



# UNIT-1

## Introduction to Early Childhood Education

### Learning Outcomes

#### By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Discuss the benefits of participating in early years education for young children
- ✓ Understand why early years education is considered essential by most experts
- ✓ Explain how and why a child's education begins long before they attend school

## Unit 1

### Introduction to Early Childhood Education

*“Education begins before a child starts school. Effective early education is crucial to children’s life chances (particularly the most disadvantaged) and to building our national skills base. Those who attend pre-school attain, on average, seven GCSE grades more than those who don’t.”*

*“There is a wealth of evidence showing the difference early education can make to attainment, especially for the most disadvantaged children; the study of Effective Pre-school Primary and Secondary Education showed that it can make the difference between achieving the nationally expected level or falling behind by the end of Key Stage 1.”*

**Source** - DfE strategy 2015-2020: world-class education and care

#### **How do Children Benefit from Early Years Education?**

The benefits of early years education are extensive and well documented. By participating in early years education, a child has the opportunity to begin their educational and developmental journey at an important early stage in life.

For younger children in particular, every encounter and experience represents an opportunity to learn, grow and evolve. It’s during the first three years of a child’s life that their brain grows fastest - it’s also when a child is most receptive to the world around them. They absorb and assimilate information on a 24/7 basis, which in all instances has a knock-on effect on their future education and development.

But what are the most important definable benefits of participating in early years education? Why should parents consider early years education mandatory, for the benefit of their children?

#### ***Social Behaviour***

For one thing, structured early years education provides children with the opportunity to build and develop social skills. For many children, this may be their first experience spending extended period of time with groups of other children - all establishing social relationships and learning how to cooperate with one another. It’s also the perfect time in a child’s life for the basics of accountability, responsibility and sharing to be taught.

#### ***Enthusiasm for Lifelong learning***

Research suggests that when a child undergoes early years education, they are significantly more likely to demonstrate enthusiasm and excitement when moving on to more formal education. Early years education builds curiosity and confidence in children, and subsequently improves their motivation and their performance in school. The earlier a child is encouraged to take an active interest in their education, the better.

#### ***Exposure to Diversity***

Likewise, it is of the utmost importance to help children understand and appreciate diversity from the earliest possible age. This helps ensure children understand and value diversity and the differences between people from different cultural or ethnic backgrounds. Exposure to diversity at an early stage helps build tolerance, understanding and appreciation in children.

### ***Improved Language and Communication Skills***

Early years education also provides children with the opportunity to build better language and overall communication skills. Along with enhancing their vocabulary and discovering new *ways* to communicate, early years education also helps children build the confidence needed to use their language and communication skills in a wide variety of settings.

Some believe that the social aspect of early years education is even more important than its academic benefits. Particularly when it comes to nurturing healthy and confident interactions with adults and other children, early years education can play a major role in a child's development.

It's also seen as an important opportunity to lay a robust foundation for a more rewarding, enjoyable and successful educational experience when the child moves on to school.

### **The Importance of Early Education in Childhood**

As it currently stands, early years education in England is optional, rather than mandatory. However, the vast majority educators and childhood developmental experts consider early years education essential.

Parents are strongly recommended to enrol their children in early years education from the age of three, rather than waiting for them to reach compulsory school age (five years old).

It is during the first few years of a child's life that they are most receptive to the world around them and their own experiences. The importance of early education in childhood lies in the fact that:

- Human beings establish the largest number of brain connections in early childhood
- It's the period in life where we begin to build our character and personality
- It provides the unique opportunity to socialize with other children and adults
- Early years education helps children understand diversity and equality
- It represents the first step on the journey towards autonomy and independence
- Early years education boosts performance and success rates at school

Importantly, early years education exposes younger children to situations, scenarios and experiences they would not otherwise encounter at home or elsewhere. It is therefore considered uniquely beneficial and advantageous - something that cannot be recreated in a typical home environment.

### **When Does Early Years Education Begin?**

A child's education begins the day they are born, though most formal or structured types of early years education are provided from the age of two or three. Children may attend a creche or kindergarten from as young as one year old, which can also contribute to their education and development.

In the United Kingdom, early years education typically begins at the age of three. This being the age at which all children in the United Kingdom become eligible for free early years education, organized and funded by the state.

Though not all parents choose to enrol their children in early years education, it is considered an important 'springboard' for their education that brings nothing but benefits into consideration.

Just a few examples of which include the following:

- The opportunity to be educated, coached and supervised by trained and experienced professionals, who know exactly how to nurture and support a child's development.

- Invaluable immersion in a new kind of social situation and exposure to new activities and scenarios, which parents would not be able to recreate at home.
- The opportunity for parents to converse and collaborate with early years educators, working together to ensure the best possible experience and outcome for their child.
- A safe, nurturing and reassuring environment, within which children can begin to build their own unique characters and personality traits.
- Stimulation of all essential cognitive and motor skills, encouraging children to take an interest in their own development and education.
- The opportunity to pick up on any potential developmental issues or irregularities at an early stage, in order to ensure they are acknowledged and addressed.

Not only is early years education considered uniquely advantageous for those who take part, the fact that it is offered 100% free of charge makes it an opportunity too valuable to pass up.

### **The Limitations of Early Education at Home**

Some parents choose not to take advantage of free early years education, instead opting for a home-based approach to their children's early stage education and development. While home schooling has the potential to be effective in some instances, there are several important limitations to consider where at-home early years education is concerned.

A few examples of which being as follows:

- Children are denied the opportunity to socialise with other children in groups
- Early education at home limits exposure to and understanding of diversity
- Parents lack the skills, knowledge and experience of qualified educators
- Children respond differently to educators than they do their own parents
- Formal or structured education can be challenging to provide at home
- Parents are unlikely to have the same resources as an educational setting
- A busy schedule may make it difficult to keep to schedules and maintain routines

Though it's not impossible for early education to be provided in a home environment, it can be challenging to offer an enriching early years education or experience at home.

Where possible, therefore, parents are advised to enrol their children in early years education, which is widely available in almost all localities across the United Kingdom.

### **Early Years Education for Enhanced Development**

Over the years, extensive studies have been carried out into the extent to which early years education can enhance and accelerate the development of children. The vast majority of those who undergo early years education demonstrate behaviours, habits and traits that contribute to their subsequent education at school and longer-term development.

Examples of which include the following among others:

- ✓ Stronger evidence of free and independent thinking
- ✓ Improved communication skills and the confidence to use them
- ✓ More confidence, optimism and self-esteem in general
- ✓ The ability to cope with change and handle challenging situations

- ✓ Highly developed social skills and the ability to work with others
- ✓ An understanding of and respect for the importance of structure
- ✓ A heightened sense of respect for educators and adults in general
- ✓ Appreciation of cultural diversity
- ✓ Genuine interest and enthusiasm in their education

All children are unique, therefore benefit from early years education in their own unique ways. Nevertheless, the advantages of early years education in general are universal and extend to *all* children without exception.

### **Early Years Education Entitlement in England**

*"Your child must start full-time education once they reach compulsory school age. This is on 31 December, 31 March or 31 August following their fifth birthday - whichever comes first. If your child's fifth birthday is on one of those dates then they reach compulsory school age on that date."*

*"For example, if your child reaches compulsory school age on 31 March, they must start full-time education at the beginning of the next term (summer term that year)."*

*"All 3 to 4-year-olds in England are entitled to free early education before they start school full time."*

**Source: Gov.uk**

In England, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) caters to children from birth to age five. However, free early education funded by the state is typically offered for children aged 3 to 4. Parents wishing to enrol their children in early education from a younger age are able to do so, though are required (in most instances) to pay for it themselves.

Publicly funded early years education for 3- and 4-year-olds is provided in nursery schools and nursery classes in maintained primary schools and academies. There are also various specialist children's centres operated by volunteers and the private sector, which are likewise funded by the government upon meeting certain requirements. These include day nurseries, playgroups and registered childminders.

As it stands, all 3 and 4 year-olds in England are entitled to a standard 570 hours of free early education per year. Referred to as 'universal entitlement', this amounts to 15 hours per week when distributed over a standard 38-week academic year. In addition to this, all 3 and 4 year-olds in England with working parents are now entitled to an additional 30 hours weekly 'extended entitlement' at nursery, again over a standard 38-week academic year.

This additional provision to support working parents was introduced in September 2017.

Publicly funded early education in its current form was introduced in England in 1998, before which availability and entitlement varied significantly from one locality to the next. Entitlement initially applied exclusively to 4 year-olds, subsequently being extended to include 3 year-olds in 2004.

Weekly entitlement has been increased several times along the way - most recently up to 15 hours per week over a standard 38 week academic year in 2010.

### **Additional Entitlement for Disadvantaged Families**

There is currently no universal entitlement for 2 year-olds - most parents looking to enrol their children in early years education from the age of 2 are required to pay for it themselves. However, 2 year-old children considered to be from disadvantaged families may be eligible for an additional provision of 15 hours per week, over the standard 38 week academic year.

Eligibility for this additional entitlement is assessed on the basis of economic factors and other criteria, such as whether the child in question has diagnosed or suspected special educational needs (SEN). This additional entitlement for disadvantaged families was first introduced in 2013, at which point it applied to approximately 20% of children within the age group.

It was subsequently extended in 2014, at which point it covered approximately 40% of the age group.

Where a child does not qualify for this additional entitlement, parents have the option of paying for childcare or early years education from private sector providers or voluntary organisations.

### Participation in Early Years Education

Early years education remains strictly optional across the United Kingdom, though is strongly recommended by educators and childhood developmental experts in general. As a result, the vast majority of parents enrol their children in some kind of nursery or preschool education, on either a part time or fulltime basis.

In all four countries of the United Kingdom, it is comparatively rare for a child to stay at home until their compulsory education begins on the first term that follows their fifth birthday.

### Universal Entitlement Participation

According to the official figures released by the UK government, approximately 95% of all 4-year-olds, 92% of all 3-year-olds and 72% of eligible disadvantaged 2-year-olds in England were participating in funded early education in January 2018.

A brief summary of universal entitlement participation rates for children within these age brackets is provided below:

Provider	% of 2-year-olds	% of 3-year-olds	% of 4-year-olds
Private and voluntary	82	51	19
Childminders	4	2	1
Independent schools	1	2	2
Maintained nursery schools	5	4	1
Nursery classes in primary schools	8	30	13
Infant classes in primary schools	-	-	63
Publicly funded secondary schools	-	-	1
Special schools	-	-	-
All providers	100	100	100

Source: *Education Provision: Children Under 5 Years of Age, January 2018*, Table 1, page 7.

### **Extended Entitlement Participation**

At the same time, around 3 out of 4 eligible children in England participated in extended entitlement. The official figures released by the government for 3- and 4-year-olds by way of type of provider were as follows:

Provider	% of 3-year-olds	% of 4-year-olds
Private and voluntary	75	70
Childminders	7	6
Independent schools	1	2
Maintained nursery schools	3	3
Nursery classes in primary schools	14	19
Infant classes in primary schools	-	-
Publicly funded secondary schools	-	-
Special schools	-	-
All providers	100	100

Source: *Education Provision: Children under 5 Years of Age, January 2018*, Table 1, page 7.

This suggests that while early years education is not mandatory, it is acknowledged as a vital contributor to a child's education and development by the vast majority of parents. In almost all instances where early years education is available - both in terms of universal entitlement and extended entitlement - parents continue to take full advantage of it.

### **Curriculum and Assessment**

*"The phase of education and care spanning the period from birth to age five is known as the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), and all publicly funded early years settings must follow the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage."*

**Source** - European Commission, *Early Childhood Education and Care in England*

The early years foundation stage (EYFS) sets standards for the learning, development and care of children from birth to 5 years old. In England, every school and registered educational environments is obliged to follow the EYFS.

However, the EYFS is only applicable to educational environments in England, as different standards applied in Wales and Scotland.

For the most part, children taking part in early years education are taught and nurtured by way of play and games. It is more of a practical 'hands on' educational experience than formal classroom tuition, during which children are nurtured and encouraged to develop new skills and build their confidence.

The primary areas of learning within EYFS (as specified by the government) for children in England are as follows:

- communication and language
- physical development

- personal, social and emotional development
- literacy
- mathematics
- understanding the world
- expressive arts and design

Children taking part in early years education will have their progress reviewed by health visitors or early years practitioners when they are between the ages of two and three. Assessments in early years education are carried out by the teachers of the classes when children turn 5 at the end of the academic year.

However, it's important to note that these reviews and assessments are based entirely on observations - no formal 'testing' in the traditional sense applies in an early years educational setting. Children are instead assessed by way of their progress and development in accordance with early learning goals, outlined in the [early years framework](#).

Enshrined in the Childcare Act 2006, the early years framework outlines all key learning and development requirements by way of:

- areas of learning and development which shape educational programmes
- early learning goals
- assessment arrangements.

It also:

- ✓ sets the standards that all early years providers must meet to ensure that children learn and develop well
- ✓ ensures children are kept healthy and safe
- ✓ ensures that children have the knowledge and skills they need to start school

### **The Role of Local Authorities in Early Education**

Section 7 of the Childcare Act 2006 (as substituted by Section 1 of the Education Act 2011) places a duty on local authorities (LAs) to secure early years provision free of charge. In addition, it is the responsibility of local authorities to provide sufficient childcare - to whatever extent is practical and feasible - to enable parents of children to work or undertake the training or education necessary to enable them to work. This does not necessarily mean that local authorities are obliged to fund or subsidise childcare for working parents, or those undergoing formal training or education. It instead means that low income households (upon meeting strict eligibility requirements) may be provided with additional tax credits to enable them to cover childcare costs.

It is also the duty of local authorities to ensure parents have open and easy access to information on the childcare options available in their vicinity. Parents must be made aware of the early years education system and the extent to which state-funded education is available for their children.

### **National Policy Aims and Objectives**

The Department for Education in England recently published its [World Class Education and Care](#) strategy, which outlined the government intent to continue improving access to and quality of early years education in

England.

Some of the priorities set out in the strategy are as follows:

- supporting local authorities to deliver high performing children’s services
- promoting the educational outcomes of disadvantaged children
- embedding the 30 hours of free childcare for working parents
- improving understanding of how best to support parents to develop their child’s learning at home

In addition, further pledges published in the policy concerning the provision of early years education included the Department for Education’s promise to:

- ✓ ensure that children are ready for school when they start, with a particular focus on ensuring that the most disadvantaged children receive high-quality early education and care from age two
- ✓ help families with the cost of childcare so that they have more employment choices
- ✓ increase the quality of the early years education and childcare offered, focused on developing the workforce

*“Our approach to the early years – broadly seeks to deliver two aims. First, ensuring that children are ‘school-ready’ by the time they reach primary age – with a particular focus on ensuring our most disadvantaged children receive a high-quality early education from the age of two. And second, supporting hard-working families with the cost of living so they have more employment choices. Free early years provision is a vital part of the support that helps more people, particularly mothers, return to employment once they have had children, or increase the number of hours they are working. Both of these boost national productivity and improve life chances.”*

### Further Reading:

- ✓ *DfE strategy 2015-2020: world-class education and care*