
UNIT 2 NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF SERVICE PROVISION DURING EARLY CHILDHOOD YEARS

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2.1 INTRODUCTION

In Unit 1 of this Block, you have been introduced to the term ‘Early Childhood Care and Education’. This is one of the terms that is used to describe services provided to children below six years of age. In this Unit, you will read about the different types of service provision for young children and the different sectors that are involved in providing these services in India. Most importantly, you will read about why is it important to provide services to children during the early childhood years.

Objectives

After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- define early childhood years from the perspective of policy and programmes;
- differentiate between the different types of service provision during early childhood years and the sectors involved in providing these services; and
- describe the rationale for providing services to children during early childhood years.

2.2 DEFINING EARLY CHILDHOOD YEARS FOR POLICY AND SERVICE PROVISION

You have read in MCD-001 that from the perspective of stages of development, the first two years of life is called the period of ‘infancy’; the period from 2+ to 12 years as the period of ‘childhood’ which is further divided as ‘early childhood’ (from 2+ to 6 years); and ‘middle childhood’ (from 6+ to 12 years). While this nomenclature is accurate from the perspective of stages of development, you need to also know how early childhood years are defined from the perspective of policies as well as service provision for young children. You will find that many ‘early childhood programmes’ in India as well as in other parts of the world, offer services to not just 2+ to 6 year olds (the period of ‘early childhood’ in terms of stages of development) but also to children younger than 2 years and older than 6 years, thus expanding the definition of ‘early childhood’ in the context of programmes and policies. **From this perspective of policy and programme provision internationally, ‘early childhood’ is defined as the period spanning birth to eight years (UNICEF, n.d.).** This period is divided into **three sub-stages** as follows:

- a) **Birth to Three Years:** This covers the period of infancy and toddlerhood, in terms of stages of development.
- b) **Three to Six Years:** This period is generally referred to as ‘preschool years’ as children attend preschool/pre-primary programme during these years.
- c) **Six to Eight Years:** These are the years when children attend the early primary classes (Grade I and II) in the formal school system.

The need to define the period of birth to 8 years as the period of ‘early childhood’ from the point of view of policy and service provision arises from the realization that development is a continuous and interlinked process. In other words, what the child learns and how the child develops in one sub-stage affects how the child grows in the next sub-stage.

The first two years are critical for brain development and the formation of synaptic connections which will influence learning and development in later stages. Also learning and development in this period of birth to eight years become the foundation for future development and learning. If children do not get optimal care and opportunities to learn in any of the sub-stages, then the loss in their developmental potential is massive, and often, irreversible. The sub-stage of 6-8 years has been included in ‘early childhood’ over the past two decades as there has been recognition of developmental continuities between the periods of three to six years and six to eight years. The need to include the component of ‘care’ in programmes for children (who are studying in the early primary grades – Grade 1 and 2); along with the need to continue with the use of play and activity-based teaching-learning methods for education (which are essential features of preschool education) has been

evident. This has led the early childhood professionals to enlarge the scope of 'early childhood' beyond 6 years up to 8 years.

It is important to note that while internationally, 'early childhood' years are accepted as being up to 8 years of age, **there are variations across programmes in different countries, and even between different programmes within a country, regarding the age group of children they cater to.** These variations often exist because of administrative as well as political reasons.

2.3 TYPES OF SERVICE PROVISION DURING EARLY CHILDHOOD YEARS

By the term 'service provision,' we mean the various programmes and schemes which provide health, nutrition, protection, early stimulation and education services to the young child.

Programmes for children during early childhood have different names and different objectives, depending on the focus of a particular programme (Choi, 2002). Let's study these different types of service provisions for young children.

a) Early Childhood Education (ECE)

Programmes of ECE are concerned with the child's early learning process, and focus on the 'education' component in the early years. **ECE is a term used to describe educational programmes for children between the age of 3-6 years that are based on play and activity-based approaches to teaching-learning.** These preschool education programmes (also known as pre-primary education or early childhood education) are generally provided in India through nurseries, Anganwadi centres, kindergartens, Balwadis and pre-primary sections of schools. As you will read the various units of this Course, you will understand the nature of preschool education.

b) Early Childhood Care (ECC)

These programmes focus on providing the 'Care' component where the term 'Care' implies focus on meeting the child's health, nutrition, and hygiene needs. Often, this term is also used to refer to the provision of alternate arrangements of care (such as crèches) for children of working mothers.

c) Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

These programmes are holistic as compared to ECE or ECC Programmes. They provide services to children between birth to six years and focus on promoting all aspects of the child's development – physical, mental, cognitive, social, emotional, language and creativity. These programmes promote holistic development by meeting the child's health and nutrition needs along with stimulation, play, learning, and

education needs through interactions with a loving, caring, and responsive caregiver.

Not only do ECCE programmes provide services to children during the birth to six years period, but they also provide health and nutrition services to pregnant and lactating women. This is because the period from conception to birth is as critical for the development of the unborn child as the period after birth. It is important to attend to the good health of the mother to ensure the birth of a healthy child. Some ECCE programmes also provide health and nutrition services to adolescent girls keeping in mind their future role as mothers. **Thus, ECCE programmes follow a life-cycle approach for fostering the optimal development of young children.**

d) Early Childhood Development (ECD)

While ECCE is a fairly holistic approach to ensuring optimal development during early childhood years since ECCE programmes meet the needs of the child in an integrated manner across all domains of development, a more comprehensive approach is ‘**Early Childhood Development**’ (ECD) or ‘**Early Childhood Care and Development**’ (ECCD). The differences between ECD/ECCD and ECCE programmes are as follows:

Firstly ECD/ECCD programmes deal with children up to 8 years of age while ECCE programmes deal with children up to six years of age. Secondly, the ECD/ECCD approach recognizes that the child is located within the family, the family within the community, and the community within the larger society. The central perspective of this approach is that the needs of the child cannot be met if the rights of women, the family, and the community for safety, livelihood, water, and sanitation are not met. **Early Childhood Development service provision is a comprehensive approach to policies and programmes for children from birth to eight years of age, their parents, and caregivers.** Such an approach involves simultaneous inputs of care, protection, nutrition, health, and opportunities for psycho-social development and learning to the child in an enabling family and community environment which promotes their well-being, holistic development, and learning. It includes the provision of maternity entitlements for all women which become operative from conception. It also recognizes that the livelihood, social security, health, water, and sanitation needs of the family must be secured to enable the family to care for children and promote their optimal development and learning. In other words, simply providing services to the child and the women during the period of pregnancy and lactation is not enough – **the capacity of the family as a whole has to be strengthened to take care of the needs of all its members; only then will the specific needs of the children be fulfilled.** This means that the community as a whole has to be enabled and strengthened to look after its children.

2.4 EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICE PROVISION IN INDIA

In terms of policies and programmes the **Government of India defines early childhood years as being up to 6 years of age**. In India, children in the age group birth to 8 years come under the purview of five separate Government Ministries. Children under 6 years of age come under the purview of the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) and the Ministry of Labour, while the 3 to 6 years period also comes under the Ministry of Education (MoE). Children in the age range 6-8 years come under the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour. Children with disabilities across age groups are provided for by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. Health and nutrition services for all children are provided by the Ministry of Health through MWCD and MoE. The Government's National Policy for Early Childhood Care and Education and the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme which provide services to children up to 6 years of age are located in the MWCD; the crèches for children at worksites are provided under various labour laws of the Ministry of Labour and also through the Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme of MWCD.

ECCE and ECE are the most common types of early childhood services in India. As you have read, ECE services provide preschool education to the child between 3-6 years of age. ECCE services focus on an integrated and holistic approach to simultaneously meet the child's needs of health, nutrition, stimulation, play, learning and education. The ECCE services aim at survival, growth and development of the young child and specific services are provided to different age groups include. The ECCE services usually are include the following services for women and children in different stages of the life cycle:

- a) **Conception to Birth:** Antenatal health check-ups, immunization and supplementary nutrition to pregnant and lactating women.
- b) **Birth to Three Years:** Health check-ups, immunization, supplementary nutrition, early stimulation. Wherever children attend an ECCE centre such as a crèche, these services are provided directly to children there. Alternatively, in programmes where children below three years do not attend the centre, the supplementary nutrition is provided as dry take home ration (THR) and the capacity of the parents to provide early stimulation to the child is developed through parent education programmes and home visits by the ECCE personnel of the programme, so that parents can learn how to meet the needs of their children more effectively. In other words, early stimulation is not directly provided to the child at the ECCE centre.
- c) **Three to Six Years:** Health check-ups, immunization, supplementary nutrition, and preschool education. These services are directly provided to children through ECCE centres.

While the above differentiation between ECE and ECCE services is well recognized and is valid, it must also be noted that the National ECCE policy states that *“for the purpose of this policy, Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) = Early Childhood Education (ECE) = Early Childhood Development (ECD) = Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) = ICD (Integrated Child Development), all promoting holistic development of young child.”* (MWCD, 2013).

In our country, the focus on ECCD/ECD is not yet as strong. The approach of ECD requires focusing on the whole community instead of only the child and the mother. It focuses on meeting the multiple and integrated needs of the family. However, water, sanitation, hygiene, livelihood care, and protection of children come under different Ministries, and converging the activities of different Ministries becomes difficult. Thus, it often happens that services for children are available in a community but the family’s livelihood and sanitation needs are not met. Thus, the family is not able to look after the child in optimal conditions.

2.4.1 National Education Policy, 2020

The newly launched **National Education Policy, 2020** of India has played a significant role in taking cognizance of the developmental continuities between the periods of three to six years and six to eight years (about which you read in section 2.2 above) and placed much emphasis on ensuring that children get much-needed support and education right from the early years of childhood. It has proposed a new school education structure that ensures that early childhood education and care get incorporated into the formal structure of schooling. While the earlier structure followed the division of 10+2 (where the focus was given to Grade 1 to 10 (10) and Grade 11 to 12 (2)), the new policy makes this division much more comprehensive by also adding children from the age of 3 years. It is a pioneering document to introduce the term **‘Foundational Stage’** in the school structure which encompasses children from the age of 3 to 8. Have a look at Fig.1 to further understand this. This foundational stage lasts for a total of 5 years and it has been further divided into two sub-stages:

- a) Preschool/Balvatika (3-6-years-old)
- b) Grade 1 and 2 (6-8-years-old)

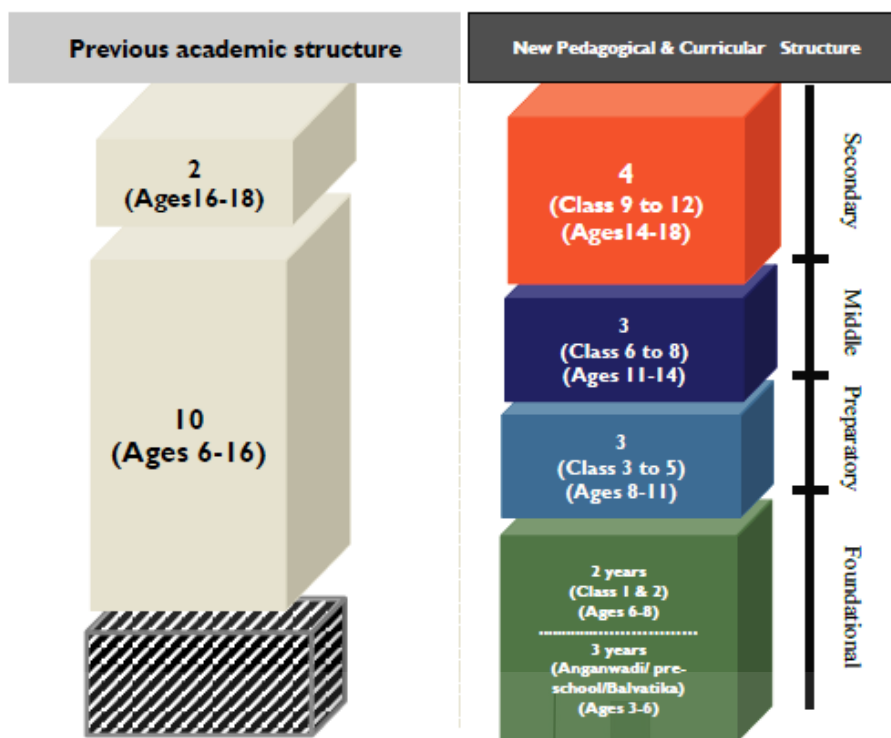


Fig 1: Structure of Foundational Stage Education

Source: *National Education Policy 2020*

While the children in the age group birth to 3 years are not part of school education structure, yet the Policy emphasizes the importance of this age group and states that a separate National Curricular Framework may be made for this age group to ensure their optimal development.

2.4.2 Sectors Providing ECCE and ECE Services in India

The ECCE and ECE services are provided by three sectors in our country: the government sector; the for-profit private sector and the not-for-profit voluntary sector.

ECCE is the favoured approach in the Indian government's policies and programmes as well as programmes of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The Government is the chief provider of ECCE services in our country. It operates the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme which provides ECCE services to children between the age of birth to six years, pregnant and lactating women and adolescent girls. These services are provided through an *anganwadi* located in the community. Presently, there are nearly 14 lakh *anganwadi* centres providing services which makes the ICDS one of the world's largest and unique programmes for early childhood care and education. The services listed for the stages 'conception to birth'; 'birth to three years' and 'three years to six years' (on page 40) are provided by the ICDS programme. For the birth to three years age group, the ICDS programme does not provide early stimulation services directly to children since the *anganwadis* do not provide crèche services. Rather, the capacities of the parents are enhanced to look after the developmental needs of their child through home visits by the *anganwadi* worker. You will read in detail about the ICDS programme in Course 4.

Many NGOs also provide ECCE services but since there are only a limited number of NGOs, these services reach out to only a limited number of children. Many NGOs run crèche services and so directly provide early stimulation and early learning opportunities to children below three years, unlike the *anganwadi* centres.

The private sector is a constantly expanding sector in India and has largely confined itself to the provision of ECE to 3-6-year-olds as seen in nurseries, kindergartens and preparatory schools, ranging from low-fee paying to very high-fee paying schools. Over the last decade, the private sector has also started providing services to children below 3 years of age in the form of play schools and crèches.

The age group 6-8 years in India is not considered to be part of any early childhood programme in India as children in this age group study in the early primary grades, i.e. Grades 1 and 2 of the primary school. In the schools run by the government, children's health and nutrition needs are taken care of through the School Health Programme and the Mid-Day Meal Scheme respectively. However, in the schools run by the private sector, these aspects are generally lacking. Also, children's need for after-school care and protection is neglected during the early primary years across the public and private sectors. There is no systematic government provision for after-school daycare, which leaves a lot of children vulnerable to abuse neglect or exploitation. Some programmes of after-school daycare are run by NGOs but these are few; private after-school daycare is out of reach of the common man. With respect to education, the play, and activity-based teaching-learning methods, which are features of good pre-primary education, should be continued in early primary classes too. However, typically education in Grade 1 and 2 is very formal, lecture-based, emphasizing the learning of three-Rs (reading, writing and arithmetic) through repetition and memorization. Since there are similarities in the needs of the preschool years (3-6 years) and the early primary school years (6-8 years), early childhood practices must be adopted in the early primary school years too. Thus, there is a need for convergence between MWCD and MoE so that the transition from preschool to early primary school is not stressful for children.

As you would have understood ECE service is one of the components of ECCE services. In other words, centres that provide ECCE services also provide ECE services. However, centres that provide ECE services cater to only one aspect of the child's development – learning and education. Usually, they do not cater to child's health and nutrition needs.

The above discussion is a brief overview of the different types of service provision for children in different age groups and the sectors that are involved in providing ECCE/ECE services in our country. You will read a critical analysis of service provisions by the government, private, and NGO sectors in Unit 4 of this Block.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) Complete the full form of the following acronyms.
 - a) Early C..... E.....
 - b) Early C.....C.....E.....
 - c) Early C.....C.....D.....
 - d) I..... C.....D..... S.....
 - e) N.....G.....O.....
- 2) Identify the following statements as True/ False.
 - a) ECD/ECCD programmes deal with children up to 6 years of age while ECCE programmes deal with children up to eight years of age.
 - b) The ECD/ECCD approach recognizes that the child is located within the family, the family within the community, and the community within the larger society.
 - c) Foundational stage includes children from birth to eight years of age.
- 3) What do we mean by a life cycle approach in the ECCE programme?
.....
.....
.....
.....
- 4) Complete the following statements.
 - a) The ECCE and ECE services are provided by three sectors:
.....and
 - b) The sector largely provides ECE services.
 - c) The ECCE programmes promote holistic development by meeting child's andneeds along withneeds.
 - d) For children in the 6-8 yaers age group, there is no systematic government provision forservices.

2.5 RATIONALE FOR SERVICE PROVISION DURING EARLY CHILDHOOD YEARS

What is the need for providing ECCE or ECE or ECCD services to young children you may wonder? During the 20th century, particularly the latter half, many countries across the world initiated early childhood development programmes. However, it is in the past three decades that the significance of early childhood years has been fully recognized by the state and the need for

providing quality experiences to children through early childhood development programmes has been felt keenly (Myers, n.d.).

While many factors led to the focus on ECCE/ ECCD programmes and activities across the globe, the expansion of the knowledge-base during the 1990s in three domains had a significant impact on the realization of the importance of ECCE services. One domain was the discoveries in neuroscience regarding how the brain develops and functions. The second was the research studies and programme evaluations that showed that even programmes of reasonable quality significantly impact early development, often with long-term effects, and that the benefits are the most for children who start at a disadvantage. This growing knowledge-base influenced the discourse on child rights and equity, where the provision of ECCE was seen as the right of the child and a ‘powerful equalizer’ (Irwin, Siddiqi & Hertzman, 2007). The third line of understanding came from the work of women economists and their research on women’s unpaid work, including caring for children and other family members, and the lack of recognition of its value to society. The provision of childcare services came to be seen as integral to prevent discrimination against women by enabling women to combine childcare responsibilities with paid work outside the home.

In the following Section, we have expanded upon the above-mentioned reasons (justifications) for providing ECCE/ ECCD services. Scholars and researchers have provided various lines of argument to support the value/ necessity of investing in early childhood programmes. In this Section, the rationale for providing early childhood programmes has been articulated in terms of five frameworks — survival, growth and development framework; child rights and equity framework; core values and sustainable development framework; economic returns framework; and changing socio-demographic profile framework.

2.5.1 Survival, Growth and Development Framework

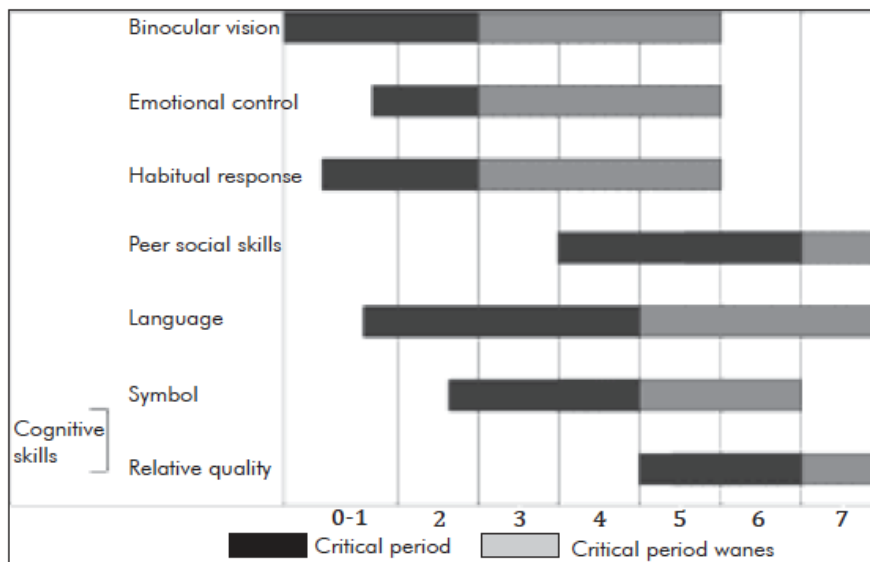
ECD/ECCD programmes are needed as they help to ensure the survival, growth and development of children.

- a) **Child Survival:** At a very basic level, early childhood programmes aim to reduce infant and child mortality and enable child survival. They do so by providing antenatal services; ensuring safe delivery; promoting breastfeeding; and providing health, immunization and nutrition services to infants to prevent diseases and malnutrition. Early childhood programmes help reduce malnutrition of pregnant and lactating women and thereby nutritional deficiency disorders in the newly born and infants. These programmes also help reduce the incidence of stillbirths, low birth weight in infants, or birth defects due to nutritional deficiencies of the mother during pregnancy.
- b) **Holistic Development of the Child:** Early childhood development programmes need to go beyond survival and aim at optimal growth and

development. This is because survival, growth, and development are simultaneous, not sequential, processes and the early years are critical in development since the pace of the development during these early years is extremely rapid and has a lifelong impact. Recent research in the field of neuroscience has added to the knowledge regarding the criticality of the early years due to the rapid pace of brain development. Research shows that a newborn's brain is already 30 per cent of the weight of the adult brain. In the first two years of life, the brain grows to almost 70 per cent of the adult size and within five years to about 90 per cent. In the early years, there are 'critical periods' for the development of various competencies. You have read about the concept of critical periods in Course 1. These critical periods are 'windows of opportunity' so that if the child receives favourable environmental inputs pertaining to health, nutrition, learning, and psycho-social development, the chances of the child's brain developing to its full potential are considerably enhanced. On the other hand, if these early years are not supported by a stimulating and enriching physical and social environment, the chances of the child's brain developing to its full potential are considered, and often irreversibly, reduced. In brief, the development of the brain is influenced by the type of care children receive and the experiences they have. Figs. 2a and 2b show some critical periods in the early years. You can see that up to 5 years of age, the peak period for development of various abilities is completed. Development and learning occur when children get a safe and stimulating environment where they are actively involved in exploring their surroundings and interacting with people and objects (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007).

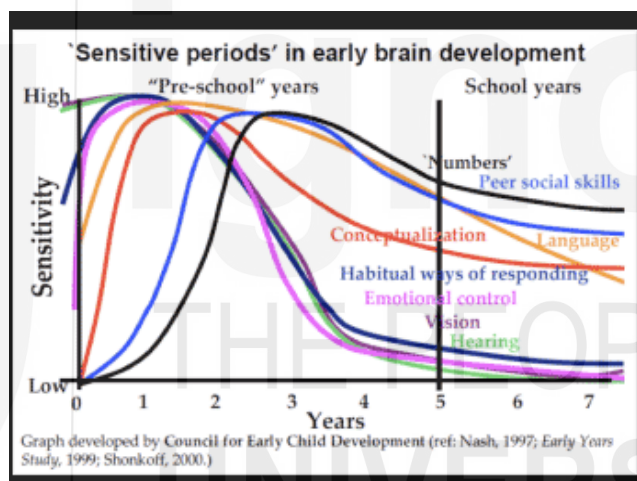
Early childhood programmes are an opportunity to provide integrated inputs for the holistic development of the child. Integrated inputs of health, nutrition, stimulation and education are important as physical, motor, cognitive, language and socio-emotional aspects of development are interrelated, which means that development in one domain influences development in all other domains.

A question may arise in your mind at this time — why do we need early childhood development programmes to provide a safe and stimulating environment for children? This can be easily provided by the family, you may say. While many families can provide such an environment, many are not.



Source: Reaching Out to the Child, HDS, World Bank, 2004

Figs. 2a & 2b: Development of Skills during Critical Periods



Due to a lack of knowledge or resources, parents may not be able to meet the health and nutrition needs of the child and may not be able to provide stimulating opportunities at home for the optimal development of their children. In the case of low-income families, older siblings, specifically older girls take care of their younger siblings in the absence of the mother at home. This not only interferes with the older sibling's education but is also not an ideal arrangement for the younger child as the elder child, who is only slightly older, may not have a proper understanding of caring for the young child.

2.5.2 Child Rights and Equity Framework

Children need opportunities for their holistic development, not just because one day, they will become productive adults, but because they have the right, as children, to live and to grow to their full potential. In other words, at each stage of the development span, every person is fully entitled to enjoy human rights. It is the undeniable right of all children to have opportunities for optimal development through meeting their health and nutrition needs, and

opportunities for learning and education. Allowing disability and arrested development of children when it can be prevented is a violation of their basic human rights (White, 2007). The discussion further explains how the provision of ECD programmes helps to achieve social and gender equality, and therefore, helps in ensuring child rights and human rights.

a) ECD Programmes Help to Achieve Social Equity

We know that many families, especially those from weaker and poorer sections, are unable to provide a healthy environment, adequate nutrition, and stimulating experiences for learning to their children. Children who are raised in such an environment of poverty and deprivation experience stressful conditions, which prevent healthy and comprehensive development in the early years. Children who do not get enough to eat fall ill more often, miss out on learning opportunities, are less well prepared to enter school, are not able to take full advantage of learning experiences in school, and do not get the same results compared to their well-off peers. This gap never ends, and they lag at every stage making them less productive as adults. This, in turn, makes it difficult for them to break out of the cycle of poverty and deprivation. This situation continues generation after generation.

The evidence is growing that initiating early childhood programmes is the most effective way of breaking this “cycle of deprivation”. Early childhood programmes provide a ‘fair start’ to all children by supporting children and their families in various ways — they provide a protected environment save children from abuse and exploitation; enhance children’s development through appropriate health and nutrition, stimulation, and early education inputs, thereby improving the immediate physical, social and economic environment.

By supporting the social contexts of children, i.e., their families and communities as a whole, by increasing the sensitivity of people towards children’s needs and rights, they reduce socio-economic inequities. This minimizes the number of children who need rehabilitation in the school years.

Studies have revealed that the most disadvantaged children — whether because of poverty, ethnicity, gender, rural isolation, or disability — experience the most dramatic developmental gains from early childhood care and development. Those who need it most get the most out of it (Arnold, 2004). Thus, by providing these early childhood services where they are most needed, nations and governments work towards building a more equitable society and reducing socio-economic inequalities.

b) ECD Programmes Promote Gender Equity

Providing services for young children serve to increase women’s workforce participation and enrolment of girls in school. Thus, the ECD programme helps to achieve women’s rights and girls’ right to education, thus promoting gender equity.

Early childhood programmes like crèches and daycare centres provide support services to women and girls so that they may continue with their education, training or work. The crèches and daycare centres provide support services to the working mothers by taking care of their children from morning till evening.

Studies indicate that among families of lower social economic status (where women work as full-day daily wagers, maids, etc.), one of the major reasons for young girl children dropping out of school is that they have to look after their younger siblings at home while their mothers go out to work. The early childhood programmes enable these girls to attend school by taking care of young children/babies for the major portion of the day.

2.5.3 Core Values and Sustainable Development Framework

Early childhood is a time when children are learning values, behaviours, skills and attitudes which last for a lifetime. Sustainable development is defined as ‘development that meets the needs of the present generations without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs. This is possible when humankind learns to value those behaviours that support sustainable development. Education for sustainable development is much more than environmental education and wise use of resources. It includes values and attitudes such as accepting cultural diversity and respecting differences; practicing equality, democracy, peace and fairness; and realizing the interdependent and interconnected nature of our existence. Scientific and technological literacy, critical thinking about present unsustainable behaviours and practices, and finding creative alternatives are part of the curriculum for sustainable development. Early childhood is a time when children are imbibing values and practices, whether or not we teach these consciously to them. Prejudices and stereotypes about races, castes and communities are acquired as early as the preschool years.

An early childhood curriculum that focuses on sustainable development can build in children, the ability to critically reflect on and adopt principles, attitudes, values and practices that will promote a just and humane society. Children will learn what they see around them — it is for us to orient them towards desirable attitudes and practices (Samuelsson & Saga, 2008).

2.5.4 Economic Returns Framework

Sometimes an argument for early childhood programmes being a way to transmit good values to children for sustainable development fails because people consider it to be too “idealistic”. For such people, a more convincing argument is the economic one. Due to the investment in the early years, children grow up to be productive adults. Investment in children during the critical period of the early years saves the nation a great deal in terms of money and preservation of the social fabric. So these early childhood programmes benefit not just the child, but also the child’s family and the nation. Let us discuss this briefly.

a) Benefits to the Child

There are both immediate as well as long-term advantages for the child attending an early childhood programme.

In terms of the child's immediate future, **early childhood programmes act as school readiness programmes for children**. These programmes provide for the overall development of children by improving their cognitive abilities, gross and fine motor skills, language skills, and enhancing their socio-emotional development. These programmes nurture in children several competencies which make them ready for formal schooling. For instance, by attending an ECCE programme, children learn to attend school away from their parents for a long time. They also learn to follow the routine, sit in one place and concentrate on an activity given and explore and manipulate materials to make discoveries on their own. Children develop a positive self-image, increase their attention span and concentration, and acquire social skills of being with other children. These programmes hence help establish a firm foundation for formal schooling (Engle, 2011; Walker et al, 2000).

Participation in these programmes enhances children's performance in school, leading to school success and achievement. It reduces dropout and repetition in primary grades; decreases the rate of conduct disorders, depression and violence; and reduces child mortality. Indian research on 38,000 children across eight states has demonstrated a 15 to 20 percent higher retention rate in primary grades for children who participated in early childhood programmes (Kaul, Ramachandran & Upadhyay, 1994).

The positive long-term impact of early childhood programmes on a person's life span has been studied through various longitudinal studies. The two most well known of these are the Perry Preschool study (Schweinhart et al., 2005) and the Abecedarian study (Campbell et al., 2012). These studies showed that good quality **early childhood education results in children's success in the elementary school years and also positively influence their adult lives**. It leads to a reduction in juvenile delinquency, teenage pregnancy, drug and substance abuse, mental illness, and crime rate; an increase in economic participation throughout life, raised earnings, job satisfaction, employment levels, and quality of the workforce; lead to better adult lives; enhanced overall well-being and better social attachments.

b) Benefits to the Caregiver

The provision of early childhood programmes enables participation by women in the labour force and also frees the older siblings for education or work.

c) Benefits to National Economy

Investments in early childhood programmes have high rates of return.

Many studies have shown that it is actually less expensive and more productive for the national governments to invest in children at a younger age, rather than at an older age. One such study is Heckman's cost-benefit analysis of ECCE provision. Heckman's study is represented by the 'Heckman curve' graph (Fig. 3) which shows that money invested in programmes for the younger ages (i.e. 0-3 and 4-5-year-old children) has greater returns than if the same money was invested in programmes for the later ages of life. This happens because early skill development makes later skill acquisition easier. Children growing up in environments that do not enable the development of both cognitive and non-cognitive skills are at an early disadvantage. Once a child falls behind, he or she is likely to remain behind. Remedial measures for compensating for inadequate early environments become progressively more costly, the later these are attempted in the life cycle of the child. Remedial programmes in the adolescent and young adult years are more expensive. So, investing in early childhood programmes promotes productivity in the economy and society at large (Heckman, 2006).

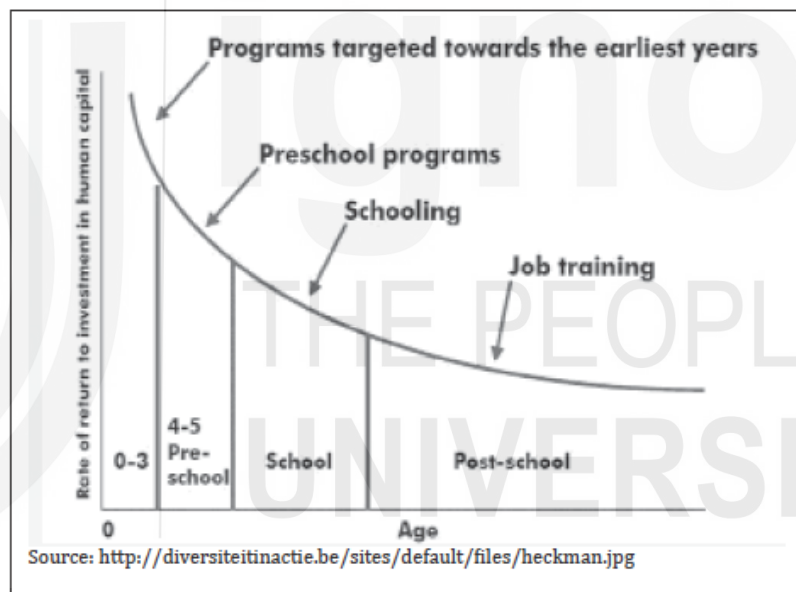


Fig. 3: The Heckman Curve
Rate of Return to Human Capital Investment at Different Ages

Furthermore, investment in these programmes enables cost savings for nations by improving the quality of the workforce, which leads to increased productivity and reduced work losses. The better health and psycho-social adjustment of individuals who have participated in these programmes lead to reduced need for later social service programmes, reduced health costs, and improved efficiency of educational systems, by reducing dropouts and the need for remedial programmes.

These programmes also generate employment for individuals to work as functionaries and educators at different levels.

Hence, by investing in ECCE programmes, the Government can save money that would be otherwise spent on providing specialized services to improve

the condition of malnourished children or children born with defects or on providing special education to school dropout children.

2.5.5 Changing Socio-Demographic Profile

There have been changes in the socio-demographic profiles of families, making early childhood services a necessity. Let us discuss this change.

a) Increase in Female Work Participation

While women from low-income families have been traditionally working outside the home in wage employment or to support the family's traditional occupation, the pressure for them to work to earn has increased over the years. There has been an increase in the rate of female labour work participation outside the home, over the decades, across middle and low socio-economic sections of society. Also in rural areas, as men migrate to cities in search of jobs, women are required to carry out the work related to agriculture. There has been an increase in the number of female-headed households in both rural and urban areas, where the woman has no choice but to work to earn.

In such a situation, who takes care of the children? In many cases, the responsibility for the child care is then taken up by the female relatives of the family such as the child's grandmother or aunt. However, with the changing composition of the modern Indian family, where joint and extended families are changing into nuclear units, this option of child care is not available to most families with young children. Despite, the emotional support provided by extended families, physical distance from them makes sharing child care responsibilities difficult.

The majority of workplaces, in organized and unorganized sectors, do not have the provision of crèche or daycare centres, and where provided, the quality is poor. Those women who can afford this service, leave the child with a paid adult care provider at home, but this person may be largely providing custodial care rather than an enriching and stimulating environment. If the child is left with an older sibling that too may be problematic as the older child may not have patience or knowledge of how to care for younger siblings.

b) The Rationale for Early Childhood Development Service Provision in India

The arguments articulated in each of the frameworks regarding the need for services during the early childhood years are pertinent to the Indian context. According to Census 2011, children in India number around 444 million, of whom 164 million are below six years of age, and constitute 13.59 per cent of the country's total population. The proportion of population living in extreme poverty (who earn less than USD 1.90 per day) is 21 per cent (UNICEF, n.d.). Children of these families live in conditions lacking basic amenities, with little or no access to services

related to their survival, growth and development. Their parents cannot provide strong nurturing environments, which matter the most for children's development. The provision of high-quality early childhood services for disadvantaged children and families can be a powerful equalizer, fulfilling rights, promoting social justice, and positively affecting society.

Further, income poverty (or economic poverty) does not provide the complete picture of deprivation, as individuals *can suffer from multiple other disadvantages simultaneously—for example, they may have poor health or malnutrition, a lack of clean water or electricity or sanitation or housing, or limited access to education. In other words, they may suffer deprivations in education, health, and other living conditions, along with income line.* The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) was introduced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in its Human Development Report in 2010. The MPI identifies multiple deprivations in the same household in education, health, and living standards.

According to global Multidimensional Poverty Index report 2021, India ranks 66 out of the 109 countries that were surveyed for multidimensional poverty. The most recent survey data that were publicly available for India's MPI estimation refer to 2019/2021. Based on these estimates, according to UNDP (n.d.) 16.4 percent of the population in India (228,907 thousand people in 2020) is multidimensionally poor while an additional 18.7 percent is classified as vulnerable to multidimensional poverty (260,941 thousand people in 2020). This means that about 35 % of the nation's population may not be able to fulfill the needs of eth children in an optimal manner.

Further, there have been changes in the family structure from joint to nuclear, an increase in maternal employment outside the home, and the demand for quality education from all sectors of the population, which necessitates the provision of ECD services.

While India has shown remarkable economic growth in the past decades, we need to understand that the benefits of economic growth do not automatically translate into improved outcomes for children (Saxena, 2007). Consistent and specific measures need to be taken to provide optimal environments for the development of the full potential of children. This has been lacking in our country. While Indian economy has increased in size from being tenth position to fifth largest in last nine years in terms of GDP, India's value on the Human Development Index (released by the United Nations Development Programme - UNDP), which includes indicators of child mortality, education, and child labour, is 0.633, for 2021. This places India in the 'medium' human development category, positioning it at 132 out of 191 countries and territories. This shows that social development is not an automatic consequence of economic development. *'If all child rights measures were to become a*

critical measure for HDI, India would fare even worse... acknowledges a report of the Ministry of Women and Child Development (pg. 2, *MoWCD, 2007*). The government needs to prioritize and enhance investment in early childhood development programmes. The government's mandate to invest in the sector of ECCE comes directly from the Constitution. The Preamble promises to secure to all citizens of India justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. However, these values cannot be practiced in the absence of a level playing field, which would provide all citizens the opportunity to grow to their full potential right from the time of birth. This level playing field can be provided by providing services during the early childhood years to all children. In the next Unit, you will read about the provisions for the young child in our country's policies, plans and laws.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) How can an early childhood curriculum facilitate education for sustainable development?

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- 2) Do you think the provision of ECD services is necessary for India? Why?

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- 3) Identify the errors in the following statements and replace them with correct answers.

- a) Investing in early childhood programmes promotes inequality in the economy and society at large.

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- b) The provision of early childhood programmes decreases the participation of women in the labour force.

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- c) Early childhood education results in children's failures in the elementary school years.
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- 4) Match the following five frameworks (Column A) with the correct option (Column B).

Column A

Column B

- | | |
|--|--|
| a) Survival, growth and development framework | i) changing the family structure from joint to nuclear families and migration |
| b) Child rights and equity framework | ii) aims to reduce infant and child mortality and foster optimum growth and development |
| c) Core values and sustainable development framework | iii) right to equality of basic rights irrespective of gender caste |
| d) Economic returns framework | iv) aims to develop critical thinking in children about prejudiced behaviours and practices and find creative alternatives |
| e) Changing socio-demographic profile framework | v) Investment in children during the critical period of the early years is more productive for the nation |

2.6 SUMMING UP

From the perspective of policy and programme provision internationally, 'early childhood' is defined as the period spanning from birth to eight years (i.e., birth-3 years, 3-6 years, 6-8 years).

Early childhood care and education programmes promote the holistic development of children by meeting their health and nutrition needs along with stimulation, play, learning and education needs through interactions with a loving, caring and responsive caregiver. In the early years, there are 'critical periods' for the development of various competencies. Moreover, the pace of development during these years is extremely rapid and has a lifelong impact. Good early childhood care ensures that children will realize their full development potential and grow into productive adults.

There are a number of these programmes being run in our country as well as in other developing countries. There are different types of service provisions for young children in India: 'Early Childhood Education' (ECE); 'Early Childhood Care' (ECC); 'Early Childhood Care and Education' (ECCE); Early Childhood Development (ECD) or Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD).

The ECCE and ECE services are provided by three sectors: the government sector; the private sector and the voluntary sector. The Government is the chief provider of ECCE services in our country and provides services through 14 lakh Anganwadi centres under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme.

The rationale for providing early childhood programmes has been articulated in terms of five frameworks: survival, growth and development framework; child rights and equity framework; core values and sustainable development framework; economic returns framework; and the changing socio-demographic profile framework.

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2.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1)
 - a) Early Childhood Education
 - b) Early Childhood Care and Education
 - c) Early Childhood Care and Development
 - d) Integrated Child Development Services
 - e) Non-Governmental Organisation
- 2) a) False; b) True; c) False
- 3) ECCE programmes provide services to children from birth to six years period. Moreover, they also provide health and nutrition services to pregnant and lactating women. The period from conception to birth is as critical for the development of the unborn child as the period after birth. Few ECCE programmes also provide health and nutrition services to adolescent girls keeping in mind their future role as mothers.
- 4)
 - a) The government sector; the private sector and the voluntary sector.
 - b) Private sector
 - c) Health; nutrition; educational
 - d) After-school daycare

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) Young children tend to imbibe values that may be influenced by prejudices and stereotypes about races, castes, and communities. An early childhood curriculum that focuses on sustainable development can build in the children the ability to critically reflect on and adopt attitudes, values and practices that will promote a humane society that enables sustainable inclusive development.
- 2) Yes, it is imperative to have the provision of ECD services in India as more than two-thirds of the country's children are raised in poverty, and live in conditions lacking in basic amenities, with little or no access to services related to their survival, growth and development. The provision of high-quality early childhood services for disadvantaged children and families can be a powerful equalizer, fulfilling rights, promoting social justice, and positively affecting society.
- 3)
 - a) Inequality (productivity)
 - b) Decreases (enables)
 - c) Failures (success)
- 4) a)- ii); b)- iii); c)- iv); d)- v); e)- i)