Determinants of Quality in Early Childhood Education: A Review of Policy, Infrastructure, and Stakeholder Attitudes

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2026.1309000255

Received: 07 October 2026; Accepted: 12 October 2026; Published: 23 October 2026

ABSTRACT

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) constitutes a critical foundation for children's cognitive, social, emotional, and educational development and has significant implications for long-term equity and learning outcomes. This review examines the principal determinants of quality in ECCE, with particular emphasis on policy implementation, infrastructure and resource availability, workforce conditions, and stakeholder attitudes and engagement. Drawing on national and international literature, the review identifies a persistent discrepancy between policy commitments and their implementation at the institutional and community levels. Although policy frameworks, including India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, emphasise universal access, holistic development, and play-based, experiential learning, their effective implementation is constrained by fragmented governance, inadequate monitoring, underinvestment, and disparities in service provision. The literature further indicates that deficiencies in physical infrastructure, learning resources, play spaces, sanitation, and other essential facilities can substantially limit the quality of ECCE environments. In addition, shortages of adequately trained and supported personnel, unfavourable teacher–child ratios, limited professional recognition, and inadequate working conditions adversely affect pedagogical quality and teacher morale. Stakeholder perspectives also influence the effectiveness of ECCE provision, particularly where parental expectations favour formal academic preparation over developmentally appropriate, play-based approaches. Overall, the evidence suggests that quality ECCE requires a systemic and integrated approach that aligns policy with implementation, strengthens infrastructure and resource provision, invests in professional development and workforce support, and promotes meaningful parental and community engagement. Such measures are essential for ensuring equitable, developmentally appropriate, and sustainable ECCE provision.

Keywords: Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), Policy Implementation, Teacher Attitude, Parental Involvement, Infrastructure.

INTRODUCTION

The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) sector has garnered increasing global attention due to compelling evidence that the period from birth to age eight is critical for holistic development and future success. Neuroscience research demonstrates that brain development is highly sensitive to early experiences, with environmental conditions and relationships during early childhood influencing subsequent cognitive, social, and behavioural development (Kolb et al., 2014). Consequently, ECCE has been positioned as a fundamental component of national development and global agendas, including the Education for All (EFA) goals and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4).

The international community, spurred by milestones such as the Jomtien Declaration of 1990, has recognised that "learning begins at birth." Subsequent policy frameworks, such as the Dakar Framework (2000), have explicitly prioritised ECCE, particularly for vulnerable children. Countries worldwide have responded by

developing comprehensive policies that advocate for holistic, democratic, and child-centred pedagogies, moving away from formal academic instruction in the early years. In the Indian context, policies like the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envision a comprehensive transformation, establishing ECCE as the foundational stage (ages 3–8) and prioritising universal access, foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN), and a shift toward play-based, experiential learning aligned with the nation's ethos. Investing in high-quality ECCE has consistently been associated with improved cognitive and non-cognitive development, greater school readiness, and reduced inequalities in later educational outcomes (Warnasuriya et al., 2020).

However, despite this widespread policy commitment and consensus on its importance, the literature reveals a pervasive implementation challenge, often described as a gap between policy rhetoric and reality. Policy documents frequently articulate ambitious goals regarding quality, equity, and access; however, realisation is hindered by fragmented services, institutional fragmentation, inadequate monitoring, and underfunding. International evidence also indicates that many countries lack reliable systems for monitoring both access to and the quality of ECCE provision, making it difficult to assess whether enrolment translates into meaningful developmental benefits for children (Raikes et al., 2023). Developing regions often struggle with weak government enforcement and fragmented governance, creating conditions in which the quality and consistency of provision vary substantially.

The successful translation of policy into effective practice fundamentally relies on two key human elements: the competence and disposition of the educational workforce, and the informed involvement of parents and the community. Studies repeatedly point to the importance of appropriately trained and supported ECCE professionals, as well-trained staff are better positioned to create high-quality pedagogical environments and promote favourable cognitive and social outcomes for children (Taguma et al., 2012). Similarly, parental engagement is vital to the quality of the process, with research identifying strong partnerships between educators and parents as an important feature of high-quality early childhood provision (Cadima et al., 2020).

Given the criticality of the early years and the acknowledged hurdles in achieving high-quality provision, a systematic review is essential to synthesise existing findings across the core structural and process quality indicators. This proposed study aims to draw on extensive research detailing policy frameworks, infrastructure deficits, workforce conditions, monitoring systems, and stakeholder perceptions to comprehensively analyse the systemic challenges that inhibit the implementation of quality ECCE. By synthesising the existing recommendations, this paper seeks to articulate a clear roadmap for policy intervention, ensuring that the promise of ECCE translates into genuine developmental benefits for all young children.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research can only be undertaken in collaboration with work already completed on problems directly or indirectly related to a proposed study. A careful review of the related literature is an essential step, providing the theoretical basis for the research and enabling the researcher to define the field's limits and state objectives clearly. Furthermore, reviewing literature helps avoid unintentional duplication of established findings, suggests appropriate research methods, and identifies valuable tools and instruments. Critically, the literature review provides comparative data to interpret results and highlights the recommendations of previous researchers for further studies.

ECCE Policy and Program Effectiveness

Global consensus underscores that investing in ECCE, particularly for disadvantaged children, leads to improved cognitive development, better educational outcomes, and increased productivity in adulthood (World Bank, 2013). Studies in India show that children with two years of pre-schooling performed consistently better in language and intellectual development compared to those with no pre-schooling (Muralidharan & Banerji, 1974). Kindergarten experience is associated with initial advantages in social, emotional, and intellectual maturity upon entering first grade (Farley, 1979). The non-formal preschool component of the ICDS project also demonstrated a significant impact on the children exposed to it (Mistry, Kaul, & Dhar, 1986). However, the relationship between attendance and sustained outcomes hinges on quality;

ISSN No. 2321-2705 | DOI: 10.51244/IJRSI |Volume XIII Issue IX September 2026

low-quality pre-schools may offer little long-term benefit (Sylva et al., 2011). Policy frameworks consistently advocate for child-centred, holistic, and play-based learning approaches (Myers, 2000; Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2013; NCERT, 2017).

Infrastructure and Resource Challenges

A significant barrier to quality ECCE, particularly in developing regions, is the widespread deficiency in infrastructure and resources. In regions like Karnataka, studies in 1979 found that most pre-primary schools lacked their own buildings, and almost all required playgrounds, gardens, and modern amenities. This problem persists: evaluations of Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) found that many lacked sufficient play space, separate kitchens, toilets, or water services (NIPCCD, 1980; Qadiri & Manhas, 2009). The lack of facilities, including multimedia equipment, first aid boxes, and sufficient stationery, continues to hinder effective implementation (Ghazi, Ajmal, & Saeed, 2018). Furthermore, overcrowding and high pupil-teacher ratios hinder individual attention and create uncongenial environments, which can contribute to children's reluctance to attend school (Rao, 1990; Sibanda, 2018). Comparisons often reveal that private centres or non-government schools may possess better facilities than government ones (Khara et al., 2013; Jayasree Saikia, 2020).

Teacher Attitude, Training, and Professionalism

The competence and attitude of the ECCE workforce are non-negotiable determinants of quality. Studies show an apparent disparity: most government preschools are managed by untrained staff, unlike private schools (Choudhury, 2021). Untrained personnel often lack the sound foundation required to deal intelligently with children (Ritu & Dave, 1994). Conversely, teachers who have undergone specialised training, such as the Cognitively Oriented Programme for Pre-school Children (COPPC), displayed better skills in organising daily routines, small groups, and outdoor activities (Srivastava, 1992). Teachers generally hold a positive attitude towards the teaching profession (Trivedi, 2012). However, studies also indicate that these attitudes can be unfavourable due to the profession's low social status, poor salaries, and lack of incentives (Farrukh & Shakoor, 2018). Furthermore, while teachers may be aware of developmentally appropriate practices (DAP), external pressures and a lack of resources often lead to a disconnect between their beliefs and practices (Regassa et al., 2021).

Parental Attitude and Involvement

Parental involvement is repeatedly cited as vital for a child’s development and literacy acquisition. Parents generally possess positive attitudes towards nursery school programs (Uma Devi & Vijayakhader, 1993). However, parental choices are influenced by socio-economic factors and perceived quality; wealthier families often choose private, English-medium schools (Vennam et al., 2009; Kaul et al., 2017). In government-led programs like ICDS, parents typically view the centres primarily for the nutrition component, leading to irregular attendance at educational activities (NIPCCD, 1980; Qadiri & Manhas, 2009). Maternal education emerges as a significant factor predicting positive attitudes towards early education (Ghosh & Steinberg, 2022). Studies highlight the need to move beyond mere attendance toward meaningful engagement, in which parents are aware of the holistic curriculum and support home-based learning activities.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The overwhelming body of research affirms the foundational significance of ECCE for individual and national development. However, the sources reveal a critical and persistent discord: the inability of diverse ECCE systems, particularly in developing regions such as India and Africa, to deliver quality services due to systemic implementation failures consistently. While policy blueprints, such as NEP 2020, outline ambitious goals for quality and equity, these objectives are continuously thwarted by identifiable constraints. This paper’s rationale rests on the urgent need to systematically synthesise evidence on the most significant yet often siloed implementation hurdles: inadequate physical infrastructure and resources; the professionalisation crisis in the ECCE workforce; and the complexities of aligning variable parental expectations with developmentally appropriate practices. By drawing on the accumulated findings and recommendations of numerous studies,

ISSN No. 2321-2705 | DOI: 10.51244/IJRSI |Volume XIII Issue IX September 2026

this review provides a robust, evidence-based synthesis that guides policymakers toward holistic, coordinated interventions, thereby enhancing systemic coherence and closing the critical gap between policy aspirations and effective practice in ECCE.

METHODOLOGY

The proposed study employs a conceptual paper, a comprehensive literature synthesis, and a Critical Analysis methodology. As the foundation of this work is an extensive review of the existing literature, the method involves the systematic selection, critical reading, and synthesis of secondary data from various academic sources, including peer-reviewed research journals, books, dissertations, and government policy documents (e.g., NEP 2020). This approach adheres to the established purpose of a literature survey: identifying key issues, defining the problem area, and gathering comparative data for interpretation and evaluation of findings. The analysis focuses on extracting findings and recommendations related to the effectiveness of ECCE, structural quality (infrastructure/resources), and process quality (teacher/parental attitudes). This method ensures that the study remains grounded in existing knowledge while providing comprehensive insights into the multifaceted challenges of ECCE implementation, avoiding duplication of well-established facts.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following five objectives guide this study:

- To synthesise the evidence regarding the impact and effectiveness of early childhood education on children's overall development and school readiness.
- To analyse the existing ECCE infrastructure and resource deficits in government and private institutions as highlighted in the literature.
- To explore the ECCE workforce, including teacher qualifications, training, and professional attitude, as significant determinants of program quality.
- To determine the prevailing parental attitudes and involvement patterns towards ECCE programs across diverse socio-economic contexts.
- To identify and structure recommendations from previous researchers for addressing the gap between policy and practice in ECCE.

Objective Wise Analysis

Objective 1: To synthesise the evidence regarding the impact and effectiveness of early childhood education on children's overall development and school readiness.

The literature provides substantial evidence that quality ECCE promotes positive outcomes for young children. ECCE interventions are crucial for laying the foundation for lifelong learning and development, leading to enhanced cognitive, social, and emotional development. For instance, a study of underprivileged children demonstrated that those who received two years of preschool education performed consistently better in language and intellectual development, achieving significantly higher scores than children who had no prior preschool experience (Muralidharan & Banerji, 1974). This initial advantage extends to formal schooling, where first-grade teachers and parents perceive children with kindergarten experience as more socially, emotionally, and intellectually mature (Farley, 1979).

The benefits are observable across various developmental domains. Children receiving preschool education demonstrated higher achievement in subjects such as Telugu and Mathematics in Class I, as well as English and Telugu in Class VII (Rao, 1980). Furthermore, non-cognitive gains were observed, including superiority in punctuality, increased participation in games and sports, and enhanced picture-drawing ability. The positive impact of the Anganwadi experience on exposed children was significant, suggesting that even large-scale, non-formal systems can be beneficial (Mistry, Kaul, & Dhar, 1986). The foundational principle guiding effective ECCE is developmentally appropriate practice, emphasising play and experiential learning. Play-based learning, a child-centred approach, fosters academic, social, and emotional development through

engaging activities (Taylor & Boyer, 2020). Practitioners believe that play is essential for school readiness and fosters cognitive skills such as creativity and problem-solving (Ndlovu et al., 2023).

However, the efficacy of ECCE is heavily qualified by its quality. Research by Sylva et al. (2011) showed that the cognitive-focused quality of pre-school predicted cognitive outcomes at age 11, and, critically, children in low-quality pre-schools showed no sustained improvements compared to those with no pre-school at all. This means that mere access without quality investment fails to realise the high economic returns and developmental potential promised by ECCE. Studies conducted in Indonesia and India have highlighted that, although ECCE programs exist and aim to promote holistic development, their impact on skill accumulation may be limited due to the current quality of provision (Pangemanan et al., 2018; Ghosh, 2023). Therefore, the evidence confirms ECCE is highly effective, but only when policy and implementation prioritise quality through robust pedagogy, training, and resources.

Objective 2: To analyse the existing ECCE infrastructure and resource deficits in government and private institutions as highlighted in the literature.

A significant finding across numerous studies, spanning different countries and decades, is the critical inadequacy of infrastructure and resources, which severely compromises the quality of ECCE. In India, studies found that pre-primary schools in Karnataka often lacked their own buildings, playgrounds, gardens, and modern amenities (Yeli, 1979). Similarly, in Delhi, 70% of preschools were located in crowded residential areas, and few had proper lighting, sufficient furniture, or fire escape systems (Saini, 1993).

The challenges are particularly acute in large-scale government programs, such as the ICDS Anganwadi Centres (AWCs). Evaluations revealed that the majority of AWCs lacked separate facilities such as a kitchen, toilet, or sufficient play space (NIPCCD, 1980; Qadiri & Manhas, 2009). The availability of learning resources is also consistently flagged as insufficient. For example, a 1978 study on Balwadis noted that a majority lacked provision for outdoor play, creative handwork, drawing, painting, and nature study (Singh, Gopal, & Murty, 1978). More recent studies in Pakistan and Ethiopia have echoed these findings, revealing a significant lack of essential ECE resources, including stationery, multimedia, and first-aid boxes, which require substantial budgetary allocation and improved facilities (Ghazi et al., 2018; Ayechew et al., 2025).

The environment itself contributes to educational challenges. Overcrowding in classrooms and unhygienic conditions are noted factors contributing to children abstaining from school (Rao, 1990). In rural Zimbabwe, the ECD program was severely compromised by a lack of funding, limited accessibility, and a scarcity of necessary resources (Sibanda, 2018). While some studies show that private centres may have better facilities than government ones (Khara et al., 2013; Jayasree Saikia, 2020), other regional analyses indicate private centres may also lack adequate physical space, suitable buildings, and outdoor play areas (Gollopeni et al., 2022). The absence of dedicated ECE infrastructure, with many programs operating within primary school premises, creates an unconducive learning environment (Ayechew et al., 2025; Worku, 2025). Addressing these structural deficits through political will, funding, and capacity building is essential for bridging the policy-practice gap (Andrew, 2014; Ahmad et al., 2019).

Objective 3: To explore the ECCE workforce, including teacher qualifications, training, and professional attitude, as significant determinants of program quality.

The ECCE workforce is recognised as the primary driver of quality, requiring professionals who possess broad knowledge, strong teaching skills, high pedagogical expertise, and essential competencies such as communication and creativity (Ilyasov, 2025). However, findings consistently point to severe deficiencies in staff qualifications, training, and working conditions. Many pre-primary teachers in regions such as Rajasthan (Ritu & Dave, 1994) and Ethiopia (Astatke & Kassaw, 2017) are untrained, with a widespread societal belief that specialised training is unnecessary. The lack of specialised ECE teacher training programs is a noted implementation challenge in countries such as Nigeria (Obiweluozor, 2015; Tombowua & Sooter, 2013).

The gap between policy expectations and teacher capacity is critical. While teachers may be aware of psychosocial needs and the importance of developmentally appropriate practices (DAP), their actual

classroom practices often fall short due to a lack of specific training and environmental constraints (Refu, 2018; Regassa et al., 2021). In one study, public preschool teachers in Nigeria were found to use whole-group instruction and rote learning, which contradicted best practices, despite recognising the importance of child-directed activities (Onu et al., 2010). The problem is compounded by low remuneration and poor status, which contribute to high turnover and low morale. A majority of elementary school teachers in Pakistan were found to have less favourable or unfavourable attitudes, citing low social status and poor salaries as reasons (Farrukh & Shakoor, 2018).

Studies confirm that specialised training significantly improves teacher skills, knowledge, and positive attitudes toward their job (Srivastava, 1987; Murlidharan & Pankajan, 1987). While teachers generally exhibit positive professional attitudes, these attitudes often decline as students progress through their training, possibly due to concerns about curriculum quality or anxiety about appointments (Fadlelmula, 2013; Tok, 2011). Urgent investment in continuous, comprehensive professional development, coupled with efforts to improve pay and working conditions, is essential to attract and retain a qualified workforce (Mkandawire, 2016; Walshe, 2021).

Objective 4: To determine the prevailing parental attitudes and involvement patterns towards ECCE programs across diverse socio-economic contexts.

Parental attitudes and involvement are foundational for successful child outcomes, influencing everything from the child's behavioural patterns to their literacy development. Across different studies, parents generally express a positive attitude towards preschool education, recognising its value for preparing children for formal schooling (Uma Devi & Vijayakhader, 1993; Zadeng, 2022). However, the reasons for participation, and thus the expected outcomes, vary significantly, creating challenges for holistic programs.

In government-run programs like Balwadis and Anganwadis, the main attractions for parents are often the provision of nutritional supplements, day care in the parents' absence, and perceived preparation for later schooling, rather than educational processes (Singh, Gopal, & Murty, 1978; Widge & Aijaz, 1986). This focus often means that attendance during pre-school activities is lower than at meal times, and parents may view AWCs primarily for their nutrition component, resulting in irregular attendance (NIPCCD, 1980; Qadiri & Manhas, 2009). Furthermore, wealthier families often opt for private, fee-based schools, driven by the belief they offer "better quality" and English-medium instruction (Vennam et al., 2009; Kaul et al., 2017). This preference highlights a common misalignment where parents prioritise early academics over developmentally appropriate play-based learning.

Socio-economic factors are strong predictors of positive attitudes and engagement. Higher maternal education is significantly associated with more favourable attitudes toward early education and care (Ghosh & Steinberg, 2022). Conversely, parents with lower levels of education and income often face economic constraints and lack the time or ability to engage in home-based learning activities (Gitonga, 2025; Ali et al., 2022). While parents generally perceive themselves as adequately involved, mothers tend to be more active than fathers (Marković et al., 2020). In nuclear families, males sometimes show significantly more positive attitudes toward preschool education than females (Bhatt & Chavda, 2019). Effective involvement requires educators to cultivate parent experiences, improve communication, and offer targeted resources, especially for low-income families, to strengthen the Home Literacy Environment (HLE).

Objective 5: To identify and structure recommendations from previous researchers for addressing the gap between policy and practice in ECCE.

The synthesis of literature reveals consistent recommendations aimed at transforming ECCE systems from fragmented services to high-quality, coherent provisions:

- **Increase Financial Investment and Ensure Targeted Funding:** Researchers repeatedly call for increased public investment and ensuring that government funds are appropriately allocated, especially for resources and infrastructure in government schools (Adnan et al., 2016; Khalid, 2021).

- **Professionalise the Workforce:** This involves providing specialist ECCE training, establishing clear career paths, addressing low pay, and ensuring adequate incentives (Mkandawire, 2016; Walshe, 2021; Jabbar, 2021). Mandatory refresher training is recommended for those currently lacking intermediate-level qualifications (Anjaneyulu, 2023).
- **Strengthen Policy and Regulatory Mechanisms:** There is a crucial need for clear policies, coordinated governance, and robust quality assurance systems, particularly regulating the unregulated private sector (World Bank & Indonesian Ministry of National Education, 2006; Obiweluozor, 2015).
- **Improve Infrastructure and Resource Provision:** Urgent provision of adequate infrastructure, age-appropriate learning and play materials, and specialised facilities (like for children with disabilities) is necessary (Sibanda, 2018; Maigida, 2017).
- **Adopt Developmentally Appropriate Pedagogy:** Curricula and teaching methods must shift toward flexible, play-based, child-centred, and experiential learning, explicitly discouraging rote instruction and early formal academics (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2013; NCERT, 2017).
- **Enhance Monitoring and Evaluation:** Establishing an effective system for continuous monitoring and evaluation of program effectiveness, including the quality of processes and outcomes, is vital (Nawaz, Ashraf, & Siddique, 2021).
- **Foster Community and Parental Engagement:** Targeted interventions, parent education, and support programs should aim to raise parental awareness of the holistic goals of ECCE, fostering collaboration with the school community (Mkandawire, 2016; Ghosh & Steinberg, 2022).
- **Ensure Inclusion and Equity:** Policy reviews must better serve marginalised groups, including disabled and poor children, ensuring equitable access and specialised support (Sibanda, 2018; Ahmad et al., 2019).
- **Promote Systemic Coherence:** Move away from fragmented, multi-sectoral approaches toward integrated, whole-systems models ("Competent Systems") that link care and education, supported by stable governance (Urban et al., 2019; Urban, 2012).
- **Align Practice with Research:** Policymakers must encourage open dialogue and avoid rigid, instrumentalist approaches that disregard the views and practical constraints faced by those working in the sector (Elwick et al., 2018).

DISCUSSION

The research demonstrates that ECCE is a vital investment in human capital, yielding substantial educational and economic benefits. However, the analysis confirms that ECCE systems globally, and particularly in regions such as India and Africa, are struggling with a profound implementation crisis, the gap between policy intent and the actual quality delivered.

This systemic failure can be distilled into three interconnected quality deficits. First, the structural deficit is evident in a pervasive lack of appropriate infrastructure, inadequate learning materials, and high teacher-child ratios, particularly in the public and rural sectors. These physical barriers fundamentally restrict the implementation of effective, play-based, and developmentally appropriate pedagogy. Second, the workforce deficit represents a critical bottleneck. At the same time, teachers generally value the profession, many lack specialised training, and their morale and retention are severely undermined by low pay and poor professional status (Farrukh & Shakoor, 2018; Walshe, 2021). This lack of a "competent system" means that even well-intentioned policies often default to teacher-directed, rote-based instruction. Third, the perceptual deficit highlights the challenge of stakeholder alignment. Parents, usually driven by a desire for their children to acquire early academic skills (Vennam et al., 2009), may inadvertently pressure schools to adopt inappropriate practices, exacerbating the quality crisis.

Achieving the goals set out in national policies, such as NEP 2020, requires a radical shift from a focus merely on expanding access to a robust commitment to quality determinants. The critical message from the longitudinal studies is clear: low quality is nearly equivalent to no provision (Sylva et al., 2011). Transforming ECCE requires political will, substantial public investment in infrastructure and resources, and, most importantly, the professionalisation and systemic support for the ECCE workforce.

ISSN No. 2321-2705 | DOI: 10.51244/IJRSI |Volume XIII Issue IX September 2026

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the review of the literature, the following ten recommendations are crucial for transforming ECCE provision and closing the policy-practice gap:

- **Increase Public Investment and Targeted Funding:** Governments must significantly increase budgetary allocation dedicated specifically to ECCE infrastructure and quality resources, ensuring funds reach the centres effectively.
- **Mandate Specialised Teacher Qualifications: Implement mandatory, standardised** pre-service education and continuous professional development (CPD) focusing on Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) and holistic development for all ECCE staff.
- **Enhance Workforce Status and Remuneration:** Improve the professional status, establish clear career paths, and raise salaries and incentives for ECCE teachers to address low morale and high turnover rates.
- **Establish and Enforce Quality Regulation:** Implement rigorous, contextually relevant quality assurance standards and accreditation mechanisms, particularly targeting the rapidly growing and often unregulated private sector.
- **Develop Child-Friendly Infrastructure:** Prioritise the construction of purpose-built, safe, and hygienic ECCE centres that include adequate indoor/outdoor play areas, proper sanitation, and appropriate learning environments.
- **Ensure Resource Adequacy and Appropriateness:** Provide sufficient age-appropriate, multilingual, and low-cost teaching-learning materials (TLMs) to support play-based and experiential learning.
- **Implement Developmentally Appropriate Pedagogy (DAP):** Teachers must be supported and monitored to shift away from formal, rote instruction toward flexible, child-centred, and integrated curricular approaches.
- **Strengthen Parental Education and Engagement:** Launch targeted community awareness campaigns and parent education programs to promote understanding of ECCE's holistic goals over purely academic readiness.
- **Reduce Teacher-Child Ratios:** Systematically work to lower class sizes to manageable levels, enabling individualised attention and effective implementation of DAP, which is often hindered by overcrowding.
- **Promote Systemic Coherence and Integration:** Ensure stronger cross-sectoral collaboration and governance, integrating ECCE with health, nutrition, and primary school systems to guarantee smooth transitions.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this literature review carry profound implications for educational practice, training, and policy development within the ECCE sector. Curriculum and Pedagogy must be fundamentally transformed, moving away from a traditional, academic, and rote-based focus towards models rooted in play, experience, and holistic development, as emphasised by the National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage (NCF-FS). The use of theme-based, activity-oriented, and emergent curricula is crucial for fostering curiosity, creative thinking, and socio-emotional skills.

For Teacher Education, the clear mandate is to professionalise the workforce. Training must focus on building pedagogical expertise in Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP), observation-based assessment, and inclusive practices for children with disabilities. The decline in positive attitudes among pre-service teachers suggests that teacher education programs need to be revised to provide more supportive, practical, and engaging experiences that will help maintain motivation.

In terms of Policy and Administration, the emphasis should be on establishing a "competent system" that supports teachers with appropriate resources and autonomy. This includes ensuring that educational administrators and leaders are trained in transformative leadership tasks, staff supervision, and fostering effective communication to sustain the vision of quality ECCE. Finally, the system must recognise and actively support parent-school partnerships; educational institutions should provide clear communication and

resources to parents, helping them align their home learning environments (HLE) with holistic developmental goals.

CONCLUSION

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is unequivocally essential for realising a society's full developmental and economic potential. This review confirms that while the policy intent across countries is mainly positive, aiming for universal and equitable access to holistic, play-based learning, the execution is critically flawed by chronic, systemic challenges. The quality of ECCE remains inconsistent, jeopardised by inadequate physical infrastructure, persistent resource deficits, and a substantial failure to professionalise and adequately compensate the specialised workforce. Furthermore, achieving genuinely effective outcomes requires managing the subtle but powerful influence of parental attitudes, shifting perceptions away from early academic pressure toward supporting holistic child development and actively engaging in learning partnerships. The success of transformative national policies, such as NEP 2020, hinges not merely on establishing a new curricular structure but on a resolute commitment to translating policy mandates into sustained, high-quality practices on the ground. This necessitates immediate, significant public investment, mandatory specialised training for all ECCE personnel, rigorous quality enforcement, and coordinated, systemic coherence to ensure that every child receives the quality foundation they are entitled to.

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