

## Importance of the early years of life and role of parents and teachers

Ruksana Saikia

Research Scholar, Department of Education, Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam, India

### Abstract

This paper attempts to highlight the importance of early years of life of an individual in his all-round development. The emotional, social and physical development of young children has a direct effect on their overall development and on the adult they will become. That is why understanding the need to invest in very young children is so important, so as to maximize their future well-being. Children's early experiences – the bonds they form with their parents and their first learning experiences etc. deeply affect their future physical, cognitive, emotional and social development. *Early* child development sets the foundation for lifelong learning, behavior, and health. The experiences children have in *early childhood* shape the brain and the child's capacity to learn, to get along with others, and to respond to daily stresses and challenges.

**Keywords:** development, early experiences, well-being, lifelong learning, challenges

### Introduction

The earliest years in a child's life are absolutely critical. There is overwhelming international evidence that foundations are laid in the first years of life which, if weak, can have a permanent and detrimental impact on children's longer term development. A child's future choices, attainment, wellbeing, happiness and resilience are profoundly affected by the quality of the guidance, love and care they receive during these first years.

The earliest years of a child's life are key to predicting ultimate success in school and life. The early learning experiences are crucial determining factors for emotional and intellectual development and will ultimately affect how well a child will perform in school. Their early experiences in the home, in the neighborhood, in child care, and in early education programs such as pre-kindergarten and kindergarten all affect how successful they will be later in life.

### The Importance of the Early Years of Life

The early years of life are the years of "flowering of the self". The attention receives during these years is irreplaceable. The amount of attention a child receives influences his or her direction in life. Children are not born with self-dependence. At the early stages of life, they need care and protection. With the passage of time, children become independent and self-reliant.

Neurological development is largely a result of the learning that takes place starting at birth and during the earliest years of life. Scientists now believe that a young child's brain needs certain types of stimulation to develop properly. Without that stimulation, certain types of learning will not be possible when the child enters school. Likewise, with the appropriate stimulation, neural pathways are developed that can enhance a child's emotional, social, and intellectual abilities. The more these neural connections are stimulated during this early window of opportunity, the stronger they become. It is so important that everyone who has contact with infants - including parents, grandparents, and caregivers - provide these

children with lots of touching, loving, talking, and singing to help them develop to their full potential.

### Quality Early Education

Early education programs, including child care, pre-kindergarten, and kindergarten, have an opportunity to help children develop to their full potential. Children who attend programs that meet high quality standards are more likely to provide lasting benefits. For instance, children who receive warm and sensitive care are more likely to trust people, to enter school ready and eager to learn, and to get along well with other children. Other factors that are predictors of good early education include:

- Small group sizes,
- High teacher/child ratios
- Appropriate staff wages
- Trained staff
- A curriculum geared specifically to young children
- Parental involvement

Programs with a strong parental involvement component have been shown to improve outcomes for children in several ways:

- 1) Parents of children living in neighborhoods characterized by social disorganization become more empowered and better able to access resources.
- 2) Parents with harsh or inconsistent parenting practices are provided more effective and supportive alternatives.
- 3) Some programs offer other support services such as job training and counseling.

Providing quality early education and fostering a developmentally appropriate home environment can have long-lasting benefits for the child, the family, and the community as a whole.

### Role of Family

While children spend considerable amounts of time with their parents or care takers during these early years, they also spend increasing amounts of time in a wide range of early years settings. Parents and care takers are the people who have the

most important influence on children's early development – but evidence shows that good quality early years provision also has a large impact on children's longer term outcomes. Early childhood is the period when maximum growth and development takes place. It is the most crucial period of a child's life. Involvement of family is very much needed in this period. This is the period when the child needs the cooperation and the supervision of the parents and other relatives. Most of the learning of a child's life begins in this period. Early childhood is usually defined as before the age of normal schooling. This is the period when the brain grows remarkably and the foundation of child's development and learning is laid. Family is the place where the child initially grows up. Family is the centre point of children's development and learning. Basic needs of the child needed to be provided by the family. From all the members of the family, mothers are closest to the children. So their role is the most vital one in children's development and education.

Children learn the most through playing. So, it is important to choose the perfect playing instrument for children, which will help their development and growth. It is a matter of warning that most of the children today are busy playing inside the house with virtual instruments. But for proper physical and mental development, children must use all their limbs and have as much fresh light and air as possible. For this they need to go out in open air. Parents should keep an eye in this regard also. If a child gets proper care to nurture his/her physical, mental, moral and intellectual skills at the very early stage of life, then it can be expected that the child would become an enlightened member of the society. To make the child a perfect citizen of the future society, the role of family is very important.

At this time physical, social, emotional and intellectual development of a child takes place. Physical development refers to the development of different body parts and different psychomotor skills, social development refers to the ability of young children to interact with others with manners and sustain relationships, emotional development refers to the children's feeling about themselves as well as others and intellectual development is the ability to acquire and to apply specific knowledge like reading, calculating and language. Good quality early life experiences, including helping families meet children's needs, can enhance children's resiliency and promote optimal child development at this period.

To a great extent, a baby's brain is constructed with building blocks of experience ready to be further developed by parents. As a child begins to experience the world through sight, sound, touch and to a lesser degree, smell and taste, the wiring and sculpting of the brain falls into place. Research shows that who and what a child becomes, is mainly determined from birth to age 8. As a parent or caregiver, every time you talk, play, sing or interact with your child, you are stimulating your child's brain and helping him or her become a happy, healthy, productive individual.

Early childhood development consists of different types of physical development like walking, talking, eating, playing etc. and different types of mental development like sharing and caring, growing values, morals and ethics, respecting others etc. At the early stage, education starts from learning all these physical and mental activities; then comes for small earning like identifying body parts, alphabets, digits, colours and shapes. According to Piaget theory, early childhood

learning starts with play. It is believed that children learn more effectively and gain more knowledge through play. All these learning by playing starts from home. Family is thus the first agency that teach the children all these things.

Thus a child's early childhood development and education largely depends on the family. So, the role of all the family members in all these learning is very important. Family is indispensable for education. We could also say the family is the most important source of education. We could even say there is no real education without the family. Families where there is strong foundation of love, children there learn about family bonding and mutual trust. Family values also help developing children's mental and intellectual strength. Thus it shows that, without the active involvement of the family members specially the parents it is quiet impossible for the children to develop strong physical, mental, moral and intellectual potential.

Though it is necessary for both the parents to contribute equally to the development and education of the children, it has been found that their roles were not at all equal. In all the families there were some specific roles for the fathers and the mothers. It is found that fathers mainly spend leisure time with the children and they keep note of what their children need and provide all those things. On the other hand, mother's responsibilities were fulfilling children's everyday necessities. It can be said that, fathers only provide financial support for the children and mothers provides all other supports including physical and mental support. Most of the father thinks that it is the duty of the mother to take care of children's education and other basic needs. A reason behind this type of thought process might be the patriarchal family system. However, there were some exceptions where the fathers used to feed, dress up, clean up the children whenever they were home. So, it can be said that mainly the role of parents in children's early childhood development and education differs because of the different role of male and female in our society, but the trend is now being changed.

Thus, the members of the family constitute the child's first environment and are the most significant people during the early, formative years of life. From contacts with family members, children lay the foundations for attitudes towards people, things and life in general.

### **Role of Teachers**

Being an early childhood teacher requires to be willing to wear many hats. As an experienced teacher, you are already prepared to be flexible. As a new teacher, remember that your job description may change on a daily basis. In most cases, your role as an early childhood teacher will be very similar to that of a guide. A guide leads others down new paths. A guide walks beside a person on a journey, not in front.

Great teachers are adaptable to the emotional reactions of their students. And when it comes to your students' interactions with other children, this can be one of the first times they interact with children their age. A teacher's role often becomes that of mediator when children have problems sharing or learning how to get along.

Teachers in early education need to be creative. They must think outside their own mature perspective and be able to place themselves in their students' shoes. What motivates a very young child? How do you make learning fun? -these are the questions you will have to ask yourself. Lessons in early

education classrooms are very hands-on. They involve arts and crafts, storytelling, exercise, educational games etc. You need to be fast on your feet and highly adaptable to continuously come up with new ways to guide children through their early learning stages.

As an early childhood teacher, you will be challenged to find new experiences to share with children. Guide children, do not lead them, and move in a direction that interests the child. As a guide, allow the child to choose their learning and playing style. Give up the notion that a teacher knows everything. Become a partner in learning and encourage children to find their own answers instead of providing the answers for them. By being a partner, teachers learn with the children and share in their experiences.

Early childhood teachers support learning by providing activities and materials that children find engaging. By facilitating learning, supplying a developmentally appropriate environment, interesting materials, and adequate time to explore, play and interact, children find learning easy. To nurture is to nourish. Nurturing a child encompasses all aspects of development: social, emotional, cognitive, and physical. In every interaction, a teacher should nurture appropriate growth and development. Teachers must also take care to listen to a child including interpreting words and actions. Listening carefully helps teachers determine a child's needs and aids in furthering the child's development. Teachers communicate with many people throughout the day: parents, children, support staff, the general public, and administrators. Early childhood teachers must be prepared to communicate with all of these people. You should feel comfortable opening up, asking questions, seeking advice, and sharing your experiences.

Teaching is full of many responsibilities, roles, and challenges. Like most worthwhile endeavors, it brings both challenges and rewards. Be flexible and you will more readily enjoy the rewards of teaching young children. Managing a classroom requires organizational skills, attention to detail, and commitment.

During the first few years of life, a child learns a lot about themselves and the world around them, and parents are their first teachers. Parents teach them how to speak, how to walk, how to feed themselves. They teach them the alphabet, shapes and colors, and even how to count and spell very simple words. But for healthy development, children need active stimulation and interaction with others. This is where early childhood education is the most beneficial. Beginning with children as young as two, teachers guide them through an important transition and oversee their adjustment.

Early childhood education focuses on "learning through play" by providing a hands-on, interactive atmosphere where children learn about themselves through playing with other children. As a teacher of young children, you become somewhat of a surrogate parent, their first source of guidance in playing with others and forming friendships. You teach them how to share, how to take turns, how to have manners--lessons that stay with them and evolve with each crucial phase of their life.

Children this young also have more physical demands than older students. Many preschools incorporate a nap time into their schedule or are on half-day schedules to accommodate a child's exhaustion after a long morning of playing and learning. Snack time is also built into these schedules, which

serve as a great opportunity to teach your students table manners. Teaching young children requires nothing short of complete devotion and perseverance. It can be a daunting task, but to a truly committed teacher, it is worth the effort.

### **Benefits of Early Child Care and Preschool Education Programs**

Children exposed to positive, stimulating experiences as young children develop enhanced learning capabilities, which improve their odds for excelling in school. Children who attend preschool or other early education programs:

- Have enhanced cognitive, verbal, and social development, which is maintained into the first few years of school.
- Have significantly higher IQs.
- Enter school better prepared to learn.
- Are less likely to exhibit later delinquency and antisocial behavior.
- Tend to demonstrate higher levels of school achievement and better social adjustment.
- Are less likely to have to repeat a grade or be placed in special education classes.
- Are more likely to graduate from high school.

Clearly, there can be long-term benefits from quality early childhood education. Children from impoverished environments tend to reap the most dramatic benefits from early childhood programs. Early education can increase parents' and teachers' expectations of children's performance. Children growing up in poverty or near poverty face many health and environmental risks. They, in particular, need to get off to a good start in life. One way to help these children is to place them in quality early education programs.

### **Conclusions**

Students' achievement in school and in life is influenced by their early educational experiences. New research findings on early brain development make it clear that quality care and early education should be vital components of every child's life. New knowledge about child development should be incorporated into early childhood curricula and parent education. Continued scientific research on brain development and early learning is needed.

Policymakers should be clear about what we expect children to be able to do when they enter school so that early education can be geared toward specific measurable goals. More coordination is needed of the full range of early childhood programs and govt. should work to ensure adequate teacher training and curriculum development. Children in child care should also have the opportunity to receive quality age-appropriate care.

Quality early education can produce important long-term improvements in the intellectual and social development of disadvantaged children. However, many families, but particularly low-income families, do not have access to quality child care and early education programs. Govt. should invest more in both the quantity and quality of early care and education and not squander the opportunity for potential gains for children.

Children are most of the time attention seeker. So, the parents should give fair share of time and care to their children. The children need both the parents equally. So there should always be a balance between the love and care of both the parents. Scolding or beating a child is never a solution; hence it has an

adverse effect. So the parents should be patient and try to convince the child and teach what to do and what not to do. Children at young age should be given nutritious as well as delicious food so that they eat properly without any hassle. Every member of the family should be fully aware of the child's physical, mental, moral and intellectual growth and everyone should contribute to the development of the child.

### References

1. Dr. Goswamee Gayatree, Child Development and Child Care. Arun Prakashan, Panbazar Guwahati. 2008.
2. Dr. Kale SV. Child Psychology and Child Guidance Himalaya Publishing House. 2008
3. Dr. Kumar. Child Psychology. Lakshmi Narain Agarwal, Educational Publishers. 2005.
4. Hurlock B. Elizabeth. Child Development, Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing Company Limited New Delhi.
5. <https://www.beststart.org>
6. [www.child-encyclopedia.com](http://www.child-encyclopedia.com)