

A Study of Childhood Care and Pre School Education System in India

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ABSTRACT

India has a long tradition of valuing in the early years of a child's life. It has a rich heritage of cultural practices for stimulating the child's all-round development and inculcating values and social skills in young children. And these shared childcare and child-rearing practices were passed on from one generation to another. This early childhood education and care practices were primarily set in the context of a joint family system. However, the family structure in India has undergone major changes in the last three decades. Major socio-cultural changes that India has witnessed have necessitated a reevaluation of our approach to early childhood education and care. In contemporary urban India, a joint family has become a rarity. It is increasingly common to find families in which both the parents are working professionals. Parents raising their children in such nuclear families are dependent on childcare centres, preschool programs and other community-based early learning settings, for providing their children with a stimulating and nurturing learning environment. But completely relying on these support systems for your child's early development is not a wise idea. Parents should remember that early childhood development and education largely happens in the child's home. Parents being the primary caretakers have a vital role to play in the child's early development.

1. Introduction

This is the first exercise in which children are separated from the comfort and secure zone of their parents. Therefore, it has to be a place which is a second home to the child; a place, which has enough material to attract and make the child feel comfortable and secure. This is the first place where the child builds his/her self-esteem. A child learns the importance of his own name, things and friends. Every child learns to communicate with his teachers and fellow students in the Pre School. It is the right place for the child's foundation for lifelong progress. The skills and knowledge that the child develops in the Pre School have a great impact on the aptitude and attitude of the child later in life.

Researches on Pre School education have shown that children taught at an early age usually have improved social skills, fewer behavioural problems and better grades without special and attention. Self-confidence gained by learning in a playful manner adds to the personality development of the child.

The child's positive learning attitude, the basic foundation in language, comprehension and management, help the teacher facilitate the child's learning at kindergarten and higher levels of education.

Moreover childhood education specialists claim that young children learn best when they have an opportunity to interact with their peers, and their parents and instructors treat them kindly. They bloom well in a tension free environment. Besides they comprehend and learn things better if they are introduced to new things in small portions.

Early Childhood Education in India

Rabindranath Tagore, Gandhi, Vivekananda, Aurobindo, GijubhaiBadheka and TarabaiModak were among the earliest and most influential thinkers in modern India who realized the importance of early childhood care and education. They helped conceptualize a child-centric approach to early childhood development. They believed that education yields maximum benefits if it begins at birth.

- Tagore and Gandhi believed that children have a natural instinct to learn and they should be allowed to learn on their own from their natural surroundings.
- Tagore believed that music, art and poetry are essential for the overall development of children and that children should be encouraged to pursue these from an early age.
- Gandhi developed the concept of 'NaiTaleem', a major initiative towards early childhood education in India. He was against the 'textbook culture' and an overt 'exam-oriented' approach towards education.
- TarabaiModak, a pioneer in pre-school education in India, created the Anganwadi (a courtyard or open school) format.



Early childhood: Different modes of learning

In more recent times, scholars in the fields of developmental psychology and child development have emphasized, based on scientific research, that playing and interacting is the child's natural mode of learning and that living in multiple social and cultural contexts positively influences the child's learning and development. A basic tenet of early childhood care and education is that learning is an active and interactive process in which children learn through play and through interaction. When children are actively engaged with their social and cultural experiences, they constantly assimilate and use new information to make sense of their experiences.

2. Importance of Early Childhood Education

Infancy and early childhood are important stages in brain development. From birth to six years children constantly develop the skills necessary not only for speaking, writing and walking but also for social interaction and self-awareness. According to research, there are critical periods in early childhood that impact the development of emotional control, habitual ways of responding, language and literacy, symbols and relative quality, all of which impact school learning and academic achievement well into later years.



Positive environment for early childhood learning is important

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5 Core objectives of Early Childhood Care and Education are:

1. Enable a sound foundation for physical and motor development of each child- as per each child's potential.
2. Enable children for effective communication and foster both receptive and expressive language.
3. Stimulate intellectual curiosity and develop conceptual understanding of the world around by providing opportunities to explore, investigate and experiment.

4. Enhance development of pro-social skills, social competence and emotional wellbeing.
5. Develop a sense of aesthetic appreciation and stimulate creative learning processes.



3. Salient Features Of A Pre School:

- A good head start for learning
- Teaching in a fun filled way play method
- Putting children on a path of life long learning
- Higher development in language and mathematical skills.
- A great opportunity to develop social skills.
- Exposure to enhance communication skills.

One of the most important cognitive shifts in the preschool years that occurs between three- to four-year-olds is the development of symbolic thought. Symbolic thought is the ability to mentally or symbolically represent concrete objects, actions, and event. The most obvious sign of the development of symbolic thought in two- to three-year-olds is the significant increase in the use of miniature form of things around them and take themselves into a world of imagination which becomes more elaborate as they grow. "Do you like my train?" Sonu asks as he runs around his classroom on his train. 'This moves very fast. It will take me to the zoo.'

Thus it is of great importance for a Pre School to have plenty of things to attract the attention of their students.

According to the National Institute of Early Education Research (NIEER) children who attend a good preschool have a better pre reading, Math's and Science skills than those who did not go to a preschool. Preschool education is the need of the time as most of the parents are working and do not have quality time to spend with their children. Most of the babies are left at home with grandparents or helpers who are not able to guide them the way they should be.

Thus Pre School is not a place to look for mastery in academic curriculum instead it is a place where the children do all kinds of activities that are appealing to them and teaches them in a special way. Preschool education helps in a child's emotional, social and personal growth and development. Although a child learns how to talk while at home, in preschool continuous interaction and exposure with children of same age group and teachers helps them to enhance their communication skills. This involves translation of mental images to languages so that thoughts and knowledge be transformed into information.

4. Early Childhood Care And Education Developmental Milestone Goals

Parents should be aware of the milestones and objectives related to early childhood education. This helps parents to validate the efficacy of the program that their child is enrolled in. It also helps parents understand if the environment in their own home is conducive to learning or not.

Learning Goals & Milestones: Birth to Three Years Sensory and Perceptual Development

- Development of the five senses through visual, auditory, olfactory and kinesthetic experiences
- Learning to control and coordinate their reflexes
- Coordination of sensory perceptions and simple motor behaviours
- Display awareness of location and spatial relationship

Physical, Health and Motor Development

- Developing coordination and control of large motor muscles
- Developing strength and coordination of small motor muscles
- Integrating the movements of many parts of their body
- Developing a sense of balance in movement
- Begin to display personal hygiene skills
- Recognise the importance of safety rules

Language Development

- Begin to develop active listening skills
- Use expressive and receptive communication skills
- Develop vocabulary and use language to engage in conversations.
- Develop verbal and non-verbal communication skills
- Display emergent literacy skills (preparing children to read and write): such as identify and differentiate sounds, phonological awareness; print awareness and concepts; recognition of letters; letter- sound correspondence; building words and sentences.
- Display the use of prewriting skills (scribbling, marking, drawing, etc.)

Personal, Social and Emotional Development

- Display awareness of their abilities, preferences and characteristics
- Development of self-concept, self-control and self-help skills
- Develop initiative and curiosity, independence and autonomy
- Display awareness of behaviour and its effects
- Display increased attention span, engagement and persistence in daily activities
- Emergence of pretend play and use of objects as representation
- Develop a friendship with peers, show cooperation and participate in group activities
- Development of attachment, and emotional bonding with adults

- Develop empathy, learn to control feelings and express emotions in a relevant manner

Physical Health and Motor Development

- Developing coordination and control of large motor muscles
- Developing strength and coordination of small motor muscles
- Demonstrate the use of body with a proper sense of space and direction
- Coordination of fine muscles with dexterity, eye-hand coordination
- Developing sense of balance, physical co-ordination
- Display healthy habits, personal care and hygiene
- Display ability to follow safety rules, make choices and avoid danger

Government of India's Initiatives in ECCE

India ratified UNCRC in 1992 and pledged to the Education for All across the nation, which extensively contributed in the efforts of the Government of India for ECCE. Since 1951, ECCE in its holistic form i.e. child welfare, education, health and nutrition became an integral part of all the initiatives. These can be seen in the form of policies, plans, constitutional amendments, acts and schemes of Government of India. The most significant are the Five Year Plans; National Policy for Children, 1974; Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), 1975; amendment in the National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986; Programme of Action (POA), 1992 on National policy of Education, 1986; District Primary Education Programme (DPEP); SarvaShikshaAbhiyan (SSA); 86th Amendment Act in the Constitution under Article 45 of the Directive Principles of State Policy in part IV; National Plan of Action (NPA), 2005; Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE)-2009 under Section 11, Chapter III and National Policy for Children (NPC), 2013. These initiatives have potential that encouraged the provision and accessibility of ECCE for all children and that can be noticed in national survey reports. The survey report of National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) found 493,700 existing pre-primary institutions in the country in 2000 (NCERT 2006, p. 6) that increased up to 655,493 in 2009 (NCERT, 2016, p. 40). Similarly, National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA) (2016, p. xv) survey report revealed, 24.07% increase of primary schools with attached pre-primary section in 2015-16, compared to 14.27% in 2002-03. These findings indicate India's efforts in making ECCE accessible to all children. However, the Eleventh Five Year plan stated that, "the preschool education (PSE) component of ICDS-Anganwadi is very weak with repetition high and learning levels low" (Planning Commission, 2008, p. 11). Recognizing this, the Twelfth Five Year Plan is committed to place high priority on provision and access to 'quality' ECCE (Planning Commission, 2013a, p. 50). In this endeavour, the major initiatives of the Government for quality reforms in ECCE are through the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD). Ministry formulated the National ECCE Policy, 2013; National ECCE Curriculum Framework (MWCD, 2013a); Quality in ECCE: Pictorial Handbook for Practitioners, 2014; Age Appropriate Assessment Cards; Quality Standards for ECCE (MWCD,

2013b) and National ECCE Council, 2014. Realising the need for awareness among various stakeholders about quality ECCE and their role in ensuring the same, the NCERT has developed a bilingual (Hindi and English) 'Resource Package for Awareness on ECCE (Chandra 2016a and Chandra 2016b): The Package is a combination of folk, print and electronic media which is further supplemented with a 'Guide Book for Early Childhood Educators on Awareness Generation on ECCE' (Chandra & Mandal, 2016b). These initiatives are considered as the most systematic, clear and serious efforts for improving quality of ECCE in the country. Still, the quality component of ECCE is considered at risk, especially education component that covers 3-6 years of age group. A study conducted by Centre for Early Childhood Education and Development (CECED) and Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) (2015) in India, found that, children attending ECCE program that were ranked high on the quality assessment gained significantly more from one year ECCE than children who attended poor quality ECCE centres. Similarly, a recent study in three Indian states indicated significant issue of quality in ECCE centres (Kaul, Chaudhary, & Sharma, 2014). Evidences from the Indian ground can magnify this picture and may lead to provide possible solutions to address issues and challenges in the quality reforms in ECCE. Thus, researcher decided to locate ground evidences against each quality standard of MWCD, assess them, uncover the major issues/challenges and suggest possible enablers for ensuring quality ECCE in India.

5. Conclusion

This review revealed that, India has intensely pursued the first EFA goal of ECCE. Government is committed to ensure that all children, irrespective of gender and social category, have access to quality ECCE. In this endeavour, Government has taken huge initiatives which have potential to improve the quality of ECCE in the country. Collectively, studies under

review provided a clear picture of success in terms of targets achieved and concerns in terms of areas of improvement for quality ECCE. Data shows that, India is successfully reaching the target of ensuring the provision and accessibility of ECCE for all children. In this venture, improvement in enrolment at pre-primary and primary and retention in primary grades are the visible outcomes. Yet findings demonstrate that, quality of ECCE across the country is very diverse. Still, there is lack of basic requisites for organising ECCE programs and activities like infrastructure; physical facility; health facilities; competent teachers; training and orientation of teacher; developmentally curriculum framework; child friendly teaching learning process; common assessment procedure and monitoring and supervision of ECCE activities. This shows that, basic quality standards for ECCE are compromised at various levels that create major hindrance in improving the quality of ECCE. However, concerted interventions from the government, local and individual level may combat these challenges. These interventions include ensuring basic infrastructure and facilities, recruitment of exclusive ECCE teachers and their training, development and rollout of common developmentally appropriate curriculum, documentation and adaption of good practices in ECCE, ensuring parent and community involvement, convergence with concerned ministries, research based interventions, making ECCE a mandate in all the schools and rigorous monitoring of ECCE activities. Therefore, it is felt that India must revise its target date according to the Incheon Declaration for achieving the goal of quality ECCE by 2030. In this venture, these findings may play a crucial role in informing the issues and challenges in improving the quality of ECCE. The suggested enablers will also, help the Government in reworking on addressing the issues and challenges emerged. The need is to have considerable amount of commitment towards quality ECCE that will lead to fruitful results.

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