

Early Childhood Care and Education

Mains Syllabus: GS II - Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Why in the News?

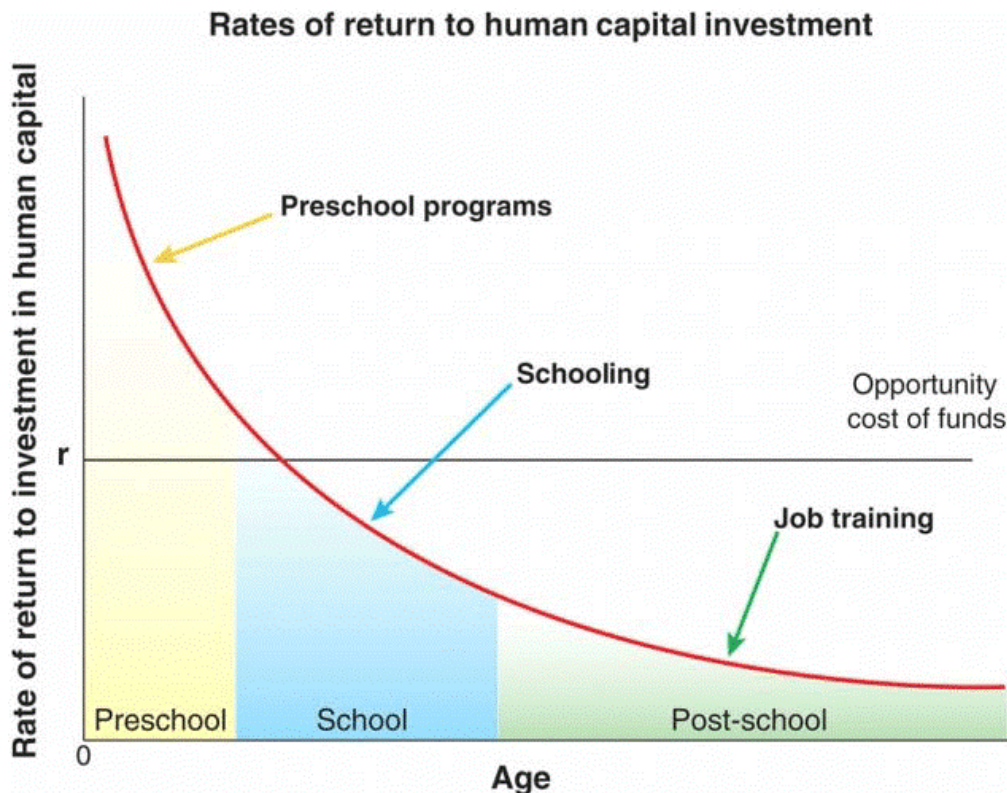
Recently many states are focussing on early childhood care and education.

What are the significances of early childhood education?

Early child development encompasses physical, socio-emotional, cognitive and motor development between 0-8 years of age.

- **Criticality of Early Years** - Between the period 0-8 years in life, the brain develops most rapidly and has a high capacity for change.
- **Strong Health Foundation** - The health and wellbeing laid during stage is the crucial foundation factor that affects throughout life.
- **Early Shaping of Potential** - By age five, many gaps in outcomes — such as earning potential and quality of life — are already evident.
- Children often struggle throughout life if motivation and learning habits are not nurtured early.
- **High Later Return** - Children who receive quality early education are four times more likely to have higher earnings and three times more likely to own a home as adults.
- Heckman found that every dollar invested in early childhood education yields a return that ranges from \$7 to \$12, with lasting impacts.

The Heckman curve was a powerful economic model that provided a simple yet profound insight — of the relationship between age and the rate of return on investments in human capital.



What are the challenges with India's ECE system?

- **Low ECCE** - The India Early Childhood Education Impact Study found that only 15% of pre-primary children could match basic objects, a skill essential for letter recognition in Class one.
- Similarly, only 30% could identify larger and smaller numbers, which are foundational for arithmetic.
- **Direct School Enrolment** - Children often start formal schooling without the skills they need, with many bypassing essential ECE years entirely.

2% of three-year-olds, 5.1% of four-year-olds, and nearly one-fourth of five-year-olds are enrolled directly in Class one.

- **Insufficient Instructional Time** - Nearly 5.5 crore children between ages three to six are enrolled in 14 lakh operational Anganwadis and 56,000 government pre-primary schools.
- However, Anganwadi workers spend only 38 minutes per day on preschool instruction, which is far short of the scheduled two hours.
- **Inadequate Teachers** - Only 9% of pre-primary schools have a dedicated ECE teacher.
- **Overburdened Supervisory** - One supervisor is responsible for monitoring 282 Anganwadis.
- **Lack of Parental Support** - Most parents care deeply about their children's education but may lack guidance on supporting early learning.
- **Insufficient Financial Support** - Government of India spends only Rs. 1,263 a child annually on ECE compared to Rs. 37,000 a student on school education, largely on

producing teaching-learning materials.

What needs to be done?

- Financial support dedicated to Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) needs to be increased.
- While increased funding would lead to immediate improvements, sustaining these gains depends on engaging parents.
- Empowering parents with simple, effective ECE practices can make a significant difference.
- With smartphone access nearly universal, parental engagement can be further strengthened through WhatsApp or EdTech apps, allowing parents to support their children's development.

Government Initiatives on ECCE

- **National Education Policy 2020** - It significantly emphasizes Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), aiming to make it a foundational stage for children aged 3-8.
- The policy aims to ensure universal access to quality ECCE by 2030, ensuring all children are "school-ready".
- **Aadharshila** - The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) has released the National Curriculum for Early Childhood Care and Education 2024 titled 'Aadharshila,' on the lines of NEP 2020.
- It is a detailed 48-week curriculum meant for learning in the age-group of three to six-year-olds in anganwadis.
- **Shishu Vatikas** - Odisha government has taken the decision to open Shishu Vatikas in all government schools to make children in the age group five to six school ready.
- **Bal Choupal programme** - In Madhya Pradesh, under this program parents directly engaged by showing them the importance of play-based learning.

References

[The Hindu | Rewriting the script of early childhood education](#)

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