

UNIT 4 BASIC ISSUES IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

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4.1 INTRODUCTION

If you remember your childhood, you may recall that you were not given the status of a person, rather you were treated as non-person, immature and incapable of rational thinking. You were not allowed to take a decision for yourself, rather your guardian would decide about your activities. It is not the practice in any one particular society but in most societies children receive the same treatment. However, in the recent time, there has been a change in the above conception of the child and, now, the child is recognised as a person. This has several implications. One such example is that the teacher-learning process has been undergoing a tremendous change, which earlier used to be teacher-centered or syllabus oriented. Now attempts are being made to make the teaching-learning process a child-friendly/centred and activity oriented.

Education during the period of childhood is of crucial importance for the optimum development of the child as an individual as well as a future citizen. Recognising this fact, the National Policy on Education (1986) envisaged to make our education child centered, focussed on play way approaches and individual needs of the children. It gave top priority to bring all children, in the age group of 6-14 years, to the schools and retain them till they have completed primary/elementary education. It also envisaged a substantial improvement in the quality of education to enable all children to achieve minimum level of learning. Despite these efforts, the picture of an average Indian child, consisting of about 35 percent of the total population, is not very bright. Poverty, illiteracy, prejudice and probably, a substantial increase in the population every day, (2.11 per cent per annum) has been identified as major barriers. The child development in India faces numerous problems, some of which we may consider in the present unit in detail.

4.2 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- describe the causes of infant mortality and child-rearing practices being followed in the country;

- state the impact of a disadvantaged home environment on children's learning;
- explain the differential treatment given to male and female children;
- detail the problems of children with special reference to the Indian context; and
- describe the special needs of a section of children.

4.3 SURVIVAL OF CHILDREN AND CHILD CARE/ REARING

In the preceding para we said that poverty, illiteracy and prejudices are the major barriers in the development of the children in our country. Like other third world countries, India lacks adequate resources for the smooth running of various child welfare programmes. The majority of the Indian population struggles hard to make both ends meet and is in no position to meet the nutritional health needs of the children. To make matters worse, literacy, particularly female literacy, is rather low and it has its own implications for child development. Regarding illiteracy, let us examine the present social reality of the Indian population as presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Indian population: A glimpse

S. No.		%	
1.	Percentage of population living in villages	74.29	
2.	Literacy percentage (1997)	Male	73.00
		Female	50.00
3.	Literacy rates for females	Urban	72.00
		Rural	43.00

Source: Selected Educational Statistics, Dept. of Edu., MHRD, 1997-1998 p. vi.

We are aware about the role of mothers in rearing their children. Table 5.1 shows that the majority of the rural mothers are illiterate and, as such, are ignorant about the facts of health and hygiene. Because of the lack of resources we are not able to provide adequate facilities in terms of nutrition, safe delivery, and other health needs of the child. As such, the survival of children during the early years of life is largely uncertain.

It is a general observation that the expectant mother should receive a balanced and rich diet to support herself as well as her child. But this is not possible for majority of the expectant mothers in general and more so in rural areas.

Please write a few points regarding child rearing practices and mother and childcare prevailing in your family or village.

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You would probably say that a pregnant women never does receive the diet what she needs. The result is poor health of the mother, low birth weight of children, and high incidence of disease.

A recent survey of the **World Health Organisation** revealed that 63 percent of Indian children below age 5 are suffering from malnutrition.

Due to the lack of adequate facilities for health and hygiene, only 58 percent of pregnant women are vaccinated against killer diseases like tetanus. The childbirth, in many cases (7%), takes place at home in the presence of elderly ladies who are often not aware of safe delivery methods and are full of whimsical beliefs. Specialist help is not available at the time of need and women have to manage with less qualified persons.

As a result, quite a substantial number of infants die within a few days of their birth. The infant mortality rate has been observed to be 92 and 90 out of 1000 for males and females respectively (as per 1989 estimate). The care of child after birth is also full of superstitions and beliefs in rural areas.

Focussing on the needs of 0-6 year old children, and pregnant and lactating mothers, the Government of India launched an Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme in 1975. The scheme is meant for children below 6 years of age and expectant and nursing mothers in backward rural areas, urban slums and tribal areas. It provides a package of services consisting of the following:

- supplementary nutrition
- immunization against major killer diseases
- periodic health check-ups
- referral and medical services
- monitoring of growth
- non-formal and preschool education
- nutrition and health education.

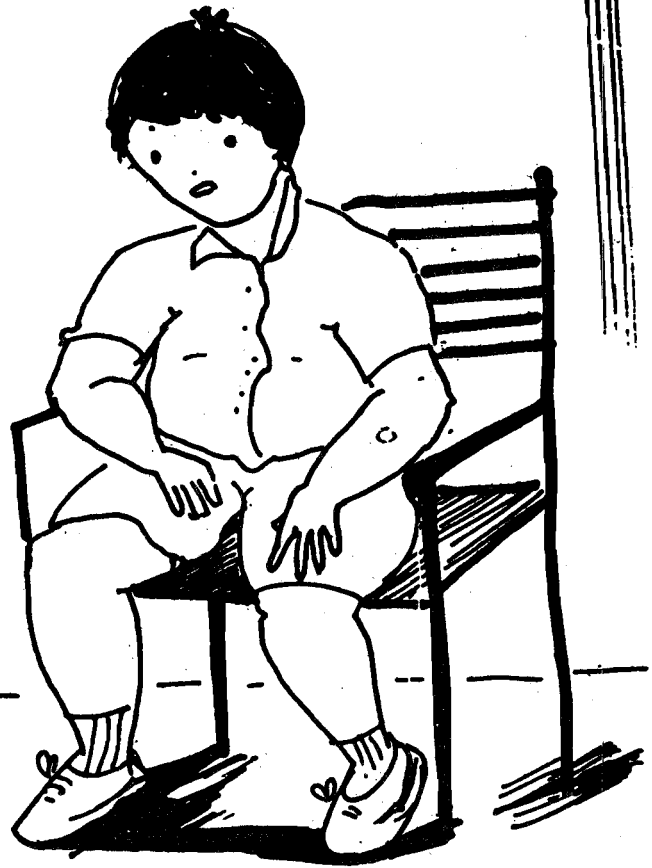
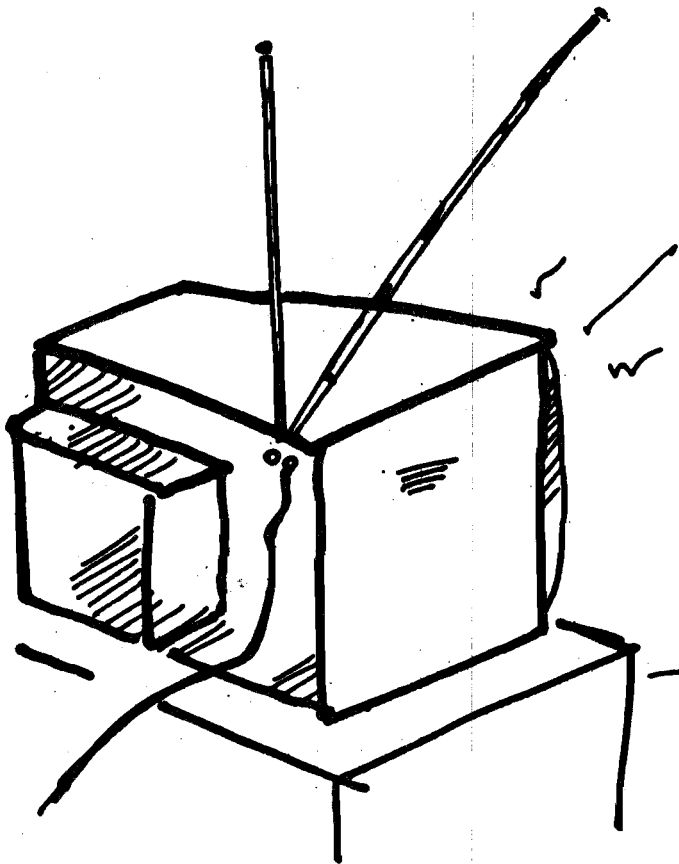
The specific objectives of ICDS are to:

- improve the nutritional and health status of children in the age group of 0-6 years.
- provide environmental conditions needed for physical, social and psychological development of children:
- reduce the incidence of low birth weight and severe malnutrition among children; and
- enhance the capabilities of the mother to provide proper child care.

You may have probably met the Anganwadi workers in your area. It is through these Anganwadis that the ICDS scheme is being implemented. ICDS is the biggest child welfare/development programme of the country and has emerged as a single major integrated social development programme during the last two decades in the developing countries.

4.3.1 Child Care/Rearing

The issue of child care in India is a complicated one. A majority of the mothers in rural areas and urban slums have to work to meet the day-to-day needs of the family. Except in a few cases of joint families particularly in rural areas, where the care of such children becomes the responsibility of elderly ladies present at home, mothers carry their babies to their workplace. During this period the children are mainly left unattended. The situation is somewhat different in urban middle



class families where working mothers, because of the nuclear family system, have to leave their children in creches/day care centres. In both the cases a sort of insecurity develops among children.

Related to the above is the pattern of child rearing adopted by the Indian family. If you closely observe the relationship between parents and children for sometime, you would probably notice that the child in the Indian family, particularly the male child, is treated with extreme indulgence. The parents are tolerant and have an accepting attitude toward the child's impulses, they make few demands for nature behaviour, on the pretext that he is just a child and will learn the necessary manners when he grows old. Indian mothers are nurturant, giving unconditional warmth and affection to their children.

You may ask what difference it makes when one maintains and accepting attitudes towards the child's demands and wishes. One thing is certain that these early experiences have a bearing on the child's personality as an adolescent/adult. The pattern of child rearing discussed above gives rise to more negative than positive characteristics, such as impulsiveness, aggression, lack of independence and inability to take responsibility.

Let us discuss another type of parenting and one that is different from the one mentioned above, "Anita is a seven year old girl. Her parents have taught her to be responsive to their demands and be responsible in her behaviour. She is expected to follow the restrictions imposed on her. At the same time, the parents also feel their responsibility to fulfil the reasonable demands of Anita. They do encourage Anita to take decisions on her own after explaining the pros and cons of each action. Her parents behave in a way so that Anita feels wanted and valued. There is an open communication between Anita and her parents; parents listen to Anita's point of view as well as express their own. A decision is taken by mutual agreement".

The type of parenting discussed above is associated with children being independent, "agenetic" in both the cognitive and social spheres, socially responsible, able to control aggression, self-confident and high in self-esteem.

Check Your Progress

Notes : a) Write your answers in the space given below.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of the unit.

1. Describe your acquaintance with the factors associated with infant and maternal mortality in your area/locality.

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2. Meet an Anganwadi/health worker and prepare a list of activities done by her/him.

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3. Observe the interaction between a child and his/her parents for 10 days. Note down your observations. What inference are you able to draw about the style of parenting and its probable impact on the child's behaviour/personality?

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4.4 DISADVANTAGED HOME ENVIRONMENT

You have seen that the survival of majority of our children and mothers is at stake. Though efforts are being made by the Government the fruits of the same are yet to reach the most needy ones. As the infants grow older, in addition to physical development, psychological development also takes place. The psychological development (e.g., cognitive, language, social, personality), in addition to nutrition, is to a large extent dependent upon the home environment. The home environment includes factors like relationship between parents and children, parental adjustment, availability of play material (i.e. toys), modern equipment (radio, television etc.), books, magazines, newspapers and the like. The availability of these materials makes the child active and fosters his/her social, emotional, language and intellectual growth.

In India, the vast majority of children do not have home environment conducive to their adequate development. They receive very little stimulation at home. They do not have opportunities for attending preparatory schools where some sort of compensatory education may be attempted. You probably know that the early years experiences determine, to a large extent, what one would be as an adult. Further, due to lack of adequate experiences, the most critical period of childhood during which the development is at its peak, is lost if children are deprived of a conducive environment.

A few children do get the privilege of attending pre-schools. In such cases, the question that arises is: what should be the **modus operandi** of these pre-schools? Should children be taught the 3 R's (reading, writing and arithmetic), and, if so, what should be the method of teaching? It is suggested that the programme of these centres should be child-oriented, focussed around play and suitable to each individual child. Formal methods of teaching and introduction of 3 R's should be discouraged. The co-operation of the community should be obtained in the endeavour.

Check Your Progress

Notes : a) Write your answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of the unit.

4. Prepare a blueprint of an educational intervention programme suitable for pre-school disadvantaged children in your locality. The intervention should be based on locally available resources. Discuss it with fellow colleagues, the headmaster and parents.

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4.5 EDUCATION OF CHILDREN

At about five to six years of age, what are the expectations from children? Among other things, it is expected that they should begin going to school. What are your observations about schooling of children in your locality? You will find that a great majority of children do not go to school. Have you ever sought to analyse the probable causes for this? Probably, you will say that poverty is the main factor responsible for it. Children from poor families are expected to help their parents in earning their day-do-day livelihood. The older children have also to take care of their younger brothers and sisters at homes when their parents are out for work. The parents are mainly illiterate, and are unable to understand the importance of schooling. Because of illiteracy they tend to have a large number of children as they feel that the more the children, the better support they would receive from them in earning their livelihood. As a result, children have to live in overcrowded homes, are subjected to low income, poor housing and civic amenities and child labour, and child beggary which are common in these homes.

We have seen that the majority of children do not go to school. Even among the children who are admitted to schools, the dropout percentage is quite high. For every 100 children enrolled in class I, only 52.07 percent reach class 5 and 34.60 percent in class 8. Have you ever thought why is it so? Why does this phenomenon occur? It is observed more in case of girls, scheduled castes/tribes and urban slum children? We have discussed some of the factors in the preceding para. In addition to these, some other factors are:

- lack of interest among children and parents because there is a mismatch between what is taught in the school and what the society expects from them;
- teachers not being able to appreciate the characteristics of children and match the curriculum according to children's characteristics; and
- inadequate teaching-learning strategies, such as, more emphasis on memorizing (rote learning), restrictive and unattractive classroom environment for the sake of discipline;

In continuation of the above factors it would be appropriate to discuss the recommendations of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) of NCERT. According to NCF, a child should be present in the school only for five hours, of which four hours should be devoted to teaching-learning purposes.

Another question is that what should be taught in the primary schools. Let us prepare a checklist of what is taught in different schools and how much time is devoted on a particular activity. You may find differences from school to school. The NCF recommends for teaching the following subjects at the primary level. The percentage of time to be devoted on a particular subject is also mentioned.

Language	30%
Maths	15%
Environment	15%
Work Experience	20%
Art Education	10%
Health and Physical Education	10%

It may be mentioned that the major issues confronting the nation is to bring all children to school, retain them till 14 years of age and bring qualitative changes in their learning. This is called **Universalisation of Elementary Education**.

Check Your Progress

Notes : a) Write your answers in the space given below.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of the unit.

5. Conduct an interview with children, parents and teachers to know the reasons for dropouts in your locality.

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6. Prepare a list of activities done in your school from beginning till end of the school hour. This may be done once in a week, on different days, for ten days. Compare these activities with the recommendations given in the National Curriculum Framework and discuss with your peer teachers at the study centre during academic counselling.

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4.6 GENDER DISCRIMINATION

There has been a widespread feeling that females are discriminated against. It has been found that favourable treatment is generally given to male children and unfavourable treatment to female children.

Let us have a look at the following figures. There has been a consistent decrease in the number of females, as compared to male population per thousand from 1901 to 2001. While in 1901, there were 972 female per 1000 males it has gone down to 934 females per 1000 males in 2001. What do they convey?

Another exercise you may like to do is to compare the sexes of younger and older children from the census data. You will find a decrease in the number of females with the increase in age.

If you keep yourself abreast with the latest information you must have read about the instances of killing the girl child or female infanticide in some parts of the country. Female foeticide (abortion of female foetus), sexual abuse of girl children in and out of family, and increasing incidence of child rapes, especially in the urban slums. It has also been observed that girls are discriminated against in feeding, weaning and toilet training practices. They have lesser access to food, health, education and recreation.

If you attempt to analyse the reasons for it, you will probably notice that two factors have primarily been responsible for the same.

1. A great majority of Indian families consider male children necessary for old age security, performing death rituals, management of family and maintaining the family lineage.
2. Prevalence of dowry system:

Recognising the importance of the problem the Government of India as well as some of the State Governments have taken steps to check these discriminations.

Some state governments (e.g., Maharashtra) have banned the practice of testing sex of the foetus, others (e.g., Tamil Nadu) have placed an economic value for having a girl child, and in some states the education of girls upto high school or upto even higher education is free regarding tuition fees. These provisions, however, do not go for enough. These need to create awareness among people about the significance of females.

You as teachers could do a lot in removing some of the misconceptions associated with girls.

Check Your Progress

Notes : a) Write your answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of the unit.

7. Observe a boy and a girl of the same age in your class or school, if possible, from the same family, for 10 days. Make a note of their daily routines, food taken by them, and the amount of time spent on studies. Prepare a comparative chart.

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4.7 CHILD LABOUR

You must have noticed the plight of children who do not go to school. What do they really do? We have mentioned earlier some of the jobs performed by such children, such as assisting parents in earning their livelihood, and looking after their younger brothers and sisters. Besides these, a large majority of children are working as domestic helpers. Some work in various small scale industries, such as making of glass, carpet and beedis. It is estimated that every 18th child in the world is a labourer and every fourth working child in the world is an Indian. The estimated child workers in India have been about 4.40 crores (1981 census) and quite a high number of child workers are added to this population every year. These children, in the age group of 5-15 years who work in different industries are in a very pitiable condition as they have to work for about 15 hours per day and that too for a very meagre wages.

The education of such children and giving them back their childhood is a real challenge before the country. The government of India has taken some steps in this direction and has formulated child labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act. A few voluntary organisations are also working in this direction. It, however, largely remains the responsibility of the citizen of the country to create awareness among the community and reverse the plight of such children. Teachers can play an important role in educating the parents as well as children by devising novel methods. The formal education system may not be of much help to these children.

4.8 CHILD MARRIAGE

There has been another unfortunate custom in our country i.e. child marriage and that too is still prevalent in certain rural and remote places. Table 4.2 shows the magnitude of this custom in India.

Table 4.2: Percentage of Child Marriages

Years	Male	Female
10-14 Years	2.6	6.5
15-19 Years	12.2	43.4

About 2.6 percent boys and 6.5 percent girls in India in the age group of 10-14 years are married.

It seems difficult to determine how this custom originated. Let us start listing the factors responsible for child marriage

- low literacy
- poverty
- low socio-economic status
- low status of women in the family
- lack of exposure.

But do you know that even in the places, where people are quite well off, literate and of high socio-economic status, child marriage is a common practice. What could be the reason? Those who have read history may probably say that the custom originated during the Medieval period, people belonging to the ruling community used to kidnap young girls of other communities and then either marry or exploit. They however, did not touch the married ones. To save their daughters from such people, the practice of marrying them at an early age started.

Let us examine the ill effects of child marriage. The effect of this custom has been damaging to the child as well as to the society. The children were married at a time when they were neither able to understand its meaning and implications, nor were physically and mentally prepared for it. As a result, their proper development was hampered. The practice of child marriage also led to an increase in population as children were unable to understand its implications. To some extent it also led to an increase in widowhood since marriages were performed at an age when children were at risk.

4.9 CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

There are children in all societies whose needs for optimum functioning are different from those of average children. They require some additional help as compared to normal children. For example, you know that a blind child has a special need of Braille material, and a hearing impaired child has a special need of hearing aid. Likewise, there are children with mental disabilities, emotional disorders and learning disabilities.

By now you are familiar with the concept of intelligence. Intelligence can be measured and the scores are interpreted in terms of Intelligence Quotient (IQ). Generally this term is used in limited context and presently limited to identification of children with special needs. Table 4.3 presents the different IQs and their description. The mentally challenged children are classified into four main categories and depending upon their special needs may require special type of schooling and special attention of the teachers. It is also possible for teachers to integrate these children in the common school. For example, one category is of slow learners and they are mainly found in our schools. Thus, a teacher has to be resourceful enough to cater to multi ability children in teaching.

IQ	Verbal Description
140 and above	Very superior
120-139	Superior
110-119	High average
90-109	Average
80-89	Low average
70-79	Borderline/ slow learner
Below-70	Mentally retarded

Have you observed a child, who is otherwise normal (has normal vision, hearing, intelligence and motivation) but is not able to learn a particular skill. S/he may have difficulty in writing or reading or performing mathematical computations. Such children are considered to have learning disabilities. Remember the child with learning disability is not disinterested or lazy. Rather s/he has difficulty with that particular ability. The causes of learning disability are many and include brain injury, biochemical imbalances, nutritional deficits, emotional disturbances, motivational problems, improper instructions etc.

The dyslexic children do manifest certain emotional problems, such as fear, anxiety, stress, etc. It must be remembered that every child exhibits some amount of emotional disturbance. It only becomes a problem when the child is not able to manage the emotion. In that case, teachers would be required to make an extra effort with that child.

4.10 LET US SUM UP

Child development in India presents a big challenge to the nation for two reasons: poverty and illiteracy. Consequently survival of children and their mothers is at stake, their education is not proper, and social evils like gender discrimination, child labour and child marriages are widespread. An understanding of these problems should enable the teacher to help children in better retention and achievement in the schools.

4.11 UNIT-END EXERCISES

1. Observe children of primary school for a few days. Try to analyse the reasons for their irregularity to the school, completion of home work, participation in school activities, and so on. Are these reasons the same for boys and girls? Compare your observations with your peers at the academic counselling. Write a report highlighting the reasons as well as the steps you would like to take to minimise them.

ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. You may answer this from your experience and observations.
2. Some of the activities are: frequent visits to families, informing parents on relevant issues related to health and nutrition and others you can add based on your observations and experiences.

3. No model answer for this.
4. There is no common answer, you have to consider local needs and demands while preparing a blueprint of an educational intervention programme for pre-school disadvantaged children in your area.
5. No common answer for this question.
6. No common answer for it. You have to develop the answer based on your experiences and observations.
7. No model answer, it will depend on your observations and experiences.