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THE FACTORS INFLUENCING CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT DURING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT. Early Childhood Education (ECE) represents a fundamental stage in children's development, laying the foundation for their future academic achievement, social competence, and emotional well-being. This article examines the major factors influencing children's development during early childhood education, with particular emphasis on family environment, educational conditions, and individual characteristics. It explores how parental involvement, family relationships, teacher–child interactions, classroom atmosphere, and individual learning differences shape children's cognitive, social, emotional, and communicative abilities. Furthermore, the article highlights the importance of developmentally appropriate teaching practices, supportive learning environments, and cooperation between families and educational institutions. Drawing on relevant academic literature, the study discusses how these interconnected factors influence children's engagement in educational activities and their readiness for subsequent stages of education. The article concludes that promoting holistic child development requires an integrated approach that recognises children's individual needs and provides equal opportunities for learning and personal growth.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, child development, family environment, educational environment, parental involvement, cognitive development, social development, individual differences, learning outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is widely recognised as one of the most significant periods in human development. Experiences gained during the early years influence children's cognitive abilities, emotional well-being, social relationships, and future educational achievements. Early Childhood Education (ECE) therefore plays a fundamental role in establishing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for lifelong learning. According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), development and learning during the early years provide an essential foundation for children's subsequent educational and personal experiences [1].

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The effectiveness of early childhood education depends on several interconnected factors rather than on teaching methods alone. Family background, parental involvement, the quality of educational institutions, relationships with teachers and peers, and children's individual characteristics all contribute to developmental outcomes. These factors interact continuously, creating different learning experiences and opportunities for individual children.

Previous research has demonstrated the importance of early educational experiences in promoting children's development. Elango, García, Heckman, and Hojman (2016) examined the impact of early childhood education and childcare programmes and highlighted their potential benefits, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds [2]. Their research emphasises the importance of accessible and high-quality educational opportunities during the early years.

Furthermore, Costley (2014) explored the positive effects of incorporating technology into educational practices, identifying its potential contribution to student motivation, engagement, and collaborative learning [3]. Although technological resources can support educational activities, their effectiveness depends on how appropriately they are integrated into the learning environment and adapted to children's developmental needs.

Despite the recognised importance of early childhood education, children do not experience identical developmental outcomes. Differences in family circumstances, learning opportunities, interests, abilities, and emotional needs may influence how children participate in educational activities and acquire new knowledge. Consequently, understanding the relationship between family environment, educational conditions, and individual characteristics is essential for improving the quality of early childhood education.

The primary aim of this article is to identify and analyse the major factors influencing children's development during early childhood education. In particular, it examines the roles of family environment, educational conditions, and individual characteristics in shaping children's cognitive, social, emotional, and communicative development.

MAIN BODY

Family environment is one of the most influential factors in children's early development because the family represents the first social and educational setting in which children acquire knowledge, values, attitudes, and behavioural patterns. Parents and other family members contribute significantly to children's intellectual, emotional, and social development through everyday interactions and educational activities.

The quality of parent–child relationships plays a particularly important role in shaping children's emotional security and confidence. Supportive communication, parental attention, and positive encouragement help children develop a sense of belonging and establish healthy relationships with others. When parents demonstrate interest in their children's educational experiences, children are more likely to develop positive attitudes towards learning.

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Parental involvement in educational activities can take various forms, including reading books together, discussing everyday experiences, playing educational games, and encouraging curiosity. Such activities provide children with opportunities to expand their vocabulary, improve their listening and speaking abilities, and develop early literacy skills. Moreover, recognising children's achievements and encouraging their efforts can strengthen their motivation and self-confidence.

The psychological atmosphere within the family is equally important. Children who grow up in supportive and emotionally stable environments may find it easier to express their feelings, communicate their needs, and establish relationships with others. In contrast, frequent conflicts, insufficient parental attention, and limited opportunities for communication may negatively affect children's emotional well-being and social adjustment.

Recent OECD research also emphasises that family resources, parenting practices, and the quality of children's everyday experiences contribute to differences in early learning and developmental opportunities [4]. Therefore, family environment should be considered not merely a background factor but an active component of children's educational experiences. Strengthening cooperation between parents and educational institutions can create more consistent and supportive conditions for children's development.

The educational environment is another essential factor influencing children's cognitive, social, emotional, and communicative development. It includes physical classroom conditions, teaching approaches, educational resources, teacher–child relationships, and interactions among peers.

A positive educational environment provides children with opportunities to explore, experiment, ask questions, and express their ideas without fear of criticism. When children feel safe, respected, and supported, they are more likely to participate actively in educational activities and demonstrate curiosity towards new experiences.

Teachers play a central role in establishing such an environment. Their professional competence, communication skills, patience, and understanding of child development directly influence the quality of children's educational experiences. By using age-appropriate activities, providing constructive feedback, and encouraging active participation, teachers can support children's intellectual and personal growth.

Furthermore, collaborative learning activities contribute significantly to the development of social competencies. Through group discussions, educational games, creative projects, and shared tasks, children learn to cooperate, respect different opinions, solve problems, and establish relationships with their peers. These experiences help develop communication skills, empathy, and a sense of responsibility.

The organisation of the classroom environment also influences children's ability to concentrate and engage in learning. Excessive noise, inappropriate learning materials, and poorly structured activities may distract children and reduce their participation. Therefore, educational settings should provide

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organised, stimulating, and developmentally appropriate conditions that accommodate children's needs and interests.

Technology can also contribute to the educational process when used appropriately. Costley (2014) suggests that educational technology may increase motivation, encourage collaboration, and provide additional opportunities for active learning [3]. However, technological resources should complement rather than replace direct communication, physical activities, creative play, and interaction with teachers and peers. Consequently, an effective educational environment should combine appropriate teaching strategies, supportive relationships, accessible learning resources, and opportunities for active participation.

Although family and educational environments have considerable influence on children's development, individual characteristics also play an important role in determining how children respond to educational experiences. Every child possesses unique abilities, interests, needs, personality traits, and developmental patterns. As a result, children may demonstrate different levels of engagement, attention, motivation, and learning achievement.

One of the most important individual differences concerns learning pace. Some children acquire new information quickly, whereas others require additional explanations, repetition, or practical activities to understand particular concepts. Such differences should be recognised as natural aspects of individual development rather than interpreted as indicators of limited potential.

Attention and concentration are also important components of the learning process. Young children may experience difficulties maintaining attention for extended periods, particularly when activities are not sufficiently engaging or appropriate for their developmental stage. Therefore, teachers should incorporate varied activities, visual materials, educational games, and movement-based tasks to maintain children's interest and participation.

Children's interests and personal preferences should also be taken into consideration when planning educational activities. Providing opportunities for drawing, storytelling, music, construction, role-playing, and exploration can encourage creativity and independent thinking. When educational activities are connected to children's interests, they may become more motivated to participate and explore new knowledge.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children identifies three essential considerations in developmentally appropriate practice: common patterns of development, individual characteristics, and the social and cultural contexts in which children grow and learn [1]. This perspective highlights the importance of recognising each child as an individual with specific strengths, experiences, and educational needs.

An individualised educational approach is therefore essential for ensuring that all children receive appropriate support. Instead of comparing children with their peers, educators should observe individual progress, identify developmental needs, and provide suitable learning opportunities. Such an approach

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can strengthen children's confidence, independence, and willingness to participate in educational activities.

Family environment, educational conditions, and individual characteristics should not be examined as separate influences because they continuously interact and shape children's developmental experiences.

For example, parental involvement can reinforce the knowledge and skills acquired in educational institutions. When parents communicate with teachers, participate in educational activities, and support children's learning at home, children benefit from a more consistent educational experience. Similarly, teachers who understand children's family backgrounds and individual needs can adapt their teaching approaches more effectively.

Elango et al. (2016) emphasise the importance of high-quality early childhood education programmes, particularly in improving opportunities for children from disadvantaged backgrounds [2]. This suggests that educational institutions can play an important role in supporting children's development by providing learning opportunities that may not be equally available in every family environment.

The relationship between these factors also demonstrates that children's developmental outcomes cannot be explained by a single influence. A supportive family environment may encourage learning motivation, while an effective educational setting can strengthen children's social and cognitive abilities. At the same time, recognising individual differences allows educators to ensure that educational activities respond to children's specific developmental needs.

Therefore, an integrated approach involving families, teachers, and educational institutions is necessary to create favourable conditions for children's holistic development.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, early childhood education represents a fundamental stage in children's holistic development, influencing their cognitive abilities, social relationships, emotional well-being, and communication skills. The analysis demonstrates that family environment, educational conditions, and individual characteristics are three interconnected factors that significantly shape children's developmental experiences.

Family involvement provides emotional support, encourages positive attitudes towards learning, and establishes the foundation for children's early educational experiences. Meanwhile, a supportive educational environment promotes active participation, independent thinking, communication, and cooperation. Individual characteristics, including learning pace, interests, abilities, and developmental needs, determine how children respond to different educational activities and opportunities.

The relationship between these factors highlights the importance of adopting a comprehensive and individualised approach to early childhood education. Parents and educators should work collaboratively to establish supportive learning conditions, recognise children's individual strengths, and provide equal opportunities for development.

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Ultimately, improving the quality of early childhood education requires not only effective teaching methods and appropriate educational resources but also strong family–school cooperation and a thorough understanding of children's individual needs. By addressing these interconnected factors, educational institutions can create a strong foundation for children's future academic success, social adaptation, and lifelong learning.

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