



Examining The Influence Of Early Childhood Care And Education Programs On Language Development And School Readiness

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Abstract

Early childhood is a period of enormous growth and development. Children are developing more rapidly during the period from birth to age 5 than at any other time in their lives, shaped in large part by their experiences in the world. These early years of development are critical for providing a firm foundation in cognitive, language, and motor development, as well as social, emotional, regulatory, and moral development. Language development plays a key role in how well a child is able to interact with friends, family and other members of society. Well-developed language can improve a child's ability to engage in social interactions, meaning that their social and interpersonal skills can also develop as they learn how to use language effectively. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is a comprehensive approach that caters to the holistic development of children in the formative stage of life (0-6 years). It includes care, health, nutrition, play, and early learning within a safe and enabling environment. It's important to pay attention to how well children develop language to ensure they can function effectively in a social setting.

Keywords: Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), Language Development, School Readiness, Early Experiences.

Introduction

Early childhood is a period of enormous growth and development. Children are developing more rapidly during the period from birth to age 5 than at any other time in their lives, shaped in large part by their experiences in the world. These early years of development are critical for providing a firm foundation in cognitive, language, and motor development, as well as social, emotional, regulatory, and moral development (NRC and IOM, 2000). Stimulating, nurturing, and stable relationships with parents and other caregivers are of prime importance to children's healthy development, and the absence of these factors can compromise children's development. The individuals who comprise the early childhood care and



education (ECCE) workforce are important providers of these early experiences. They form meaningful bonds with the children in their care, and their interactions, behaviours, and teaching practices all influence children's development, as well as their later school readiness (NRC, 2001; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001; Pianta and Stuhlman, 2004). Language development is the process by which children come to understand and communicate language during early childhood. Therefore there is a felt need to take care of the young children in the early childhood period and prepare them for the formal schooling. In addition, ECCE is essential to help children learn reading, writing and arithmetic which is required to prepare children for formal school readiness. ECCE is now being Universally recognized as a crucial input for the overall development of the child.

Definition of Ecce, Language Development & School Readiness

ECCE full form is Early childhood care and education (ECCE), as defined by UNESCO, is the “holistic development of a child's social, emotional, cognitive and physical needs in order to build a solid and broad foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing.” ECCE promotes **brain development and has positive long-term economic benefits.**

The Language Development domain describes children's developing ability to effectively communicate (expressive language) and understand (receptive language) oral language in different environments and for a variety of purposes. Such skills are key to children's learning and social competence. The understanding and use of language is also closely related to students' developing literacy and their later success in learning to read and write.

School readiness is foundational across early childhood systems and programs. It means children are ready for school, families are ready to support their children's learning, and schools are ready for children. Head Start views school readiness as children possessing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for success in school and for later learning and life. Physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development are all essential ingredients of school readiness. Managers, teaching staff, caregivers, family advocates, and families can learn more about creating enriching and supportive learning environments for young children ages birth to 5.

Why is early childhood care and education so important?



Early childhood care and education (ECCE), which addresses the period from birth to 8 years old, is important because it capitalizes on a period of rich brain development for children and, when it is of good quality, can help them achieve their full potential. It can lay the foundation for good health and nutrition, learning and educational success, social-emotional learning, and economic productivity throughout life. Despite the evidence for these social, human and economic developmental gains, it is still often given low priority in education policy and investment and, where it does exist, may exclude marginalized groups. ECCE has its own extra vulnerability in that much of it is privately provided.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions in India

In India, the constitutional and legal provisions concerning Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) are primarily based on the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) and the Right to Education (RTE) Act.

- **Article 45 of the Indian Constitution:** As part of the **Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP)**, the State shall endeavour to provide ECCE for all children until they complete the **age of six years**.
- **Right to Education (RTE) Act, Section 11:** The appropriate Government may make necessary arrangements for providing free pre-school education for children above the **age of three years** and early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the **age of six years**.
- **Article 39(f) of the Indian Constitution:** The State shall direct its policy towards ensuring that children are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and conditions of freedom and dignity.
 - It also protects childhood and youth against exploitation and moral and material abandonment.

Language development is important in early childhood care and Education

Language development is an important part of child development. It supports the child's ability to communicate. It also supports the child's ability to express and understand feelings. It also supports the child's thinking ability and helps them develop and maintain relationships. Language development lays the foundation for the reading and writing skills in children as they enter and progress through school. Language is needed for all aspects of their education in the classroom as they connect with peers and teachers, and throughout their lives as they



grow into adulthood. Developing language skills is of absolute significance for every child's progress in later life span both as social beings and in pursuing an education.

Language skills underpin many other areas of children's development by:

- providing a strong foundation for other areas of learning, such as reading and writing and enabling access to the whole curriculum
- supporting communication skills
- promoting social skills and forming friendships
- building confidence and self-esteem
- supporting emotional and behavioural development
- helping children to make sense of the world around them.

Importance/ Need for early childhood care and education

Significance of early childhood years

i. Early childhood is a period of life not just quantitatively different from that of an adult but also qualitatively different. 0-6 years in a child's life are formative years for his/her development. Development research consistently links higher quality child care with a child's well being, developing skills and subsequently adjustment in life. It claims that the first six years after the birth of a child is the period of optimum growth in the child's life. It is also stressed that neglect of children in these years of life impairs their learning capacity even when the conventional intelligence is within normal range. The adverse effect may last throughout life and cannot be changed by subsequent remedial measures (Montessori).

ii. The domains of young children's development revolve around physical, motor, emotional, psycho-social and cognitive/intellectual areas.

iii. ECCE programmes organized in good preschools provide the best chance of permanently enhancing children's cognitive skills, social attitudes, behavior and personality. Activities given at home, and in the immediate environment enables the children's sensory development which in turn organize the pathway for neurons in the brain during 0-6 years.

iv. In the area of motor development, children master the skills of walking, running and balancing, etc., by the age of three. And by the age of four, five and six, they are genuinely



accomplished to face increased physical challenges, eye-hand co-ordination, fine-muscular co-ordination and large muscular co-ordination are at an accelerated speed.

v. Preschool age is the crucial stage of emotional development too. A child learns to control and express his/ her emotions in an acceptable manner.

vi. On the social development front, the literature reveals that the child starts enjoying the company of other children by the age of three and in the process he/ she learns to adapt to the environment in which he/ she has to live and function. Knowledge, attitude and proper social conduct imbibed by children at this age tend to alter their outlook and behaviour in future and prepare the child to become a worthy and useful citizen of the country.

vii. Intellectual development of an individual through various phases of life shows that about 50 percent of the abilities and aptitudes are attained by the age of four. The following 30 percent are acquired between five and eight years and remaining 20 percent between the age of eight and seventeen years.

viii. Early childhood is also known as a problem age, toy age, preschool age, troublesome age, pre-gang age, exploratory age, questioning age, initiative age, enactive age and moldable age.

ix. The major developmental tasks of early childhood are centered on laying the foundation for adjustments to people and stimulations outside the home.

x. Foundations for the major physical and psychological habits are being laid.

xi. The content and quality of speech in this period play an important role in the child's adjustment to peers as well as adults.

xii. Early childhood is a time of remarkable transformation and extreme vulnerability.

xiii. Early childhood years needs a climate of security and acceptance, a stimulating environment wherein he has enough freedom to explore, observe, touch, feel, handle and manipulate different objects, materials and situations.



Importance/ Need/ Scope of early childhood care and education (ECCE)

Preschool, nursery school, kindergarten, Montessori, Anganwadi, Balwadi, crèche, laboratory nursery school, co-operative nursery school, and day care centre are all ECCE centres; which are managed by either the Government or NGO or private organisations. The following points bring out the significance of ECCE in the present scenario:

i) ***Learning begins at birth.*** Early childhood experiences create the base for all subsequent learning. It is the foundation stage. Learning is at its peak during early childhood years. ECCE plays a significant role in the learning process of the child.

ii) ***ECCE: A right in itself.*** Access to preschool education is a right for children and development of the nation, because children are the nation's future. Fortunately, the world recognised the importance of ECCE and therefore international commitment to early childhood is growing. The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the child, signed by 192 nations, focuses on guaranteeing the rights of young children to survive, develop and be protected. The 1990 World Declaration on Education for All states that learning begins at birth and encourages the development of ECCE.

The World Education Forum at Dakar in 2000 reaffirmed the importance of ECCE in reaching basic educational goals. This was also endorsed by the UN Special Session on Children in 2002. These ground-breaking legal and political commitments recognize that children are born with the right to have their learning needs met through approaches that promote their holistic development. The convention is a means of empowering children creating an environment in which all children are able to live securely and realize their full potential in life. The detailed civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights for every child are grouped into four sets of basic rights such as:

- The right to survival which includes the right of life, the highest attainable standard of health, nutrition, adequate standards of living, name and nationality.
- The right to protection which includes freedom from all forms of exploitation, abuse, inhuman or degrading treatment and neglect including the right to special protection.



- The right to development which includes the right to education, support for early childhood development and care, social security and the right to leisure, recreation and cultural activities.
- The right to participation which includes for the views of the child, freedom of expression, access to appropriate information and freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

iii) ***Smooth transition to primary school.*** Good health, nutrition and a nurturing environment are the strong early foundations which can ensure a smooth transition to primary education. Realizing the crucial significance of ECE, the National Policy on Education (NPE-1986/1992) in an unprecedented way, recognized ECE not only as an essential programme for the human development but also as a support for universalisation of elementary education.

iv) ***Helpful to disadvantaged sections of people.*** ECCE compensates the disadvantaged sections. Programmes in a preschool such as feeding, health care, activities for hand and head, organized and unorganized activities promote mental functions. By stimulating young children's development and coping mechanism with well designed childcare programmes, preschools help the children of poor families to overcome from the disadvantaged circumstance. This interchange among different environments is essential.

Even after six- and- a half decades of independence, female literacy is still lower, per capita income is very low, considerable percentage of people are below the poverty line and human development index is in poor position. Owing to such conditions, a majority of our homes do not provide the ideal conditions for children's all-round development during early childhood years. The ECCE centres provide such developmental opportunities to children under the guidance of a teacher.

v) ***Reduction in poverty.*** As we know, driven by socio-economic compulsions these days both parents seek jobs and remain away from the child for the whole day or most part of the day. ECCE is an important instrument of reducing poverty. Children are provided with free meals, immunization and free education at ECCE centres which enable the family members to go for work; they need not stay at home to look after the children of 0-6 years. Parents need not spend on children's feeding, health and education; hence they may come out of the poverty level. Suitable skills, attitudes and knowledge gained through ECE are very helpful in developing earning capacity during the course of life.



vi) **Manipulation of objects.** Early childhood care and education can provide opportunities for young child to manipulate objects and materials and understand the world.

vii) **Emotional support.** Emotional support provided at the early stage develops their sense of personal and physical security. It is the appropriate stage to strengthen family bonds. ECCE helps to inculcate positive emotions and channelize the negative emotions into right direction by organizing various activities such as clay modeling, paper tearing, finger printing, crayoning.

viii) **Improvement in primary education.** Participation in ECCE programs helps to progress to primary classes comfortably. By reducing drop-out rates, ECCE can improve the efficiency of primary education. While on the one hand it is expected to provide the necessary maturational and experiential readiness to the child for meeting the demands of the primary curriculum, on the other hand it also indirectly impacts on enrolment and retention of girls in primary schools by providing substitute care facility for younger siblings at ECCE.

ix) **Support to parents.** ECCE programmes provide parents and others who look after the children with access to parental education and other forms of support which in turn can improve adult learning and skills. For young children's transitions to be successful, one must recognize that early childhood is a life phase carrying the same rights and importance as any other. It is not merely a training ground for becoming older, but a time for societies to help children cross new thresholds. Peers, families and communities play a critical role in primming children for the next step in life.

x) **Promotion of girls' education.** ECCE is an important gadget of promoting gender equality. Elder sisters are usually involved in sibling care; hence they do not continue elementary education. By sending younger children to preschools, the elder sisters are able to continue their schooling. Thus ECCE promotes girls' education.

xi) **Meeting needs of changing family structure.** Joint families are disappeared. Earlier there were several elders as well as brothers and sisters to look after younger ones. Due to modernization, joint families are disintegrated and small families have come up with husband, wife and the child. Hence there is a dire need for ECCE to take care of the children and help the parents to continue their career and home front works.



xii) **Developmental perspectives.** Children's motor, physical, social, cognitive and emotional functioning differs from that of older children and adults. It, therefore, needs a special environment, and ECCE envisaged as a holistic input fostering health, psychosocial and physical development. The National Policy on Education emphasized the significance of making it play based, while cautioning against the dangers of reducing it to the teaching of 3 Rs. The holistic and integrated concept of ECE has now been further emphasized by terming ECCE universally as early childhood development programme.

xiii) **High returns of investment.** Impact of ECCE is positive. Money spent on children in young years fetches returns when the child becomes an adult. Children who participated in quality ECCE programmes are likely to obtain a higher level of education and get a better paying job.

xiv) **Brain development.** A baby is born with approximately 100 billion neurons, or nerve cells, in his/her brain that communicates through tiny connections that form networks. These networks allow neurons to transmit information involved in sensing, feeling, thinking, learning and remembering. At birth, most of these important connections are not formed. By experiences only neural networks are establishing in the brain. Through every experience, the baby forms a corresponding network in his/her brain. Movements are the central part in acquiring these experiences and stimulating the brain. When a child surrounded with positive environment his/her innate intelligence and unique gifts will blossom. Unfortunately, many children's brains are starving due to a lack of attention, movement and the right kinds of experiences. Without the opportunity to be used, neurons can actually wither away and die. Early childhood experiences have vital and long lasting effects on the mental development.

xv) **Caring of children = Caring of women.** Caring of children automatically leads to focusing on women whose physical and emotional condition influences their pregnancies and their babies' development. Poor prenatal care and mal-nutrition in mothers leads to low birth weight, learning difficulties and brain damage in children and other problems in mother. Thus when the older children are taken care by ECCE centres, mother with the next pregnancy has ample time to safeguard the pregnancy and motherhood.



Conclusion

Child development is a continuous process, welfare measures given for the children of early childhood period, has begun to be accepted as investment for basic education and life-long learning. Child care taken both at home and nation has developed into a vision for ECCE. The provision of experience in ECCE centres enables the child's development physically, socially, emotionally and intellectually; helps to acquire good habits, adjustment with others, promotes independence and fits to enrol in elementary school. Language development plays a key role in how well a child is able to interact with friends, family and other members of society. Well-developed language can improve a child's ability to engage in social interactions, meaning that their social and interpersonal skills can also develop as they learn how to use language effectively. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is a comprehensive approach that caters to the holistic development of children in the formative stage of life (0-6 years). It includes care, health, nutrition, play, and early learning within a safe and enabling environment. It's important to pay attention to how well children develop language to ensure they can function effectively in a social setting. Thereby ECE helps for individual child's future, families' upliftment in terms of literacy, women employment, enhanced educational status of the child and nation's development.

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