

# 6

## Child Development— A Psychological Perspective

Krishna Chandra Choudhary\*

Prabhat Kumar Mishra\*\*

### Abstract

*The period of early childhood, i.e., between three and six years of age, is the most crucial in an individual's life. It is marked by rapid physical, psycho social and mental development. Children, particularly, in this age group, display curiosity, enjoy the company of peers and try to imitate adult behaviour. Hence, early childhood years need to be replete with friendly interactions with peers and family members so as to ensure the holistic development of the children. This paper reflects on the views of psychologists like Freud, Piaget, Skinner, etc., on various stages of child development. It also gives insight to various domains of child development, which would be useful for curriculum planners and developers, administrators, policy makers, educationists and teachers. It would help them to understand the different stages of child development and change in children's behaviour patterns, particularly, at the primary level.*

### INTRODUCTION

'Child development' does not simply imply a child growing up physically. It refers to a progressive series of coherent changes (physical, mental, emotional, linguistic and psychological) that occur in a person from birth till the beginning of adulthood. Therefore, child development entails the overall and

holistic development of a person so that one transforms into a responsible and an independent adult.

Child psychologists have measured development in terms of age and that it starts with conception. 'Prenatal' development covers the development of a foetus from conception until birth. Foetus development is described in terms of 37 weeks or 9 months.

---

\* Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, S. B. College, Veer Kunwar Singh University, Arrah, Bihar.

\*\* Associate Professor, Department of Educational Psychology and Foundations of Education, NCERT, New Delhi.

'Postnatal' development implies growth and development of a baby after birth. Infancy, babyhood, early and late childhood are measured in months and years. The school education period offers another convenient mode of fixing stages like grade wise classification, or preschool, primary, and so on. Yet, it needs to be taken into account that age or grade are only convenient points of reference and are not absolute thresholds.

Hence, it is inferred that development is a continuous process and chronological in nature. For example, a child does not demonstrate all types of behaviour at the same time. Jealousy in most children is observed at the age of 18 to 24 months. Children start participating in role-play and games at the age of four to five years, for instance they may place some leaves and flowers in a row and act as though it is a feast. Almost all self-initiated activities of children are examples of 'game' or 'play' in their natural contexts.

'Play', therefore, is a natural path for children and they actively participate in constructing their environment. A learning environment that allows maximum opportunities for play is best suited for the overall and holistic development of children.

### **DOMAINS OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT WITH STIMULATION**

There are eight domains of child development — fine motor, sensory, cognitive, language, emotional, social, personal and gross motor.

Child development may, thus, be examined through different domains or aspects, which are interrelated and interdependent. Development in each domain may be promoted by providing each child with an opportunity to participate in play based activities. Such activities allow children to actively engage in tasks, learn, practice and master skills, which would further help in boosting their confidence, and motivating them to fix and achieve goals. It is also important for policy makers, educators and curriculum developers to plan the curriculum in a manner that addresses all domains intended to achieve the overall and holistic development of children.

### **UNDERSTANDING CHILD PSYCHOLOGY**

Play helps in the 'psycho physical recreation' of a child. Psycho physical recreation relaxes one's brain, nerves, muscles and bones. Effective eye-hand and two-hand coordination are important areas of child development. Eye-hand and two-hand coordination involve activities related to sorting (like understanding the difference between two or more articles based on their physical appearance), classification (on the basis of size, shape and colour), grouping and balancing. Activities like walking, climbing the stairs, playing musical instruments, stirring food in a bowl and sorting require efficient eye-hand and two-hand coordination. Such activities require the child to handle many objects simultaneously, and look at and try to catch things.

Therefore, eye-hand and two-hand coordination develop the child's muscles and also nurture one's cognitive skills.

A variety of activities may be taken up in schools to help improve the eye-hand coordination of children. For example, a teacher may ask children in a classroom to sit in a circle. The teacher may sing a song or recite a poem in the mother tongue or regional language, along with corresponding gestures and facial expressions, and ask the children to sing along and imitate the actions.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Many prominent psychologists have also shared their theories and opinions as regards to human and child development stages.

Sigmund Freud, the 'Father of Modern Psychology', in his theory stated that child development consists of a sequential series of fixed stages. They are — oral, anal, phallic, latent and genital. He, however, stated that a child may not be able to adjust in a given stage, and hence, retreat to the previous or earlier stage, where one was successful. He termed this phenomenon 'Regression'.

According to Gesell, an American psychologist, pediatrician and professor, all development occurs in a definite, patterned and internally controlled sequence. Gesell's theory is also known as 'maturational-developmental theory'. This theory is the foundation of nearly every other theory of human development.

Early in the twentieth century, Gesell observed and documented the patterns, in which children develop. According to him, each child goes through similar and predictable sequences at one's own pace. So, 'maturation' plays a dominant role in child development but environment and culture may, too, help in modifying it.

Piaget, a Swiss developmental psychologist, views development as succession of definite stages for a given behaviour, emerging in an unchanging and constant order. Each stage incorporates the structure of the preceding stages and is characterised by the 'initial period' of 'preparation' and the 'final period' of 'achievement'.

Burrhus Frederic Skinner was an American psychologist, behaviourist, author, inventor and social philosopher. He represents the Behaviouristic School, which emphasises the 'role of environment' in child development. 'Behaviour' is described in terms of a series of 'stimuli' and 'responses'. According to the theory of behaviourism, development is continuous in nature, and children develop and change their behaviour as per their environment. Hence, this theory suggests that behaviour is acquired from the environment, and that innate or inherited factors have little influence on one's behaviour.

Sullivan, an American psychiatrist and psycho analyst, emphasised that "personality can never be isolated from complex interpersonal relationships

in which a person lives”. According to him, interpersonal relationship(s) is the key to child development. Factors like how a child adapts, methods used for adaptation, ways of perceiving the world and relating oneself with others in the environment determine one’s development. The child’s behaviour is primarily oriented towards meeting one’s biological and security needs. Psychological problems stem out of insecurity. The development stages from infancy to childhood are characterised by new interpersonal needs and relationships.

However, it may be noted that no singular view can be accepted as the sole explanation of child development stages. The current trend is towards the formulation of an ‘integrated approach to development’. Whatever be the description of the stages, it is, generally, agreed that development follows certain trends, and principles of development have evolved on

the basis of studies conducted on children of varied age groups.

## CONCLUSION

It may, thus, be concluded that the first six years are the most crucial period of a person’s life. These early childhood years lay the foundation for the development of one’s personality. This period is characterised by rapid growth and development — both physical and mental. Studies suggest that there are critical stages in the development of the brain during this period. Researchers point out that chances of a child’s brain developing into its full potential are considerably reduced, if there is lack of a stimulating and enriching psycho physical environment in the early years. Deficits during the early years of life have adverse impacts on an individual’s overall personality, and thus, one’s physical and mental health, and behaviour.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BHATNAGAR, R. 2005. *Little Steps — A Manual for Preschool Teachers*. NCERT. New Delhi, India.
- CHOUHARY, K. C. 2012. ‘Emerging Challenges in Early Childhood Education — A Psycho-social Perspective’. *The Primary Teacher*. NCERT. New Delhi, India. Vol. XXXVII. No. 1 and 2, pp. 14–19.
- KAUL, V. 2010. *Early Childhood Education Programme*. National Council of Educational Research and Training. New Delhi, India.
- MURALIDHARAN, R. AND S. ASTHANA. 1991. *Stimulation Activities for Young Children*. NCERT. New Delhi, India.

- NATIONAL COUNCIL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING. 2006. *Position Paper on Early Childhood Care and Education*. NCERT. New Delhi, India.
- SONI, R., R. KAPOOR AND K. K. VASHISHTHA. 2008. *Early Childhood Education — An Introduction*. NCERT. New Delhi, India.
- SWAMINATHAN, M. AND P. DANIEL. 2004. *Play Activities for Child Development — A Guide to Preschool Teachers*. National Book Trust. New Delhi, India.