

Vol 4 Issue 6 Dec 2014

ISSN No :2231-5063

International Multidisciplinary
Research Journal

Golden Research
Thoughts

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RNI MAHMUL/2011/38595

ISSN No.2231-5063

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THE ROLE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN ACHIEVING CHILD RIGHTS

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Abstract:-Worldwide, more than 200 million children aged under five do not reach their full developmental potential due to the absence of early childhood care programmes. Education is the mainstay of a development of a human being. Childhood education lays foundation of the child leading to awareness of child rights and empowerment. The awareness about child rights is even more necessary in lieu of various crimes being committed against children. Qualitative school education should not merely confine to text books and theory, it should encompass social and societal issues touching upon the child rights. The utility of primary child education shall go a long way in achieving child rights. This article dwells on role of early childhood education in achieving child rights.

Keywords:Early Childhood Education and Thinking, Indian History, Legal Provisions, Global Education Strategy for Children.

1.INTRODUCTION

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

**Nelson Mandela, former president of South Africa,
1993 Nobel Peace Prize laureate**

A child's first days, months and years – particularly from prenatal until the age of eight-are crucial. Those first years determine how well a child's brain matures, their ability to develop language skills and to interact with society. Ultimately, this period will shape the rest of his or her childhood, adolescence and adult life. Worldwide, more than 200 million children aged under five do not reach their full developmental potential due to the absence of early childhood care programmes. In developing countries, poverty, a lack of good nutrition, care and stimulation means nearly 40 per cent of children under five fail to reach their milestones for cognitive development. Those who do reach primary school often lack the basic skills to develop or learn in a classroom setting. This leads to high numbers of children dropping out of education, potentially adding to the 67 million children who are already out of school.

Early education programs typically aim to improve children's academic skill including improving language and early literacy abilities as well as developing knowledge and skill that relate to academics. Also important is the development of children's social and emotional skills, as many are entering a group environment for the first time. A series of research has found that preschool education programs can produce substantive gains in children's development and that these can persist well into the school year.

Education is to make use of the developmental concept, while dealing with identification & planning of educational goals and guiding children's early education. Functionaries and professionals of early childhood education are to keen in their mind that there is a very positive relationship between child development and early childhood education and education curricula. Education should be viewed as intrinsic and extrinsic values. It increases a wide awareness, fitness, fellow feeling, mutual respect, tolerance, joy and happiness. Education brings overall development of an individual and equips him with vision of empowerment. It is education which has brought change and progress in all shape of human life and civilization.

Vijaykumar R. Londhe¹ and B. Yuvakumar Reddy², “THE ROLE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN ACHIEVING CHILD RIGHTS”, Golden Research Thoughts | Volume 4 | Issue 6 | Dec 2014 | Online & Print

2. MEANING OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION:

In some advanced and developing countries, early childhood education means education for two to five year old children i.e. before primary school or kindergarten. In Indian context the age span covered under early childhood care and education is from conception to 6 years, therefore, formal method for teaching is restricted for this stage of children's development. Early childhood education a pre-school education stage is preparatory and readiness stage for primary education. It is generally of two year duration extending from 3 to 5 years or 4 to 6 years. Recently 4 to 6 years has commonly been covered under pre-school stage.

3. THE NEED AND BENEFITS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION:

Early childhood education can produce significant gains in children's learning and development. High quality early childhood education assists many at-risk children in avoiding poor outcomes, such as dropping out of school. Although the benefits seem to cross all economic and social lines, the most significant gains are almost always noted among children from families with the lowest income levels and the least amount of formal education. Early childhood education, with social and mental development as the foundation of this learning period, will focus on children learning through play and human interaction.

The early childhood is fundamental age as the child acquires most of its personal and social behaviors before age six. Therefore this age and stage is foundational stage for later development and life. Thus parents, teachers and society should pay full attention to early childhood education so that future of the young child is groomed into making him an obedient and law abiding citizen paving the way for an just and equitable society .

4. INDIAN HISTORY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION:

The consequence and systematic attempt to educate children from all section of the society began in 1937 with the educational philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi. Mahatma Gandhi's basic education scheme was designed to set up free and compulsory education at national level in India. Early childhood education has been constant focus of all major committees and commissions established by government of post-India. In 1953, the Committee on Early childhood education recognize the limitations of leaving total responsibility for early childhood education with parents and recommended inclusion of pre-primary classes in the existing Indian primary schools. The National Policy on Children (1974) defined early childhood education to all children in India, especially to those sections of the population where children are first generation school attendees.

5. LEGAL PROVISIONS IN INDIA:

India is signatory to three key international instruments that guarantee the Right to Education-Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Covenant), 1966 and the (UDHR) Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 1989. In 2002, India joined, albeit after fifty-two years of Independence, the host of countries that provide a constitutional guarantee for free and compulsory education (FCE). The Constitution (Eighty-sixth Amendment) Act, 2002 inserted Article 21-A in the Constitution of India to provide free and compulsory education of all children in the age group of six to fourteen years as a Fundamental Right in such a manner as the State may, by law, determine. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, which represents the consequential legislation envisaged under Article 21-A, means that every child has a right to full time elementary education of satisfactory and equitable quality in a formal school which satisfies certain essential norms and standards.

Article 21-A and the RTE Act came into effect on 1 April 2010. The title of the RTE Act incorporates the words 'free and compulsory'. 'Free education' means that no child, other than a child who has been admitted by his or her parents to a school which is not supported by the appropriate Government, shall be liable to pay any kind of fee or charges or expenses which may prevent him or her from pursuing and completing elementary education. 'Compulsory education' casts an obligation on the appropriate Government and local authorities to provide and ensure admission, attendance and completion of elementary education by all children in the 6-14 age groups. With this, India has moved forward to a rights based framework that casts a legal obligation on the Central and State Governments to implement this fundamental child right as enshrined in the Article 21A of the Constitution, in accordance with the provisions of the RTE Act.

6. GLOBAL COMMITMENTS TO CHILDREN'S EDUCATION STRATEGY:

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) addresses all aspects of a child's life, covering human rights for children in the civil, political, social, economic and cultural realms. It establishes a set of legal norms for the protection and well-being of children and is an integral part of the broader human rights system.

UNESCO's policy brief examines the issue of equal access to early childhood care and education

6.1. The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child:

Almost every state in the world is committed to the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, which outlines the right of every child to free primary education. Numerous states and international agencies have also signed up to global development goals that include specific education targets. Save the Children's education strategy is aligned with these collective principles and aims.

6.2. Role of UNESCO for Early Childhood Care and Education :

Early childhood is defined as the period from birth to eight years old. A time of remarkable brain growth, these years lay the foundation for subsequent learning and development.

UNESCO advocates for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programmes that attend to health, nutrition, security and learning and which provide for children's holistic development. It organized the first World Conference on ECCE in Moscow from 27 to 29 September 2010, which culminated in the adoption of a global action agenda for ECCE called Moscow Framework for Action and Cooperation: Harnessing the Wealth of Nations. As a follow-up to the World Conference, UNESCO works in partnership with Member States, partners and other stakeholders to encourage timely and effective implementation of the Moscow Framework so that all young children develop their potential to the fullest.

7. CONCLUSION:

Every child has a right to education, but not every child enjoys this right. Indeed, 61 million children worldwide are unable to attend school. This is disturbing trend which needs to be rectified because education brings multiple and long-lasting benefits mainly equipping the of child with knowledge of their rights .The government through legislative mechanism and policy measures should ensure holistic child development. The role of parents is to ensure they provide education to their children and make most of the government free education programmes .An multi dimensional approach through coordinated efforts of state, legislature, executive, social organisations and NGO's shall ensure the child rights are enforced by empowering the children of childhood education.

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