



Developmental Psychology of Learners: Environmental Factors Influencing Child Development

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Abstract

Introduction to The Problem : Child development constitutes a progressive process influenced by both genetic and environmental factors. The environment plays a significant role in shaping the child's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional domains. The family unit, peer groups, educational institutions, and cultural values are highly influential in determining the trajectory and overall quality of developmental outcomes. **Purpose :** This research aims to analyze the impact of environmental factors—specifically social elements, parenting styles, education, nutrition, and culture—on child development. This investigation is crucial for providing a comprehensive understanding, which will serve as the foundation for reinforcing effective educational and child-rearing strategies. **Design/methods/approach:** This study utilized a literature review method, involving the rigorous examination of current scientific literature, academic journals, and relevant educational psychology textbooks. The data were acquired through document analysis focusing on the impact of the environment on child development. **Findings :** Research indicates that a warm and responsive family environment promotes the child's sense of security and self-confidence. Interactions with peers cultivate essential social skills and the development of self-identity. Quality education stimulates cognitive and social capacities, whereas adequate nutrition underpins physical growth and neurological development. Cultural values further shape the child's character and behavioral patterns. Conversely, an adverse environment may impede the achievement of optimal development in the child. **Research implications/limitations:** This study is qualitative, thereby restricting its generalizability; nevertheless, it offers profound insight into the interaction of various environmental factors. Furthermore, the variation in cultural context constitutes an additional limitation regarding the universal applicability of the findings. **Originality/value :** This article presents an integrated analysis concerning the influence of the environment on child development and highlights the importance of collaboration among parents, educators, and the community in fostering a conducive environment. Further research is recommended for the development of culturally and socially based intervention models.

Keywords: Social environment; Parenting styles; Child education; Child nutrition; Cultural values; Child development

Introduction

Child development is a multidimensional process encompassing physical, cognitive, social, and emotional aspects. Although genetic factors play a significant role, an increasing body of research affirms that the surrounding environment critically determines the trajectory and quality of child development. The environment in this context includes the family, peers, school, community, and cultural values that shape the child's daily experiences and patterns of interaction. A profound understanding of these environmental factors is crucial, as it provides a foundation for parents, educators, and policymakers to create effective strategies for supporting the child's optimal growth and development.

This topic has become highly relevant amidst rapid social and cultural shifts, which potentially pose new challenges in child rearing and education. Various studies indicate that warm and responsive parental practices can enhance a child's sense of security and self-confidence, thereby supporting their social and emotional development. Quality education is also proven to stimulate a child's cognitive abilities and social skills, while balanced nutritional intake serves as an essential foundation for brain development and physical growth. Furthermore, the socio-cultural environment in which the child grows plays a significant role in the shaping of character, values, and habits that will be carried forward into adulthood.

However, there are differences in perspective and even controversy regarding which factor is most dominant in influencing child development. Some experts emphasize the crucial role of family and school, while others highlight the increasing influence of peers and the community as the child matures. Additionally, debate exists regarding the extent to which environmental interventions can overcome limitations caused by genetic factors. This controversy affirms the necessity of a comprehensive and integrative study to understand the dynamics of environmental influence on child development.

Literature Review

Child development stems from a complex interaction between genetic and environmental factors. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of development asserts that the child's environment comprises various interconnected systems, ranging from the micro-system (family, peers, school) to the macro-system (culture, society).

The family environment serves as the primary foundation in shaping a child's character, moral values, and personality from an early age. Warm and responsive parental parenting practices can enhance the child's sense of security, self-confidence, as well as their social and emotional skills.

In addition to the family, peers also play a crucial role in a child's social development. Through peer interaction, children learn to communicate, cooperate, adhere to rules, and resolve conflicts. Peers contribute to the formation of identity, self-concept, and self-esteem. However, the influence of peers is not uniformly positive; a detrimental peer environment may encourage negative behaviors such as aggression or bullying.

School, as a secondary environment, is also highly instrumental in a child's cognitive and character development. Within the school setting, children acquire new experiences, learn moral values, and develop talents and social skills through interactions with teachers and peers. The community environment further shapes a child's norms, values, and behaviors through broader social experiences, either positively or negatively, depending on the specific characteristics of that community.

Parental parenting style is recognized as one of the most influential environmental aspects. Hurlock (1990) categorized parenting styles into three types: authoritarian, permissive, and democratic. Each style yields different impacts on a child's behavioral and intellectual development. Democratic parenting, for example, tends to foster independent and responsible children, whereas authoritarian parenting may result in children who are obedient but lack self-confidence.

Several studies have highlighted the influence of environmental factors on child development. Anindita & Suryani found that positive parental parenting styles significantly enhance the social development of early childhood children in Bandung City. Zakiyyatul demonstrated that parenting styles and a conducive environment play a crucial role in character formation during early childhood. The research by Wicaksono & Laeli further asserts that the family environment is highly determinative of a child's social-emotional development.

Overall, the existing literature and prior research indicate that a positive and supportive environment—encompassing the family, school, and community is essential for promoting optimal child development. Nevertheless, scholarly debate persists regarding which factor is the most dominant, and how the interaction between these factors holistically shapes child development.

Methods

This article utilizes a qualitative approach, with the literature review method serving as its primary research design. The literature review was selected to examine and analyze various theories and prior research findings relevant to the theme of environmental factors influencing child development. The population of this study encompasses all relevant literature, including books,

scientific journals, and articles discussing child development and environmental influence, with the sample comprising the most pertinent sources.

Data collection techniques were executed via document and literature scrutiny, specifically by identifying, collecting, and critically reviewing the bibliographic sources pertaining to the research topic. The research instrument consisted of a literature review protocol containing source selection criteria, such as relevance, year of publication, and author credibility. The data obtained were subsequently subjected to a descriptive-qualitative analysis, specifically by classifying the principal findings based on established environmental factor categories (family, peers, school, community, and culture), and by comparing and synthesizing various perspectives and research outcomes to achieve a comprehensive understanding.

In this research, the author actively served as the primary instrument responsible for data selection, interpretation, and analysis. The research subjects are defined as the reviewed literature, while the informants comprise the authors and researchers whose works served as references. The literature search was executed both online and offline (utilizing the campus library and digital resources), with the research location being geographically unrestricted and spanning a period of approximately one month. To ensure the validity of the analysis results, source triangulation was employed by comparing various bodies of literature and critically citing from disparate sources.

Result

Social Factors in Child Development

Individual development, particularly that of children, is significantly influenced by environmental factors, especially social factors. As humans cannot live without interaction with others, social factors are highly likely to impact individual development. The social environment encompasses an individual's interactions with family, peers, school, and the broader community. The following outlines key social factors that influence individual development:

1. The Role of the Family

The family environment is paramount in influencing individual development from an early age. The family plays a critical role in shaping the individual's character, encompassing both moral values and ethics. The family's role in establishing an individual's attitudinal patterns determines the educational processes they acquire. An individual's behavior in social settings is largely influenced by the family environment, which teaches social skills from infancy.

Parenting style and communication within the family are crucial determinants of a child's personality and social skills. An unhealthy family environment can trigger stress and negatively affect the child's social competence. This is often precipitated by parents with mental disorders,

low job skills, or the presence of domestic violence. Conversely, a healthy family environment can guide the child toward sound social skills and even enhance mental functions, such as intellectual capacity.

2. The Role of Peers

Peers possess a highly significant role in the social development of an individual. Through interaction with peers, individuals acquire essential social skills such as communication, cooperation, sharing, adherence to rules, and conflict resolution. These experiences contribute to the shaping of their self-concept, self-esteem, and social identity.

Peers are instrumental in the formation of a child's identity. Through peer groups, children discover their personal interests, values, and preferences. They also learn to become independent, make their own decisions, and expand their social circle beyond the family. Children develop empathy, tolerance, and responsibility through relationships with their peers.

Social interaction with peers encourages children to be more open, self-confident, and capable of adapting to new environments, such as school or the neighborhood. Peers also serve as a source of emotional support, which can bolster a child's confidence and self-esteem. Children who actively socialize with peers tend to adapt more easily and possess better social skills later in adulthood.

The influence of peers is not always positive. Children within detrimental peer environments may mimic negative behaviors, such as anti-social conduct, aggression, or even involvement in bullying incidents. Children who lack adequate supervision from parents or teachers are more susceptible to the negative norms or behaviors of their peers. To ensure that peer influence remains positive, the involvement of parents and teachers is essential. They need to monitor and guide children's social interactions, model positive behaviors, and encourage healthy friendships.

3. The Role of the School

The school is a crucial secondary environment for child development, following the family. At school, children gain new academic and non-academic experiences that are unavailable at home. The school environment helps children practice socialization skills, explore their potential, and develop their inherent talents.

Schools are vital not only for cognitive aspects but also for the formation of a child's character. Through interaction with peers, teachers, and the entire school community, children internalize values such as tolerance, cooperation, responsibility, and discipline. In this context, teachers serve as role models whose attitudes and behaviors are readily imitated by students. Through school, children learn to interact with various individuals from diverse backgrounds, fostering an appreciation for differences, building friendships, and broadening their social perspective.

Schools instill moral values through the curriculum and established regulations. Clear rules and consequences teach children the importance of discipline, fairness, and accountability essential foundations for community life. The school's role in child development is optimized when supported by collaboration with parents. Communication between teachers and parents is critical to ensure that character formation and child development progress cohesively, both at home and at school.

4. The Role of the Community Environment

The community environment plays a pivotal role in shaping a child's social, emotional, and character development. Children learn not only from family and school but also from interactions and experiences acquired in their residential community. The community provides a broader social context where children learn prevailing social norms, values, and rules. By interacting with various community members, children observe and imitate existing behaviors, thereby shaping their personality and attitudes.

In the community, children learn to adapt to various social situations, recognize different social roles, and develop more complex social competencies. The community environment also offers experiences such as learning to value diversity, cooperating in groups, and understanding social responsibilities. A conducive and positive community environment supports the development of responsible, disciplined, and ethical character traits in children. Conversely, if the community environment contains negative influences—such as criminal behavior, violence, or deviant norms—children may experience confusion and face the risk of mimicking these behaviors, especially without adequate supervision and guidance from family and school.

The community environment works synergistically with family and school. Harmonious families and supportive schools strengthen the positive influence of the community on child development. Conversely, incongruence in values among the family, school, and community can lead to conflict and confusion for the child.

Overall, the community environment functions as a broad and dynamic social arena where children learn to interact, form character, and internalize social values and norms. Its influence is highly determinant in shaping a child's personality and behavior, necessitating the active role of family, school, and community to create an environment that supports optimal child development.

Parenting Style Factors in Child Development

The family constitutes the primary social environment for children and, consequently, exerts the most significant impact on their development. The family lays the foundation for a child's personality, values, morality, and education. The quality of family interaction shapes a child's attitudes and behaviors toward others in society. For instance, a child's emotional intelligence can

be influenced by high emotional intensity within the family environment, making sound nurturing and education from the family crucial for personality formation. While every parent adopts a unique approach to raising their children, including their parenting style, some parents may be unaware of the specific style they employ. Parental parenting style is, in fact, the most critical aspect in shaping a child's behavior and intelligence. The manner in which parents treat their children profoundly affects their social, emotional, and intellectual development.

A parenting style represents the interaction patterns between parents and children, encompassing parental attitudes and behaviors during interaction. This includes the implementation of rules, the teaching of values and norms, the provision of attention and affection, and the demonstration of positive attitudes and behaviors to serve as a role model for the child. The main objectives of parental parenting styles are to sustain the child's physical life and promote health, facilitate the development of the child's abilities in alignment with developmental stages, and encourage the child to adopt behaviors consistent with religious and cultural values. A parenting style related to child growth and development can help the child achieve and navigate normal growth and appropriate development.

Hurlock (1990) categorized parenting styles into three types: the authoritarian style, the permissive style, and the authoritative style (often termed 'democratic' in the Indonesian context).

1. Authoritative Parenting (Pola Asuh Demokratis): In this style, children are given freedom to be creative and explore various activities. This approach demonstrates the parents' maturity in guiding and raising the child according to the child's abilities without excessive demands. While it maintains clear rules about what the child can and cannot do, parents enforce these rules firmly to keep the child on a correct and beneficial path.
2. Authoritarian Parenting (Pola Asuh Otoriter): This style grants no room for discussion with the child. Rules are established primarily to control the child, and parents maintain strong control over the child's behavior. If the child disobeys or violates rules, parents impose punishment, sometimes even physical punishment. The negative effects of physical punishment include inducing aggressive behavior, lack of self-confidence, and shyness in the child.
3. Permissive Parenting (Pola Asuh Permisif): This style grants children the freedom to express their urges or desires and does not impose clear boundaries. Parents typically acquiesce to all of the child's wishes, leading the child to be generally unregulated and unable to self-regulate. Parents usually exert poorly controlled demands on the child's behavior and rarely punish them when mistakes are made.

Educational Factors in Child Development

Education plays a crucial role in the psychological development of individuals, particularly during childhood. Through education, children not only acquire academic knowledge but also undergo development in social, emotional, and cognitive aspects. A more detailed explanation follows:

1. Cognitive Development (Intelligence)

According to Lathifah (2017), cognitive development relates to an individual's intellectual potential, encompassing the ability to think and solve problems. Cognitive development focuses on rational thinking abilities such as learning, remembering, and problem-solving. It is also tied to the brain activity of students and constitutes a part of cerebral operations. The cognitive domain emphasizes intellectual aspects, categorized into: Lower Order Thinking Skills (LOTS), which include remembering, understanding, and applying; and Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS), which involve the capacity to analyze, evaluate, and create.

Education not only directly enhances cognitive ability but also provides a strong foundation for the development of higher cognitive skills, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity.

A study on the relationship between Preschool Education and the cognitive development of first-grade students at SD N Pasir Angin 01, involving 54 respondents, indicated that the students' cognitive development was categorized as moderate. This suggests that the cognitive development of students was strong, irrespective of whether they attended preschool. The study results showed a correlation of 5.6% between preschool education and cognitive development. This finding highlights that education, particularly preschool education, is important for enhancing children's cognitive abilities.

2. Psychomotor Development

Development is defined as the increase in an individual's systems, functions, and skills, which become increasingly complex or progressive, involving continuous change from birth until death. Development can be interpreted as an active, gradual mental transformation over a certain period, progressing from rudimentary skills to more challenging capacities, such as intelligence, behavior, attitude, and so forth.

Development can be described as a series of orderly changes that are mutually dependent and influential, where physical and psychological factors form a cohesive unit. Physical growth in children accelerates significantly during early childhood.

Between the ages of 4 and 6, students experience significant motor development and growth due to bodily changes. Children grow taller, and their body size increases. Their head size becomes

more proportionate to their body size. The maturation of nerves occurs in the brain and spinal cord. This combination influences bodily changes, making students more agile. Their proportionate and energetic bodies allow children to perform vigorous physical activities for prolonged periods without quickly feeling fatigued. Therefore, education plays a vital role in developing children's psychomotor skills. Educators must actively seek methods and create programs to develop and train children's psychomotor skills, such as maximizing physical education classes, incorporating physical games into learning, and implementing practical activities like stringing beads (meronce), folding clothes, painting, and other small classroom activities.

3. Social-Emotional Development

To cultivate social-emotional development, consistent practice and early education are necessary, such as within Early Childhood Education (ECE). In ECE, educators facilitate the general growth and development of children based on their age, covering aspects such as religious and motor skills, cognitive development, and moral development (e.g., in Islam, understanding and practicing wudu [ablution], learning how to make friends and maintain positive relationships, and respecting teachers). ECE is a training program for children from birth up to six years old, implemented by providing educational stimuli for physical and spiritual growth and development, preparing the child for further learning. ECE positively impacts children's social and emotional development by providing age-appropriate activities, such as games, puzzles, crafting, drawing, and other minor skill-building activities, thereby encouraging social interaction, cognitive growth, and creativity, which enhances children's social maturity and improves social adjustment. This principle applies similarly to higher educational levels, including primary, secondary, and even tertiary education. Education aims to hone an individual's social-emotional competence so they can successfully lead community and family life and contribute positively to their environment. However, the programs, lessons, and activities must be adjusted to suit the age, capacity, and needs of each respective level.

Nutritional Factors in Child Development

Nutrition is a fundamental environmental factor profoundly influencing a child's growth and development. During the early stages of life, especially in early childhood, adequate and balanced nutritional intake critically determines the quality of a child's physical, cognitive, and psychosocial development. Nutrition supplies macronutrients such as carbohydrates, proteins, and fats, which serve as sources of energy and building blocks for the body, as well as micronutrients such as vitamins and minerals, which are essential for various biological functions and brain development.

The golden period of child growth (0-5 years) is a critical time when nutrient intake highly determines the brain's ability to develop optimally. Nutritional deficiency during this period can

lead to impaired brain development, motor skill delays, and reduced cognitive abilities, resulting in long-term consequences for future human resource quality. For example, the deficiency of iron, iodine, and Vitamin A has been proven to inhibit the development of nerve function and children's learning capacity.

Protein is an essential nutrient that functions to build and repair body tissues and supports the production of enzymes and hormones vital for growth. Carbohydrates provide the energy required for physical activity and metabolic processes, while fats, especially omega-3 fatty acids, play a critical role in the development of the brain and central nervous system. Vitamins and minerals such as Vitamin D, calcium, magnesium, zinc, and folate are also crucial for bone formation, muscle function, and the production of red blood cells, which support the child's overall health and development.

Beyond physical aspects, nutrition also affects children's cognitive and psychosocial development. Children with good nutritional status tend to have better language ability, creativity, and social interaction skills compared to children experiencing malnutrition. Adequate nutrition supports optimal brain function, allowing children to learn and adapt to their social environment effectively.

The quality of nutrition received by a child is also influenced by the family and social environment. Parental education and knowledge regarding the importance of a balanced diet highly determine the child's eating patterns. Furthermore, the availability of nutritious food in the surrounding environment and eating habits are equally important supporting factors.

Key Nutritional Factors in Development:

1. Balanced nutrition provides the essential energy and building substances for physical growth and brain development.
2. The 0-5 year period is a critical phase for brain growth, which is highly sensitive to nutrient intake.
3. Protein helps build and repair body tissues and supports the production of hormones and enzymes.
4. Carbohydrates serve as the main energy source supporting children's physical activity and metabolism.
5. Omega-3 fatty acids and Vitamin D play essential roles in the development of brain function and the nervous system.
6. Deficiencies in iron, iodine, and Vitamin A can lead to cognitive and motor developmental disorders.

7. Vitamins and minerals such as calcium, magnesium, zinc, and folate support bone growth, muscle function, and red blood cell formation.
8. Good nutrition supports the development of children's language, creativity, and social skills; conversely, malnutrition can cause delays in motor and cognitive development and behavioral disorders.

Thus, nutrition is a crucial environmental factor determining the quality of a child's growth and development. Efforts to enhance family and community understanding of the importance of balanced nutrition, alongside the provision of access to nutritious food, must be prioritized in sustainable human resource development programs.

Cultural Factors in Child Development

Culture is a fundamental aspect of human life that profoundly influences the developmental process of individuals, especially during childhood. Culture encompasses a system of values, norms, customs, language, beliefs, and behavioral patterns transmitted intergenerationally, serving as guidelines for daily life. In the context of child development, culture acts as a frame of reference that shapes the child's personality, attitudes, behavior, and social skills from an early age. Children learn to understand the world through interaction with their cultural environment, making culture the primary medium for identity and character formation.

Research across various regions of Indonesia indicates that local traditions and customs significantly influence children's social and emotional development. For instance, in Maumere, the traditional Bebing dance not only serves as a means of artistic expression but also teaches social values such as togetherness, respect, and cooperation, which are essential for character formation. Furthermore, culture acts as a means of strengthening nationalism from an early age through the introduction of national values embedded in customary ceremonies, traditional arts, and religious rituals involving children.

Culture is also influential in educational processes, both formal and non-formal. The family environment, as the first social unit to introduce culture to the child, determines how the child learns to socialize and internalize prevailing social norms. School education is also influenced by local and national culture, shaping children's mindset and character. For example, the teaching of values such as gotong royong (mutual cooperation), tolerance, and discipline, which are integral to Indonesian culture, significantly contributes to the formation of positive social attitudes in children.

Beyond social and moral aspects, culture also affects children's language development and communication skills. Studies on children from various ethnic groups such as Madura, Batak, and Java reveal that a rich and diverse cultural environment provides varied linguistic stimulation,

thereby enriching children's language and communication abilities. Language, as an integral part of culture, is the primary means by which children interact and comprehend their environment, which in turn affects their cognitive and social development.

Culture also determines parenting styles and practices. The cultural variations in Indonesia influence how parents, especially mothers, nurture and feed their children. For example, the collective culture often found in Asia emphasizes obedience, respect, and social dependency, contrasting with the individualistic cultures in the West, which focus more on independence and self-expression. Cultural norms dictate the types of food considered beneficial or detrimental for children, feeding patterns, and parental attitudes towards child health and growth. The habit of providing supplementary foods that are inappropriate for the child's age, such as giving lotek (a type of Indonesian salad) to infants under 6 months, can adversely affect the child's health and lead to nutritional deficiencies.

Moreover, culture influences children's behavioral patterns and psychological development. Cultural values instilled through folklore, traditional songs, and customary rituals help children understand moral concepts, ethics, and prevailing social norms within their community. Children who grow up in a strong cultural environment tend to possess a higher sense of self-identity, good self-esteem, and more effective abilities to manage emotions and engage in social interaction. Conversely, children who are less exposed to cultural values may experience difficulty in social adjustment and emotional development.

In addition, culture influences attitudes towards education and health. Some cultures have strong traditions supporting children's education as a future investment, while others might prioritize the child's role in supporting the family economically. Cultural attitudes towards health also affect parenting behaviors, such as the use of traditional medicine, dietary patterns, and healthy lifestyle habits inherited within the family.

Overall, culture is a complex environmental factor with a broad influence on child development. By understanding cultural influence, educators, parents, and policymakers can design more effective and contextual child development programs that honor local wisdom while preparing children to face global challenges.

Conclusion

Environmental factors exert a substantial influence on the process of child growth and development. Factors such as parental rearing practices (parenting styles), the presence and quality of peers, the educational system, nutritional adequacy, and prevailing cultural values within the surrounding environment, all play a crucial role in shaping the child's cognitive, social, emotional,

and physical dimensions. An environment that provides positive support will aid the child in developing greater self-confidence, autonomy, and robust adaptive capabilities. Conversely, an insufficiently supportive environment can impede development and generate various difficulties in the child's learning and socialization processes.

Consequently, serious attention and concerted involvement are required from various stakeholders namely the family unit, the school institution, and the wider community—to establish an environment that is both healthy and conducive to optimal child development. Parents are expected to implement nurturing parenting styles; schools must provide child-friendly learning environments; and the community needs to uphold constructive social and cultural values. Should all these factors operate harmoniously and synergistically, the child will have a significant opportunity to develop into an individual who is not only intelligent and skilled, but also possesses strong character, exhibits empathy, and is prepared to navigate the challenges of future life.

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