
UNIT 4 EARLY CHILDHOOD (*PHYSICAL, PSYCHOSOCIAL, COGNITIVE AND LINGUISTIC*)

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4.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit you have studied about the infancy period its characteristics and common hazards during infancy period. The physical, psychosocial, cognitive and linguistic development of infancy were also discussed in detailed. Now in this unit we will discuss all these aspect in the early childhood period. Firstly, we have to understand the concept of early childhood period and its characteristics. Childhood begins when the infancy period is over approximately two years of the age group. Childhood period is divided into two age group (i) early childhood, 2-6 years (ii) late childhood, 6- to the time the child becomes sexually mature. Early childhood period is called as a conclusion of the infancy period. The child enters in the preschool and forms a personality that no –one adults or other children. His personality is absolutely individual. We generally consider as a ‘little individual’ or ‘small figure’ of the family. It is widely recognised age group and fairly long period in the life span. There are many factors are influence the child personality, that is,

- i) Child social history: The child learning experiences comes form the society and these experiences are supervise by the parents or teachers;
- ii) Culture: The child is encouraged to embody the typical or ideal personality of her culture;
- iii) Place: the element of place and time that bring out some personality traits and leave others to reserve and;

- iv) Biological makeup: facial features, physique, growth rate, genetic and temperament can advance the child personality.

4.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- define and describe early childhood;
- describe the characteristic of early childhood and explain how they differ from other periods in the life span;
- explain the physical and psychological hazards which faces the child;
- describe physical and psycho-social development in early childhood period; and
- explain cognitive and linguistic development in early childhood period.

4.2 MEANING OF EARLY CHILDHOOD

Many psychologists define early childhood term in many ways. In a simple term early childhood age often focuses on children learning through play. It generally includes toddler hood and some time afterwards. Sometimes it is called a play age.

It is also defined as the period from birth to 8 years of age. A time of remarkable brain development, these years lay the foundation for subsequent learning (UNESCO).

The terms preschool or kindergarten age emphasise education around the ages of 3–6 years. The terms “early childhood learning,” “early care,” and “early education” are comparable with *early childhood education*. The terms day care and childcare do not embrace the educational aspects. Many childcare centers are now using more educational approaches. They are creating curricula and incorporating it into their daily routines to foster greater educational learning.

Researchers in the field and early childhood educators both view the parents as an integral part of the early childhood education process. Early childhood education takes many forms depending on the beliefs of the educator or parent.

4.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD

The characteristics of the early childhood are:

- Some parents feel that behavioural problems of childhood period are more troublesome than physical care of infants.
- Some behavioural problems occur in this period such as obstinacy, stubbornness, disobedience, negativistic and antagonistic.
- It is a toy age because most of the time children are engaged with their toys. These toys are also helpful to educate the children. Toys are important element of their play activities.
- This is a period when a child is considered physically and mentally independent. This is also a school going age.
- Children are become more self sufficient, independent, develop self-esteem.
- This is the age of foundations of social behaviour. They are more organised social life they will be required to adjust to when they enter first grade.
- Develop physical, cognitive, emotional and social development.

4.4 HAZARDS DURING EARLY CHILDHOOD

There are some hazards during early childhood, which are divided into two categories, viz., (i) Physical hazards and (ii) Psychological hazards. Let us see what these are:

- 1) **Physical hazards:** Some of physical hazards that affect the children during the early childhood.
 - i) *Illness:* Illness is highly susceptible in early age. Children are more prone to respiratory illness and wide spread infectious diseases. Today many viruses are spread in the air, if children are affected to this virus they will fall sick.. Children who are sick for an extended time fall behind in their learning of skills needed for play and other activities.
 - ii) *Accidents:* The chances of deaths in early years are high because of accidents than at any other age. Some studies suggest that boys are having more accidents than the counterpart of girls. Most young children face the problems of getting knife and blade cuts, burns, infections and broken bones, etc. Some also get into physical accidents which may disable them temporarily or permanently.
 - iii) *Obesity:* Obesity is always a hazard in early childhood years. Children with endomorphic body builds tend, as a group, to have more problems with obesity than do those who have mesomorphic body build. Children who are very fond of food, and having a typical personality are more prone to diabetics and heart attacks, as compared to normal children. This is also a health hazard in early period of development. Having junk food regularly make children more obese.
- 2) **Psychological hazards:** The common psychological hazards are discussed here:
 - i) *Speech hazards:* Communication is an important tool for social belonging. They can communicate through their speech or language. Some time their language is not understandable to others and their communication is not clear and this will lead to the feelings of inadequate and inferiority. The quality of speech is poor in young children.
 - ii) *Social hazards:* There are number of social hazards in early childhood. If a child has some communication problem he may be unpopular with the peer group children. Such children may feel not only the lonely but also feel deprived of opportunities to learn to behave in a peer approved manner. Some times children develop unhealthy social attitudes. Young children who have experiences of discrimination and prejudice because of religion, caste or sex, they manifest biased behaviours. As a result they minimize the contacts with the people at outside the home or inside the home.
 - iii) *Play hazards:* Children who feel isolated in the play ground and lack of playmates, either because of geographical isolation or because they are not forced to engage in solitary forms of play, stand to be rejected by other children and do not develop the needed motor and other related skills and thus may feel handicapped and inferior to other children.

- iv) *Moral hazards*: Inconsistent discipline slows down the process of learning to conform to social expectations. Children are confused when they find that different people have different views about the particular behaviour.

4.5 GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

Growth and development are complementary processes. Growth indicates the bodily changes in a qualitatively way such as height and weight, and development indicates the changes in both the qualitative and quantitative way (e.g. intelligence, creativity and language acquisition).

Development can be defined as a ‘progressive series of orderly coherent changes. The various types of developmental changes follow certain principles. Some of these principles are as follows:

- 1) Growth and development follow an orderly sequence.
- 2) Each child normally passes through a number of stages, each with its own essential characteristics.
- 3) There are individual differences in rate and pattern of development.
- 4) Though the human being develops as a unified whole, yet each part of the body develops at a different rate.
- 5) Development is essentially the result of the interaction between maturation and learning. While maturation is the ‘unfolding of characteristics potentially present in the individual’s genetic endowment’, learning refers to the relatively enduring ‘changes that come about as a result of experience and practice.’

Self Assessment Questions

Fill in the blanks

- 1) Childhood period is divided into two age group (i)_____ (ii)_____.
- 2) Early childhood period is called a conclusion of _____period.
- 3) Physical hazards are _____, _____, _____ and _____.
- 4) Psychological hazards are _____, _____, _____, and _____.
- 5) Growth indicates the bodily changes in _____way.

4.6 PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

Early childhood period is more developing period in respect to the cognitive, physical social and language. Erikson, Kohlberg, Piaget, and Bronfenbrenner, explain the more subtle changes that occur inside the body.

Physical changes in early childhood are accompanied by rapid changes in the child’s cognitive and language development. From the moment they are born, children use all their senses to attend to their environment, and they begin to develop a sense of cause and effect from their actions and the responses of caregivers

Height: Growth rate slows: the average child in this stage grows 2 1/2 inches in height and 5-7 pounds per year.

Weight: The average annual increase in weight is 3 to 5 pounds. At age 6, children should gain weight approximately six times as much as they did at birth. The average girl weighs 48.5 pounds, and the average boy weighs 49 pounds. Body fat declines during preschool years.

Body build: Body differences are fairly seen during this period. Some children have an endomorphic or flabby, fat body, some have mesomorphic sturdy look, muscular body build and some have an ectomorphic or thin body. Boys have more muscle while girls have more fat. The boy's muscles become larger, stronger, and heavier.

Motor skills: Gross and fine motor skills progress rapidly. Gross motor skills include running, skipping and jumping. Fine motor skills include turning pages of a book and learning to write and draw.

Brain development: The most important physical development during early childhood is the brain and nervous system growth.

Body proportion and shape: The average preschool child requires 1700 calories per day. Well balanced meals are important in this stage because their diet affects skeletal growth, body shape and susceptibility to disease.

Teeth: During the first four to six months of this stage, the last four baby teeth-the back molars-erupt. During the last half year of early childhood, the baby teeth begin to be replaced by permanent teeth. When early childhood is over, the child generally has one or two permanent teeth in front and some gaps where permanent teeth will eventually erupt.

4.7 PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

Erik Erikson's (1902-1994) theory of psychosocial development describes the impact of social experience across the whole lifespan. The theory of psychosocial development is one of the best-known theories of personality in developmental psychology. The word 'psychosocial' is Erikson's term, effectively from the words psychological (mind) and social (relationships). He believed that his psychosocial principle is genetically inevitable in shaping human development, and it occurs in all people. In early childhood years, children start to develop self-conscious emotions, instead of purely reacting to caregivers' or other adults'. For example younger children feel perfectly happy himself and will not experience negative emotions until caregivers express their displeasure at the messy situation. Children may still enjoy playing with the play mates at early childhood stage and they may feel happy when they get praise or reward from the family members.

According to Erickson's developmental theory, children start to evaluate themselves at the early stage of development of "*Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt.*" At the end of this stage, young children's self-evaluations are either autonomous and positive, or negative and ashamed. Young children who feel autonomous see themselves as good, valuable people who are able to do what is expected of them in a positive way. In contrast, young children who feel ashamed also feel worthless and incapable of doing what is expected of them.

As children become increasingly self-aware, more effective at communicating, and

better at understanding the thoughts and feelings of others, their social skills increase. Children in the early childhood stage become skilled at modifying and expressing their emotions to fit different social situations. For example, Billy may feel angry, but he knows that having a tantrum at school is inappropriate. Similarly, Sally learns that acting pleasant and happy even if she feels shy and scared is a better way to meet people at a birthday party when she doesn't know many of the other children. Changing or controlling one's emotions in social situations is an important skill that allows children to fit in with groups and start to create interpersonal relationships. Children who successfully complete this stage feel secure and confident, while those who do not are left with a sense of inadequacy and self-doubt.

4.8 COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

Jean Piaget described two processes of behaviour (i) assimilation and (ii) accommodation. *Assimilation* is the process of using or transforming the environment so that it can be placed in preexisting cognitive structures. Let us take an example of an infant who uses a sucking schema that was developed by sucking on a small bottle when attempting to suck on a larger bottle.

Accommodation is the process of changing cognitive structures in order to accept something from the environment.

Both processes are used simultaneously and alternately throughout life. An example of accommodation would be when the child needs to modify a sucking schema developed by sucking on a pacifier to one that would be successful for sucking on a bottle.

As schemas become increasingly more complex (i.e., responsible for more complex behaviours) they are termed structures. As one's structures become more complex, they are organised in a hierarchical manner (i.e., from general to specific).

Stages of Cognitive Development: Piaget identified four stages of cognitive development; sensory motor stage (birth- 2 years), preoperational stage (2-7 years), concrete operational stage (7-11 years) and formal operational stage (11-above).

At the pre-operational stage (Play age and Early Childhood) intelligence is demonstrated through the use of symbols, language use which matures, and memory and imagination are developed, but thinking is done in a non logical, non reversible manner. Egocentric thinking also predominates at this stage. Children form stable concepts and mental reasoning begins to develop.

From 2-4 years children develop symbolic reasoning (the ability to picture an object that is not present.). Egocentrism starts out strong in early childhood, but weakens. Magical beliefs are constructed.

Between 4-7 years of age the child develops intuitive thought (the use of primitive reasoning skills and wondering "why"). Starting school is a major landmark for children at this age. Piaget also noted that children feel great difficulty to accept the views of others and Piaget called this egocentrism. Egocentrism is when children experience difficulty in experiencing others person's perspective.

As we know that this is called a play age and many schools are adopting the Piaget's theory of cognitive development, which provides part of the foundation for constructive learning. Discovery learning and supporting the developing interests of

the child are two primary instructional techniques. It is recommended that parents and teachers challenge the child's abilities. It is also recommended that teachers use a wide variety of concrete experiences to help the child learn (example, use of manipulatives, group work, field trips or work, etc.).

4.9 LINGUISTIC DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

Proper language development is the main concern in the early childhood. Language is the only powerful tool to enhance the ability of cognitive development. As we have already read that unclear communication may create the hazards for the development of a child. A good language always allows the child to communicate or interact with others persons and solve their problems. At the end of age seven, children are able to demonstrate some basic understanding of less concrete concepts, including time and money. However, the eight-year old still reasons in concrete ways and has difficulty understanding abstract ideas.

Beginning the first three years of life, children develop a spoken vocabulary of between 300 and 1,000 words, and they are able to use language to learn about and describe the world around them. By age five, a child's vocabulary will grow to approximately 1,500 words. Five-year-olds are also able to produce five-to seven-word sentences, learn to use the past tense, and tell familiar stories using pictures as cues.

At the age of six years a child can learn consonants that are to be mastered: f, v, sh, zh, th, l .

They should develop the concept of 7 and their speech should be completely intelligible and socially useful. Children at this age should be able to tell others a well connected story about a picture seeing the relationships therein. Between objects and happenings

At the age of seven years a child masters the consonants s-z, r, voiceless th, ch, wh, and the soft g as in George . They should be able to handle opposite analogies easily: girl-boy, man-woman, flies-swims, blunt-sharp short-long, sweet-sour, etc . They must be able to understand such terms as: alike, different, beginning, end, etc. In addition children at this age should be able to tell time to quarter hour and do simple reading and write many words.

Self Assessment Questions

State whether the statement is *True or False*.

- | | |
|--|-----|
| 1) Early childhood is more developing period. | () |
| 2) Boys muscles get weak during the early age. | () |
| 3) Children start to evaluate themselves at the early stage. | () |
| 4) Ego centrisms start at pre operational stage. | () |
| 5) Clear communication may hazards for the child. | () |

4.10 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have studied about the early childhood period with reference to the physical, cognitive, psychosocial and linguistic development. Let us take it one by one:

- 1) Childhood begins when the infancy period is over approximately two years of the age group. Childhood period is divided into two age groups (i) early childhood, 2-6 years (ii) late childhood, 6- to the time the child becomes sexually mature. Early childhood period is called as a conclusion of the infancy period.
- 2) There are many factors which influence the child personality such as, child's social history, culture, place and biological makeup. Early childhood has its own characteristics, which make it strong and influential. Physical and psychological hazards are also affected in the early years.
- 3) Physical changes in early childhood are accompanied by rapid changes in the child's cognitive and language development. From the moment they are born, children use all their senses to attend to their environment, and they begin to develop a sense of cause and effect from their actions and the responses of caregivers
- 4) As children become increasingly self-aware, more effective at communicating, and better at understanding the thoughts and feelings of others, their social skills increase. Children in the early childhood stage become skilled at modifying and expressing their emotions to fit different social situations.
- 5) At the pre-operational stage (called as a play age and early childhood age) intelligence is demonstrated through the use of symbols, language use matures, and memory and imagination are developed, but thinking is done in a non logical, non reversible manner. Egocentric thinking also predominates at this stage.
- 6) Language development is the main concern in the early childhood. Language is the only powerful tool to enhance the ability of cognitive development. A good language always allows the child to communicate or interact with other persons and solve their problems. At the end of age seven, children are able to demonstrate some basic understanding of less concrete concepts, including time and money. However, the eight-year old still reasons in concrete ways and have difficulty understanding abstract ideas.

4.11 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) What do you mean by the early childhood period?
- 2) What are the major characteristics of early childhood period?
- 3) Explain physical hazards during early childhood period.
- 4) Explain psychological hazards in early childhood period.
- 5) Elucidate the role of growth and development.
- 6) Define the concept of Erikson theory of psychosocial development in early childhood.
- 7) Explain the process of assimilation and accommodation in Piaget's theory of cognitive development.
- 8) Elucidate the of language development in early childhood period.

4.12 SUGGESTED READINGS

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Hurlock, E. B. (1980). *Developmental Psychology* (5th edition) Tata McGraw- Hill Publishing Company Ltd.

Mussen, P. H, Conger, J.J & et.al (1984) *Child Development and Personality* (6th edition) Harper & Row, Publishers, New York.

4.13 ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Fill in the blanks

1) early childhood and late childhood, 2) infancy, 3) illness, accidents, and obesity, 4) speech, social, play and moral, 5) qualitative.

True and False

1) True, 2) False, 3) True, 4) True, 5) False