ROLE OF FAMILIES ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION: DHAKA CITY PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Early childhood is the period when maximum development takes place. It is the most crucial period of a child’s life. Involvement of family is very much needed in this period. This study has been carried out on Dhaka- the capital city of Bangladesh; in search of the role of the families on children’s early childhood development and education. The specific objectives for this study were determining the role of parents and other members on children’s early childhood development and education and comparing both the parents’ role on this issue. To attain these objectives two different interview schedules were developed; one for the parents and the other one for one other family member. Data was analyzed in a mixed method using simple percentage for quantitative parts and thematic analysis for qualitative parts. The major findings included families with highly educated parents care more for their children’s overall development than that of other families, mothers take more responsibilities of the children then fathers and most families now are well aware of extra-curricular development of their children.

KEY WORDS: Role of Family, Early Childhood Development, Early Childhood Education

1. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is a crucial period for every child all over the world. This is the period when the child needs the cooperation and the supervision of the parents and other relatives the most. Most of the learning of a child’s life begins in this period.

Early childhood is usually defined as before the age of normal schooling. The age is from birth to 5 years in most nations but the US National Association for the Education of Young Children defines early childhood as before the age of 8. This is the period when the brain grows remarkably and the foundation of child’s development and learning is laid. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Prince Edward Island, Canada suggests that,

To a great extent, a baby's brain is constructed with building blocks of experience ready to be further developed by you. As a child begins to experience the world through sight, sound, touch and to a lesser degree, smell and taste, the wiring and sculpting of the brain falls into place.

Research shows that who and what a child becomes, is mainly determined from birth to age 8. As a parent or caregiver, every time you talk, play, sing or interact with your child, you are stimulating your child’s brain.
and helping him or her become a happy, healthy, productive individual.

According to World Bank’s Early Childhood Development (ECD) program, early childhood is the most rapid period of development though children develop at their own paces. Thus early childhood development and education is very important for the children because this accelerates Education For All (EFA) movement and helps achieving Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Early childhood development consists of different types of physical development like walking, talking, eating, playing etc. and different types of mental development like sharing and caring, growing values, morals and ethics, respecting others etc. At the early stage, education starts from learning all these physical and mental activities; then comes formal learning like identifying body parts, alphabets, digits, colours and shapes. According to Piaget theory, early childhood learning starts with play. It is believed that children learn more effectively and gain more knowledge through play. (Wenner, 2009). All these learning by playing starts from home. Family is thus the first agency that teach the children all these things.

“Family plays key role in child’s education” titled a report on an Indian newspaper “The Hindu” on May 6, 2010. A letter on the public opinion page of The New York Times from April 14, 2011 says that “…Yes, there are bad teachers. Yes, there are bad administrators. But the root cause of poor student performance rests with families, not with poor public education.” This shows how much family role matters in children’s education.

Thus a child’s early childhood development and education largely depends on the family. So, the role of all the family members in all these learning is very important. Hardon (1998) described the importance of the family in early childhood education like this, “We could begin by saying that the family is indispensable for education. We could also say the family is the most important source of education. We could even say there is no real education without the family.” This shows how much the family means to a child on the question of education.

Now the questions are, what role most of the families really play in children’s development and education, is that enough for the children, what should be the ideal role of the family in children’s development and education. This study intended to find out the answer of the first question.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Different authors, researchers and well aware members of the society has studied and written different types of reports and articles on early childhood development and education and the role of family in this perspective. All these literatures have helped to gain insight about this study.

2.1 Early Childhood Development

Early childhood is the time of maximum growth and development. At this time physical, social, emotional and intellectual development of a child takes place. Physical development refers to the development of different body parts and different psychomotor skills, social development refers to the ability of young children to interact with others with manners and sustain relationships, emotional development refers to the children’s feeling about themselves as well as others and intellectual development is the ability to acquire and to apply specific knowledge like reading, calculating and language. Good quality early life experiences, including helping families meet children’s needs, can enhance children’s resiliency and promote optimal child development at this period. (Early child development in social context: A chartbook, 2004)
The Science of Early Childhood Development Report (2007) has underlined some of the key issues regarding early childhood development. It says,

The early development of cognitive skills, emotional well-being, social competence, and sound physical and mental health builds a strong foundation for success well into the adult years. Beyond their short-term importance for positive school achievement, these abilities are critical prerequisites for economic productivity and responsible citizenship throughout life. All aspects of adult human capital, from work force skills to cooperative and lawful behavior, build on capacities that are developed during childhood, beginning at birth.

Again, Introduction to Early Childhood Development Report says that, “A key aspect of healthy child development is the establishment of a preferred, lasting emotional tie between a child and his/her parents.”

2.2 Early Childhood Education

Lewis defined early childhood education as, “a term that refers to educational programs and strategies geared toward children from birth to the age of eight. This time period is widely considered the most vulnerable and crucial stage of a person’s life.”

Importance of education in early childhood has been given the most priority by the government of the USA. Official webpage of Whitehouse says,

Expanding access to high quality early childhood education is among the smartest investments that we can make. Research has shown that the early years in a child’s life—when the human brain is forming—represent a critically important window of opportunity to develop a child’s full potential and shape key academic, social, and cognitive skills that determine a child’s success in school and in life.

According to Casper and Theilheimer (2009), there are five developmental domains of early childhood development—Physical, Social, Emotional, Language Development and Cognitive Skills. Language and Cognitive Skills development are very important for the children to sustain in the challenging world. These can be developed through proper education and training.

2.3 Role of Family

Family plays the most important role in children’s development and education. Many researches and studies found out this result. Researchers and educators view parents as an essential part of early childhood education. Parents are often said to be the first and best teacher for a child. (The Early Years Framework, 2008)

United Kingdom Government’s Department for Education defines the importance of family in child’s education like this.

The research shows that parental involvement in children’s learning is a key factor in improving children’s academic attainment and achievements, as well as their overall behaviour and attendance.

The role of parents during a child’s earliest years is the single biggest influence on their development. Good quality home learning contributes more to children’s intellectual and social development than parental occupation, education or income.

Cimagala (2010) described the important role of parents in children’s education as,

Parents today should be up to the complex challenges children are facing in their
education. Not only are there more factors to reckon with. These factors often compete with each other and can have multiple effects, some good, some bad. Parents have to be keenly discerning to handle these factors expertly.

David (2009) found that the role of family on children is very much influential. He described that changed roles of the family has great impact on children’s development and education. Family pattern has a lot to do with child’s moral development as well. Families where there is strong foundation of love, children there learn about family bonding and mutual trust. Family values also help developing children’s mental and intellectual strength.

Thus it shows that, without the active involvement of the family members specially the parents it is quiet impossible for the children to develop strong physical, mental, moral and intellectual potential.

3. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

A project on Engaging Families in the Early Childhood Development Story (2010) described that,

Neuroscience provides compelling evidence that early experiences impact on brain development. Early experiences can have a long-term effect on wellbeing. A large proportion of human brain development takes place after birth as a result of interactions with the environment – the impact of early experience has a greater influence than heredity on development. The first three years are the period of the most rapid growth.

From the above description it is clear that maximum brain development results in the early age when children are fully linked with the family members only. So, at that time the role of the family becomes very crucial as the future of the child depends on that role.

Again, Bangladesh as known is a highly populated, poverty stricken country with a very low literacy rate. In such a country, properly brought up citizen is a must. It is known to all that Napoleon has said, “Give me a good mother and I will give you a good nation” which means proper upbringing of citizens is essential for proper society. So, it is very important in this country that the families take initial steps for the development and education of their children.

If the family members are unaware of the child’s development and educational needs then one can never expect to have well aware citizens who can contribute to the country. So, for the development of the county, it is needed that the families be aware of child’s development as well as education and play proper role regarding this issue.

Thus the main purpose of this study was to find out the role of parents and other members of the family in children’s early development and education and draw a conclusion. To accomplish this purpose some specific objectives were set and some research questions are asked.

3.1 Research Objectives

1. To determine the role of parents on children’s early childhood development and education.
2. To determine the role of other family members on children’s early childhood development and education.
3. To compare both the parents’ role on children’s early childhood development and education.

3.2 Research Questions

1. What is the role of mother on children’s early childhood development and education?
2. What is the role of father on children’s early childhood development and education?
3. What is the role of other members of family on children’s early childhood development and education?
4. What are the differences between mother’s role and father’s role on children’s early childhood development and education?

4. METHODOLOGY

The major purpose of this study was to find out the role of families on children’s early childhood care and education. The study had been carried out based on descriptive mode of research. Data have been collected from different sources for the purpose of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Two types of interview schedule were used in this study for collecting data.

4.1 Population and Sample

All the children from 0 to 8 years of Dhaka city were the population for this study. As sample, 50 families were selected from five different areas of Dhaka city. The areas were: Mirpur, Mohammadpur, Gulshan/Banani, Dhanmondi and Old town.

4.2 Sampling Technique

Convenience sampling was employed in order to select the families. The families were chosen in such way that in every family there was someone else besides the parents and the child. The sampling can be shown easily in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Number of Families</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Other members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mirpur</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10*2=20</td>
<td>10*1=10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohammadpur</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10*2=20</td>
<td>10*1=10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gulshan/Banani</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10*2=20</td>
<td>10*1=10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhanmondi</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10*2=20</td>
<td>10*1=10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Town</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10*2=20</td>
<td>10*1=10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3 Source of Data

Information and evidence were collected and recorded from two sources: a) Parents and b) One other member of the family. Both the parents and one other family member of each family were interviewed in order to get a clear view of the development situation of the child.

4.4 Data Collection Tools

Semi structured interview schedule was the only data collection tool for this study. Two different interview schedules were developed for parents and other members of the family. The interview schedule for the parents had initially 25 semi-structured multiple choice type questions and the interview schedule for other members of the family had 10 questions. Interview schedule had been employed on 5 families for piloting and as a result both the interview schedules had been redeveloped. The final interview schedule for the parents had 18 semi-structured questions and the final interview schedule for other members had 9 questions.

4.5 Data Analysis

Mixed method approach was used for data analysis. Simple percentage was applied for quantitative analysis and thematic analysis was employed on the qualitative part.

4.6 Limitations

The study was a very effective one on the present context of Bangladesh. However it had some limitations. The sample for this study was taken from five specific areas from Dhaka city only for the convenience of the researcher. The sample size was also very small regarding the whole population. For the convenience of the researcher, only interview of parents and one other family member...
member was taken, the children have not been observed at all.

4.7 Ethical Consideration

While conducting each step of the study, ethical rules of research was considered. Consent letter had been signed from the parents before taking the interviews. Only the researcher dealt with the data collected from interview and collected data was analyzed without any type of manipulation. The report has been written without any type of plagiarism. Information has been presented with appropriate reference.

5. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

All the data have been categorized thematically according to the items of the questionnaires. Here, the result of the analysis is being showed using charts for quantitative parts and description for the qualitative parts.

5.1 Basic Information

Basic information like age of the children and education level and profession of the parents has been collected to get clear view of the difference of family role on children. Among the 50 children, 23 were of age 0 to 3 and thus they do not go to school. All others were school going children. Information regarding the parents is shown in the table below.

Table 1. Parents level of Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Mother</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post Graduation</td>
<td>37 (74%)</td>
<td>14 (28%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation</td>
<td>3 (6%)</td>
<td>26 (52%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSC/HSC</td>
<td>9 (18%)</td>
<td>6 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
<td>4 (8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Profession of Fathers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>17 (34%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Govt. Service</td>
<td>14 (28%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Service</td>
<td>12 (24%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>7 (14%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Profession of Mothers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>36 (72%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Govt. Service</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Service</td>
<td>7 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>4 (8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Result of the analysis showed that in most of the cases, families of Old Town has illiterate or up to SSC pass parents, the business man fathers were mostly of Old Town and Gulshan/Banani area and service holder mothers were mostly from Mohammadpur and Dhanmondi area. It also showed that where both the parents were at least up to graduate, the children were more likely to develop morally than from those with less educated parents. So, the major finding here is, children with highly educated parents tend to develop quickly and have high moral values than that of other children.

5.2 School Going Children

Out of 50 children, 27 were school going. It is showed that in most of the cases, both the parents have gone for the admission of the children which is a positive sign. It means both the parents are well aware of their child’s development and needs. The whole school admission scenario is shown by the figure below.
On the question of who takes children to school, in maximum cases, it has been found that parents and other members of the family have equal contribution. Analysis showed that for the morning shift children fathers were more likely to take them to school and mothers take them back home. Where both parents were job holders, other family members like grandfather, brother or sister and maid servants tend to take children back home. The percentage of the result is shown here.

Regardless the area of residence, mothers were mostly the teachers of the children at home. In some cases fathers try to teach the children, only the hard things which the mother had trouble with. Some children from mostly Gulshan/Banani area had house tutors as well. Here goes the scenario.

Here the major finding is that over 50% parents are actually well aware of their children’s educational needs and thus they have a very positive attitude towards children’s education.

5.3 Time with Parents

Almost all the fathers spend only the night time and weekends with their children. Children spend most of their time with their mothers. In some cases, where both the parents work, children spend most of the time with some elder people like grandparents or aunts. The amount of time parents spend with children is as shown.

Table 4: Total Time Spend with Parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>The whole day</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>Whenever free</th>
<th>At night</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The time that most of the fathers spend with their children was night time. Fathers thus tend to play games or watch television with the children at that time of the day. They rarely try to teach their children anything at that small amount of time that they had with their children. It has been found that both the parents do multiple tasks with their children. The activities of parents with children are as follows.
Table 5: Activity of Parents with Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Teaching - Learning</th>
<th>Playing</th>
<th>Watching TV</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here the major finding is, 68% mothers spend the whole day with their children by teaching-learning activities, playing, watching television and different other activities, whereas 86% fathers spend the night with children mostly by watching television and playing different games.

5.4 Curiosity and Interest of Children

Parents and other family members told that all the children were very much curious and interested in learning new things. However, when the parents force them to learn, they not always respond that much. But if the parents try to convince them, then they learn things quickly and with interest.

When asked the other members of the family, it came out that, parents of children below the age of 3 become very happy when child shows curiosity in doing or learning new things. The statistics is as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Feels Happy</th>
<th>Encourages</th>
<th>Feels Disturbed</th>
<th>Don’t React at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4: Parents feelings regarding child’s curiosity

Here the major finding is, 76% parents feel happy about children’s curiosity and encourage them to learn new things.

5.5 Physical and Mental Development

Parents, specially the mothers played the most important role in children’s physical and mental development. It was mostly the responsibility of the mothers to feed, dress up, clean and make children sleep. It is found that 90% of the mothers did all these things whereas children learnt to walk and talk with the help of all the members of the family. However, some families also said that they don’t have any idea about how the child actually learnt to walk or talk. It seems like they didn’t give importance to this point of physical development at all.

So, the major finding goes, 90% mothers and 60% fathers and all other members of the family teach their children most activities of physical development. On the other hand, some 10% families are totally unaware of children’s physical development.

Things that measure mental and moral development like manners, respect for others, values, helping others and sharing with others were mostly taught jointly by all the family members. 76% of the respondents said that whenever they had chance, they tried to teach the children all these values and morals. Nevertheless, other 24% said that they thought their children were at that time too young to learn all these things and will learn all these eventually with the passage of time.

It has been found that 42% of the parents teach their children to do their own work and to help others from childhood. They said that it was essential as this practice will make their children responsible family member and citizen in the future. But, it is a matter of sorrow that among
those 42% children, only 14% were boys and all others were girl children.

5.6 Eating, Playing and Others

From the responses of all the family members it has been found that about 68% of the children did not eat properly and among those 44% parents force to feed their children. Almost all the mothers had complaint about their children’s food habit and all of them were very much anxious about the health of their children.

Children below the age of 5 spend most of their time in eating, playing and sleeping. When asked about the playing instruments of the children, various responses have been found. However, most of the girl children’s playing instruments were dolls and household things and all the boys had cars, airplanes and balls as playing instruments. Some families said that they provide blocks and legos to their children so that they can learn through playing. In one response it has been found that the child had a pet rabbit with which she plays most of the time.

All the families said that they encourage their children for extra-curricular activities. Most of the children were engaged in more than one extra-curricular activity. Popular activities for the girls were singing and dancing and for the boys were drawing and reciting poems. The percentage is shown below.

5.7 Role of Other Members

In the responding families, other members included grandparents, siblings, uncle and aunt. Their roles actually differed depending on their age, relationship and profession. Those who were students, didn’t get enough time with the children; thus whenever they got time they usually played or spend leisure time with the children. Sometimes they also tried to teach different things to the children. The grandparents on the other hand, mostly taught manners and values to the children. In families where both the parents work, grandparents feed the children, tell stories to them, take them for a walk and also make them sleep. The members, who had a job, didn’t have enough time with the children. So their role was very minor in children’s development and education.
On the question of parents’ awareness, 82% of the members said that both the parents are well aware of the children’s growth and education. They also added that the children’s development rate was satisfactory and this was just because of the care and love of the family members. Again, on the question of the rate of learning, over 90% of the respondents said that the children were fast learners and could catch up with things very easily.

However, all these other family members agreed that they had a very close emotional attachment with the children and they would always love to be with those children and see them grow up.

5.8 Comparison of Parents Role

Though it is necessary for both the parents to contribute equally to the development and education of the children, it has been found that their roles were not at all equal. In all the families there were some specific roles for the fathers and the mothers. It has been found that fathers mainly spend leisure time with the children and they keep note of what their children need and provide all those things. On the other hand, mothers’ responsibilities were fulfilling children’s everyday necessities. It can be said that, fathers only provided financial support for the children and mothers provided all other supports including physical and mental support. It has been found that in more than 60% families, both the parents had equal share in making important decisions about the children other than the families where all important decisions were taken by the head of the family- the father.

The study also showed that there is a tendency that fathers’ usually care a lot about children’s education, but they do not always try to teach their children themselves. Most of the father thinks that it is the duty of the mother to take care of children’s education and other basic needs. A reason behind this type of thought process might be the patriarchal family system.

However, there were some exceptions where the fathers used to feed, dress up, clean up and lull the children whenever they were home. So, it can be said that mainly the role of parents in children’s early childhood development and education differs because of the different role of male and female in our society, but the trend is now being changed.

6. DISCUSSION

Children are not born with self dependence. At the early stages of life, they need care and protection. With the passage of time, children become independent and self-reliant. Family is the place where the child initially grows up. Family is the centre point of children’s development and learning. Basic needs of the child needed to be provided by the family.

From all the members of the family, mothers are closest to the children. So their role is the most vital one in children’s development and education. The study shows that almost all the mothers have fulfilled their responsibilities with care. However, fathers also need to care for their children equally with the mothers. It has been found that fathers are a bit behind regarding this issue. They should keep this thing in mind and should contribute more to their children’s development.

Children learn the most through playing. So, it is important to choose the perfect playing instrument for children, which will help their development and growth. It is a matter of warning that most of the children today are busy playing inside the house with virtual instruments. But for proper physical and mental development, children must use all their limbs and have as much fresh light and air as possible. For this they need to go out in open air. Parents should keep an eye in this regard also.

If a child gets proper care to nurture his/her physical, mental, moral and intellectual skills at the very early stage of life, then it can be expected that
the child would become an enlightened member of the society. To make the child a perfect citizen of the future society, the role of family is very important. Thus through this study it has been tried to figure out whether the families are actually playing that role or not. If this study can contribute a little to the society, then the effort of the researcher will be successful.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The result of the study asks for some recommendations. Here are some recommendations for the parents and other family members.

1. Children are most of the time attention seeker. So, the parents should give fair share of time and care to their children. The children need both the parents equally. So there should always be a balance between the love and care of both the parents.

2. Scolding or beating a child is never a solution; hence it has an adverse effect. So the parents should be patient and try to convince the child and teach what to do and what not to do.

3. Children at young age should be given nutritious as well as delicious food so that they eat properly without any hassle.

4. Every member of the family should be fully aware of the child’s physical, mental, moral and intellectual growth and everyone should contribute to the development of the child.

8. REFERENCE


