

RESEARCH REPORT

Early Childhood Care and Education

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Early childhood education is the formal teaching and care of young children by people other than their own family or in settings outside of their home. 'Early childhood' is usually defined as before the age of normal schooling - 5 years in most nations, although the U.S. National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) defines 'early childhood' as before the age of 8 years. According to the UNESCO ECCE (Early Childhood Care and Education) Unit, early childhood, i.e., a time of remarkable brain development as these years lay the foundation, is defined as the period from birth to 8 years of age for development. Babies begin to learn rapidly from the moment they are born. By age 2 years, most of the growth of the human brain is already complete. For good mental growth, a child's greatest need is the love and attention of adults. A child's needs at this period are different from those of older schoolchildren, because early childhood sees the greatest growth and development of the physical body and brain. It is a period when walking, talking, self-esteem, vision of the world and moral foundations are established. The early years of life are critical to the development of intelligence, personality and social behaviour. Researches on brain development attest to the importance of mental, physical and social capabilities. If these fundamental capabilities are not well established from the start, neurological damage occurs and the child's learning potential could be adversely affected.^{1c}

Early childhood is also called the try age. The child considers toys as his living companies. Playing is important to a child's development because by playing a child exercises both his mind and body and absorbs basic lessons about the world. Parents can help a child to play. Children learn how to believe by initiating the behaviour of those closest to them. He likes and shows an interest in dramatisation, drawing, painting, games and movies. This

is the age when most female children love to play with dolls to celebrate its wedding, imitating teachers in class and playing the role of their mothers, whereas boys love to play with the toys of cars, trains and aeroplanes. Early childhood education (ECE) focuses on children through play. This is the best time to plan important activities and teach them through their games. Children learn many things without knowing that they are being taught.

Educationally, it is a very important age and is called the 'preschool age'. It paves the way for effective learning. The child is prepared in all respects to profit from schooling. An enriched environment is to be provided for the receptive minds of children. Some psychologist calls this a period of plasticity as impressions that are made on the child last throughout his life and influence his career. Piaget, through his research studies conducted on the ways in which

children learn, has arrived at the conclusion that a child's learning consists of two processes:

1. Assimilation
2. Accommodation

Both process begin at birth and increase in intensity in early childhood. At this stage, the ability of representing things develops and there is a gradual acquisition of knowledge and skills on part of the child. Benjamin Bloom, an eminent psychologist, observes that the environment from the first 6-7 years of life is very significant for cognitive development. Therefore, all the facilities should be provided to the child to explore, enquire, to play and to interact with his peers for optimum education.

Therefore, ECE should be according to the physiological and psychological needs and conditions of the child. It should be free, flexible and comprehensive in finding the best ways of getting families and schools to work together.

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Edgar Paure and others in their important reports 'Learning to be' have mentioned the importance of early childhood in the later development of aptitude and personality development. As modern psychologists have testified researches and studies have shown that an adequately enriched environment in early childhood brings about optimum development in various aspects. It is felt that pre-school education is absolutely essential for maximisation. Some significant parameters of the quality of life of any nation are infant mortality rate, incidence of malnutrition, morbidity picture and literacy rates. The infant mortality rate today stands at 104 (1984). The rural-urban IMR differential is striking, being 113 and 66. Respiratory disorders, diarrhoea and parasitic infestations and nutritional deficiencies are significant contributors to child morbidity. Overall, 83% children have body weights below normal standards. These include 42% being mildly malnourished, 35% moderately malnourished and 6% severely malnourished. Cognitive stimulation at home during early childhood, which is so vital for the later years of life, is poor because of low female literacy rate, which is 24-88. At present, by the most generous estimate, only ~12% of the child population (0-6 years) of the country is being reached by one or more of the six services in the Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS) package; although within the ICDS project areas, a large proportion of disadvantaged children are benefitted by the comprehensive package of six services. Realising the crucial importance of rapid physical and mental growth during early childhood, the government has started a number of programmes of early childhood care and education (ECCE). Declaration of a National Policy for Children (1974) shows the government's commitment.

Role of Different Groups in Ecce

It is noted that there are seven categories, including children who are involved in different activities of childhood care and improving their educational status. Their roles are identified as below:

Parents: They are the first caregivers and educators of a child. Their knowledge and awareness facilitate sound development.

Practitioners: They are those who directly work with children, influencing the learning and teaching environment with their knowledge and appropriate facilitation.

Politicians: They are responsible for promoting ECCE through development policies, laws and mechanisms for implementations.

Bureaucrats: They follow politicians' address that they have to strengthen institutional resources and capabilities in order to guarantee the effectiveness of programmes.

Funders: They have the resources not only to finance programmes but also to monitor them in terms of effectiveness and quality.

Implementers (agencies, organisations and institutions): They should ensure quality of programmes reaching every single child's needs effectively.

Researchers and experts: They support the effectiveness of other stakeholders through contributing with their expertise.

Some pioneers like Gijubhai and Tara Bhai Madak have struggled to establish a number of educational institutions for young children and training centres for teachers. Maria Montessori stimulated the growth of ECE at centres and organised philosophical principles and established training centres around her. The Central Social Welfare Board in 1953 sponsored voluntary agencies to set-up Balwadis for children of the less privileged. As a result, the Balsheviks was coined and Balsheviks training programmes were launched.

Realising the crucial importance of rapid physical and mental growth during early childhood, the government has started a number of programmes of ECCE. Declaration of a National Policy for Children (1974) shows the government's commitment for the development of children. The existing ECCE programmes include:

- (i) ICDS;
- (ii) Scheme of assistance to voluntary organisations for conducting ECE centres;
- (iii) Balwadis and day-care centres run by voluntary agencies with the government's assistance;
- (iv) Pre-primary schools run by the State Governments, Municipal Corporations and other agencies;
- (v) Maternal and child health services through primary health centres, sub-centres and other agencies.

The ICDS is currently the biggest programme of early childhood development. Over the years, this programme has demonstrated that even a modest investment in child development goes a long way in developing human resources. It needs to be fully integrated with universal

immunisation programmes started with effect from 19 November 1985.

Keeping in mind the role of ECCE as a support service in the universalisation of elementary education, as well as for human resource development, ECCE will be directed to the most underprivileged groups, those who are still outside the mainstream of formal education. Some of these can be defined as follows:

- (i) Very poor urban slum communities;
- (ii) Ecologically deprived areas where children are required to fetch fuel, fodder, water and do other household chores;
- (iii) Family labour and household chores in rural areas and artisan households;
- (iv) Working children in the unorganised sector;
- (v) Itinerant or seasonal labourers who have a mobile and transient lifestyle, like road workers;
- (vi) Construction workers in urban and rural areas;
- (vii) Landless agricultural labourers;
- (viii) Nomadic communities and pastoralists;
- (ix) Forest dwellers and tribes in remote areas;
- (x) Residents of remote isolated hamlets.

Girls in these groups may require support services like child care, sometime in very small units. Special attention should be given to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in all the above-defined categories.

ICDS

The pre-school education component needs to be strengthened in ICDS. For this, the following steps must be taken:

- (i) Each Anganwadi Worker's Training Centre should be given the responsibility of running at least twenty-five Anganwadi centres so as to provide the trainees with adequate field practice areas.
- (ii) The trainees should be placed for a minimum of 1 month in the Anganwadis for practical training.
- (iii) Instructional materials for the use of trainers and trainees should be developed.
- (iv) Materials for children - picture books, pictures, posters, minimum essential play materials - should be made available to all Anganwadis and replenished periodically.
- (v) Trainers, supervisors and CDPOs should be oriented through refresher courses in pre-school education components and given field training so that it is strengthened both at pre-service and in-service levels.

- (vi) The CDPO's office should be developed into a resource centre and should be well-equipped with training materials.

A beginning will be made in ICDS by developing a small percentage of Anganwadis as day-care centres and effort will be made to coordinate the timings of ICDS Anganwadis with primary schools.

ECE Centres (Department of Education)

The ECE scheme as it stands does not have components of health and nutrition; neither does it have any provision for the training of teachers. Therefore, the following measures will be taken with immediate effect:

- (i) Adding health and nutrition components;
- (ii) Provision for training the personnel;
- (iii) Supply of educational materials for children;
- (iv) Using play-way method and discouraging teaching of the three R's;
- (v) System of monitoring to be developed and linked to renewal of grants.

Balwadis Run by Voluntary Agencies

There are varieties of patterns in the Balwadis. Each scheme has its own history and background. All programmes of child development implemented through voluntary agencies will have an integrated approach, offering a comprehensive package and avoiding duplication. Where this does not happen, the existing activities will be merged into some comprehensive and integrated programme. Most of the programmes run by voluntary agencies do not have all the components of health, nutrition and education. They need to be converted into total child development centres.

Pre-primary Schools of the State Governments and Municipalities

They essentially focus on education. Therefore they require:

- (i) Adding components of health and nutrition;
- (ii) Discouraging the early introduction of the three R's;
- (iii) Using play-way method;
- (iv) Developing a relationship between home and community.

Day-care Centres

Crèches and day-care centres being run with CSWK support and otherwise need to be reviewed and strengthened

on an immediate basis. The following requirements will be ensured:

- (i) Timing co-terminus with school working hours or mothers' working hours;
- (ii) Adequate, safe and hygienic space;
- (iii) Adequate child-worker ratio;
- (iv) Drinking water;
- (v) Supplementary nutrition;
- (vi) Paramedical care under medical supervision;
- (vii) Minimum equipment including linen, cradles, etc.;
- (viii) Toys and play materials;
- (ix) Training and supervision of workers.

Programmes and Schemes

The Ministry of Women and Child Development (external website that opens in a new window) has come up with several schemes deciding the norms of child nutrition. These guidelines emphasise the following:

- **National Guidelines on Infants and Young Child Feeding:** Importance of breastfeeding. Breastfeeding must commence immediately after birth and continue exclusively for 6 months before other forms of milk are introduced. Appropriate and adequate complementary feeding must commence thereafter and breastfeeding can continue for up to 2 years.
- **National Nutrition Policy:** This was adopted by the Government of India in 1993 under the Department of Women and Child Development. It advocated a multi-sectoral strategy for eradicating malnutrition and achieving optimum nutrition for all. The policy advocates the monitoring of nutrition levels across the country and sensitising government machinery on the need for good nutrition and prevention of malnutrition. The National Nutrition Policy also includes the Food and Nutrition Board, which develops posters, audio jingles and video spots for disseminating correct facts about breastfeeding and complementary feeding.
- **The ICDS Scheme:** This is one of the most comprehensive schemes on child development in the country and perhaps in the world. The Ministry of Women and Child Development has been running the scheme since 1975 in pursuance of pre-school children in an integrated manner. It aims at providing services for the growth and development of children in rural, tribal and slum areas. This centrally sponsored scheme also monitors nutrition of children.

- **Udisha:** In Sanskrit, this means the first rays of the new dawn. It is a nationwide training component of the World Bank-Assisted Women and Child Development Project. Udisha has been cleared with an outlay of about Rs.600 crores for 5 years. UNICEF is also a technical collaborator in the project. The programmes aim to train child-care workers across the country. Its scope reaches as far as remote villages.
 - o Training Programmes under Udisha
 - o The Udisha Team
 - o Udisha at the State level
- **National Policy for Children:** This lays down that the state shall provide adequate services towards children, both before and after birth and during the growing stages for their full physical, mental and social development.
- **National Charter for Children:** This emphasises the Government of India's commitment to children's rights to survival, health and nutrition, standard of living, play and leisure, early childhood care, education, protection of the girl child, empowering adolescents, equality, life and liberty, name and nationality, freedom of expression, freedom of association and peaceful assembly, the right to a family and the right to be protected from economic exploitation and all forms of abuse.
- **National Plan of Action for Children:** This includes goals, objectives, strategies and activities for improving the nutritional status of children, reducing infant mortality rate, increasing enrolment ratio, reducing drop-out rates, universalisation of primary education and increasing coverage for immunisation.
- **Other Schemes Include**
 - o Balika Samriddhi Yojana (BSY)
 - o Kishori Shakti Yojana (KSY)
 - o Nutrition Programme for Adolescent Girls (NPAG)
 - o ECE for the 3-6 age group children under the programme of universalisation of elementary education
 - o Scheme for welfare of working children in need of care and protection
 - o An integrated programme for street children
 - o Child-line services
 - o Central Adoption Resource Agency (CARA)
 - o Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme For the Children of Working Mothers

- o Programme for Juvenile Justice
- o General Grant-in-Aid Scheme
- o Pilot Project to Combat the Trafficking of Women and Children for Commercial Sexual Exploitation in Destination Areas
- o Mid-day Meal Scheme
- o National Crèche Fund

Along with so many schemes, there are some important organisations that help children in their development.

Opportunity Council's Child-Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) is a community service that works with parents/families, early childhood educators, businesses and community organisations to help promote the availability of high-quality early care and education programmes in Island, San Juan.

CCR&R services

- We provide **licensed child-care referrals and consumer education materials** to families free of charge in Island, San Juan, and Whatcom counties.
- We manage a **confidential** database, including family, child-care provider and community resources information.
- We maintain **phone lines** for a minimum of 30 hours per week, giving referrals to parents/families and technical assistance to child-care providers.
- We are a hub for information and resources, enabling us to be a source of **free advertising** for providers.
- **Professional development** opportunities such as the initial 20-hour STARS class as well as the ongoing 10-hour continuing education requirement, college courses offering credit in ECE, and community-based workshops that offer STARS credits.
- **Onsite consultation** that is available to licensed and potential child-care providers free of charge. Our consultants are extremely experienced in the early learning field and can offer strategic advice aimed to enhance your child-care centre/home. They offer services on pre-licensing visits, environments, behaviour, administration, marketing techniques, communication and quality improvement.

- **Child-Care Financial Assistance** for families living in Whatcom countries. If families are homeless or in a crisis situation, we may be able to support them with child-care payments on a temporary basis.
- **A quarterly newsletter**, called Early Learning Connections, which includes literature on early learning legislative updates, WA Scholarships for Child-Care Professionals and topics on business practices, health/safety and more.
- **A parent newsletter**, called the Daily Parent, which includes information on child development, health and safety, parenting, quality child care, parenting education resources and CCR&R services available.
- **A lending library**, which includes informative books and videos on early care and education, such as administration, behaviour, child development, communication, cultural diversity, curriculum, health and safety, special needs, parenting and professionalism. Our lending library also consists of preschool theme kits and toys. All of these items can be borrowed on a monthly basis.
- **Child- and Adult-Care Food Programme**, referrals to this programme, a federally funded programme to help family home child-care providers serve healthy meals to the children for whom they care.
- **Early Support for Infants and Toddlers**, referrals to this programme, which assists families who have children ages birth to three with developmental delays.
- **Early Head Start, Head Start, ECE and Assistance Programme**, serve pregnant women and children aged birth to 5 years from income eligible families.

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