

Transforming Early Childhood Care and Education in Manipur through Art and Play-based Pedagogies under NEP 2020 and NCF-FS 2022

AKOIJAM PETE MEITEI*, NAOREM INGOCHOUBA SINGH**, AND KH. KESHO SINGH***

Abstract

The article discusses integrating art and play-based pedagogies into early childhood care and education in Manipur. It focuses on three key developmental goals: maintaining health and well-being, becoming effective communicators, and evolving as involved learners connected to their surroundings. Using a qualitative methodology and thematic analysis, the study analyses policy frameworks, academic literature, and best global practices to evaluate the alignment of these pedagogical approaches with the objectives of NEP 2020 and NCF-FS 2022. It emphasises the importance of art and play in early childhood development, outlining different types of play and their benefits. The paper provides strategies for implementing these approaches to support physical health, motor skills, mental well-being, language development, multilingual exposure, and experiential learning. Despite challenges like resource constraints and teacher training, the article highlights the new policy framework's opportunities. It concludes with recommendations for future directions, including research, technology integration, community engagement, and continuous professional development. The paper examines how integrating art and play-based pedagogies is crucial for achieving holistic development in young children and realising India's vision for high-quality early childhood education.

Keywords: Pedagogy, NEP-2020, NCF-FS 2022, ECCE, Play-based Pedagogies, Pre-primary Education

*Assistant Professor, Ibotombi Institute of Education, Canchipur, Manipur; and Research Scholar, Department of Education, Manipur University

**Assistant Professor, Ibotombi Institute of Education, Canchipur, Manipur

***Associate Professor, Department of Education, D.M. College of Arts, Dhanamanjuri, University, Manipur

INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is increasingly recognised as the cornerstone of the foundational stage for lifelong learning and development, particularly during the formative years from birth to eight, which is marked by rapid brain development and foundational growth in cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical domains. Acknowledging its critical importance, the Government of India has prioritised ECCE through the National Education Policy 2020 and the National Curriculum Framework for the Foundational Stage 2022. These policy frameworks advocate transitioning from traditional teaching methods to developmentally appropriate, engaging pedagogies, emphasising art and play-based learning (NCERT, 2022; NEP, 2020).

This shift aims to foster holistic development in children aged 3–8, covering key developmental goals such as health and well-being, effective communication, and active, environment-connected learning. The NEP 2020 sets an ambitious target of achieving universal access for children (aged 3–6) to provide high-quality ECCE by 2025 under the NIPUN Bharat mission, while the NCF-FS 2022 offers specific guidelines for experiential, holistic, and art-integrated education. Art and play-based pedagogies are central to these reforms, with art-integrated learning promoting creative and

expressive abilities (GoI, 2021). The policies seek to transform early childhood care and education by addressing theoretical and practical aspects of these methodologies, focusing on their potential to enhance children's learning experiences. This article examines these pedagogies' theoretical basis and empirical benefits, proposing research methodologies to evaluate their impact. The ultimate goal is to provide insights into how these approaches can revolutionise early childhood care and education, particularly in Manipur and India, ensuring a solid foundation for lifetime learning and development.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Traditionally, ECCE in India has been dominated by rote learning, focusing on early literacy and numeracy delivered through structured worksheets and teacher-directed activities (Kumar, 2010). While these skills are valuable, their overemphasis often sidelines exploration, creativity, and social interaction, which are essential for holistic development (Bodrova and Leong, 2024). This approach fails to meet young children's diverse learning styles and developmental needs, potentially causing disengagement and a lack of intrinsic motivation (Claxton, 2008).

NEP 2020 and NCF-FS 2022 address these issues by advocating for child-centred, play-based, and joyful learning environments. The NEP highlights the “play-based and

activity-based learning” (NEP 2020, 2.1). It underscores the role of art in fostering creativity and expression. Similarly, the NCF-FS identifies “Art and Aesthetics” and “Play” as core developmental domains, emphasising their importance for children aged 3–8.

Research supports this paradigm shift, demonstrating that play promotes exploration, problem-solving, social skills, and emotional regulation (Piaget, 1952; Vygotsky, 1978). Engagement with art enhances creativity, sensory awareness, fine motor skills, and emotional expression (Eisner, 2003). These pedagogies align education with children’s natural learning processes, fostering holistic growth.

Despite the robust policy framework, implementation challenges persist. Resource disparities, insufficient teacher training, and inadequate infrastructure, especially in rural areas, hinder the adoption of play-based and art-integrated approaches (Kaul and Sankar, 2020). Many educators rely on rote methods, undermining holistic development (UNICEF, 2021). Bridging this gap is vital for realising the transformative potential of NEP 2020 and NCF-FS 2022.

The study explores art and play-based pedagogies in achieving the three aforementioned developmental goals. It also examines integrating India’s artistic heritage into early education to enhance cognitive and socio-emotional outcomes (R. Kaur and Mohite, 2021). Notably, the study incorporates the views of

preschool teachers, parents, and children to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities in implementing these pedagogies. This stakeholder engagement enhances the study’s reliability and practical relevance.

Recognising the NEP’s emphasis on equitable and inclusive education, the study aims to ensure these innovative pedagogies benefit children across diverse socio-economic contexts. Addressing implementation barriers seeks to close the gap between policy and practice, contributing to national priorities and international educational standards. Ultimately, this research supports India’s broader goals of achieving quality education (SDG 4) and becoming a global knowledge leader while ensuring superior Early Childhood Care and Education for all children by 2025 (Kalavathi and Dscholar, 2023).

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

ECCE is a foundational stage for lifelong learning, with global research highlighting the significance of play-based and art-integrated pedagogies in fostering holistic development. These approaches engage young learners in experiential activities that nurture cognitive, socio-emotional, and creative skills while promoting curiosity, problem-solving, and critical thinking (Fisher *et al.*, 2011). NEP 2020 and NCF-FS 2022 reinforce these principles, emphasising child-centric

pedagogies to ensure comprehensive development during foundational years (NEP, 2020; NCERT, 2022).

Numerous studies have shown that play-based learning enhances emotional well-being, self-regulation, and intrinsic motivation, which are essential for academic success (Bruce, 2015; Howard and McInnes, 2013). Simultaneously, art integration fosters cultural relevance, critical thinking, and emotional expression, making learning meaningful and contextually appropriate (Bruce, 2015; Koster, 2012). Research by Fler (2011) highlights how play allows children to explore their environment, acquire social skills, and develop cognitively. Burchinal emphasise that creative expression enhances engagement and understanding among young learners (Burchinal *et al.*, 2015).

In the Indian context, NEP 2020 envisions reimagining the early education with play- and art-based pedagogies at its core. However, practical challenges persist, including disparities in resources, insufficient teacher training, and limited awareness of innovative practices, which hinder the effective implementation of these methods (Kaul and Sankar, 2020). Traditional rote-based teaching methods remain prevalent in many pre-primary settings, especially in under-resourced areas (NCTE, 2009).

Empirical studies, such as those by Mohite and Shukla, demonstrate the transformative potential of play

and art-based pedagogies in improving learning outcomes, particularly among children from diverse socio-economic backgrounds (Mohite and Shukla, 2021). Nonetheless, these studies also underscore the need for robust teacher capacity-building programmes and infrastructure improvements to bridge the gap between policy aspirations and classroom realities.

Research indicates that preschool teachers, parents, and children support art and play-based pedagogy in early childhood care and education (ECCE). Teachers report high levels of child engagement and enthusiasm, with most noting positive impacts on creativity, emotional expression, social skills, and cognitive and motor development (Vasilaki, 2024; Kraus, 2024). However, they also face barriers such as inadequate resources, infrastructure gaps, and the need for continuous training (NCERT, 2022; ICERT, 2024). Parents value art and play to support children's holistic growth and enjoyment, encourage play-based learning at home, and appreciate safe, well-equipped environments (Lungu and Matafwali, 2020; Zaman, 2024). NEP 2020 and its frameworks affirm children's natural inclination toward play, art, and creative activities as essential for holistic development across all domains. Engagement with these pedagogies is joyful, meaningful, and promotes creativity, curiosity, and collaboration (NEP, 2020).

The literature emphasises the integration of play and art into early childhood care and education to promote holistic development, aligning with the NEP 2020 and NCF-FS 2022 frameworks. The study aims to tackle implementation challenges and improve equity and quality in early education nationwide. While art and play-based learning are well-researched globally, there is a pressing need for studies tailored to India's unique socio-cultural contexts. Key research areas include evaluating the impact of these pedagogies, developing effective teacher training programmes, and successfully adapting curricula to comprehensively incorporate play and art into diverse preschool (Balvatika) classrooms across the country.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem is “Transforming Early Childhood Care and Education in Manipur through Art and Play-based Pedagogies under NEP 2020 and NCF-FS 2022”.

Objectives

The objectives of the study include:

- (i) To analyse the alignment of art and play-based pedagogies with the vision and recommendations of the NEP 2020, NCF-FS 2022, and NIPUN Bharat mission.
- (ii) To explore integrating art and play-based pedagogies in Manipur's early childhood care and education, focusing on three key developmental goals outlined in the policies.

- (iii) To identify the challenges and potential opportunities for implementing these pedagogies effectively and propose recommendations for their successful adoption.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research approach, analysing policy documents, academic literature, journals, and books to explore integrating art and play-based pedagogies in preschool education, within the NEP 2020 and NCF-FS 2022 framework. The principal analytical approach is thematic analysis, entailing the coding and categorisation of qualitative data to discern significant patterns and themes. This approach ensures a structured and transparent process, including data familiarisation, coding, theme development, and interpretation. Through this process, the study uncovers insights into stakeholder perspectives and the degree of alignment between policy and practice. Policy analysis further supports the research by examining the extent to which proposed reforms align with best international practices and identifying implementation barriers such as teacher training, resource inequality, and infrastructural limitations. Educational theories and practical case insights from Manipur are synthesised to contextualise findings and inform actionable early childhood care and education policy recommendations.

Objective 1: Alignment of Art and Play-based Pedagogies

NEP 2020 and NCF-FS 2022 bring art and play-based pedagogies to the forefront of Indian education (NEP, 2020; p. 17). They highlight the importance of experiential and activity-based learning to enhance cognitive, emotional, physical, and social development.

The NIPUN Bharat mission ensures that every child achieves foundational literacy and numeracy by Grade 3 (GoI, 2021; p. 1). Art and play-based pedagogies promote these skills by making learning engaging and accessible (Bhargava and Gupta, 2016). The 2020 policy also focuses on developing students' creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills (NEP, 2020; p. 22). Art and play-based pedagogies foster these skills by encouraging exploration, experimentation, and self-expression (Bhowmik, 2019). Thus, analysing this alignment provides critical insights into the transformative potential of NEP 2020 and NCF-FS 2022 in reimagining preschool education. The policy recommends the following types of play:

1. **Free play:** In free play, children decide what, how, and how long to play. The role of the teacher is indirect, such as preparing the environment for play and observing the children. Free play enables one to develop social and self-regulation skills, such as resolving disagreements and managing

emotions. Examples include Block play, Rock paper scissors, Rainbow creation, *Khulokpi* (stone catching), Sandy Shores adventure, *CheitekLotpi*, etc.

2. **Guided Play:** Guided play involves children leading the activity with active facilitation from adults. For example, a teacher may guide children using clay to develop fine motor skills. This type of play is considered effective for enhancing skills in all domains of development as it encourages collaboration between children and teachers. Nature's Treasures Hunt (Nature Scavenger Hunt), The Amazing Bridge Challenge (Building Challenges), Ocean Wonders Sensory Bin (Sensory Bin Activities), Bead Bonanza Math Game (Math Games with Manipulatives), *Marum Konbi*, etc., are examples of guided play.
3. **Structured play (also known as Directed Play):** Structured play consists of teacher-directed activities that are fun and playful but have specific rules and guidelines. For instance, a teacher may ask children to create a story together in a playful manner. This type of play helps focus on specific learning outcomes at the foundational stage. Games like Alphabet Adventure (Letter/Number Recognition), Paper Plate Pets (Craft Activities with Instructions), Musical Movement Mania (Movement and Music

Activities), Colour Mixing Magic (Science Experiments), Five Senses Parade (identify and categorise activity), etc.

The NCF-FS 2022 describes play-based learning as a teaching method that incorporates child-oriented activities with some adult guidance. It suggests that children should have balanced opportunities for all three types of play throughout the foundational stage, including Grades 1 and 2. In addition to these three main types of play, they suggest different kinds of play that can be incorporated into the learning environment, such as:

- Dramatic Play: Role-playing as doctor and patient, teacher and student, mother and children, play with dolls (*Laidhi Sanaba*), etc.
- Environment Play: Mini garden creation, Mud Kitchen making, Weather reporter (Children dress up and report weather), etc.
- Exploratory Play: Hands-on discovery activities like Water Table Fun, Magnet Play, Shadow Play, etc.
- Physical Play: Scroll through the tunnel, Jump over blocks, Balance on beams, Red light and green light, Animal walks, etc.
- Games with Rules: Musical Chairs, Duck, Duck, Goose, Hopscotch (*Chegai Chongbi*), etc.

Analysing the types of play endorsed by NEP 2020 and NCF-FS 2022 illustrates a profound shift in India's early childhood care and

education approach. By prioritising play as a fundamental pedagogical method, these frameworks aim to create learning environments that are engaging, inclusive, and conducive to the holistic development of children. This alignment enhances children's readiness for formal schooling. It reimagines educational practices to become more child-centred and responsive to diverse learning needs.

The transformative potential of the play lies in its role as a crucial learning component that nurtures cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. Integrating these play types effectively into the preschool education curriculum can lead to a reformed educational landscape that celebrates the natural ways children learn and grow.

Alignment with NIPUN Bharat Mission and NEP 2020

NEP 2020 envisions a holistic and developmentally appropriate pedagogy for the Foundational Stage, emphasising “learning through activities, discovery, and play” (NEP, 2020, p. 16). It perfectly aligns with the play-based and art-integrated approach advocated in this article.

Furthermore, NEP 2020 outlines five developmental domains—cognitive, affective, social, physical, and moral—that form the pillars of a holistic education. Integrating art and play can significantly contribute to these goals:

1. **Cognitive Development:** Pretend play, a cornerstone of play-based learning, encourages children to think critically, solve problems, and develop their imagination. For instance, activities like creating a pretend restaurant or a doctor's clinic enable them to explore and enhance these skills. Art activities like drawing, painting, collage from natural materials, and sculpting strengthen these cognitive skills by encouraging experimentation, observation, and spatial reasoning.
2. **Affective Development:** Play, like creating a 'Feeling Corner' with dolls or puppets, gives children a secure place to express their emotions, handle stress, and gain self-confidence. Art, through activities like creating 'mood monsters' with clay, is an effective medium for emotional expression, assisting youngsters in processing feelings and developing emotional intelligence.
3. **Social Development:** Play fosters collaboration, communication, and teamwork as children interact with peers and negotiate roles during various plays, such as in a group puppet show. Art projects, including creating a collaborative collage or sculpting a group Claymation scene, provide a platform for collaborative learning, where children learn to share materials, take turns, and appreciate each other's work.
4. **Physical Development:** Play activities like running, jumping, and building blocks encourage gross motor skills development. Art activities like drawing, painting, and clay modelling refine fine motor skills, hand-eye coordination, and agility.
5. **Moral Development:** Play teaches children social norms like fairness, empathy, and cooperation. For example, organising a "Sharing Circle" during playtime encourages children to take turns and share toys, fostering a sense of fairness and generosity. Art projects like creating a 'Recycling Mural' or designing a 'Diversity Collage' can explore ethical concepts like sharing, environmental responsibility, and respect for diversity. Diversity-themed art activities, including African masks, Diwali lamps, Aboriginal dot paintings, traditional masks or textiles, and Subika art, are meaningful ways to cultivate children's cultural appreciation and ethical awareness.

By Grade 3, the NIPUN Bharat Mission aims to achieve foundational literacy and numeracy using play-based learning with art integration. Activities like word games, rhymes, and picture stories strengthen language development and nurture mathematical concepts while sorting objects by colour, size, and shape.

NCF-FS 2022 and Art-Integrated Pedagogy

The NCF-FS 2022 provides a detailed framework for implementing a play-based curriculum that integrates various disciplines, including art forms like visual arts, music, dance, and drama. It emphasises the importance of creating a nurturing learning environment rich in open-ended materials and encouraging exploration. This document outlines specific strategies for integrating art across different learning domains:

- **Language Development:** Use storytelling, singing songs, and creating picture books to enhance language skills.
- **Cognitive Development:** Encourage problem-solving through open-ended art activities involving construction, collage, and experimentation.
- **Socio-emotional Development:** Promote self-expression and emotional regulation through music, dance, and dramatic play.
- **Physical Development:** Incorporate movement activities like skipping, dancing, and creating dance narratives to refine gross motor skills.

Integrating art and play-based learning in ECCE aligns strongly with NEP 2020 and NCF-FS 2022's vision for holistic development. The stakeholders' perspectives of teachers indicate that they enhance student engagement, creativity, and collaboration while children

exhibit fun, joyful, and meaningful experiences, which promote creativity, curiosity, and collaboration. Parents increasingly appreciate the nurturing of confidence and social skills in their children. However, challenges such as limited resources, large class sizes, and a lack of teacher training, especially in under-resourced areas, hinder effective implementation. The study recommends targeted teacher development, stronger parent-school partnerships, and equitable resource allocation.

Objective 2: Integrating Art and Play-based Pedagogies Concerning Three Developmental Goals

The NEP 2020 and NCF-FS 2022 emphasise three primary developmental goals for young learners: maintaining health and well-being, becoming effective communicators, and evolving as involved learners connected to their surroundings. Art and play-based pedagogies effectively address these goals by supporting holistic development. Contextualising these pedagogies for India's socio-economic and linguistic diversity requires integrating traditional art forms, local storytelling, and indigenous games. This approach enhances accessibility and ensures equity and quality in early education (NCERT, 2022). The study highlights the potential of art and play-based methods to transform early childhood care and education in Manipur.

Developmental Goal 1— Maintaining Health and Well-being

The NEP 2020 and NCF-FS 2022 emphasise the importance of early childhood education in shaping children's well-being. They suggest that art and play-based pedagogies can significantly promote physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional development. Play-based teaching enhances cognitive development and encourages physical activity. At the same time, art-integrated learning allows children to express emotions and thoughts, developing emotional intelligence and gross motor skills. These approaches align with the NEP 2020's holistic development focus and the NCF-FS 2022's child-centred learning environment.

Physical Health and Motor Skills Development

Art and play can significantly improve children's physical health and motor skills. Outdoor play sessions with traditional Indian/local games promote spatial awareness and coordination. Art activities like clay modelling and finger painting develop fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination (Sharma and Mehta, 2018; Vahter, 2015).

Educators can design activities that combine art and movement, such as:

- Dance-and-draw sessions: Children move to music and represent their experiences through drawings. Emotion Dance and Art (Children listen to different types of music

(e.g., fast, slow, happy, sad) and move their bodies freely in response), Animal Movement and Drawing (slithering like a snake, hopping like a rabbit),

- Nature walks and leaf printing: Combining outdoor exploration with art to enhance gross motor skills and environmental awareness. E.g., Leaf Hunt and Sorting, Seasonal Nature Walk and Art Collage, Leaf Rubbing Art, Leaf Printing with Paint, etc.
- Yoga-inspired art: Practising simple yoga poses and creating artwork based on the experience. Pose and Paint, Breath and Mandala Drawing, Yoga Silhouette Art. Kids strike different yoga poses (e.g., Warrior Pose), and a teacher or partner traces their shadow onto paper, etc.

These activities promote physical health and contribute to cognitive development and sensory integration, as highlighted in the NCF-FS 2022 (NCERT, 2022).

Mental Health and Emotional Well-being

Art and play are powerful tools for emotional expression and regulation, crucial aspects of mental health and well-being. NEP 2020 emphasises the need for socio-emotional development in early childhood education (NEP, 2020). Implementing this, educators can use:

- Storytelling and role-play: Helping children express and understand

emotions through narrative and dramatic play. Stories like the Monkey and the crocodile, Rabbit and Tortoise race, the Fox and the Grapes, *Kabui Keioiba*, *SandrembiChaihra*, etc.

- Emotion-based art projects: Encouraging children to create artwork representing different feelings. For example, in the artwork, 'The Four Friends and the Hunter', children are asked to represent how four friends (deer, crow, turtle, and rat) feel when they work together to outsmart the hunter.
- Mindfulness activities: Introducing simple meditation techniques through guided imagery and art. For instance, mindful drawing of Akbar and Birble's Wisdom art activity, Buddha's Lotus Meditation, etc.

Research indicates that engaging in such activities can significantly decrease stress and anxiety in young children, enhancing emotional intelligence (Perryman *et al.*, 2019).

Nutrition and Healthy Habits

Art and play can effectively teach children about nutrition and healthy habits. Activities might include:

- Creating food collages using magazine cut-outs to learn about balanced and rainbow diets.
- Role-playing scenarios related to personal hygiene and health practices. E.g., handwashing steps, personal hygiene lessons,

healthy eating habits, clean and safe school environment, etc.

- Gardening projects to understand the origin of food and promote healthy eating habits.

These hands-on experiences align with the NCF-FS 2022's recommendation for experiential learning in health education (NCERT, 2022).

Developmental Goal 2: Becoming Effective Communicators

Effective communication plays a crucial role in children's early development. Art and play-based pedagogies can enhance communication skills by allowing children to express themselves through various media. Storytelling-based pedagogy helps children develop language skills and become communicators. Art-integrated learning encourages creative expression through art forms like drawing, painting, or drama, building confidence, and promoting collaboration. Effective communication is a cornerstone of early childhood development, and multilingualism and diverse modes of expression are essential in early education.

Language Development Through Art and Play

Art and play provide rich contexts for language acquisition and development. Activities that support this goal include:

- Storytelling circles: Children create and share stories,

enhancing narrative skills and vocabulary.

- Puppet making and shows: Combining craft with dramatic play to encourage dialogue and expression.
- Picture book creation: Children illustrate and narrate their stories, integrating visual and verbal communication.

These activities support the development of receptive and expressive language skills, as emphasised in the NCF-FS 2022 (NCERT, 2022).

Multilingual Exposure: In Manipur's diverse linguistic landscape, exposing children to multiple languages through art and play is crucial. Ultimately, NEP 2020 emphasises multilingualism. Strategies may include:

- Bilingual storytelling sessions: Narrating stories in two languages, supported by visual aids. For example, Mowgli short stories and tales from *Panchatantra*, *Hanuba Hanubi Pan Thaba*, *Tapta*, etc.
- Multilingual song and dance activities: Introducing simple songs in different Indian languages. E.g., *Vaishnav Jan too*, *Mangalyam*, *We Shall Overcome*, etc.
- Language-based art projects: Creating artworks inspired by words or phrases from various languages. E.g., alphabet art

(letter recognition with crafts), nature word art (collection of leaves, flowers, or grains, etc., and arranging to form words from different languages), *My name in many languages*, etc.

Research suggests that such multilingual experiences enhance young children's cognitive flexibility and cultural awareness (Bialystok, 2018).

Non-verbal Communication Skills:

Art and play also offer opportunities to develop non-verbal communication skills crucial for holistic expression. Activities might include:

- Mime and gesture games: Encouraging children to express ideas without words.
- Emotion-based painting: Using colours and shapes to convey feelings.
- Dance and movement exercises: Expressing narratives through body language.

These activities help children understand and use non-verbal cues effectively, an essential aspect of communication development (Goldin-Meadow, 2015).

Digital Literacy and Communication

While emphasising hands-on experiences, NEP 2020 recognises the importance of digital literacy in modern communication. Age-appropriate digital activities might include:

- Interactive storytelling apps: Using tablets for collaborative story creation. E.g., Book Creator, Epic! Story Jumper, Bolo by Google, Toca Stories, Wattpad, Tappytoon, etc.
- Simple coding games: Introducing basic programming concepts through play-based apps like ScratchJr, Lightbot, Code.org's Minecraft Hour of Code, Tynker, Robot Turtles, etc.
- Digital art creation: Using child-friendly drawing software to create and share artwork. For example, MS Paint, Doodle Apps, ABC Kids—Tracing and Phonics, interactive whiteboards, Tux Paint, paint 3D, etc.

However, balancing screen time with other forms of play and interaction is crucial, as recommended by the NCF-FS 2022 (NCERT, 2022).

Developmental Goal 3: Becoming Involved Learners and Connecting with Their Immediate Surroundings

The NEP 2020 and NCF-FS 2022 emphasise the significance of experiential learning in preschool education, focusing on art and play-based pedagogies. These approaches allow children to engage with their environment and become involved learners. The NCF-FS 2022 recommends hands-on and arts-integrated education to make learning more engaging and meaningful. Art-integrated learning incorporates local

art forms and cultural practices, fostering an appreciation for cultural heritage and community connection. These approaches promote exploration, curiosity, and environmental awareness in early education.

Experiential Learning Through Local Art Forms

Integrating local art forms into the curriculum helps children connect with their cultural heritage while developing cognitive and motor skills. Activities might include:

- Traditional craft workshops: Introducing age-appropriate versions of local handicrafts like making clay pots, dolls, paper flowers, origami, etc.
- Folk music and dance sessions: Exploring regional rhythms and movements through Garba (circular clapping dance), Bhangra (joyful jumps and arm raises), *ThabalChongba*, Baul music, Bihu dance, *Leima Jagoi*, Ras Leela, etc.
- Local art-inspired projects: Creating artwork based on community traditions and symbols, such as Subika art, Rangoli, Mandala painting, Kolam painting, Meitei Mayek Calligraphy Art, Phanek and Rani Phi Textile Art, Sangai Deer Mask Craft, etc, in preschools of Manipur.

These activities enhance cultural awareness and promote fine motor skills and creativity, aligning with the NCF-FS 2022's emphasis on

culturally responsive pedagogy (NCERT, 2022).

Nature-based Learning: Connecting children with nature through art and play fosters environmental awareness and scientific curiosity. Potential activities include:

- Nature journaling: Observing and drawing local plants and animals like Siroi Lily and Sangai of Manipur.
- Eco-friendly art projects: Creating artwork using natural, sustainable, and locally available materials like mud, wood, bamboo, cane, stone, natural dyes, etc.
- Sensory gardens: Designing and maintaining small garden spaces to explore different textures, smells, and colours.

These experiences align with the NEP 2020's focus on environmental education and sustainability.

Community Engagement Through Play

Involving children in community-based play activities helps them understand social structures and develop a sense of belonging. Examples include:

- Community helper role-play: Dressing up and acting out different community roles.
- Neighbourhood exploration walks: Observing and discussing local landmarks and services like art galleries, museums, parks, forts, festivals, fairs, etc.

- Collaborative art projects: Creating murals or installations that reflect community themes.

Such activities promote social awareness and civic responsibility, which are key aspects of the NCF-FS 2022 framework (NCERT, 2022).

Problem-solving Through Art and Play: Encouraging children to solve problems through creative play and artistic expression fosters critical thinking skills. Activities might include:

- Open-ended building challenges: Using blocks, mud, clay, or recycled materials to create structures, for instance, squares, cubes, animals, birds, utensils, pots, etc.
- Art-based storytelling: Solving narrative problems through visual representation.
- Dramatic play scenarios: Enacting and resolving everyday conflicts through role-play.

These experiences are consistent with NEP 2020's vision of developing twenty first century skills from an early age.

Objective 3: Challenges and Opportunities in Implementation

The integration of art and play-based pedagogy in Manipur preschool education not only has significant benefits but also presents several challenges. Some of the major challenges are:

- **Lack of Infrastructure and Resources:** Many preschools,

particularly in rural Manipur, struggle with inadequate infrastructure, limiting the adoption of art and play-based learning. Utilising locally available materials and repurposing everyday items can help address this challenge.

- **Challenges in Assessment:** Standardised assessment methods often fail to measure the holistic learning fostered by art and play-based education. Developing alternative assessment tools that align with these pedagogies is critical (Gullo and Hughes, 2011).
- **Limited Parental Awareness:** Parents may lack understanding about the value of art and play in early learning. Regular communication and parental education initiatives can help build awareness and acceptance of these approaches.
- **Ensuring Cultural Relevance:** For these methods to be effective, they must reflect the regional diverse cultural and social contexts, like Manipur, making inclusivity a key consideration in curriculum design.
- **Need for Teacher Training:** The effective integration of these pedagogies requires educators skilled in developmentally appropriate practices. Structured teacher training programmes and continuous professional development of teachers are crucial to ensure effective

implementation (Kaul *et al.*, 2017).

Despite these obstacles, NEP 2020 and NCF-FS 2022 implementation provide the following opportunities:

- **Supportive Educational Policies:** The policy and policy framework strongly advocate for developmentally appropriate practice, providing a strong foundation for integrating art and play-based learning.
- **Flexibility in curriculum design:** The policies provide flexibility in the localisation and adaptability of learning models, enabling educators to tailor activities to specific community needs.
- **Focusing on Holistic Child Development:** By integrating cognitive, emotional, and social growth, these pedagogies are consistent with policy objectives for comprehensive early childhood education.
- **Integration of indigenous and local arts:** It provides ample opportunities to integrate traditional and regional art forms into early education, which enhances engagement, preserves cultural heritage, fosters experimental learning, promotes sustainability, and makes art-based education more accessible, especially in resource-limited settings, through the use of locally available materials.
- **Increased Funding and Resources:** A renewed national focus on early childhood education

may lead to a more significant investment in teacher training, infrastructure development, and allocation of resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To move forward, several strategies must be prioritised to effectively implement art and play-based pedagogies in early childhood care and education.

1. **Enhancing Research and Policy Development:** Comprehensive research is essential to assess the long-term impact of these pedagogies in the Manipur context. Longitudinal studies tracking children's development from preschool to primary education can offer valuable data to inform future policies and refine teaching methodologies.
2. **Leveraging technology for learning:** While experiential learning remains central, integrating technology can enhance engagement. Interactive storytelling apps, digital art tools, and movement-based games can supplement traditional methods, making learning more dynamic and accessible.
3. **Strengthening Community Involvement:** Collaborating with local communities can enrich learning experiences and ensure cultural relevance. Inviting artisans, storytellers, and craftspeople to engage with children can provide authentic, context-based learning opportunities that preserve traditional knowledge while fostering creativity.
4. **Promoting Inclusivity in Education:** It is crucial to ensure that art and play-based learning, accessible to all children, including those with disabilities or from marginalised communities, should be prioritised. It may involve adapting activities and materials to meet diverse needs and abilities.
5. **Continuous Professional Development:** Establishing ongoing professional development programmes for preschool educators is crucial. These programmes should focus on practical skills in implementing art and play-based pedagogies, understanding child development, and effective assessment strategies.
6. **Resource Development:** Creating and distributing high-quality, culturally appropriate resources to support art and play-based learning is essential. It could include developing instruction manuals, activity guides, and low-cost material kits that align with the NEP 2020 and NCF-FS 2022 recommendations.
7. **Developing Sustainable and Low-cost Learning Materials:** Promoting eco-friendly, low-cost learning materials and handmade toys, training teachers to create DIY teaching aids, and encouraging public-

private partnerships to distribute affordable learning kits in underserved areas.

8. **Policy Advocacy:** Continued advocacy for the importance of art and play-based approaches in early childhood education is necessary to ensure sustained support and resources from policymakers and educational authorities.

CONCLUSION

As envisioned by the policies, integrating art and play-based pedagogies into early childhood care and education is vital for achieving developmental goals. These pedagogies promote holistic development by enhancing young children's well-being, communication skills, and connection with their environment. This approach supports India's aim to become a global knowledge superpower by ensuring

high-quality education and preparing children for successful lives.

Incorporating these pedagogies fosters health, effective communication, and engaged learning through rich, stimulating experiences that form a strong foundation for lifelong learning. The successful implementation requires collaboration among policymakers, educators, parents, and communities, nurturing a generation of creative, curious, and confident learners.

As India advances with these educational reforms, ongoing research, innovation, and adaptation are crucial to providing every child with quality early education in Manipur. This approach respects individuality and cultural heritage, preparing children for future success. Integrating art and play-based pedagogies represents a significant step towards a holistic, inclusive, and empowering ECCE educational system.

REFERENCES

- BHARGAVA, M., AND R. GUPTA. 2016. Art and play-based learning for foundational literacy and numeracy. National Institute of Education.
- BHOWMIK, S. 2019. Pedagogies of exploration: The role of art and play in early childhood education. *Indian Journal of Early Education*, 27(3), 7–15.
- BIALYSTOK, E. 2018. Bilingual education for young children: Review of the effects and consequences. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 21(6), 666–679.
- BODROVA, E., AND D. LEONG. 2024. *Tools of the mind: The Vygotskian approach to early childhood education* (3rd ed.). Pearson. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003164920>
- BRUCE, T. 2015. *Early childhood education: A guide for students and practitioners*.
- BURCHINAL, M. R., N. VANDERGRIFT, R. C. PIANTA, AND A. J. MASHBURN. 2015. Threshold analysis of child care quality and child outcomes. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 30, 45–61.

- CLAXTON, G. 2008. What's the point of school? Rediscovering the heart of education. Oneworld Publications. <https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&id=SBY9DwAAQBAJ>
- EISNER, E. W. 2003. The arts and the creation of mind. *Language Arts*, 80(5). Yale University Press. <https://doi.org/10.58680/la2003322>
- FISHER, K., K. HIRSH-PASEK, AND R. M. GOLINKOFF. 2011. The benefits of play for early childhood learning.
- GOI. 2021. National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN Bharat), 1–332.
- GOLDIN-MEADOW, S. 2015. Gesture as a window onto communicative abilities: Implications for diagnosis and intervention. *Perspectives on Language Learning and Education*, 22(2), 50–60.
- GOVERNMENT OF INDIA. 2020. National Education Policy 2020. Government of India. https://www.mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English.pdf
- GULLO, D. F., AND K. HUGHES. 2011. Reclaiming kindergarten: Part I. Questions about theory and practice. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 38(5), 323–328. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-010-0429-6>
- HOWARD, J., AND K. McINNES. 2013. The impact of play-based approaches on young children's learning.
- ICERT. 2024. Practical pedagogical approaches. <https://icertpublication.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/121.-Practical-Pedagogical-Approaches.pdf>
- KALAVATHI, J., AND P. DSCHOLAR. 2023. Holistic development of the learners through an “ECCE” in NEP 2020. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 8(9). www.ijisrt.com2594
- KAUL, V., S. BHATTACHARJEE, A. B. CHAUDHARY, P. RAMANUJAN, M. BANERJI, AND M. NANDA. 2017. The India Early Childhood Education Impact Study. UNICEF, New Delhi.
- KAUL, V., AND D. SANKAR. 2020. Early childhood education in India: Status and challenges.
- KAUR, G., S. SINGH, AND I. NGADNI. 2023. Exploring preschool parents' understanding of play-based learning and its importance in early childhood education. <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v12-i2/17546>
- KAUR, R., AND P. MOHITE. 2021. Integrating cultural heritage into early childhood education: A case study approach. *Journal of Education and Learning Development*, 9(3), 56–72.
- KOSTER, J. B. 2012. *Growing artists: Teaching the arts to young children*. Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- KRAUS, M. 2024. The role of art in early childhood development – Ladybug Child Care Centers. <https://ladybugcc.com/childcarecenter/the-role-of-art-in-early-childhood-development/>
- KUMAR, K. 2010. *Education and the poor: Issues in policy and planning*. National Book Trust.
- LUNGU, S., AND B. MATAFWALI. 2020. Parents' views on play-based learning for children aged 3–6 years: Evidence from selected early childhood education centres in Zambia. *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)*, 7(5), 2349. <https://doi.org/10.20431/2349-0381.0705008>

- MOHITE, P., AND M. SHUKLA. 2021. Play and art in early education: An Indian perspective.
- NCERT. 2022. National curriculum framework for foundational stage. National Council of Educational Research and Training. https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NCF-School-Education-Pre-Draft.pdf
- NCTE. 2009. National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education. National Council for Teacher Education. Ministry of Human Resource Development.
- NEP. 2020. National Education Policy 2020. Economic and Political Weekly, 55(31). Government of India. <https://doi.org/10.1201/9781003254942-12>
- PERRYMAN, K., P. BLISARD, AND R. MOSS. 2019. Using creative arts in trauma therapy: The neuroscience of healing. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 41(1), 80–94. <https://doi.org/10.17744/mehc.41.1.07>
- PIAGET, J. 1952. *The origin of intelligence in children*. International Universities Press.
- SHARMA, A., AND K. MEHTA. 2018. Traditional Indian games: A therapeutic tool in the modern era. *International Journal of Innovative Knowledge Concepts*, 6(7), 68–72.
- UNICEF. 2021. Report on early childhood education.
- VAHTER, E. 2015. Looking for possibilities to improve the visual art teaching in primary school. *International Journal of Art and Design Education*, 34(1), 60–73.
- VASILAKI, V. 2024. Pre-school teachers' views on the impact of visual arts education on early childhood education. <https://doi.org/10.22159/ijoe.2024v12i4.51710>
- VYGOTSKY, L. S. 1978. *Social constructivism – Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press. <https://autismusberatung.info/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Vygotsky-Mind-in-society.pdf>
- ZAMAN, H. 2024. Exploring parents' perceptions of the play-based approach for early childhood education. https://dspace.bracu.ac.bd/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10361/24317/22355002_BIED.pdf?sequence=1&disAllowed=y