



THE SPECIFIC CHARACTERISTICS OF EDUCATING PRESCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

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Abstract

Preschool education plays a crucial role in shaping a child's cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development. Unlike formal schooling, education at the preschool level is characterized by play-based learning, individual-centered approaches, and the integration of care and education. This article explores the distinctive features of educating preschool-aged children, highlighting developmental appropriateness, the role of play, the importance of the learning environment, and the educator's role in fostering holistic development.

Keywords: preschool education, early childhood development, play-based learning, holistic development, child-centered education

Introduction

Early childhood is a critical period in human development, during which foundational skills, attitudes, and behaviors are formed. Preschool education, typically designed for children aged three to six, differs significantly from primary and secondary education in both goals and methods. The primary objective is not the transmission of academic knowledge, but the comprehensive development of the child. Understanding the specific characteristics of preschool education is essential for educators, policymakers, and researchers aiming to improve educational quality at this level

Developmental Characteristics of Preschool-Aged Children



Preschool-aged children are in a stage of rapid physical, cognitive, and emotional growth. Their thinking is largely concrete rather than abstract, and they learn best through direct experiences. Attention spans are relatively short, and motivation is strongly influenced by interest and emotional engagement. Therefore, educational activities must align with children's developmental needs and capabilities. Instruction that ignores these characteristics may hinder learning and negatively affect a child's attitude toward education

Play as a Core Educational Method

One of the most distinctive features of preschool education is the central role of play. Play is not merely a recreational activity; it is a fundamental learning mechanism through which children explore the world, develop language, practice social roles, and enhance problem-solving skills. Through structured and unstructured play, children acquire essential competencies such as cooperation, self-regulation, creativity, and decision-making. As a result, effective preschool education integrates educational goals seamlessly into play-based activities.

Child-Centered and Individualized Approach

Preschool education emphasizes a child-centered approach that respects individual differences in development, interests, and learning pace. Each child enters the educational setting with unique experiences and abilities. Educators are expected to observe children carefully and adapt activities accordingly. This individualized approach fosters self-confidence, autonomy, and intrinsic motivation, which are critical for lifelong learning.

The Learning Environment

The preschool learning environment is another key characteristic that distinguishes early childhood education. Classrooms are typically organized into



activity centers that encourage exploration, interaction, and hands-on learning. Materials are visually appealing, safe, and accessible, allowing children to make independent choices. A supportive and emotionally secure environment helps children feel valued and confident, which positively influences their learning outcomes.

The Role of the Educator

In preschool education, the teacher's role extends beyond instruction to include guidance, observation, and emotional support. Educators act as facilitators who create meaningful learning experiences rather than delivering formal lessons. They model positive behavior, support social interactions, and encourage curiosity. Professional competence in early childhood pedagogy is essential, as educators must balance educational objectives with children's developmental needs.

Integration of Care and Education

Another unique aspect of preschool education is the close integration of care and learning. Daily routines such as meals, rest, and hygiene are viewed as educational opportunities that promote independence, responsibility, and social skills. This holistic approach recognizes that learning occurs throughout the day and is deeply connected to children's well-being.

Conclusion

Educating preschool-aged children requires approaches that differ fundamentally from traditional schooling. The specific characteristics of preschool education—developmental appropriateness, play-based learning, child-centered methods, supportive environments, and the integrated role of care—collectively contribute to holistic child development. Recognizing and applying these principles



is essential for ensuring high-quality early childhood education and for laying a strong foundation for future learning.

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