



# Curriculum Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education: The Nagaland Experience

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*Nagaland initiated curriculum reform for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in 2019. This was prior to the release of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, and its emphasis on the early years. This article describes the reasons the State took up this initiative and the process followed.*

## **Basis for developing the curriculum**

Even prior to statehood in 1963, Nagaland had Lower Primary (LP) schools in the school system. There were three classes before class 1 namely A1, A2 and B.

There was an established practice of formal teaching and learning of the 3 R's (Reading, wRiting, aRithmetic) right away as a child began school, and even conventional evaluation. Our observation was that this practice in the early grades moved very quickly towards rote learning and the more mechanical academic skills. It was neither

understood nor were children engaged in school readiness activities necessary to initiate and prepare them to start learning how to read, write and perform basic mathematical operations as they enter primary stage. The foundational skills upon which further learning can be built on, were egregiously overlooked.

The need to shift from traditional methods of teaching and learning was paramount. The endeavour was to provide learning experiences that would facilitate holistic development of the child through play. This kindled the vision to develop a preschool curriculum that would provide contextual, stimulating and meaningful learning experiences. We wanted to ensure that children attained grade-level outcomes as they moved to higher grades. We also wanted to align the approach to current thinking about ECCE.

Towards achieving this goal, work began in 2019, even before NEP 2020 was brought out. The priority NEP 2020 placed on ECCE was timely and further propelled our vision to create a joyful, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate early childhood curriculum. The focus was to nurture the holistic growth of every child—fostering curiosity, creativity, confidence, and care through play-based, experiential learning rooted in the child’s cultural context and lived experiences. The curriculum aimed to lay a strong foundation for lifelong learning, school readiness, and overall wellbeing by empowering educators, engaging families, and building vibrant, safe learning environments where every child can thrive.

### Process followed to develop the curriculum

State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) Nagaland resolved to involve a diverse group of resource persons from various sectors -DIET faculty members, teachers from government and private schools, officials from social welfare department, faculty members from SCERT Nagaland - to collaborate with Azim Premji University Bangalore.

Before work began on writing the curriculum, the core team engaged in intensive workshops on understanding the need for curriculum review and redesign, learning about the different components of ECCE curriculum planning, learning about

the different curricular perspectives, models and approaches in ECCE.

The group also developed principles and an approach for the present curriculum. This was followed by the development of curricular goals, objectives and early learning outcomes aligned to the Preschool Curriculum developed by NCERT in 2019.

### Principles and approach of material development

The principles that informed the work were primarily around the child, content, pedagogy and context. First, the child was seen as playful, curious and engaging with the environment. Therefore, the content must be drawn from the environment – learning must be through the lived experiences of children. Next, pedagogy must be such that it nurtures playfulness and curiosity and enables the child’s exploration. Also, the pedagogy must be inclusive, experiential and aligned to the developmental needs of young children. Finally, context is the physical and socio-cultural environment that child engages with, is familiar with and finds meaningful.

Themes that are taken up to develop the learning experiences and environments for children were based on ecosystems around themes. The eight themes included Home, Neighbourhood, Market, Preschool, Fields and Forests, Hills and Mountains, Rivers and Oceans, and Sky and Outer Space. Each theme provides a variety of interactions between people, objects, spaces, and events, leading to learning experiences that are contextual, inquiry based and meaningful.

The curriculum provides day-wise plans for the themes and the subthemes. Learning experiences, during which children learn new concepts and practice skills through purposeful activities, are the main part of the day and are built on any aspect of a theme.

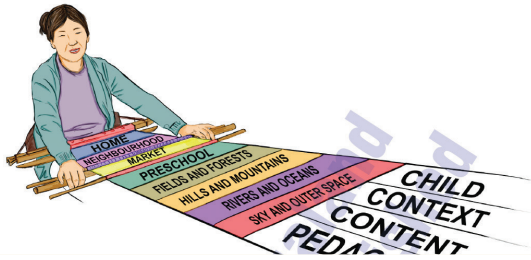
The approach to developing the curriculum and related teaching learning materials was

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR IN THIS THEME?	
DISPOSITIONS	EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE
<b>Curiosity</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exploring the neighbourhood and the different details</li> <li>Interacting with trees using multiple senses</li> <li>Bird watching</li> </ul>	<b>Feelings</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expressing ideas of a dream neighbourhood</li> <li>Working with peers-painting</li> <li>Teamwork-roles and responsibilities for displaying things at museum</li> </ul>
<b>Trust and playfulness</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Playing board game</li> <li>Drawing an outline and painting foot-prints</li> </ul>	<b>Ownership and belongingness</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifying family traditions</li> <li>Keeping things brought by children safe in a museum</li> </ul>
<b>Perseverance</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Asking questions</li> <li>Identifying different birds and recognising them</li> </ul>	<b>Wonder and amazement</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learning about dinosaurs and their footprints</li> <li>Explore how letters are posted in a</li> </ul>

to create materials that were purposeful and meaningful and not mere decorative articles. Teaching-Learning Materials (TLMs) developed were related to the theme-wise learning experiences described above.

The process of developing the curriculum and related materials was a highly collaborative and hands-on process, which happened through open dialogue, exchange of ideas and suggestions, and a unifying desire to build a curriculum that emphasises play and stimulates joyful learning. Careful considerations were made to develop contextualised and developmentally appropriate materials for the 4–6 age group, matching their cognitive, physical, emotional, and language development stages.

#### 2.1. HOW ARE THE PRINCIPLES WOVEN INTO THE THEMES?



Suggestions and steps to make TLMs were provided by incorporating familiar everyday items relevant to children, which were easily available, recyclable, or eco-friendly materials. The materials were simple, clear and visually stimulating but not overwhelming. Efforts were made to design materials that can be used in multiple, flexible, open-ended ways, across themes and learning areas, which fosters integrated learning and cater to multi-domain development. Materials were designed to include all learners, including those with disabilities, and promote gender equity and diversity. Images, names, and stories that represent varied family structures, tribal/indigenous communities, and occupations were developed.

To support teachers in implementing the curriculum, handbooks that elaborated on the perspectives, approach and desirable learning environments through illustrative classroom experiences were created. Besides this, these handbooks also had day wise learning experiences under themes and subthemes, the related domain competencies and intended learning outcomes and methods for assessment. This handbook was not meant to be taken as an instruction manual or a textbook with a set syllabus. Rather it was meant to be used as a guiding document and modified according to the requirement of a particular classroom, with space for the teacher to adapt the activities based on local context and interests of the children.

#### Processes for review

As the curriculum was being developed, the materials developed were being reviewed by external ECE experts.

The piloting of the curriculum was carried out in 46 government primary schools spread across all the districts of the State. Training with all related materials required to transact the curriculum was provided to teachers at these schools. On-site monitoring and support, and feedback from the pilot schools were provided by State officials from SCERT Nagaland, Directorate of School Education and Samagra Shiksha.

#### Contextualisation of curriculum and materials

Contextualisation for the curriculum developers meant that, having understood the importance of creating an environment that is familiar and relevant for the child to engage in learning meaningfully, the curriculum should support learning through lived experiences of the children.

The learning experiences were identified through discussions on how children engage with their environment, what their

environment is made of, and the relationship that they share with different members in their context. The handbook is not meant to be taken as an instruction manual or a textbook with set syllabus, rather it is to be used as a guiding document and modified according to the requirement of a particular classroom, with space for the teacher to adapt the activities based on local context and interests of the children. The curriculum content reflects local environment and culture, incorporating traditional knowledge and practices.

In light of NCF-FS 2022 and NCF-SE 2023, and even particularly SCF-FS being put in place, alignment of our curriculum concurrently with the curriculum goals, core competencies and learning outcomes defined in these documents is underway, for which a series of workshops involving the core members of the curriculum development team have been organised.

**WEEK-3**

**Sub theme: WHO'S IN THE KITCHEN?**

**DAY 1      MAKING A GROCERY LIST**



*Circle Time*

Children talk about how food is cooked in their house every day. Teacher asks: *Who cooks every day? From where do you buy vegetables? What is your favorite food to eat?* The teacher writes a song 'Naga Dali' on a chart and brings it to the classroom. The teacher sings the song with action and children follow till they can sing alongside.

Naga dali! Oil and chilli,  
Onion, garlic - Mix together, Fry and eat,  
Yummy, yummy!

*Objectives*

- ▶ To enjoy singing a song about cooking
- ▶ To identify the ingredients required for cooking a dish (e.g., Naga dali)
- ▶ To scribble a grocery list

## Recommendations for other States

Creating a new ECCE curriculum is a foundational investment in a State's future. Below are clear, actionable recommendations for a State undertaking this important task, organised under priorities, pitfalls to avoid, and preparations needed.

### What to prioritise?

#### Child-centered and developmentally appropriate practices

Design curriculum around the holistic

development of children: physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and language development. Emphasise learning through play, exploration, and hands-on experiences rather than rote instruction.

#### Contextual relevance

Root the curriculum in local culture, language, environment, and traditions. Reflect children's lived experiences. Include multilingual resources that honour children's mother tongues, especially in tribal, rural, or diverse areas.

#### Theme-based, integrated learning

Use integrated themes (like "Home," "Nature," "Community," etc.) that connect learning across domains and mirror the NCF-FS 2022.

#### Inclusivity and equity

Design for diverse learners, including children with disabilities, first-generation learners, and those from underrepresented communities. Ensure gender-sensitive, non-discriminatory, and socio-culturally respectful materials.

#### Empowering educators

Involve Anganwadi workers, preschool teachers, and ECCE trainers in curriculum development. Provide continuous professional development aligned with the new curriculum.

#### Alignment with NEP 2020 and NCF-FS 2022

Ensure vertical and horizontal alignment with Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) goals and the 5+3+3+4 structure.

#### Leverage community knowledge

Invite elders for storytelling, farming parents to explain seasons, artisans for craft demonstrations.

#### Incorporate wellbeing

Provide emotional literacy, mindfulness, and nutrition learning in simple, age-appropriate ways.

### Invest in communication materials

Share the curriculum vision with parents and local leaders to create community ownership.

### What to avoid?

#### Academic pressure and formality

Avoid pushing early reading, writing, or arithmetic through worksheets or textbook-heavy methods. ECCE is not a downward extension of primary school.

#### One-size-fits-all models

Resist adopting models that ignore local diversity or the realities of community-based learning settings.

#### Neglecting the role of the family

Avoid designing curriculum only for classroom delivery—include family and community engagement strategies.

#### Technology overuse

Use digital tools wisely and not as a replacement for human interaction, play, or movement-based learning.

### What to prepare for?

#### Curriculum development teams

Form multidisciplinary teams of ECCE experts, local educators, child psychologists, art and language specialists, representatives from tribal welfare department.

#### Piloting and feedback

Pilot the curriculum in a small sample of schools, gather data, revise, then implement at scale.

### Teacher orientation materials

Prepare user-friendly guides, visual aids, theme books, and planning tools in regional languages.

### Learning environment guidelines

Include non-negotiables for ECCE centres like safe and stimulating spaces, child-sized furniture, local play materials.

### Monitoring and support systems

Plan for ongoing assessment, supportive supervision, and feedback loops, not just inspections.

### Conclusion

Pilot school teachers were not provided adequate support, specifically the use of 'some sort' of training and 'some orientation'. All teachers received some level of support: Pilot school teachers had intensive guidance, other teachers received training and the rest of the teachers began implementing the curriculum after an orientation. We are holding focus group discussions with all these categories of teachers to understand gaps and provide support in the implementation. Classroom observations are also planned in some schools along with demonstration classes by faculty from SCERT.

**Roseline Richa**, a Reader at SCERT Nagaland, has been involved in material development, research and training in different areas, particularly ECCE and Science Education for almost a decade. She has extensive experience of working in early years development and education spanning a period of 17 years.