



CHAPTER-I
BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.0 Introduction:

“Early childhood education is the key to the betterment of Society”

-Maria Montessori

Children are the most valuable human resource of any nation and the future of a nation lies in their proper development. The childhood period is apparently the most decisive period, where a human's character and affectivity in developing a child's full potential is outlined. The destiny of an individual is molded at this age and the impressions that are made on the child's mind, last throughout life. The early years of human life begin to form a strong self-image and both positive and negative attitudes towards society. There is already growing literature evidence that value of preschool education to transform the existing systems and educate the young child to live a life with positivity, research proves that children from 2-5 years start becoming aware of the ongoing social behaviors if the children during this period train to acquire skills to respect all the elements of society and remove hatred and turn negativity into positive; there will have a society with responsible citizen (Hagser& Sandberg, 2011). Preschool learning experiences have been considered as the key to success, increasing students' lifetime achievements that enable children to develop skills to build a healthy society (UNICEF,2020).

The earliest years of a child's existence are crucial. The resilience and success of a child in later life are set during these formative years, which also create the groundwork for the child's overall growth and development. Children's early experiences shape their brains and bodies and ultimately equip them with the cognitive, physical, psychomotor, social, and emotional competencies they'll need to achieve throughout their lives (UNICEF, 2005). From a variety of perspectives, experts in the field of child care and development agree that educating children under the age of six is crucial. Experts in the field of child development agree that this time is crucial for the kid's future success in all areas of growth; social, emotional, linguistic, physical, and cognitive. (Kurian, 2001)

Since progress is so rapid at this stage, unfavorable experiences, such as a lack of health care, nurturing or stimulation, toxic living arrangements and exploitative job situations, have a significant impact on development. The same is true of how progress is aided by

favourable conditions. This time period is especially significant for human development since it lays the foundation for later stages of life (Hurlock, 2019).

Pre- Primary education being the foundation stone for later learning and development, paving the way for reform, development, and new ideas. Great personalities like Maria Montessori and Friedrich Frobel have worked tirelessly to improve the preschool system in order to improve the lives of young children during the most formative years of their lives. These educators believe that the early years are crucial for a child's intellectual, physical, emotional, and social development, so they focus on providing children with learning experiences that foster all of these areas. Despite decades of work to build programmes like Montessori's and Frobel's and others like them, there is still a dearth of high-quality preschool education due to a lack of qualified educators and adequate funding (Topor, Shelton & Calkins, 2010).

According to 2011 Census of India there are 164.48 million children who are below 6 years of age need to provide quality pre-primary education. There are constitutional provisions for development of primary education and higher education in India. But the most decisive part to be taken care is early years of human life which is very ignored till the date. The provisions and laws made in Indian constitution are found inadequate for bringing about development and welfare of the children (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012).

For the first time NEP,2020 has taken into consideration bringing pre-primary education into mainstream education, by realizing the importance of educating the first 6 years of human life, The new educational pattern 5+3+3+4 wherein a strong base of pre-primary education from the age of 3 is included; which instills hope for quality education and for the holistic wellbeing of the children (NEP, 2020). And as per the suggestions made by NEP,2020 the recently launched National Curriculum Framework on Foundational Stage 2022 document is inseminating a hope for universalizing pre-primary education in India. The first-ever curriculum framework on foundation stage.

The above discussion has revealed that pre-primary education plays a very vital role in shaping human life, it gives the strong foundation for the better and sustainable life. Government of India has also realized it rightly and emphasized utmost importance in their

level of education through NEP, 2020. Now, this is the right time to validate the mission of NEP, 2020 and justify the importance of pre-primary education.

1.1 Concept of Pre-Primary Education:

Pre-primary education refers to educating the children from the ages of infancy until six years old. The system of preschool education varies widely with different approaches, theories, and practices within different school authorities. Many terms have been used for pre-primary education such as preschool education, Early childhood education, nursery school, kindergarten, Montessori etc., but all the terms signify the same purpose educating the young children before they join in formal school or Primary education. The term 'pre-primary education' has been used mainly because this education precedes formal primary education (Kurian, 2001 & Chuaungo, 2001). According to Panda (1992) Preschool education refers to the education of the young child, usually 3 to 5 or 6 years of age, that is, up to the age of entry into primary school.

In India, basically starting age for primary school is six. Before the age of six, children are not required to attend school formally. Among the many recommendations made by the Indian Education Commission, or Kothari Commission, (1966–1967) was that preschool education be provided to children as young as three. Preschool programmes can last for a variety of years, depending on the opinions of educators and specialists working with the child in question. Katz and Cain defined preschool as children ages 3 to 6, while Torrance, Montgomery, Andrews, Singh, and Piaget defined it as children ages 3 to 5. (Kurian, 2001). In this regard, Mohanty, (1994) states that, a preschool center is a place where some programmes are initially taken up to accelerate growth and development of children of the age group 3 to 5 years. Taking into account factors like cultural tradition and the age at which children typically enter school, this time period can be made as long as six years in some countries (Sing,2005).

Pre-primary education, however, does not target a specific age range, but rather places a premium on educating kids under the age of six in order to foster their overall growth as human beings, so, this period is also termed as "school without books" or "active learning" (Soni, 2011).

Moreover, it can be said that the pre-primary education aimed with imparting guidance and training to children below 6 years of age, through play way activity methods with the explicit purpose of helping their physical, language, socio-emotional, cognitive and creativity development and thereby laying in them a foundation of sound personality (Mtahabwa, 2010).

1.2 Pre-primary Education: A Stepping Stone for Quality Schooling

Preschool education should play an important role in fostering sustainable lifestyle since this is the most decisive period of human life thus, it is of the utmost importance to teach children to respect others, eliminate biases and prejudices, and develop a nonethnocentric perspective early on in life, making preschool an important factor in promoting sustainable lifestyles (Hagser& Sandbberg, 2011).

Providing a curriculum from a young age that incorporates a methodology of problem-solving approach through projective techniques and content related to environmental issues, promoting values, human rights, children's rights, etc., and the children, parents, and teachers interacting related to these issues and finding an effective teaching strategy to make the children motivated and understand the value of education (Nodhal,2008).

The key to the future would be providing quality education from the earliest years of human life and making the child aware of all societal activities and about preventions, as proposed by Hopkins, (2007) who notes that the early years of a person's life are crucial for the development of an individual. When it relates to resolving issues of social justice, environmental protection, and economic development, education is without a doubt the most important factor (Fuentes, 2008).

As reported by National Institute of Early Education Research (NIEER, 2014) every state will be capable of delivering high quality preschool education to all the 2-4 years age children within 10 years of time, if they set high standard and commit adequate quality and resources (Barnett, Carolan, Squires, Clarke & Horowitz 2015).

Preschool education being the foundation stone of human life paves way for lifetime of change, development and creativity. Influential scholar like Maria Montessori and Friedrich Frobel have worked extensively to improve the preschool system in order to improve the lives of young children during the most formative years of their lives. These

educators believe that the early years are crucial to a child's future success in school and work to ensure that every child has access to a high-quality education. However, despite the fact that institutions like Montessori's preschool education and Frobel's kindergarten school have been around for decades, quality preschool education is still lacking somewhere due to a lack of well-trained teachers and resources (Topor, Shelton, & Calkins, 2010).

All children, regardless of their social, emotional, mental, physical, or cognitive starting points, deserve a high-quality preschool education that takes a holistic approach to their growth. This helps the kid out in the long run, not just on tests. When the United Nations first introduced Sustainable Development Goals in 2012, 'Quality education' was one of the targets. Further, students' access to secondary and tertiary education in the modern era is enabled by ICT, which has transformed the very nature of teaching and learning. A good education shapes a person in many ways, including their aptitudes, values, and character, so it does more than just make them job-ready. Preschool programmes strive to provide a well-rounded education for young children by incorporating lessons in ethics and morality into the curriculum. This benefits both the children and their working parents, who can then provide them with a solid foundation for a happy and healthy future (Rao, 2021).

Prioritizing and caring for children before the age of six is essential for their future success and development because that's when the brain grows and develops the most (NEP,2020). Pre-primary education plays a pivotal role in this context by providing the necessary facilities to motivate and excite young minds about learning. Studies of preschool programmes have shown positive effects on children's overall growth and development, as well as a decrease in the high school dropout rate (Sing, 2007).

1.3 Global Perspective on Pre-primary Education:

In 1989, the United Nations held its first Conviction on Child Rights to improve conditions for children worldwide. The second conference was held in 1990, and it was hosted by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to discuss the importance of educating young children and preventing problems like infant mortality, child labour, poor health, and the inability to provide for basic necessities. It was at the 1990 EFA (Education for

All) conference in Thailand, announced that "learning begins at birth" and the importance of preschool were first brought to widespread attention (Kurian, 2001& Khan, 2009).

Pre-primary education is gaining ground on the global agenda; the importance of educating children before they enter kindergarten is rising on a worldwide scale. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the post-2015 education agenda propose targets that place greater emphasis on early childhood development and specifically mention pre-primary education, whereas the Millennium Development Goals paid no attention to education for children before the start of primary school. The growing body of evidence demonstrating the positive effects of pre-primary education on children's school readiness, transition to school and performance in the early grades and beyond has unsurprisingly contributed to this shift in emphasis (UNESCO, 2019).

According to the latest Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report (2015), nearly 180 million more children are now enrolled in preschools or kindergartens over the past decade. Even though the gross enrolment rate has risen from 32.8% in 1999 to 53.7% in 2012, only about 17% of children in low-income countries had access to school in that year. These numbers also conceal significant regional differences. In low- and middle-income countries, the highest participation rates are in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) at around 74.5 percent, while the lowest are in sub-Saharan Africa at 19.5 percent. In recent years, pre-primary enrollment has increased the most in South and West Asia, as well as East Asia and the Pacific (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012).

Some of the developed pre-primary education transaction process has been found as discussed below:

i) Pre-primary education in USA:

In the United States of America, pre-primary education has received considerable attention. In the United States, there is a wide variety of options for children ages three and up, including public, private, Montessori, and religiously affiliated institutions.

As a form of public education, cooperative schools are the most cost-effective option because they allow parents to work alongside certified educators in a voluntary capacity. Church-related educational institutions typically feature a religious focus, though this is not limited to any particular faith. Students of all faiths are welcome to attend.

Private schools are more costly than public ones because they generally use the Montessori approach to education, which is based on the idea that every child is a unique individual with specific requirements, passions and trajectories of development. In the United States, pre-primary education entails a wide variety of activities, such as art and craft, music, fostering communication skills, educational games (UNICEF, 2019 & Kurian, 2001).

ii) Pre-primary education in Japan:

In Japan, the welfare sector oversees daycare centers for children ages 0 to 3, while the education sector is responsible for kindergartens for children ages 3 to 6. In these centers, under the supervision of trained specialists, students engage in group living experiences, intellectual learning activities, and creative construction activities. Both the Philippines and Malaysia too have established plans for ECCE implementation (UNESCO, 2015).

iii) Pre-primary Education in UK:

Children aged four to seven are eligible for preschool programmes in the United Kingdom. Children under the age of five are not required to attend preschool or kindergarten in this country. Part-time early childhood education is provided for kids up to the age of four as part of a government programme that started in 1998. One of the lowest provisions of nursery education in Europe, with only a guaranteed two and a half hours per week at a registered play scheme or school, while in Belgium and France, 95% of children attend nursery school (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012).

On average, a child will spend two and a half hours per day, five days a week in therapy and it requires to pay a small fee to join, but you'll also be expected to pitch in with group management. In the United Kingdom, attending nursery school is strongly encouraged, especially for children whose parents are not native English speakers. A child who attends nursery school for a year or two is socially and academically prepared to enter primary school. Many books have been published for parents who want to work with their young children on their education at home, which most educators agree gives kids a head start in the classroom (UNICEF, 2019 & Khan, 2019).

iv) Pre-primary education in Australia:

The Australian government recognizes the importance of early critical years of development and is working to create a working-class system of integrated early learning and care by providing pre-primary education to young children beginning at age 3. The goal of Australia's pre-primary education system is to help young children discover and cultivate their own unique strengths as a long-term investment in their own success. For children who are too young to attend kindergarten, the Australian government funds and operates a variety of daycare centers, playhouses, and other early childhood development projects, while parents and local governments also operate their own preschools (Australian Bureau, 2021).

1.4 Evolution of Pre-Primary Education in India:

The pre-primary education program in India has not been well documented yet; after independence the government of India has brought various policies and made provisions for free and compulsory primary education, but no policy has prioritized on making pre-primary education compulsory for the children; but there are certain post independent policies that had focused on pre-primary education such as- Kothari commission 1964-66, ICDS -1975, ECCE- 2015, SSA-2018 but before NEP, 2020 no policy has talked about brining pre-primary education into main-stream education.

However, the notion of early childhood learning in India cannot be considered as new; one of the noble instances of early childhood learning from the 'Vedic period' can be found in the 'Mahabharata' the story of Abhimanyu how he learned from his mother's womb. Abhimanyu the great warrior prince was the son of Arjuna and Subhadra. Abhimanyu acquired the most secretive knowledge of breaking the 'Chakravyuha' -the literal meaning refers to the group of Military. It was Krishna who was the maternal uncle of Abhimanyu was narrating the strategies of breaking Chkravyuha to Subhadra while Abhimanyu was in her womb. During listening to the story Subhadra fell asleep. Later, it has been seen that the young Abhimanyu learned the techniques of breaking the Chakravyuha but he could learn only half of the techniques; he could only able to break the Chakravyuha but was not able to come out of it. (Mazo & pandey, 2020)

From the story of Abhimanyu, wondered how a child starts learning. It proves that the children in the mother's womb can learn many things. Thus, proper parenting, care and learning during the most decisive period from pre-natal to the first 5 years of human realized long back to assist the child to have a proper life direction.

Similarly, if we see the notion of early childhood learning in the mediaeval period; it can be found that there were no such concept of educating the children in early age only it could be known that health care to the children was given through 'Ayurveda' system (Chaurasia, 2021) since, women education in mediaeval India was limited to home schooling and they were taught essentially practical education for managing kids and households and that's how the young children's learnt from their mothers and elder members the moral habits and skills (Biswas, 2016).

The idea of formal pre-primary education in India was introduced towards the end of the 19th century with the setting up of Christian missionaries. The missionaries have taken the initiative to start pre-primary classes attached to primary schools and separate nursery schools in different places in India such as Loreto convent school, Lucknow, Hilda's Nursery school, Pune, Saidapeth school, Madras etc. (Khan, 2019& kurian,2001).

The pioneering effort in India has taken by Gijubhai Bhadeka by starting the first Montessori school in 1920. Later Bhadheka joined Tarabai Modak with the joint efforts of these two pioneers the Nutan Balshikshan Sangh was organized in 1926. Later Mahatma Gandhi and Tagore, and Sri Aurobindo flourished in the form of education and training centers (Kurian, 2001).

After independence led to the government taking on more responsibility for the well-being of children and recognised the need for pre-primary education for children ages 3 to 6 in the country's first five-year plan, and it strongly encouraged municipal and regional governments to implement such programmes in outlying regions. The government at the local level has set up preschools to make sure the kids are educated and healthy from a young age (Kurian, 2001 & Rahman, 2007).

The Indian government's Ministry of Education took a giant leap forward in 1963 when it established the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in New

Delhi with the mandate to improve child development services and research. Later, in 1966, the Kothari commission was established and it has pushed for an increase in India's access to preschool (Pattnaik, 1996 & Khan, 2019).

1.4.1 Promotion of Pre-primary Education in India: Policy Perspectives:

i) Sargent Commission (1944)

Before India's independence in 1944, a group called the Sargent committee worked to rebuild the country's educational system. Preschool and primary school education have been prioritized by the committee. Listed below are some of the suggestions made to improve India's pre-primary education system:

- a) Separate nursery schools or departments may be provided in urban areas where as a sufficient number of children are required to provide preschool education within a reasonable distance. Ideally, kindergartens would be a part of regular elementary schools.
- b) Women with specialized training in education should always be hired to teach in nursery schools and other classes for young children.
- c) Even though it might be impossible to make pre-primary school attendance mandatory, no effort should be spared to encourage parents to voluntarily enroll their children.
- d) The primary goal of early childhood education is not so much academic instruction as it is the opportunity for children to interact with others.

ii) The Kothari Commission (1964-66):

Considering the significance of pre-primary education to children's overall growth and development, the Kothari commission has advocated for it in India. In its report, the commission lists the following as the goals of Pre-primary education:

- To teach the child how to take care of themselves by dressing, using the bathroom, eating, cleaning, and so on.
- To teach proper etiquette and foster positive relationships with peers in order to foster growth as an individual and an active member of society.

- To foster healthy emotional development by teaching the child to identify, name, accept, and master his feelings and emotions; to foster healthy aesthetic development by teaching the child to appreciate art.
- To pique early interest in learning about the world around them and to equip with the knowledge needs to thrive in it; to provide them with opportunities to explore, investigate, and experiment.
- To give a foundation on which to build new passions and hobbies with the ample space for personal expression in order to foster autonomy and originality, mainly the commission aimed at helping the child learn to speak clearly, correctly, and fluently; and to help the kid grow up with a healthy body, well-developed muscles, and solid motor skills.

iii) Integrated Child Development Scheme (1975):

The Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) was initiated by the government of India and is carried out at the state level with full funding from the federal government for all inputs except supplementary nutrition, which the states were expected to provide from their own resources. Kids under the age of six were the primary focus of the programme, which sought to foster growth in all areas of their lives. The primary objective of the service is to shield infants and toddlers from the vicious cycle of malnutrition, mortality, and morbidity by improving their health and nutrition and providing them with a quality pre-primary education.

Through ICDS, the Indian government has prioritized the development of two fundamental aspects of human resource development: education and health care for young children.

This programme integrates essential services through community-based nominal employees. The village's "Anganwadi" child play center serves small children and pregnant women.

The services offer young children additional nutrition, frequent health checks, immunization, basic reading, nutrition, and health education (NIPCCD, 2013).

a. Development of Pre-Primary Education Through ICDS:

Preschool education underpins the ICDS curriculum. Anganwadi provides preschool education for three hours a day to children aged three to six. Instead, then following a curriculum, preschool education aims to engage and satisfy children's curiosity. Music, songs, games, and more are taught at preschool. In preschool education centres, teaching-learning materials are local. Flexibility and no formal curriculum are encouraged.

Non-formal preschool education is a key component of ICDS services. Anganwadi provides non-formal preschool education to 3–5-year-olds.

Anganwadi activities are not meant to teach children, but to instill good values, habits, and behaviour and stimulate them. Anganwadies don't try to standardise children's learning. Preschool activities attempt to develop the kid holistically (NIPCCD, 2013).

iv) Early Childhood Care and Education (2013):

The concept of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is very wide-ranging. The ECCE is concerned with all round development of the child. It gives the kids the love and stability that needs to flourish. In addition to focusing on children, ECCE also takes into account the needs of expectant mothers and covers all stages of a child's growth and development. Early childhood care and education (ECCE) helps kids grow in all kinds of important ways, including mentally and emotionally.

The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme seeks to provide assistance and try to meet the need of security and acceptance by providing all kinds of care and facilities such as safe, secure environment, to aid in the development of a healthy sense of identity, to facilitate socialization, the acquisition of knowledge, and so on.

India's government prioritized the well-being of its youngest citizens when it started an early childhood education programme in 2013. For the ECCE, keeping kids in school and lowering their risk of dropping out is priority number one. Priority in the National Policy for Education (1968) has been placed on educating and caring for young children. To guarantee a child's complete growth and development, an ECCE programme incorporates a wide range of services, including health care, early education, and nutrition. All pre-primary education should be conducted using the ECCE policy's focused play and activity

approach. It has also warned of the perils of beginning formal education too soon in a child's development. ECCE's primary goal is to set the stage for the child's fullest possible growth and to encourage a love of learning that will last throughout their lives.

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programmes make it possible for every child to feel loved and cared for, respected and safe, and to have a strong sense of self-worth.

a. Programme Planning and Practices of ECCE:

ECCE includes all kind of activities that develops young children's language skills, cognitive skills, creativity etc. with all kind of infrastructural materials which is necessary for the kids.

b. Role of Caregiver/Teacher According to ECCE:

The caregiver or teacher in ECCE programme are facilitator who engage the children in multiple experience to foster their all-round development. The teacher observes the children to identify their needs and capabilities and move with the pace of the child's development. The teacher's duty is to organize supportive learning environment by taking care of aspects such as the arrangement of the physical environment and the equipment, the scheduling of activities, events and grouping. The teachers also need to contact with the parents of the children by establishing a relationship of trust and mutual understanding, equal participation in children's progress and sharing about different activities etc.

v) Samagra Siksha Abhiyan Scheme (2018):

India's Union Minister for Human Resource Development, Shri Prakash Javadekar, recently (2018) launched the 'Samgra Siksha Scheme' in Delhi to provide funding and resources to the states' elementary and secondary education systems. Samagra has a broad, all-encompassing meaning. which means looking at education as a whole, rather than breaking it up into subcategories. The paradigm shift in the conceptual design of school education for holistic development along a continuum from preschool through primary, upper-primary, secondary, and senior-high levels is represented by this scheme. This plan is the first of its kind to recognize and priorities preschool learning as an integral part of the schooling process and to make efforts to integrate it into the regular school day. In an

effort to fulfil the Prime Minister's promise to provide a high-quality education to all students—a promise he has dubbed "Sabko Shiksha Achchi Shiksha"—the Ministry of Human Resources and Development (HRD) has taken a historic step by revamping the existing Schemes in School Education. The scheme's primary goal is to raise educational standards across the board by modernizing the teaching and learning process.

In addition to the aforementioned committees, eminent educators and politicians like Zakir Hussain (1955), Murli Manohar Joshi (1944), the Central Social Welfare Board in 1953, the Indian Child Education Conference in 1955, the Committee of Members of Parliament on Education in 1967, the U.S. Research and Policy Committee for Economic Development in 1971, UNESCO in 1974, the British Department of Education and Science in 1976, etc.

vi) National Education Policy (2020):

After almost 34 years the govt of India approved the New Educational Policy 2020 on 29 July 2020, where for the first time taking into consideration bringing pre-primary education into mainstream education, by realizing the importance of educating the first 6 years of human life. NEP,2020 made a provision for bringing pre-primary education into the mainstream of education to ensure proper development of all the domains of the children and make the children ready for primary education.

The first ever govt. policy that stepped for universalization of pre-primary education in India. NEP, 2020 instills hope in the people who are working for the welfare of children from the disadvantaged group.

The main objectives of this policy for the development of pre-primary education in India have been highlighted here:

- a) NEP,2020 has been planned for a national curriculum and pedagogical framework for early childhood care and education (NCPFECCE) to be developed by NCERT in two parts, the first part would be a subjective framework for 3-8 years of children and the other part would be for 3-8 years of children aiming with containing activities for holistic development of the

children. This framework will serve as a guide both for parents and for pre-primary education institutions.

- b) To ensure universal access to quality pre-primary education in India. Special attention would be given to children from remote areas and disadvantaged groups. As per this policy report, pre-primary education shall be delivered through strengthening standalone Anganwadis and Anganwadi co-located with the primary schools and pre-primary schools covering at least 5-6 years co-located with existing primary schools and stand-alone pre-primary schools for these institutions trained teachers would be recruited.
- c) To bridge any language barrier between teachers and students in pre-primary school teachers a digital infrastructure for knowledge sharing (DIKSHA) will be made available for acquiring the strategy to make the young children learn.
- d) High-quality infrastructural facilities will be provided to the pre-primary schools such as well-ventilated and designed, child-friendly classrooms, well-designed and spacious buildings with trained teachers and teachers will be in motivated to attend different programs for their development.
- e) NEP,2020 will introduce pre-primary education in ‘Ashramshals’ in tribal-dominated areas in all formats of alternative schooling in a phased manner. which would be a great privilege for children from disadvantaged groups to bring out their skills-based literacy to ensure the universalization of primary education. (NEP, 2020).

vii) National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage, (2022):

As per the suggestions of NEP,2020 for the first time a national-level curriculum framework has been developed for the foundational stages, which instills a hope for an appropriate curriculum for pre-primary education. The framework aimed at developing a diversified curriculum for pre-primary children by not just providing ideas, since the curriculum consist of the overall experience of a child in school thus, it has included all the aspects of school to enable the positive transformation of overall learning experiences of the children:

- Some of the guiding principles of NCF for the foundational stages, (2022) are mentioned below:
 - a) Since children learn through watching others, imitating others' actions, working together, and having hands-on experiences, it is imperative that children be exposed to a safe and nurturing environment.
 - b) Children are more likely to succeed in school if they feel like their unique perspectives and experiences are being taken into account and respected.
 - c) Instead of slamming kids over the head with information, schools should encourage them to learn through exploration, experimentation, and experience through play.
 - d) The school is responsible for providing a developmentally appropriate setting, complete with age-appropriate activities and resources for fostering critical thinking and conceptual clarity.
 - e) Educators need to exercise caution when planning lessons for students from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds; allowing students to participate in activities of their own choosing has been shown to foster greater imaginative and linguistic development in young students.

1.5 Pre-primary education in Assam:

The idea of formalizing pre-primary education in Assam how it has started is yet to be discovered but from the narrations of the pre-primary educational experts and from the people associated with the oldest institutions it has come to know that the pre-primary educational institutions in Assam have started in mid-90's by the Christian missionaries. One of the institutions called 'Jingle Bell' through which the pre-primary education was imparted initially and gradually established some other institutions in different parts of Assam. Later, during late 90's the pre-primary education program has been expanded through some of the organizations such as Kidzee, Euro-kid etc.

Assam has witnessed a quantitative growth of pre-primary schools under different private bodies. The pre-primary educational program in Assam can be divided into 3 parts on the

basis of its organizational affiliations they are: i) Organizational schools ii) Missionaries school iii) Stand-alone schools. But unfortunately, there has been no record found regarding these institutions and the total number of the pre-primary schools in Assam. On the other hand, ‘Anganwadi’ the center for early childhood care is running by the state social welfare department under ICDS (Rahman, 2007). The centers are being taken care by social welfare department to provide nutrition for the infant and pregnant women. It has been found that in Anganwadi centers, children are also introducing fundamental literacy but the main aim of Anganwadi is not related to only education rather to provide proper nutrition and care especially the children from disadvantage groups. As per state social welfare Assam, report 2018, there are 62153 “Anganwadi” centers in Assam. But still the real picture of Pre-primary education in Assam in terms of quality of education, the emergency services provided in the pre-primary schools and the curriculum transaction process, pedagogical strategies, teachers training is yet to be explored. Thus, it urges the researcher to take into consideration regarding the status of pre-primary education in Assam with regards to its complete school environment.

1.6 Statement of the problem:

The first 5 years of the children are the most significant period of human life. Effective learning environment is the utmost necessary for quality learning; pre-primary schools with all the effective learning facilities plays an important role in shaping children’s life. Research proves that the quality of pre-primary education is highly affected by the physical and learning env

ironment, class size, teacher-children interaction, teachers’ qualifications, school activities (Hurlock,2019 &Roopharine & Johnson, 2015). The pre-primary education in Assam has not been made mandatory for the children and till date it is under the private body; which is why the status of pre-primary education has not yet identified in a holistic manner. Thus, the present study has been designed to study the complete school environment of the pre-primary schools in Assam; the curricular and co-curricular activities, school leadership process, problems faced in smooth transition of the pre-primary education program.

Hence, the present study has been stated as:

“Pre-primary Education in Assam: An Exploratory study”

1.7 Research questions:

1. Did the school follow any prescribed guidelines before setting up the school?
2. Does the institution recognize by any legal authority? What are the regulation acts?
3. What are the curricular and co-curricular activities are provided in the schools?
4. Do the schools follow any evaluation procedure? What are the bases of evaluation in the pre-primary schools?
5. What criteria does the school follow for recruiting the teacher? Do the schools provide in-service teacher's training?
6. What are the facilities provided in the schools for holistic development of the children?
7. What are the main problems faced by the schools in smooth transition of the pre-primary education program?
8. Do the parents co-operate with the schools? what kind of problem parents face in providing pre-primary education to their children?
9. What are the remedial measures can be adopted for strengthening the pre-primary education in Assam?

1.8 Objectives of the study:

To carry out the specified problem the researcher has designed the following objectives:

- i) To study the status of pre-primary education in Assam with regard to the school leadership, curriculum process and school environment.
- ii) To study the facilities provided in the pre-primary schools of Assam in terms of human resources and infrastructural facilities.
- iii) To study the institutional and academic problems faced by the parents as well as the Pre-primary schools in Assam.
- iv) To recommend for policy foundation for strengthening the pre-primary education in Assam.

1.9 Operational Definitions:

a. Pre-primary school:

In the present study Pre-primary school refers to the educational institutions where the focus has been given to educating children from 3-5/6 years of age. Pre-primary education is also known as Preschool education and Early childhood education, Kindergarten and Nursery. But they signify the same purpose, educating young children before joining a formal school or Primary education. The term pre-primary education has been used mainly because this education precedes formal primary education.

b. School leadership:

Leadership is a shared responsibility. It capitalizes on the unique qualities of all stakeholders who have specific attributes that can contribute to social excellence. School leadership involves the process of guiding, motivating and enlisting the talents and energies of the teachers, students and all the members associated with it (Fullan,2007). In the present study school leadership refers to the complete management process of the schools it includes teachers' recruitment process, maintaining relationships between parents and schools, and all the activities that are guided and carried out towards achieving the vision.

c. Curriculum process:

Curriculum defines the totality of the experiences that are gained from the complete activities of the school. In the present study the curricular process refers to total activities or the learning experiences that are provided for the students and it also includes its transaction strategies, total required or given time duration to complete a task or activity and the process of evaluation.

d. School Environment:

In the present study, the school environment refers to the complete scenario of the pre-primary school. It includes all the elements, physical environment, social environment and learning environment.

e. Human resources:

Human resource refers to the set of people or the manpower in an organization; who work together for the betterment of the organization. In the present study, human resource refers to the teachers or caregivers, administrative staff members, helpers, and all members associated with the institutions.

f. Infrastructural facility:

In the present study infrastructural facility refers to the complete physical environment of the schools and the resources provided for the development of the children. It includes school building, play grounds, play-materials, toilet facilities, classrooms, craft rooms, laboratories and all the equipment made available in the school.

g. Institutional Problem:

Here, institutional problem refers to the issues that negatively impacts in smooth transition of the overall process of the school; it includes all the issues related to the school management process, classroom activities, school environment and school facilities.

h. Academic Problem:

In the present study academic problem refers to the issues that occurs in transacting and evaluating the curricular and co-curricular activities of the school.

1.10 Rationale of the study:

Pre-primary education has tremendous significance for the development of children of below six years old, benefit greatly from a quality pre-primary education. A person's sense of self and their positive and negative views of the world around them are shaped during their formative years. Research shows that young children, between the ages of two and five, begin to become aware of the ongoing social behaviours; if children in this age range are trained to acquire skills to respect all elements of society, eliminate prejudices, and turn negativity into positivity, then society will have responsible citizens (Hagser & Sandbberg, 2011).

The importance of a quality education cannot be overstated, but it is especially crucial during a child's first six years of life because that's when their brain is developing the fastest (Ohri,2020). A global consensus has emerged around the value of preschool education as

a cornerstone of sustainable progress. Recent studies in psychology and education have established that childhood is the most formative and influential time in a person's life, and that it is during this time that crucial building blocks for optimal personality development are laid down. Studies on preschool education show that it improves children's development in all areas and helps lower school dropout rates (Choudhary, 2012).

Preschool and kindergarten are crucial to a child's development as a social being. Participation in formal educational settings has been shown to improve certain aspects of social behaviour. Kids who go to preschool are more likely to have healthy friendships than their peers who didn't have the opportunity to participate in preschool's learning activities (Ohri, 2020).

The World Conference on 'Basic Education for All' - 1991 has also highlighted early childhood education as an important input to guarantee the universalization of elementary education. Numerous government agencies and commissions, such as the Central Advisory Board of the Government of India (1944), the Central Social Welfare Board (1953), the Indian Child Education Conference (1955), the Indian Education Commission (1964-66), and the Sargent Report (1944), have stressed the importance of pre-primary education. Despite the policies' best intentions, pre-primary education is still not available to everyone decades after they were first enacted, and concerns about its quality continue to be raised (UNICEF, 2005 & Kurian, 2001).

The constitution of India has also made provisions for the welfare of the children in order to provide proper care, nutrition, health facilities and education; the Article 45 of the constitution provides free and compulsory education for the children from 6-14 years and Article 24 prohibits engaging children in the factory and other heavy work. But there has not been seen such compulsory provisions for care and development of the children below 6 years of age. The constitutional provisions and the laws enacted to realise about the negligence and inadequate provisions for the welfare of the early age of human life. Millions of young children in India are failing to achieve their developmental potential. The government's policies are laudable and in line with international trends. However, there is a big gap between policy and its implementation. There is considerable opportunity for India to meet international and national targets related to quality pre-primary education (UNESCO, 2019 & Kurian, 2001).

According to the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER, 2014), in the next decade, all states will be able to provide high-quality preschool education to all children ages 2-4 if the states commit to rigorous standards and sufficient quality and resources. When it comes to educating young children, it's important to take a holistic approach that takes into account all of their unique needs, including their emotional, social, physical, and intellectual growth. The benefits go beyond academic improvement on tests and extend to general life readiness. In 2012, for the first time, the United Nations included quality education as one of its Sustainable Development Goals. Further, students' access to secondary and tertiary education in the modern era is enabled by ICT, which has transformed the very nature of teaching and learning. A good education shapes a person in many ways, including their aptitudes, values, and character, so it does more than just make them job-ready. Preschool programmes strive to give children a well-rounded education by including lessons on morality and ethics as part of the curriculum, which benefits both the children and their working parents.

If we look into the context of Assam, it has experienced considerable and quantitative growth of Pre-primary educational institutes in different parts opened by the various private agencies and organizational bodies for the business purpose; But the system of pre-primary schools and the quality of the education the children supposed to receive is becoming doubtful. There are many questions arise in the mind of parents and the people who are working for the welfare of children regarding the present status of pre-primary education in Assam, the facilities that are provided to enable children's overall development, the curricular and co-curricular process, teaching-learning strategy, teachers training etc (Rahman, 2007) but hardly any study found to present the real picture of pre-primary education in Assam. Therefore, answering these questions demands an introspective study for the people who are working for the welfare of children, the policymakers, administrators, educationists, teachers, parents, and social activists. It is a moral responsibility for the researcher to find out the answer to these questions since pre-primary school has a great impact on the later life of a child. Therefore, it pursued the researcher to raise the following issues such as- what is the existing conditions of Pre-primary schools, the learning environment, the facilities provided in the institutions to enable child

development, the pedagogy, the curriculum process and evaluation system, and the problems and prospects of preprimary education in Assam.

1.11 Significance of the study:

Pre-primary education has tremendous significance for the optimum development of children below 6 years of age. when significant learning and development take place. The skills children learn in this period lay the foundation for later learning. The world conference on 'Basic Education for All' - 1991 has also emphasized early childhood education as a necessary input to ensure the Universalization of elementary education. Pre-primary education has been recognized as an important part of holistic development all over the world.

The significance of the present study has been discussed below:

- i) The present study would be a greater assistance to understanding the importance of educating children below 6 years of age to make the foundations strong.
- ii) The present research can give an insight for the policy makers, pre-primary workers on the present status of pre-primary education in Assam.
- iii) The study would help pre-primary school authorities to adopt a proper management style and cultivate a healthy school environment.
- iv) The present study would assist teachers to implement suitable teaching-learning strategies to make young children motivated.
- v) The study aids information regarding the curricular and co-curricular activities that are provided in the pre-primary schools in Assam.
- vi) The study would be beneficial for the pre-primary curriculum developer to select the activities and content for the development of all the domains.
- vii) The study will help the parents as well as teachers to identify the main problems faced by the children to adjust to the school.
- viii) The study would assist to adopt remedial measures for the development of pre-primary education.

1.12 Delimitations of the Study:

The present study has been delimited in the following way:

- i. The present study has been delimited to the Pre-primary schools in Assam only.
- ii. The study has been delimited to the pre-primary educational institutions from the private sector only.

1.13 Organizations of the Thesis:

The present thesis has comprised of 6 chapters, the description of the chapters is given below:

Chapter I- Background of the study:

This chapter provides an insight about the background of the study by conceptualizing about the pre-primary education.

Chapter-II: Review of Related Literature:

This chapter presents an overview of the work that has been done in the present field of study and gives an insight into the methodological design, substantive findings of studies done in the field and recommendations for the improvement of a certain field.

Chapter III: Research Methodology:

The third chapter discusses about methodological design adopted for the study; which comprises of research design and method, Population, sample, tool, data collection procedure, tabulation of data, techniques adopted for data analysis.

Chapter IV: Data Analysis and Interpretation:

In the chapter fourth analysis of the gathered data has been presented.

Chapter V: Result and Discussion:

The fifth chapter discusses the main results that are found after analysis of the data.

Chapter VI: Summary and Conclusion:

Finally, in the chapter 6 complete summary of the thesis has been given. The major findings of the study, educational implications of the present study have been given here and also some suggestions are provided for the further study.