ECCE of the Draft National Education Policy

What is the issue?

- The draft National Education Policy (NEP) has a separate chapter on early childhood care and education (ECCE).
- This ECCE has said to omit certain factors.

What did the draft NEP omit?

- The draft NEP states that the learning process for a child commences immediately at birth.
- Higher cognitive function attains peak growth between the ages of 1 and 3, before school education begins.
- However, the draft also says that over 85% of a child's cumulative brain development occurs prior to the age of 6.
- Stretching the window of opportunity to 6 years is a mistake because the global focus for optimal brain development is on the first 1,000 days of a person's life.

How is the foundation laid?

- These 1,000 days are when rapid and dramatic changes take place in the brain and fundamental cognitive and interpersonal skills are developed.
- Pregnancy and infancy are important periods for the formation of the brain and the foundation for the development of cognitive, motor and socio-emotional skills is laid.
- Apart from genetic determinants, environmental determinants play an equally critical role in shaping personality.

What does the draft NEP lack in?

- The drafting committee of the NEP should have consulted a **paediatrician or developmental neurologist** on what needs to be done in the first 1,000 days.
- The policy has rightly categorised early childhood education into two parts.
    1. Children below the age of 3 years.

2. Children aged 3 to 6 years (Anganwadi centres' target)

- The section on ECCE up to 3 years is sketchy and inadequate.
- It only mentions health and nutrition services for both mothers and children.
- The responsibility to provide psycho-social stimulation for development is left entirely to the parents or family members.
- Children below age 3 are not enrolled in the daily services of the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) centre/ Anganwadi centre.

How to fill the gap?

- This gross design defect in the architecture of the ICDS has existed since its inception.
- Policy directions and strategies for, care concept with early stimulation for child development are lacking in the ICDS.
- The solution is to have an additional worker in every Anganwadi, who will impart psychosocial stimulation of the child.
- This stimulation is useful for the development of the brain through 5 sensory organs of the body.

How does development take place?

- The intensity and frequency of flow of the above-mentioned stimulation during early childhood determines the level of intelligence and mental development attained.
- The baby's **explorative learning** and storage of such inputs into the brain takes place every moment of her early life.
- The baby also derives **analytical conclusions** based on which she develops value systems and character.

What could the parents/caregivers do?

- Cleaning the baby, using tactile and pressure stimulation adds to the baby's understanding of love and care.
- The concentration should be given for providing her security, improving her social interaction skills, improving visualisation, improving the auditory areas and other sensory learning.
- By the time the child is two or three, she will be asking questions. Stories stretch their imagination.
- **Policymakers** – May have a look at the Chhattisgarh's experimental project of Fulwari or community-managed crèches, for its replication.

Source: The Hindu

