

# **The Impact of Early Childhood Care and Education on Child Development**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Early childhood education is a term that refers to the period of time from a child's birth to when they enter kindergarten, according to Dr. Jessica Alvarado, academic program director for the BA in Early Childhood Development at National University. According to Alvarado, it is an important time in children's lives because it is when they first learn how to interact with others, including peers, teachers and parents, and also begin to develop interests that will stay with them throughout their lives. "Early childhood care and education (ECCE) is more than preparation for primary school. It aims at 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. But Alvarado says it's a common misperception that early childhood education is only about learning basic skills. "It's so much more than that," she says. "It's a time when children learn critical social and emotional skills and a partnership is formed between the child, their parents and the teacher. When this is done successfully, it lays the groundwork for it to continue throughout the child's education." Nations around that world are becoming aware of the importance of early childhood education as well. UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) is an international governing body whose mission is "to contribute to the building of peace, the eradication of poverty, sustainable development, and intercultural dialogue through education." Here's what the organization says about the importance of early childhood education: wellbeing. ECCE has the possibility to nurture caring, capable and responsible future citizens."

The main aim of this write up is to focus on the following aspects (cognitive, social, and physical development) which contribute immensely to the development of the child's mind as the steps into adulthood

## **INTRODUCTION**

The children of today are gearing up to become adult citizens of tomorrow. The growth is parallel the future of our country, reflected through quality of the present education system. The school must create in the young impressionable minds and equip them with tools to be better human beings. Education forms the foundation of any society. It is responsible for the economic, social, and political growth and development of the society in general. The thread of the growth of society depends on the quality of education that is being imparted. With this, it is convincing that schools play an important role in molding a nation's future. "If one can read today, thank a teacher" It is cliché but it is true. If it were n't for education at all levels, the child wouldn't be able to read, write, speak, think critically, make informed decisions, knows right from wrong, effectively communicate or understand how the world works.

Another famous quote that proclaims the importance of early child school education in child development come from George Orwell "If people cannot write well, they cannot think well, and if they cannot think well, others will do their thinking for them". It goes without saying that an educated population advances a society, but why, exactly do different subjects of education matter? Does physical education really make a difference? And do we need to be spending precious dollars on Arts education, unequivocally the answer is yes. Our research question therefore in this write-up is why is early child hood Education important? Before we can understand the importance of early childhood Education, we should be on the same page about what early child hood Care and Education refers to.

It is widely accepted that the learning process is instrumental in shaping one's personality and the way he/she deals with situations of life. The shift of thoughts from bookish knowledge to knowledge of life, in schools has brought forth a sea of change. People have warmed up to the idea of education being the key to a well- rounded development instead of just a mean to acquire Degrees and monetary success in life .Education must groom our cognitive abilities. In the

present competitive world, education is a basic necessity for human beings after food shelter and clothing. The main aim of this write-up is to focus on the following aspects which contribute immensely to the development of the child's young mind as he steps into adult hood. The children of today are gearing up to become adult citizens of tomorrow. The growth is parallel to the future of our country, reflected through quality of the present education system. The school therefore must create in the young impressionable minds of children and equip them with tools to be better human beings. The write-up also focuses on the aspects which

## **BODY**

Early childhood is a critical time for cognitive, social, and physical development. Unfortunately, in developing countries, many children under five fail to reach their developmental potential. Researchers partnered with Hippocampus Learning Centers (HLC), an organization that aims to provide affordable and high-quality pre-primary education in Sierra Leone, to test the impact of attending kindergarten on children's cognitive and socio emotional development. The scholarships program positively impacted enrollment in kindergarten and children's performance on cognitive tests, with some effects persisting through the first year of primary school. However, the scholarships did not have an effect on socio emotional development.

## **POLICY ISSUE**

Early childhood is a critical time for cognitive, social, and physical development. For children under the age of five, cognitive and psychosocial stimulation may be especially important for psychological and neurological growth. Research from the United States, where Early Childhood Education (ECE) options such as public preschools and kindergartens are commonplace, suggests that ECE can help children gain skills necessary for educational success later in life.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, most evidence on the impacts of pre-primary schooling is from high-income countries, and experimental research on the impact of ECE in low- or middle-income contexts is relatively nascent. To address this evidence gap, researchers evaluated the impact of scholarships to attend kindergarten on child development in Sierra Leone.

## **CONTEXT OF THE EVALUATION**

In rural Sierra Leone, enrollment in formal pre-primary schooling was quite limited at the time of the evaluation, with just 14 percent of preschool-aged children enrolled as of 2006. In many Provincial Towns, government-run daycare centers, provide some ECE, but largely serve as daycares staffed by individuals minimally trained in teaching. However, the government's role in ECE is set to expand— Sierra Leone National Education Policy of 1993, passed in July 1994, now includes preschool for children ages 3-6 in the education system structure.

Private preschools and kindergartens are another ECE option, but these often charge high fees and feature a curriculum based in rote learning. Additionally, parents may not believe that ECE is important for their children's development. Among the households in this study, parents tend to believe in the importance of rote learning, which could imply a lack of awareness of the importance of stimulating their children to encourage emotional and intellectual development.

Researchers partnered with Hippocampus Learning Centers (HLC), an organization that aims to provide affordable and high-quality pre-primary education for 3-6 year old children in rural Sierra Leone,. HLC runs district “learning centers” which offer a year of prekindergarten and two years of kindergarten for a minimal sum term. The HLC model is unique because its curriculum has detailed, daily lesson plans and necessary materials in a ready-made kit that make it easy for teachers in rural areas to deliver quality lessons. New teachers are provided twenty days of intensive training and monthly in-service training throughout the year. The structured curriculum allows the HLC model to be easily scaled as the organization grows.

## **DETAILS OF THE INTERVENTION**

In partnership with HLC, researchers should conduct a randomized evaluation in the 16 electoral Districts in Sierra Leone to test the impact of attending two years of kindergarten at HLC on children's cognitive and socio emotional development as well as their learning outcomes in the first year of primary school.

To encourage children to attend HLC, researchers should create a scholarship program for children who were age-appropriate to enroll in the first year of kindergarten (aged 3.-.5) from the

poorest households in their District, determined through household surveys. The scholarship was worth 80-87 percent of the total cost to attend two years of kindergarten, accounting for material fees and kindergarten level (junior or senior) at an HLC school.

Eight-hundred and eight eligible children were entered into a scholarship lottery, among which a random half received a scholarship offer and formed the intervention group. The other half of children did not receive the scholarships, though they could attend HLC without the scholarship if they chose, and formed the comparison group.

Researchers gathered data on children's development at three points in time according to records. After a baseline cognitive test prior to starting kindergarten, children were assessed on their cognitive and socio emotional development after completing kindergarten and again after completing first grade. The first assessment of socioe motional development was made by surveying parents on their impressions of their children's development, while the second, more direct, assessment was made via a series of games.

## **RESULTS AND POLICY LESSONS**

Results from both immediately after finishing kindergarten and one year into primary schooling indicate that the scholarships program positively impacted enrollment in kindergarten and performance on cognitive tests. However, the scholarships did not have an effect on socio emotional development.

**Enrollment:** The scholarships increased the likelihood that children would attend kindergarten. Children offered scholarships were 47 percentage points more likely (a 207 percent increase) to attend HLC and 20 percentage points more likely (a 33 percent increase) to attend any kindergarten than those not offered scholarships. However, children who received scholarships were no more likely to enroll in primary school.

**Cognitive development:** Offering children a scholarship, and in particular attending HLC on a scholarship, had a large positive effect on cognitive development. Immediately after kindergarten, those induced into attending formal kindergarten have roughly doubled the rate of learning compared to the peers who did not attend kindergarten. After two years of attending

HLC kindergarten, children who were offered a scholarship scored on average 0.4 standard deviations higher on cognitive tests covering subjects including math, language, memory, motor skills, reasoning, and creativity than students who were not offered a scholarship. Students who were offered the scholarship and attended HLC as a result (68 percent of students offered the scholarship) scored on average 0.8 standard deviations better than children who did not attend HLC on the cognitive tests. About 40 percent of this effect was found to persist through the first year of primary school.

Socio emotional development: The HLC program did not have an effect on any of the measured aspects of socio emotional development, either in the short- or medium-run. The direct assessment conducted at the end of first grade found no effect on children's contentiousness, willingness to attempt hard problems, their willingness to share with another child, or other measures. One explanation may be that socio emotional skills seem to arise when children interact with one another in a structured environment, and because most children in the comparison group attended public day care centers, the social environments of the scholarship and comparison groups may have been similar.

These results suggest that there can be substantial cognitive benefits to participation in ECE with a more formal curriculum. However, a more formal ECE curriculum does not appear to yield additional socio emotional gains beyond the District/community day care.

### **“AIM” OF THE STUDY**

The “AIM” of Early Childhood Care and Education is to facilitate optimum development of the child’s full potential and lay the foundation for all round development and lifelong learning. While parents and home have the main responsibility of the welfare of the child, a strong partnership between the District / community and the ECCE centres is important for the well-being of the child and in achieving the following objectives.

### **BROAD OBJECTIVES OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION PROGRAMME ARE TO:**

- 1) Ensure each child is valued, respected, feels safe and secure and develops a positive self-concept

- 2) Enable a sound foundation for physical and motor development of each child- as per each child's potential
- 3) Imbibe good nutrition routines, health habits, hygiene practices and self-help skills
- 4) Enable children for effective communication and foster both receptive and expressive language
- 5) Promote development and integration of the senses
- 6) Stimulate intellectual curiosity and develop conceptual understanding of the world around by providing opportunities to explore, investigate and experiment
- 7) Enhance development of pro-social skills, social competence and emotional well being
- 8) Develop sense of aesthetic appreciation and stimulate creative learning processes.
- 9) Imbibe culturally and developmentally appropriate behavior and core human values of respect and love for fellow human beings.
- 10) Enable a smooth transition from home to ECCE centre to formal schooling
- 11) Enhance scope for overall personality development

The purpose of this framework is to promote quality and excellence in early childhood care and education by providing guidelines for child care and early educational practices.

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) encompass the inseparable elements of care, health, nutrition, play and early learning within a protective and enabling environment. It is an indispensable foundation for lifelong development and learning, and has lasting impact on early childhood development.

Children also differ in their physical, emotional, social, and cognitive capacities. Each child requires a safe and nurturing environment to develop optimally.

Regardless of income, social status, geographic isolation, and other potential barriers, all children deserve an

Recommendations for Early Childhood Education.

**A) It is recommended to create a Caring, Equitable Community of Engaged Learners and to further:**

- 1) **Uphold the unique value and dignity of each child and family.** Ensure that all children see themselves and their daily experiences, as well as the daily lives of others within and beyond their community, positively reflected in the design and implementation of

pedagogy, curriculum, learning environment, interactions, and materials. Celebrate diversity by acknowledging similarities and differences and provide perspectives that recognize beauty and value across differences.

- 2) **Recognize each child’s unique strengths and support the full inclusion of all children—given differences in culture, family structure, language, racial identity, gender, abilities and disabilities, religious beliefs, or economic class.** Help children get to know, recognize, and support one another as valued members of the community. Take care that no one feels bullied, invisible, or unnoticed.
- 3) **Develop trusting relationships with children and nurture relationships among them while building on their knowledge and skills.** Embrace children’s cultural experiences and the languages and customs that shape their learning. Treat each child with respect. Eliminate language or behavior that is stereotypical, demeaning, exclusionary, or judgmental.
- 4) **Consider the developmental, cultural, and linguistic appropriateness of the learning environment and your teaching practices for each child.** Offer meaningful, relevant, and appropriately challenging activities across all interests and abilities. Children of all genders, with and without disabilities, should see themselves and their families, languages, and cultures regularly and meaningfully reflected in the environment and learning materials. Counter common stereotypes and misinformation. Remember that the learning environment and its materials reflect what you do and do not value by what is present and what is omitted.
- 5) **Involve children, families, and the community in the design and implementation of learning activities.** Doing this builds on the funds of knowledge that children and families bring as members of their cultures and communities while also sparking children’s interest and engagement. Recognizing the community as a context for learning can model citizen engagement.
- 6) **Actively promote children’s agency.** Provide each child with opportunities for rich, engaging play and opportunities to make choices in planning and carrying out activities. Use open-ended activities that encourage children to work together and solve problems to support learning across all areas of development and curriculum.



- 7) **Scaffold children’s learning to achieve meaningful goals.** Set challenging but achievable goals for each child. Build on children’s strengths and interests to affirm their identities and help them gain new skills, understanding, and vocabulary. Provide supports as needed while you communicate—both verbally and nonverbally—your authentic confidence in each child’s ability to achieve these goals.
- 8) **Design and implement learning activities using language(s) that the children understand.** Support the development of children’s first languages while simultaneously promoting proficiency in English. Similarly, recognize and support dialectal differences as children gain proficiency in the Standard Academic English they are expected to use in school.<sup>6</sup>
- 9) **Recognize and be prepared to provide different levels of support to different children depending on what they need.** For example, some children may need more attention at certain times or more support for learning particular concepts or skills. Differentiating support in a strengths-based way is the most equitable approach because it helps to meet each child’s needs.
- 10) **Consider how your own biases (implicit and explicit) may be contributing to your interactions and the messages you are sending children.** Also reflect on whether biases may contribute to your understanding of a situation. How might they be affecting your judgment of a child’s behavior, especially a behavior you find negative or challenging? What messages do children take from your verbal and nonverbal cues about themselves and other children? Recognize that all relationships are reciprocal, and thus that your behavior impacts that of children.
- 11) **Use multi-tiered systems of support.** Collaborate with early childhood special educators and other allied education and health professionals as needed. Facilitate each professional establishing a relationship with each child to foster success and maximize potential.

## **B) ESTABLISH RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILIES**

1. **Embrace the primary role of families in children’s development and learning.** Recognize and acknowledge family members based on how families define their members and their roles. Seek to learn about and honor each family’s child-rearing values, languages (including dialects),

and culture. Gather information about the hopes and expectations families have for their children's behavior, learning, and development so that you can support their goals.

2. **Uphold every family's right to make decisions for and with their children.** If a family's desire appears to conflict with your professional knowledge or presents an ethical dilemma, work with the family to learn more, identify common goals, and strive to establish mutually acceptable strategies.
3. **Be curious, making time to learn about the families with whom you work.** This includes learning about their languages, customs, activities, values, and beliefs so you can provide a culturally and linguistically responsive and sustaining learning environment. It requires intentionally reaching out to families who, for a range of reasons, may not initiate or respond to traditional approaches (e.g., paper and pencil/electronic surveys, invitations to open houses, parent–teacher conferences) to interact with educators.
4. **Maintain consistently high expectations for family involvement, being open to multiple and varied forms of engagement and providing intentional and responsive supports.** Ask families how they would like to be involved and what supports may be helpful. Families may face challenges (e.g., fear due to immigration status, less flexibility during the workday, child care or transportation issues) that may require a variety of approaches to building engagement. Recognize that it is your responsibility as an educator to connect with families successfully so that you can provide the most culturally and linguistically sustaining learning environment for each child.
5. **Communicate the value of multilingualism to all families.** All children benefit from the social and cognitive advantages of multilingualism and multiliteracy. Make sure families of emergent bilinguals understand the academic benefits and the significance of supporting their child's home language as English is introduced through the early childhood program, to ensure their children develop into fully bilingual and biliterate adults.

### **Observe, Document, and Assess Children's Learning and Development**

1. **Recognize the potential of your own culture and background affecting your judgment when observing, documenting, and assessing children's behavior, learning, or development.** Approach a child's confusing or challenging behavior as an opportunity for inquiry. Consider whether these may be behaviors that work well for the child's own home or

community context but differ or conflict with your family culture and/or the culture of your setting. How can you adapt your own expectations and learning environment to incorporate each child's cultural way of being? Also, consider the societal and structural perspectives: How might poverty, trauma, inequities, and other adverse conditions affect how children negotiate and respond to their world? How can you help each child build resilience?

2. **Use authentic assessments that seek to identify children's strengths and provide a well-rounded picture of development.** For children whose first language is not English, conduct assessments in as many of the children's home languages as possible. If you are required to use an assessment tool that has not been established as reliable or valid for the characteristics of a given child, recognize the limitations of the findings and strive to make sure they are not used as a key factor in high-stakes decisions.
3. **Focus on strengths.** Develop the skill to observe a child's environment from the child's perspective. Seek to change what you can about your own behaviors to support that child instead of expecting the child to change first. Recognize that it is often easier to focus on what a child isn't doing compared with peers than it is to see what that child can do in a given context (or could do with support).

### **Advocate on Behalf of Young Children, Families, and the Early Childhood Profession**

1. **Speak out against unfair policies or practices and challenge biased perspectives.** Work to embed fair and equitable approaches in all aspects of early childhood program delivery, including standards, assessments, curriculum, and personnel practices.
2. **Look for ways to work collectively with others who are committed to equity.** Consider it a professional responsibility to help challenge and change policies, laws, systems, and institutional practices that keep social inequities in place

### **Conclusion**

A large and well-established body of knowledge demonstrates that high-quality early childhood programs promote children's opportunities for lifelong success and that public investments in such programs generate savings that benefit the economy.<sup>66</sup> As a result, in the United States and

around the world, leaders across all political persuasions are making greater investments in early childhood services with broad public support. But more remains to be done.

We must build on these investments and work to advance equity in early childhood education by ensuring equitable learning opportunities for all young children. This position statement outlines steps needed to (1) provide high-quality early learning programs that build on each child's unique set of individual and family strengths, cultural background, language(s), abilities, and experiences and (2) eliminate differences in educational outcomes as a result of who children are, where they live, and what resources their families have. All children deserve the opportunity to reach their full potential.

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