
Research Papers



EDUCATION FOR DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN

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Introduction

Education is the process of instruction aimed at all round development of individuals, providing the necessary tools and knowledge to understand and participate in day today activities of today's world. It dispels ignorance and boost moral values of the individuals. It is the only wealth which cannot be robbed; it builds character, provides strength of mind and increase knowledge. The education sustains the human values which contribute to individual and collective well-being. It forms the basis for lifelong learning and inspires confidence to face challenges. It provides the skills to the individuals to become more self reliant and aware of opportunities and rights. It also enhances the ability of individuals to manage health problems, improve nutrition and child care and plan for future.

The UN convention on the rights of the child, ratified by 192 countries in 1980, affirmed the right for all children to have free, relevant and quality education. As education is the only tool which takes the country to greater heights, at the world education forum in Dakar in 2000, participants from 164 countries pledged to provide education for all by 2015. Education not only impacts on human development and economic growth, but also is the fundamental requirement of democracy. Through education people become more responsible and informed citizens, and have voice in politics and society, which is essential for sustaining democracy. It is essential for eradicating poverty and it allows people to be more productive, playing greater roles in economic life,

expectancy raises by as much as 2 years for every 1 percent increase in literacy.

The education is the key which allows people to move up in the world, seek better jobs and ultimately succeed in their lives, and one should be deprived of it. Indian constitution in its direct

principles of state policy has affirmed free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of fourteen .So, the disadvantaged children are not an exception. Every disadvantaged child should be given opportunity to learn with integrated of technology to improve overall learning capacity of the student which can enhance the lives of disadvantaged children.

There are a large number of disadvantaged children at present with no access to education. A basic education has not reached all children as targeted. If we include the over-18 school-age group with less than 12 years of basic education, the number of those deprived of educational opportunities will be even much higher. In spite of the endeavor made by the civil society organizations and public sectors to provide services in different forms, these services are still neither inequitable nor so not truly beneficial to the underprivileged.

The National Education Act 1999 mandates equal rights and opportunities for all to receive basic quality education. Hence, the programme on education for disadvantaged children is therefore needed. A clear direction and successful implementation of the programme will enable these unfortunate children to raise their quality of life and well-being. They will thus be

able to live happily among others in the society, earn their livelihood, and contribute significantly to national advancement.

Early educational programs with integrated technology can enhance the lives of disadvantaged children and improve overall student learning. The importance of educated children in today's society is overwhelming. Some form of education seems necessary for all children to succeed in life by giving them the skills they need for the social milieu they are surrounded by. The term 'early childhood educational programs' refers to preschool type educational and developmental programs for children from birth to the age of five that allow children to gain all types of life skills.

Disadvantaged children, in this case, ones they are handicapped or kids from poverty stricken areas, need just as much basic education as any other child. Technology, especially computer usage among the youngsters, can help these children to succeed in an ever-changing society. Early childhood educational programs with integrated technology can enhance the lives of disadvantaged children and improve overall student learning.

Definition Disadvantaged Children

Disadvantaged children are those who cannot afford basic necessities of life from the early stage, these are children whose parents or guardians cannot afford to pay for either their education, feeding, clothing or in some cases even shelter, the end result is that these children end up less than their peers both intellectually and morally as they grow.

Various agencies and organizations concerned have given different interpretations regarding the definition and type of "disadvantaged children". For the purpose of the policy, however, interpretations of the Plan for protection of Children in Especially Difficult Circumstance (CEDC) 2002 – 2006, approved by the Council of Ministers on September 4, 2002, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 serve as references. These interpretations are flexible and could be adjusted at the agencies concerned

In the context of educational provision, "disadvantaged children" are identified as those under the age of 18 (except in cases requiring special care, the age limit could be extended to 24), who are confronted with problems or find themselves difficult circumstances or in less favourable situations. These children need special assistance for a better life and well-being. Their development in all aspects must be commensurate

with their age, enabling them to reach their highest potential.

Types of Disadvantaged Children

The Plan for Protection of Children in Specially Difficult Circumstances (CEDC) 2002-2006 formulated by the National Youth Bureau identifies CEDC covering the following six groups:

- 1) Abandoned and neglected Children i.e. street children / child beggars; orphans; and slum children;
- 2) Children physically or sexually abused i.e. assaulted children; child prostitutes; sexually violated children; and children involved in child labour;
- 3) Children with undesirable behavior i.e. children who use drugs; children pregnant out of wedlock or before appropriate age; those involved in criminal action / criminal offence; those in remand homes; and those socializing in brothels and night spots;
- 4) Children with physical/ mental/emotional/ intellectual and learning deficiencies;
- 5) Socially deprived/ poor children i.e. children without schooling; children of migratory construction workers; children of unemployed laborers; children of ethnic minority groups; children of those under absolute poverty line; and those without Thai nationality, birth registration certifies or household registration certificates; and
- 6) HIV/AIDS – affected children i.e. those infected with HIV/AIDS; and orphans of parents with HIV/AIDS.

What Makes a Child Disadvantaged

Disadvantaged children tend to be slightly ignored when one thinks of education. However, they are individuals just like any other child and they should be given the same opportunities that all children have. Poverty is a nucleus of the problem in many areas of the world. If a child lives in poverty they may lack everything they need for their development.

Children with handicaps, whether they are physical or mental, also fit into the category of disadvantaged children. These children do not, and will never, have the same opportunities as children who are so-called 'normal.' However, early childhood education programs "can effectively raise the intelligence of disadvantaged children, guide them toward better social adjustment and help them learn more in school". Therefore, even if a student does experience a handicap, they may have a better chance at doing well in school and when they enter into a real societal working

atmosphere.

Effects of Early Childhood Education Programs

There is a great need for early childhood education programs for disadvantaged children. It is especially necessary to start learning as young as possible. Education at younger age will give a rich exposure to the disadvantaged children. These experiences can hopefully spark a child's interest in learning as well to become an effective part of life

The effects of early childhood educational programs, both short and long-term, for all children are remarkable. Albeit there is a general perception that children with disabilities cannot get the full experience and that they cannot take advantage of those experiences that they would encounter in a preschool type program, a study done by Lamprey and Bricker found that "children with disabilities enrolled in integrated early childhood programs demonstrated higher level of social play and more appropriate social interactions, and were more likely to initiate interactions with peers" (Diamond, 1994). Getting socialized and maintaining interaction with peers are just the beginning of the effects that these 'early intervention' type programs have on children (Smith, 1988).

Even though some may believe that disadvantaged students may get socially abused in a preschool type program, the social development of the disadvantaged child can be one of the most influential effects that these programs can create on the student. It is found by experience that children who have any type of disadvantage tend to be either secluded from the rest of society or to be more antisocial and isolated if not been put into the preschool type of programme

Teachers can play a predominant role in effecting the social development of youngsters by encouraging the disadvantaged children and creating trust on themselves. Children in early intervention type programs "were more likely to initiate play activities and communications with their peers" when their teachers or supervisors acted more child-like and less authoritative-like (Diamond, 1994). This may be because the child trusts the teacher and therefore when he sees the teacher acting a certain way, he imitates her and acts that way toward his peers. The teacher can guide the student, "stimulating him to play, and leading him gradually to a more independent way of initiating ideas and thinking up play schemes that he can engage in with other children" (Biber,

1984).

Cognitive development may be one of the most important effects of these programs because the children have the opportunity to use and acquire information about ideas such as language and literacy. From many studies it has been found that the "average initial effect on cognitive abilities is about...seven or eight points on an IQ test" and there is no evidence of negative effects that has consistently shown up in any of the studies (Barnett, 2002). Acquiring well-rounded cognitive abilities in early educational programs can give struggling children a head start on becoming greatly adept in reading, arithmetic and language achievement and in effect completing schooling and making a difference in society.

Early intervention programs have long-lasting effects as well and these may be more influential on the lives of children than any other effects. Although some researchers have found that cognitive gains level off once the child reached the middle of primary years, it seems as if there is a benefit in early childhood programs for any non-cognitive development. Many "positive and significant relationships between preschool participation and task-related, social, and attitudinal outcomes" have been found in longitudinal studies that observed participants from preschool to adulthood (Cotton and Conklin, 1989).

There are some long-term benefits of early education that are especially influential on society. These include lower pregnancy occurrence, drug abuse, and other delinquent acts (Cotton and Conklin, 1989). Avoiding such occurrences could lead to a healthier lifestyle and a longer, more productive life. Also, in these programs students can learn to understand their environment and therefore they can "learn what is acceptable and what is not in terms of taking advantage of opportunities to act" (Margolin, 1974). The students learn these 'rules' and in effect, they can carry them throughout their lives and help them to make decisions on their path through life

Methods for Teaching Young Students with Disabilities

Teaching the young child can be a demanding experience for teachers because it can be hard to find a desired blend of techniques to teach each individual learner. This can be even more difficult when it comes to disadvantaged child with more specialized needs. It is known that young children learn better through interactive teaching, rather than traditional, lecture-type teaching (Willis,

1993). Teachers of early intervention programs must have detailed training in curriculum and “supportive curriculum supervision, which help them engage in practices that support children and parents” (Schweinhart, 1994). With educated teachers in the early educational programs, students can achieve more and become more prepared for their future.

Teachers can use different tools to engage the students in learning including some forms of technology. Technological innovations have been influencing teaching and learning for years. In most schools computers have taken over previous forms of instruction. However, technology has not been integrated into early childhood programs to the degree it should be. Young children, especially disadvantaged ones, could benefit from computer use in the classroom in many ways. Careful selection of computer programs for the individual child and groups of children can give “a wide range of skills and information to the disadvantaged children that they might never encounter in a classroom without a computer” (Beaty and Tucker, 1987). The social aspect of working in groups can reassure shy and “quiet but highly intelligent children who are too unsure of themselves to attempt group activities” that they can to achieve to the same degree as those children who are more outgoing (Beaty and Tucker, 1987).

Some researchers are hopeful that future technological advances will be able to help extremely handicapped children to communicate and learn more efficiently. Sensory prosthetic devices for disabled people, including children, will hopefully make it easier for disabled children to take part in activities, including playing and interacting with their peers (Withrow, 2000). These technological advances will help the student develop not only a sense of acceptance by their peers, but it will

also enhance their social and cognitive development.

It has been found that children learn a great amount through playing, and interactions with their families and peers. The child also “learn about cooperation and problem solving by laying board games” and “playing catch, riding bikes, and going to the playground builds gross motor-skills”. Also, when children play they tend to congregate in groups, therefore increasing social development and giving those experiences they might not encounter if they were not enrolled in an early childhood program.

Effects on the Families of the Students

Early childhood educational programs have been shown to have a great affect on the student himself; however his family can also be positively affected by the enrollment of the child into a program. First, when the child is going through the many experiences of the programs, parents can more easily “view their children as able, active learners and to support their children's development of a sense of control and of intellectual, social and physical abilities” (Schweinhart, 1994). Families of disadvantaged children at times can have feelings of “disappointment, social isolation, stress, frustration, and helplessness” and these factors can contribute to a decrease in family well-being and can in effect interfere with child development (Smith, 1988). There are findings that indicate an increase in divorce and suicide in families with a child who has a disability, but the early intervention programs can result in “parents having improved attitudes about themselves and their child” (Smith, 1988)

Other benefits of the early intervention programs take some of the everyday stresses out of life for the parents of young children, especially those who live in impoverished areas. When a child is enrolled in an early educational program, he/she is generally away in a center-based program, therefore alleviating the stress of finding and affording a qualified babysitter while they work. Also, the programs give the child a safe place to be during the day and they keep the child off of the streets where he could get involved in difficult situations. A lasting effect of the programs is that they can give children a better chance to become independent and work for themselves, instead of always relying on struggling parents.

Conclusion

Early childhood programs for the disadvantaged can help a child start to better their lives from the beginning. The demands of society are continuing to grow and technology innovations are shaping the world and the educational system. It has been found that “preschool education pays off in a number of important ways” and for a number of different people (Unknown, 1980, par. 1). If early childhood educational programs can be implemented across the nation, eventually expanding across the world, the future of society will be in the hands of a more diverse group of individuals with the drive to succeed.

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