

H10EC18 IMPORTANCE, NEED AND SCOPE OF EARLY

CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION

QUADRANT I

18.1 Introduction

Families in India prioritise young children and inculcate basic values in them, through traditional child care practices which was commonly shared by all members of the family especially women. However there have been changes in the family structure as well as social context in the last few decades due to an increase in women's education, employment, urbanization and the nuclear family system. Hence, there is no one at home today, to look after the young children. 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.

Learning objectives

By teaching this module, students will be able to:

- Understand the importance of early childhood education for 0-6 years
- Learn the need and scope of early childhood education.

18.2 Importance/ Need for early childhood care and education

18.2.1 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 moludable 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.

18.2.2 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 groundbreaking 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 (*e= 10192 context= if schhmtartulsan.ac.kr*). 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 (*wedsc.ap.nic.in*):

- The right to survival which includes the right of life, the highest attainable standard of health, nutrition, adequate standards of living, name and nationality (*multiworldindia.org*).
- 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 (wcdsc.ap.nic.in).
 - 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 (www.bernardvanlear.org).

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 (www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr/wdr-archive, <http://hdr.undp.org/en>)

- 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 (e=1019context=if schhmtartulsan.ac.in).
- 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 (www.education.nic.in).
- 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 (www.bernardvanleer.org).
- 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. (site.younme.com.my). 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 (*submitted to Webster University*).
- 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.

- xvi) **Lasting imprints.** The care and nurture given to the children in the early years have a vital and lasting impact on their growth to adulthood and it influences the development of their ability to adjust, and capacity to regulate their emotions.

It's easy to develop basic skills in children in their younger years; later on it becomes increasingly difficult. Children who didn't meet their basic needs during infancy or early childhood years may show some behavioural problems. If these problems are not prevented children may become distrustful, frightened and also show disorganized behaviour.

- xvii) **Inadequate space.** With the increase of population and due to urbanization people are moving to cities, the living space in towns is becoming less day by day. Families live in small apartments or even in a single room where there is hardly any space for a child to move around, run and play. There is no freedom of movement and no scope for the child to investigate and experiment, both of which are very necessary to run, jump and play for good development.

- xviii) **Foundation for personality development.** The early childhood years are the foundation for later personality development. An individual's habits, attitudes, interest and trust in people and the world are all moulded by early childhood experiences. For good personality development, the early years in life must be full of learning experiences and challenging. Rich and challenging experiences are best given through early childhood education in an ECCE centre.

- xix) **Early education:** It is difficult to learn in the first grade without early preparation. Readiness activities like drawing, clay modeling, cutting, pasting, learning rhymes, listing stories and outdoor activities enable children to read, write and do arithmetic in an admirable way, in later years.

- xx) **Social equality.** Social inequality is very much present in our society. Socially backward children do not have equal opportunities compared to socially advanced children. A preschool (ECCE centre) brings about social equality by providing opportunities for interaction between children of different castes and classes.

- xxi) **Best child care services.** Of all the services provided by the Government, NGO and private, ECCE is the best because it involves programmes for feeding, health, education and development simultaneously.

xxii) **Group activity.** Apart from all the above mentioned reasons, children love to play with other children. After two and a half or three years, the peer group becomes increasingly important to them. In a preschool a child gets the opportunity of playing with other children, and thus learns to share, wait for his turn, co-operate with others and acquire other social skills.

xxiii) **Grandparents as role model.** In olden days grandparents imbibed the human values in young children, companion during play, laid foundation for language and act as a role model for grand children. At present due to lack of grandparents at home, ECCE is a must for child care.

xxiv) **Expert care:** children grow under the expert care of trained teachers and learn the rules of co-operative living with fellow peers.

xxv) **Behavioural disorders:** in the absence of secure and cordial environment at home and due to the occurrence of stressful experiences, children often develop behavioural disorders. These may be in the form of aggressive behaviour, regression, shyness, anxiety or hyper activity. When parents and teachers try to understand the child's problems and show a reassuring attitude to help the child overcome his anxiety and fear, the child is able to get over the behavioural disorders.

xxvi) **Investment in human resource development.** It is now globally acknowledged that investment in human resource development must accompany the investment for economic development of any nation. Considering that human development profits along a continuum and that the process of development is essentially cumulative in nature, investment in programmes for the youngest age group of children in the 0 to 6 age range becomes a major priority as the very foundation for basic education and lifelong learning and development (www.education.nic.in, site.younme.com.my).

All these facts emphatically reveal that the global agenda for the new century is "Optimal Early Childhood Care and Education". ECCE is one of the best ways to realizing the Rights of the Child as its objectives are corollary to child development. Its purpose is to protect the child's right to develop his or her full cognitive, social and physical potential (*cf.hst.net*).

18.3 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

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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 enroll in elementary school. 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.

