the activities suggested by NCFFS to be carried out during the curriculum transaction of Balavatika through play, which can be related to the koshas of Panchakosha concepts, are named below:

1. **Annamaya kosha**: as this layer is associated with the physical body or the physical well-being of the child, the ways could be:

- Role-play as a doctor and patient involving discussion of healthy food.
- Flashcards of hygienic tools like a comb, soap, toothbrush, etc.
- Short walk in a safe area to explain traffic rules.
- Discussion on safe adults.
- Concept of nutritious food.
- Difference between biodegradable and non-biodegradable objects.

2. **Pranamaya kosha**: the second layer can be developed by:

- Breathing exercises.
- Different types of yoga and meditation.
- Observing nature and everything associated with it.
- Recognising texture, smell, sound, size, shape, etc.

3. **Manomaya kosha**: activities under this layer are:

- Integrating dance, drama, music and art.
- Storytelling.
- Expression and management of different emotions.
- Embracing inclusion.
- Inculcating value education.

4. **Vijnanamaya kosha**: the intellectual layer consists of activities like:

- Inquiry-based activities.
- Creation through observation and logical thinking.
- Problem-solving approach.
- Identification and classification of objects.
- Focusing on linguistic skills.
- Imagination activities.

5. **Anandamaya kosha**: the last layer could be attained by:

- Celebration of different festivals and days of national importance.
- Recreational activities.

Importance of integrating Panchakosha into the curriculum of ECE

NEP focuses on fostering Early Childhood Education by amalgamating a modern approach with Indian traditional culture for the development of a child, which should cover a range extending beyond surface learning, implying inner and external development or a well-cultivated holistic development because education is not confined to academic success only. It encompasses social, emotional, and personal growth through the implementation of a well-designed curriculum with varied methodologies. This could be supported by Miller (2000), who proposed the dimensions for holistic development as physical, social, mental, spiritual, and aesthetic. Even Lucila T. Rudge (2008) identified certain areas that formed the basis of holistic development. Those were human wholeness, spirituality, autonomy, respect for life & nature, uniqueness, interconnection, caring relationships, and democracy as the eight guiding principles.

According to the Panchakosha framework, the combination of physical, mental, spiritual and intellectual layers fosters holistic development; so, when the five koshas are integrated together, it enhances a balanced life characterised by harmony, peace and interconnection with self as well as others. This leads to happiness and self-realisation.

As the NCFFS 2022 emphasises both the integration of Panchakosha and holistic development, it is therefore necessary to look into the relationship between these in the context of ECE. The application of Panchakosha in the Early Childhood Education setting fosters a comprehensive approach to nurture all the domains of development. It has also been pointed out that this framework aids in the development of resilient individuals in globalised contexts. Apart from this, it improves social interaction, physical fitness, mindfulness practices, develops critical thinking, self-awareness, inclusive learning, sense of empathy, enhanced concentration, and emotional well-being.

Other policies where the development of the whole child through Panchakosha is stressed include the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE), 2023. This policy emphasised the nurturing of the five layers for holistic development through some specific practices. Practice for one layer does not merely nourish one layer but contributes to the development of the others as well, reflecting the interconnectedness of the layers. This could also be considered as the body-mind complex in human experience.

However, in NPE 1968, no specific recommendations were made on Panchakosha, but general physical education and games were taken into account in pre-primary education for the harmonious development of the mind and the body. Later on, NPE 1986 gave due attention to the practice of Yoga in schools and made it an integral part of learning.

Another experimental study by Panchal et al. (2023) concluded that Panchakosha Vikas-based activities brought about behavioural development change in pre-primary education students. It impacted the development of students positively. Even the findings from several case studies obtained from demonstrated that Panchakosha, when embedded into daily school life, transformed the school hours into a living and dynamic class because flexible and low-cost resources were used during the integration of Panchakosha.

Thus, the relevance of the Panchakosha system in ECE for balanced development is imperative because integration of Panchakosha addresses the multifaceted nature of the child and the curricular goals with the respective activities, as suggested by NCFFS 2022, and strongly reflects its richness, is deeply rooted and is aligned with the Indian Panchakosha framework. Additionally, one of the necessary steps to be taken for achieving SDG Goal 4 by 2030 was curriculum and pedagogy, where the curriculum, apart from focusing on the development of Cognitive, physical, socio-emotional, moral and religious aspects, should be culturally specific (Target 4.7 of SDG 4) to that country (The Global Goals, n.d.).

Conclusion

The goal of Early Childhood Education as envisioned in NEP 2020 to attain quality early childhood development, care and education, could be attained by embracing Panchakosha into the curriculum, training teachers for implementation through Pedagogical approaches and positive support from other stakeholders. When these are attained, a child could be equipped with a dynamic personality competent enough to thrive in the 21st century.

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