

EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

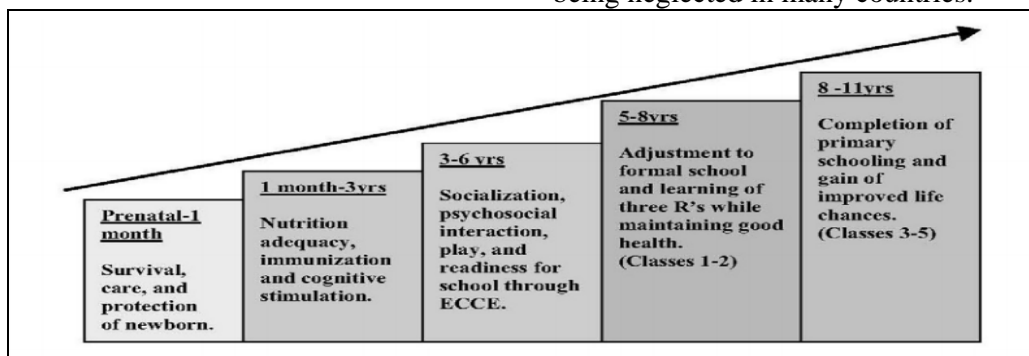
Early childhood care and development programmes are considered very useful for the children. It is an umbrella term which denotes providing a variety of interventions for young children and their families which includes childcare, education, health, and nutrition, and as well as the parents' support. The first goal of education is to promote early childhood development for vulnerable children. The importance of early childhood care and development was provided by World Health Organisation, UNICEF, and UNESCO for improving physical as well as psychosocial wellbeing of the children's and to develop cognitive skills among the learners to eradicate poverty. In India the early childhood care and development programmes are school based nursery programmes for the age group of 3 to 6, through community groups or play schools where the learners learn through play way method. In India, the institutions were basically designed on the grounds of British Infant Schools and Froebellian kindergartens and were serving the requirements of British rulers and Indian elites. For a normal child, the facility of childcare was mainly informal and was being provided within the family system or in extended kinships. The current study focusses on the early childhood care and development from an Indian perspective. It analyses various initiatives taken by the government of India for girl childcare. Moreover, the author give some measures through which the childcare can be improved in India.

Keywords: Early Childhood Care and Development, UNICEF, UNESCO, World Health Organisation.

Introduction

The first 6–8 years of a child's life that are regarded as the early childhood stage are being globally recognised as the most critical years for the lifelong development of the children because the speed of development during these years is extremely rapid (ECE NCERT, 2006). In today's society, the young children require utmost care and nurture so that they can grow healthy and productive citizens of

the country. Research too believes that there is dire need of interventions for the children falling under six years of age. It was found by the neuroscientists that during the early childhood synaptic connections are formed in the brain and at the age of three years, 85 percent of the child's brain is developed (Doherty, 1997). However, there are evidences through which it can be said that majority of the children falling under this age group are being neglected in many countries.



Same is the case with the country like India when we talk about the situations of the programmes and interventions for these children. Leaving these short falls aside, India too has a wide-ranging network of programmes that are meant to address the Early Childhood Care Development needs in the country

under the age of six years. The ICDS programme is the only most important programme in the country that is dedicated to the needs of children under six years of age. The supreme court of India have mentioned that at the age of six years the ICDS services must be provided to the children, pregnant

women, and the adolescent girls (Sinha & Bhatia, 2009). The ICDS programme in its vision provides a comprehensive set of services meeting the health, nutrition, and development needs of children. However, these programmes have been largely ineffective and need major refurbishing. The state shall try to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years as mentioned in Article 45 of the Constitution of India. Child development is a continuous and cumulative process. The development in children passes many phases in terms of Health, nutrition, and educational/psychosocial development are all synergistically interconnected, which makes a case for the importance of addressing all the needs of children through a holistic approach. With regard to the child development, World Bank in their report issued in 2014, categorize it as: (World Bank, 2014)

Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD)

Early childhood care and development (ECCD) refers to the overall development of the child in all spheres i.e., cognitive, physical, linguistic, and socio emotional development from the prenatal stage to 6 years of age. The programme aims at responsive parenting with home-based care increased access to early learning centres enhance teachers training, smooth transition of children into schools, and improve health and nutrition for children. Delhi and NCR regions are specially seen as a bone of construction sites where the construction labour move with family and lot of young children are seen on these sites. The benefits of ICDS have reached these areas and ECCD centres with support from building contractors have been started.

Early childhood care and development is the period in the child's life from conception to six years of age. Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) can be defined and interpreted as the overall development of children in many aspects like physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional development. At this stage of life, the child needs proper care and special attention regarding their health and nutrition, their emotional and social abilities, as well as their minds it is a special and crucial period during which a brain develops fastest and is most responsive to change. Environment influences such as nurturing, care, stimulation, nutrition and health care have a major

impact on the developing brain during this stage. Most of the evidences indicates that if the children are provided good nutrition, adequate care, and stimulation, they will develop fully, i.e. both intellectually and physically. If the children are well nurtured and cared at the beginning, they will be able to develop fully in thinking, language, emotions and social skills and due to this they can be able to perform better in school and become more productive as adults. Early childhood includes four main stages and each of these stages requires age appropriate support from parents.

- Conception to birth
- Birth to 3 years
- 3 to 6 years
- 6 to 8 years

Early childhood care and development is the combination of Nursery class level of children from the age group of 3 to 6 years

Early Childhood Care and Development in India

The institutions that were providing early childhood education in India were first established during the pre-independence period in the 19th century (Swaminathan, 1992). These institutions were basically designed on the grounds of British Infant Schools and Froebellian kindergartens and were serving the requirements of British rulers and Indian elites. For a normal child, the facility of childcare was mainly informal and was being provided within the family system or in extended kinships. Despite these kinds of efforts, in India the spread of formal childcare provision and the concept of early childhood care and development were very slow.

As need emerged of early childhood care and the interventions after independence, the main root cause was to protect children from the risk of poverty. In order to prevail quality education for all the sections, it further encouraged the women into the work (Pattnaik, 1996 & Sharma et al., 2008). In India, the Government started a major initiative in 1975 by starting Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme to provide complete services mainly to the poor section of the society between the age group of 0-6 years. The international organisation UNICEF played an important role in providing technical as well as material support to ICDS which includes jeeps, photocopying machines, typewriters, growth charts and IFA tablets etc.

Current Status of ECCD in India

As per the census 2011, the population of 158.7 is in the age group of 0-6 years and to cater them is a challenge (ECCE Policy, 2013). As we all know that the first five years of Child's life supports fast learning, 90 percent of the child's brain gets developed. The most empiric part of the personality their emotions, their moral values, their ability to deal with peoples and situations are all based on the kinds of experiences they perceive for 0-5 years. Early childhood care and development is not a new term at all. In its past cultural heritage, it indicates that traditionally the early years are considered to lead the foundation for inculcation of basic values and skills in the children. Most of the early care and education of the child was informal that too within the families in the form of stories and were handed from one generation to another. In today's time, children are allowed to play in mud and sand even that toys are also made of mud, clay or wood which all help in developing the child's fine muscles without paying any stress and anxiety. However, these tested approval and appropriate childcare techniques gradually became extent and the modern provision came into the picture. Though we are quite good at early childhood care and education, but we adopted the new methodologies and theories from the west with a very little understanding and even lesser training suddenly the old poor techniques were discarded. Another reason for the shift was a change in the types of families which was reduced from joint to nuclear families. Responsibilities of parents shifted from many people in the family and got rusted on the shoulders of the mothers and fathers. Now they started seeking help from the outside institutions and this is how flourished the concept of organised preschool education. Madam Montessori made a visit to India and met Mahatma Gandhi. They both were of the common opinion about Indianised form of Montessori methodology which further led to the establishment of first preschool education centre in Gujarat. Since then though a lot of progression can be seen in last 60-70 years but yet they are not sufficient to call ourselves good at providing early childhood care and education because of lack of funds. More importance is given to primary education then early childhood education and it is often neglected in the areas of regulations and teachers training. To impart practical knowledge, it must be easy to understand and should not made suddenly hectic and even the child should also enjoy their school time. In presence of note learning

children can miss out on stimulating environment that are of high importance in early years. The quality of non-formal pre-schools education imparted through these multiple channels' is uneven and varies from minimalistic approach to a mixed combination of academic programs. Current peaceful structures are result of lack of understanding of the very concept of ECCD, its importance and philosophy likewise our system has does not have enough capacity and standard to produce large number of peaceful educators which are demands of growing peaceful business. The well informed structure encourage swarm loving instruction between the teacher and a child who both explore the world together under this structure. A teacher is eligible for employment only after three and half years of university education and nothing less than that. All this brings us to a realization that early childhood care and education in India dearly needs the common framework in the form of a curriculum of learning standards. To help the staff to clarify the pedagogic aims keeps progression in mind and focus on the most important aspect of the child development and respond adequately to the child's needs. The good news is that we have utmost reached the threshold of bringing such a framework into reality. In 2001 the Indian Govt. has already proposed the early national childhood care and policy that was supposed to be keeping in mind under the new policy which will coming up in 3 years.

Initiatives Towards ECCD in India

UNICEF in its report in 2017 clearly focuses on the initiatives taken in India towards improving the Early Childhood Care and Education. These kinds of initiatives has got wide publicity through Social Media platforms and print media as well. Among these initiatives, the report talks about the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan where the Indian Government targeted 526 million people for spreading the awareness regarding the use of toilets and making hand washing a key part of it. In yet another instance, the Government of India started a flagship programme called Beti Padhav Bethi Bachaav where the Government laid down special emphasis on the education of the girl child. The main motto behind the programme was to increase the value of the Girl child in India and to make it understandable to their parents. These programmes got major support from the Bollywood celebrities as well who came forward for its advertisement for

the sake of spreading the awareness among common masses.

To highlight the importance of ECCD, India participated in two programmes at the global level. These programmes were Early Moments Matter and World Children Day. These two programmes were having a vast reach of 54 million with child rights and ECCD as the main goal. UNICEF India also made a good use of mainstream media i.e. TV series and Radio to engage the adolescents and make them understandable about ECCD. There were state wise initiatives as well. Among these was the initiatives taken by the Government of Bihar by focusing on END GRILCHILD MARRIAGE. Above all the Government started a large scale Massive Open Online Course (MOOCs) for those children who for one or the other reason have been left out of the school. The National Survey, conducted by the government of India highlights that only one-third of the children in the age group of 3 to 5 are presently enrolled in any pre-school, public or private - 30.5% in rural areas and 49.5% in urban areas (Sinha & Bhatia, 2009). The importance of Early Childhood Education has also been acknowledged in 12th Five Year Plan. The government of India in 2013 has also approved the National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy which also includes the Quality Standards and National Curriculum Framework for ECCE (Singh, 2018).

Approaches to Early Childhood Care and Development

In India, the ECCE initiatives are being offered through various public and private centres like Balwadis, preschools, Anganwadis, day care centres, playschools, crèches, kindergartens, and preparatory schools (Deccan Herald, 2013).

Various types of things and approaches must be kept in mind for improving child development

- Mothers must be given proper health and nutrition facilities before during and even after birth.

- To improve breast feeding and practices of feeding which includes during weaning.
- Children's must be given access with micronutrients, and it must be practised to the whole group or the population
- Diseases must be properly prevented and must be treated through proper recognition and management better facilities, proper time and high quality of proper care and attention must be given to the child providing better education for empowering men and women
- There is an evidence on these approaches which proofs that these things have an outcome that is relatively strong as compared to the other areas. Large number of academic and policy literatures have been done on various problems and approaches were suggested.

Conclusion

It has been observed that in India, a lot of work have been done for the early childhood care and development. Infact various programmes like ICDS and some agencies are also involved, and they are providing support for the children under the age of six years but still it needs a lot of improvements and after analysing various factors, it can be interpreted that the ICDS programme may require maximum investments for children and greater implementations support. For the provision of ECCD, there are very good models in our country and a lot of organisations are working on this issue but still these initiatives seems small. The ultimate aim should be achieving good quality of early childhood care and development services that were provided by the government of India and it must be available for those who deserve. Therefore, it is important that there is a requirement to have many more models to be used for the early childhood care and Development and the efforts must be done for bringing improvement towards it.

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