# 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?

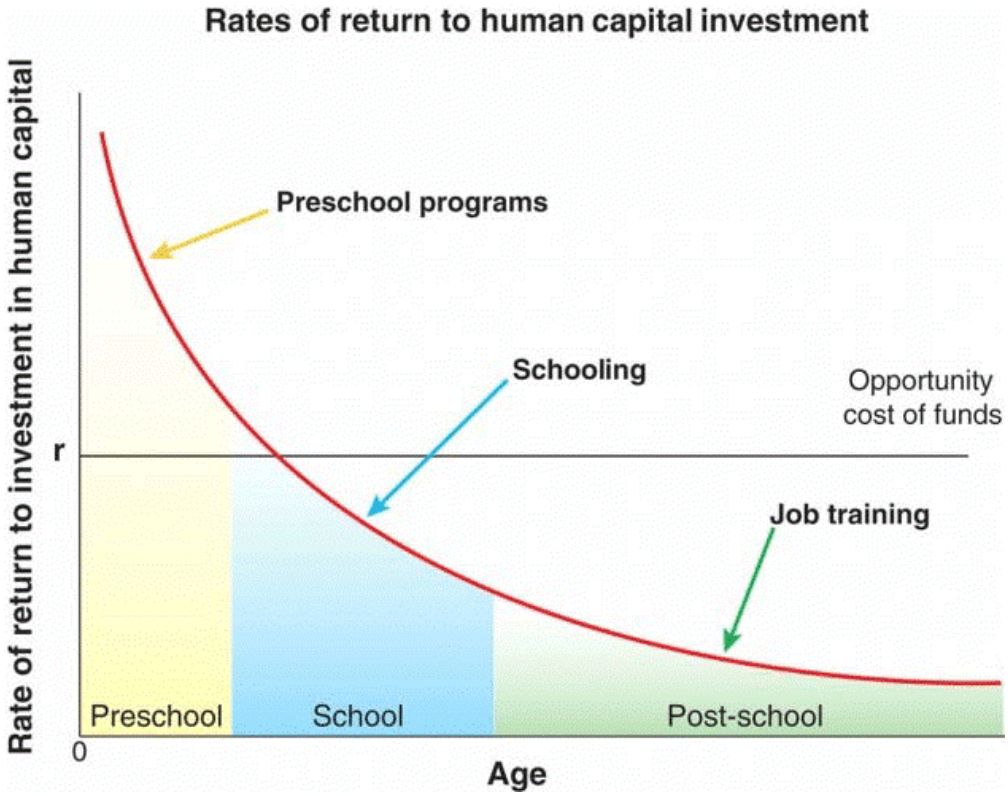
Recently many states are focussing on early childhood care and education.

## 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 |
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| • **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.<br>• The policy aims to ensure universal access to quality ECCE by 2030, ensuring all children are "school-ready".<br>• **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.<br>• It is a detailed 48-week curriculum meant for learning in the age-group of three to six-year-olds in anganwadis.<br>• **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.<br>• **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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