

SAMVARDHINI :- 30/07/2024

Volume – 6

Issue – 1

(ISSN ONLINE:- 2583-7176)

<https://samvardhini.in>

Psychological Perspective of Early Childhood Care Education (In the light of National Education Policy, 2020)

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Abstract

This paper provides a consolidated view of three psychological theories namely *Developmental Theory* of Jean Piaget, *Constructivist Theory* of Vygotsky and *Attachment Theory* as proposed by John Bowlby that offer valuable insights into *Early Childhood Care Education* especially in the context of *National Education Policy, 2020*. Paper explores the major contribution of these Psychological Theories with special reference to their approach to understand the Early Childhood Care and Education. It also explores the Bharatiya Thoughts as background of these thoughts.

Keywords

Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE), Developmental Theory, Human Potential, Cognitive Development, Constructivism, Proximal Development, Scaffolding, Cultural Tools, Private Speech, Social Interaction, Attachment Theory, Critical Period, Secure Base, Caregiver Responsiveness, Intergenerational, Mental Health, Developmental Needs.

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Presently, quality ECCE is not available to crores of young children, particularly children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Strong investment in ECCE has the potential to give all young children such access, enabling all children to participate and flourish in the educational system throughout their lives. ECCE is perhaps the greatest and most powerful equaliser. Universal provisioning of quality early childhood development, care, and education must thus be achieved as soon as possible, and no later than 2030, to ensure that all students entering Grade 1 are school ready.

The overall aim of ECCE will be to attain optimal outcomes in the domains of: physical and motor development, cognitive development, socio-emotional-ethical development, cultural/artistic development, and the development of communication and early language, literacy, and numeracy.

(National Education Policy, 2020 1.1 and 1.2)

Introduction

Draft of National Education Policy (2019) refers a report *Learning: The Treasure Within* (UNESCO, 1996) on International Commission (chaired by Jacques Delors) on Education for the Twenty-first Century. The Report argues that education throughout life should be based on four pillars:

- *Learning to know*

Acquiring a body of knowledge and learning how to learn, so as to benefit throughout life from the opportunities education provides.

- *Learning to do*

Acquiring not only an occupational skill but also the competence to deal with many situations and work in teams, and a package of skills that enables one to deal with the various challenges of working life.

- *Learning to live together*

Developing an understanding of other people and an appreciation of interdependence in a spirit of respect for the values of pluralism, mutual understanding and peace, and

- *Learning to be*

Developing one's personality and being able to act with autonomy, judgement and personal responsibility, while ensuring that education does not disregard any aspect of the potential of a person, memory, reasoning, aesthetic sense, physical capacities and communication skills.

These four basic pillars of Education remind us the message of our ancient scripture as the base of educational pillars as:

- ज्ञान हि मनुजस्य तृतीयं नेत्रम् (Knowledge is the third eye of human beings)
- ज्ञानं भारं क्रिया विना (Knowledge is burden without an action)
- सङ्गच्छध्वम्, संवदध्वम् (walk together, speak together)
- मनुर्भव (be humane)

National Policy on Education, 2020 envisions the *India centric* education system that should contribute directly to transform our nation *sustainably* into an *equitable* and *vibrant knowledge* society, by providing *high quality* education to all. It believes that the learning process for a child, in fact commences immediately at birth. Accordingly:

Evidence from neuroscience shows that over 85% of a child's cumulative brain development occurs prior to the age of 6, indicating the critical importance of developmentally appropriate care and stimulation of the brain in a child's early years to promote sustained and healthy brain development and growth. Indeed, analysis of brain scans of children who encountered various levels of neglect or deprivation in their early years revealed unfortunate deficiencies in the development of critical areas of the brain, and corresponding adverse effects on cognitive and emotional processing. Excellent care, nurture, nutrition, physical activity, psychosocial environment, and cognitive and emotional stimulation during a child's first six years are thus considered extremely critical for ensuring proper brain development and, consequently, desired learning curves over a person's lifetime.

(NEP, 2019 (Draft, 45))

Early Childhood typically refers to the period of development from Birth to 8 years of age. This phase is characterized by rapid growth and development across various domains, as physical, cognitive, emotional and social. During this stage, children undergo significant changes and acquire foundational skills that prepare the ground for their future learning and well-being. It is a critical time for shaping a child's overall development as well as setting the stage for future success in school and life.

In general, the *five stages of Early Childhood Development* can be viewed as:

- Newborn.
- Infant.
- Toddler.
- Pre-school.
- School-age.

Many theories provide insights into how do children learn, develop social relationships and navigate their environment. Applying these theories into practice can create supportive environment that foster children's cognitive, emotional and social development helping them to thrive and reach their full potential as is envisioned by *National Education Policy, 2020* as, *Education is fundamental for achieving full human potential. (Chapter, 1)*

Some of the important theories can be viewed as:

Piaget's theory of cognitive development

Jean Piaget supports for the idea that children think differently than adults. His research identified several important milestones in the mental development of children. His work generated interest in cognitive and developmental psychology. It is known as Jean Piaget's *theory of cognitive development* and suggests that children move through four different stages of learning. His theory focuses not only on understanding *how do children acquire knowledge*, but also on *understanding the nature of intelligence*.

Piaget's stages are:

- *Sensorimotor stage: Birth to 2 years*
- *Preoperational stage: Ages 2 to 7*
- *Concrete operational stage: Ages 7 to 11*
- *Formal operational stage: Ages 12 and up*

Piaget believes that children take an active role in the learning process, *acting much like little scientists* as they perform experiments, make observations, and thus learn about the world around. Kids interact with the world around them; they continually add new knowledge, build upon existing knowledge, and adapt previously held ideas to accommodate new information. Piaget's views indicate that there is no knowledge that is pre-existing in the world such that it can be 'taught' to a child. Nor does knowledge come innately (on its own) to the child. Knowledge develops when child acts on the world. His theory also helps in understanding how do children *construct knowledge*.

Jean Piaget provides *a framework* to understand the process of acquiring knowledge by children as well as understanding the world around them during their different phases or stages of life:

- **Sensorimotor Stage (Birth to 2 years old)**
 - During the sensorimotor stage, infants learn about the world primarily through their senses and motor actions. The key developmental achievement in this stage is the development of object permanence, which is the understanding that objects continue to exist even when they are out of sight. Initially, infants do not have this understanding, but as they interact with objects and experience them disappearing and reappearing, they develop a sense of object permanence. Infants also begin to co-ordinate their sensory experiences with their motor actions, leading to the development of basic reflexes and voluntary movements.

- Infants' cognitive development during this stage is characterized by trial-and-error, exploration and the gradual development of schemas (mental frameworks) for understanding the world.
- **Pre-operational Stage (2 to 7 years old)**
 - In the pre-operational stage, children become increasingly proficient in using *language and symbols* to represent objects and events. They engage in pretend play and show imaginative thinking. However, children in this stage often exhibit ego-centrism, where they have difficulty in understanding that others have different perspectives and beliefs than their own. They also demonstrate animistic thinking, attributing human-like qualities to inanimate objects.
 - One of the key limitations of preoperational thinking is the lack of conservation, which is the understanding that certain properties of objects (such as volume, mass or number) remain the same even when their outward appearance changes. For example, a child in this stage might believe that a taller glass contains more liquid than a shorter, wider glass, even if the amount of liquid is same.
- **Concrete Operational Stage (7 to 11 years old)**
 - In the concrete operational stage, children begin to think more logically and systematically about concrete objects and events. They develop the ability to perform mental operations, such as reversibility (understanding that actions can be undone) and seriation (arranging objects in a logical order).
 - Children in this stage become capable of understanding conservation and other principles of logic, although their thinking is still tied to concrete, tangible experiences.

Piaget's theory of early childhood development emphasizes the active role of children in constructing their understanding of the world through *interactions with their environment*. He believed that *cognitive development proceeds through a series of stages, each building upon the accomplishments of the previous stage*. However, *it's important to note that children do not progress through these stages at the same rate and individual differences and cultural influences may have its impact on timing as well as sequence of cognitive development*.

Vygotsky's theory of early childhood development

It is often referred as the *socio-cultural theory*, emphasizing the role of social interactions and cultural influences in shaping a child's cognitive development:

1. Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

Perhaps the most well-known concept in Vygotsky's theory, the *Zone of Proximal Development* refers to the gap between what a child can do independently and what they can achieve with the guidance and support of a more knowledgeable individual, typically an adult or a more capable peer. Vygotsky argued that learning and cognitive development occur within this zone through *social interaction and collaboration*.

2. Scaffolding

Scaffolding refers to the support provided by adults or more capable peers to help children accomplish tasks within their zone of proximal development. This support can take various forms, such as *asking leading questions, providing hints or breaking down complex tasks into smaller, more manageable steps. As the child becomes more competent, the level of support provided is gradually reduced, allowing the child to take on more responsibility for their own learning.*

3. Cultural Tools

Vygotsky emphasized the importance of cultural tools, such as language, symbols and artifacts, in shaping cognitive development. These cultural tools are not only means of communication but also instruments for thinking and problem-solving. Through interactions with others, children acquire and internalize these cultural tools, which then become integral parts of their cognitive processes.

4. Private Speech

Vygotsky observed that children often engage in private speech, talking to themselves while working on tasks. Vygotsky argues that *this private speech serves as a way for children to regulate their own thinking and behavior.* Over time, as children internalize social interactions and cultural norms, private speech becomes internalized as inner speech, which continues to play a role in *self-regulation and cognitive processing.*

5. Role of Social Interaction

According to Vygotsky, *social interaction plays a crucial role in cognitive development.* Through interactions with more knowledgeable people, such as *parents, teachers, or peers, children are exposed to new ideas, perspectives and ways of thinking.* These *social interactions provide opportunities for learning and scaffold the child's cognitive development.*

Overall, Vygotsky's theory emphasizes the dynamic interplay between the individual child, their social environment, and cultural context in shaping cognitive development during early childhood. It highlights the importance of social interaction, guided participation and cultural tools in fostering learning and intellectual growth. Language has to play a key-role in this process and the approach basically is known as 'Constructivist Approach'.

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory, proposed by psychologist *John Bowlby*, is a cornerstone in understanding early Childhood Development. It focuses on the bonds formed between infants and their caregivers, particularly the role these bonds play in *shaping emotional and social development.* Here's an elaboration on key aspects of attachment theory in *Early Childhood Development:*

- Attachment Styles

Attachment theory identifies different attachment styles that infants develop based on their interactions with caregivers. The main attachment styles are *secure, insecure avoidant, insecure-anxious/ambivalent and disorganized*. These styles influence how do children approach relationships and regulate emotions.

- **Internal Working Models**

Infants form internal working models of relationships based on their early experiences with caregivers. These *mental representations guide their expectations and behaviors in future relationships, shaping their social interactions and emotional responses*.

- **Secure Base**

A secure attachment provides a child with a *sense of security and trust* in their caregiver, serving as a "secure base" from which they can *explore the world and develop independence*. Knowing they have a reliable source of support allows children *to take risks and navigate challenges with confidence*.

- **Care-giver Responsiveness**

Attachment theory emphasizes the importance of responsive caregiving, where caregivers consistently meet the *child's needs for comfort, safety, and emotional connection*. Responsive caregiver's help infants develop a secure attachment by being attuned to their signals and providing sensitive, nurturing care.

- **Critical Period**

Attachment theory suggests that there is *a critical period* in early childhood during which the foundation for attachment is established. While attachments can be formed later in life, the quality of *early attachments sets the stage for future relationships and emotional well-being*.

- **Impact on Development**

Early attachment experiences influence on various aspects of child development, including *emotional regulation, social skills, self-esteem and coping strategies*. Secure attachments promote *resilience and positive outcomes*, while insecure attachments can lead to difficulties in forming healthy relationships and managing emotions. –

Intergenerational Transmission

Attachment patterns tend to be *passed down from one generation to the next, as parents' own attachment styles influence how do they interact with their children*.

Understanding one's attachment history can help in breaking negative cycles and promoting secure attachments in future generations.

By recognizing the key aspects of attachment theory in early childhood development, caregivers, educators, and mental health professionals can support children's *emotional well-being and foster healthy relationships that lay the foundation for positive development throughout life*.

Above presented Psychological Process of Development of the CHILD can be viewed and reviewed in the light of Bharatiya Process of child development mentioned in Ayurveda and other related literature as well as process of attainment of knowledge. The basic principle in Bharatiya literature is that:

अयोग्यो पुरुषो नास्ति

Which simply means that no one is incapable.

In the same way, one has to look into the fact that Bharatiya theory of personality development as well as educational development considers language as the basic tool of the whole process of personality development of a person:

न सोऽस्ति प्रत्ययो लोके यः शब्दानुगमादृते ।
अनुविद्धमिव ज्ञानं सर्वं शब्दने भासते ॥

(There is no concept without the language. Language is the base of all KNOWLEDGE.)



Thus learning language by child is an important basic tool for personality development of the child. It is also important to note that linguistic base of constructivist approach to Education is considered. It is well accepted that:

The specifically human capacity for language enables children to provide for auxiliary tools in the solution of difficult tasks, to overcome impulsive action, to plan a solution to a problem prior to its execution and to master their own behavior.

Bharatiya theory of child development Child is not a blank slate:

“ज्योतिरमृतमर्त्येषु” (ऋग्वेद, ६९.४)

(वह अमृत ज्योति सब प्राणियों में विद्यमान है।)

Bharatiya theory of Education has given too much importance to EXPERIENCES of life. It also stresses the environment of ART, GAMES, Music and literature:

साहित्य-सङ्गीत-कला-विहीनः साक्षात्पशुः पुच्छ-विषाणहीनः ।

Thus the process of Education of children is to be seen in this light. NEP, 2020 states: *ECCE ideally consists of flexible, multi-faceted, multi-level, play-based, activity-based, and inquiry-based learning about, e.g., alphabets, languages, numbers, counting, colours, shapes, indoor and outdoor play, puzzles and logical thinking, problem solving, drawing, painting and other visual art, craft, drama and puppetry, music and movement. It also includes a focus on developing social capacities, sensitivity, good behaviour, courtesy, ethics, personal and public cleanliness, teamwork, and cooperation. The overall aim of ECCE will be to attain optimal outcomes in the domains of: physical and motor development, cognitive development, socio-emotional-ethical development, cultural/artistic development, and the development of communication and early language, literacy, and numeracy. (NEP, 2020, para, 1.2)* National Education Policy (Draft, 2019) recognises that:

Investment in ECCE gives the best chance for children to grow up into good, moral, thoughtful, creative, empathetic, and productive human beings. (NEP, Draft, 2019) In the whole process of CHILD Education one has to remember that:

Recognise and identify the unique capabilities of the child by sensitizing teachers as well as parents to promote the child's holistic development with focus not only through academic performance but in overall sphere of development culled out by keen observation of the child. (National Education Policy, 2020)