



# शोध भूमि

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## Role of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programs in Shaping Secondary Students' Educational Aspiration and Self-concept

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### ABSTRACT

Educational aspiration and self-concept are critical determinants of academic achievement and lifelong learning. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programs play a foundational role in nurturing these traits by providing structured learning experiences, fostering cognitive and socio-emotional development, and promoting self-confidence in children. Recognizing the long-term impact of early education, this study examines how ECCE interventions influence secondary students' educational aspirations and self-concept by analyzing existing research, reports, and scholarly data.<sup>1</sup> Through a comprehensive review of secondary sources, including government reports, academic journals, policy documents, and international education studies, this paper investigates the interplay between early learning experiences, family environment, and teacher preparedness in shaping students' motivation, goal-setting behavior, and self-perception. The study also evaluates the role of Integrated Teacher Education Programmes (ITEP) in equipping educators with pedagogical strategies that enhance the effectiveness of ECCE initiatives.

By synthesizing evidence from multiple sources, the research identifies patterns, correlations, and insights that highlight the significance of continuity between early childhood education and secondary-level academic outcomes. The findings emphasize that well-structured ECCE programs, supported by qualified teachers and nurturing family environments, significantly contribute to the development of students' self-concept and their aspirations for higher education.<sup>2</sup> This paper aims to inform policymakers, curriculum developers, and educators about the value of evidence-based early education strategies, providing a framework for improving educational outcomes and fostering holistic development in children.

### Keywords:

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), Self-Concept, Secondary Education, Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP), Family Environment.

## **1. INTRODUCTION -**

Early childhood is widely regarded as the most formative period in an individual's life, laying the foundation for cognitive, emotional, and social growth. The experiences and environments a child is exposed to during the first eight years profoundly influence their personality, confidence, and motivation to learn. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) thus plays a crucial role in nurturing a child's holistic development and setting the stage for lifelong learning. In the Indian context, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes ECCE as the "bedrock of education," recognizing that quality early education leads to stronger academic outcomes, higher retention, and improved self-concept during later years of schooling.<sup>3</sup>

ECCE not only supports the development of basic literacy and numeracy but also instills essential values such as curiosity, discipline, and emotional stability. Studies suggest that children who receive structured early education show better self-regulation, stronger motivation, and higher educational aspirations compared to those without such exposure.<sup>4</sup> A well-designed ECCE program provides a balanced blend of play-based learning, socio-emotional engagement, and family participation are the factors that contribute directly to a child's sense of competence and self-worth.

The transition from early childhood education to secondary schooling is not merely academic; it also reflects how early learning shapes a child's goals, aspirations, and self-perception. Educational aspiration drives to achieve higher learning goals and is often rooted in the confidence and cognitive stimulation children experience in their early years. Similarly, self-concept, which reflects how students perceive their abilities and identity as learners, is built gradually through consistent encouragement, positive teacher interaction, and supportive family environments.<sup>5</sup>

In this light, understanding the long-term influence of ECCE on secondary students' educational aspirations and self-concept becomes essential for educators, policymakers, and curriculum planners. The Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP) under NEP 2020 further strengthens this relationship by preparing teachers who are better equipped with child-centered pedagogical approaches and a deep understanding of early development.

This paper, based entirely on secondary data, aims to synthesize existing literature, policy frameworks, and empirical findings to explore how ECCE programs influence later educational

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behavior. It draws insights from national and international reports, government initiatives, and prior studies to highlight the importance of early education in shaping motivated, confident, and self-assured learners.

## **2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY -**

Education during the early years of life has a big influence on how individuals think, learn, and perceive themselves. The purpose of this study is to examine how Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programs shape the educational aspirations and self-concept of students when they reach the secondary level. As this study is based entirely on secondary data, it aims to integrate findings from various research works, policy frameworks, and institutional reports to create a holistic understanding of this relationship.

The first objective of the study is to analyze the influence of ECCE programs on the development of educational aspirations among secondary-level students. Educational aspiration refers to the desire and motivation of learners to achieve higher educational goals. Research indicates that children who receive strong foundational learning experiences in early childhood are more likely to aspire toward higher education and academic achievement later in life.<sup>6</sup> These programs instill curiosity, confidence, and perseverance are the key factors that guide a child's long-term academic motivation.

The second objective is to study the relationship between ECCE participation and self-concept formation. Self-concept, which reflects how students view their own abilities and potential, is a crucial psychological factor that determines learning outcomes. Positive early experiences, empathetic teachers, and supportive peer interactions during ECCE build a child's sense of competence and self-worth. Studies emphasize that when children feel valued and encouraged in early classrooms, their belief in their abilities continues to strengthen throughout school life.<sup>7</sup>

The third objective focuses on examining the role of teacher preparedness and family environment in sustaining early learning outcomes. Trained educators play a vital role in providing emotionally safe and intellectually stimulating classrooms. The Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP) under the NEP 2020 is a key initiative designed to prepare teachers who understand the psychology of early learners and can extend these benefits into later education stages.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, family support through emotional care,

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encouragement, and consistent involvement serves as a reinforcing element for sustained learning and motivation.

Finally, the fourth objective is to synthesize the key insights drawn from existing secondary data sources including reports from UNESCO, NCERT, and academic literature to identify recurring patterns and policy implications. This synthesis will not only highlight the long-term value of ECCE but also offer recommendations for strengthening the continuum between early learning and secondary education.

### **3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES -**

Research questions and hypotheses form the backbone of any academic inquiry, guiding the direction of analysis and interpretation. This study, based entirely on secondary data, aims to explore how Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) influences secondary students' educational aspirations and self-concept. It also seeks to understand the role of teacher preparedness and family support in sustaining the outcomes of early education. The formulation of research questions is grounded in existing theoretical and empirical literature that establishes a strong connection between early learning experiences and later educational motivation.

- The central research question of this study is –

#### **How does participation in ECCE programs shape educational aspirations and self-concept among students at the secondary level?**

This question is rooted in the recognition that early childhood education provides not only cognitive foundations but also emotional and social competencies necessary for success in formal schooling. According to UNESCO (2020), children who receive high-quality ECCE are more likely to develop a positive attitude toward learning, which translates into higher academic ambitions later in life.

- The second research question focuses on –

#### **What is the nature of the relationship between early learning environments and students' self-concept?**

Self-concept, as explained by Rao and Sun<sup>9</sup>, is built gradually through positive reinforcement, peer interaction, and teacher feedback during the early years. It reflects how learners perceive their abilities and influences their level of confidence and persistence. Understanding this relationship through secondary data enables educators to identify patterns in existing literature that reveal how ECCE contributes to psychological readiness for higher education.

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- The third research question asks –

**How do teacher training and family environment mediate the effects of ECCE on later academic behavior?**

The National Education Policy (2020) emphasizes that teacher quality and family participation play pivotal roles in ensuring continuity between early and secondary education. The Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP) seeks to prepare teachers who understand the developmental needs of young learners, thus reinforcing early learning gains throughout a child's educational journey.

Based on these questions, two primary hypotheses have been developed:

- **H<sub>1</sub>:** Exposure to high-quality ECCE programs positively correlates with higher educational aspirations at the secondary level.
- **H<sub>2</sub>:** Students with early ECCE exposure demonstrate stronger academic self-concept compared to those without such exposure.

These hypotheses will be tested through a comprehensive review and synthesis of existing literature and national educational data. The results are expected to reaffirm that strong early childhood education systems significantly enhance both the academic and personal growth of learners across developmental stages.

#### **4. METHODS AND PROCEDURE -**

The present study is descriptive and analytical in nature, designed to explore the relationship between Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) and the later development of educational aspirations and self-concept among secondary-level students. Since the study is grounded exclusively in secondary data, it aims to interpret and synthesize existing research findings rather than collect new empirical evidence. The purpose is to derive meaningful insights from previously published academic works, national and international policy reports, and official educational statistics.

##### **4.1 Nature of the Study**

The study adopts a descriptive research approach, as it focuses on identifying and describing patterns and associations that exist within the domain of ECCE and adolescent educational outcomes. The analytical component of the study lies in its effort to critically evaluate existing literature and interpret how early learning interventions contribute to cognitive, emotional, and

social growth. This approach allows for a systematic understanding of how foundational experiences influence later academic motivation and self-perception.

#### **4.2 Sources and Type of Data**

The study exclusively uses secondary data derived from authentic and reputable sources. The main bodies of literature include:

- Government reports and policy documents, such as the *National Education Policy (NEP), 2020* and the *ECCE Policy Framework (2013)* released by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India.
- International publications from organizations like UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank, which provide global perspectives on the importance of early childhood education and its long-term impacts.
- Peer-reviewed academic journals and research articles focusing on early learning, child psychology, and educational development. Studies were especially significant in explaining the link between early experiences and self-concept formation.<sup>10</sup>

#### **4.3 Data Analysis Procedure**

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis and literature synthesis techniques. Through thematic categorization, recurring patterns and core ideas were identified—such as the role of teacher quality, curriculum design, and parental engagement in shaping educational aspirations. The literature was then synthesized to compare trends across different socio-economic contexts, enabling the study to highlight both the universality and the contextual uniqueness of ECCE's impact.

This method ensures that conclusions are not based on isolated studies but on an integrated understanding of collective research findings, providing both depth and reliability to the interpretations.

#### **4.4 Scope and Limitations**

The scope of this study is confined to the review and analysis of published materials related to ECCE and its developmental outcomes. While this enhances credibility and global relevance, the limitation lies in the absence of primary data collection, which restricts firsthand observation of outcomes. Moreover, differences in methodologies across reviewed studies may create some inconsistencies in comparative analysis. Nevertheless, secondary data provides a rich foundation for understanding broader patterns and global educational trends.

## **5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION -**

The findings from the reviewed secondary sources strongly indicate that ECCE plays a foundational role in shaping the long-term educational aspirations, emotional stability, and self-concept of students at the secondary level. The synthesis of various studies reveals that early learning experiences particularly those involving structured play, social interaction, and nurturing environments significantly influence children's confidence and motivation to learn later in life.

Evidence shows that quality early childhood programs improve not only cognitive readiness but also socio-emotional adaptability.<sup>11</sup> Children who received exposure to inclusive and engaging ECCE settings tend to develop higher self-esteem, which later translates into ambitious educational goals. Conversely, inadequate or inconsistent early experiences often result in lower confidence and diminished academic persistence.

Another major outcome observed through literature review is the role of teacher preparedness. The introduction of the ITEP under the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 aims to build a more holistic and competent teaching workforce. Studies suggest that teachers trained through integrated frameworks are better equipped to address the diverse developmental needs of young learners. This quality of teacher engagement, in turn, reflects in how students perceive learning during their foundational years and how that perception influences their future academic identity.

Socio-economic context also emerges as a crucial factor. Research from UNICEF and national-level studies highlight that children from supportive home environments, where parents are involved in early learning activities, show stronger academic aspiration at later stages.<sup>12</sup> Parental literacy, communication patterns, and emotional support serve as mediating factors that reinforce the benefits of ECCE.

Comparative studies further show that nations with robust early childhood systems such as Finland and Singapore demonstrate better continuity between pre-primary and formal schooling stages. This seamless transition contributes to sustained learning interest, a finding that carries clear implications for India's ECCE-ITEP framework.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY -**

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Based on the synthesis of secondary data, the study concludes that ECCE is not merely a preparatory stage but a determinant of lifelong educational orientation. The quality of early learning experiences profoundly shapes how children view themselves as learners and influences their future aspirations and achievements.

The integration of ECCE principles into teacher training through ITEP marks a promising direction for India's education system. It emphasizes continuity, inclusivity, and experiential learning, bridging the gap between early years and formal education. However, effective implementation demands sustained policy support, capacity building, and strong collaboration between teachers, parents, and local communities.

For policymakers, the implications are clear: investing in high-quality ECCE and teacher education is one of the most effective strategies to promote educational equity and achievement. Curriculum design must prioritize emotional development, play-based learning, and parent engagement to ensure holistic growth.

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