

Emergent Literacy in Early Years of Education

Dr. Indu Bala¹, Dr. Anju Bala^{2*}, Dr. Amit Singh³

ABSTRACT

The language learning is very important step towards the harmonious development for every child. Proper command over the language can lead him to greater success in personal life and help him to develop socially also. The children who fail to learn language at their early stage face many difficulties in learning other subjects also. Thus, it is very important to introduce a language in such a way that children could get attracted and curious about learning language. In other terms, emergent literacy can play a crucial role to make the children aware about the language and its beauty. For the beginners, any language should be presented in its natural settings or as they learn their mother tongue. Step by step introduction of any language can stimulate the children to get interest in learning that language. The following paper describes the possible ways of introducing the language as emergent literacy at early level of the education.

Keywords: *Emergent Literacy, Language Learning, Early Years of Education*

Language is the finest asset for human being that enables him to interact with other people. It is a primary vehicle of communication that is required for every human being to make it easy to not only understand others 'thoughts, feelings, and ideas but also to explore the beautiful world around him. Considering utterance of child's first meaningful sound 'Ma' or 'Da' as one of the important and happy things that happened to a child itself indicates the importance of language in one's life. Every person uses the language for its communication purpose but when we talk about formal language learning we mean to say command over the four skills of a language i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing.

A person who can read and write a language can be termed as literate. It means to be literate; a person should have knowledge of reading and writing. Reading and writing skills hold the position of 3rd and 4th in the hierarchy of language skills to master that specific language. Moreover, when a child starts formal schooling and enters in the process of being literate, he/she is encountered with reading and writing skill especially during learning of second or third language.

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Teacher Education, Central University of Haryana, Mahendergarh

²Assistant Professor, Department of Education, BPSMV, Khanpur Kalan

³Assistant Professor, Department of Teacher Education, Central University of Haryana, Mahendergarh

*Corresponding Author

Received: July 27, 2024; Revision Received: September 01, 2024; Accepted: September 05, 2024

Emergent Literacy in Early Years of Education

Emergent literacy

Usually, it is believed that a child starts learning a language in schools, but if it is true then how a child understands the instructions given by the teacher and others in the school as well as in the home? This question clearly indicates that learning a language starts at very early age of a child. The child starts learning language or being literate by listening first, when a mother speaks to him, his/her father and other family members. After listening language, he starts to understand it and then imitating it, thus make use of second skill of language i.e. speaking. In the same way learning the second language also follows the same pattern, in spite of the fact that child gets less chance of listening and speaking second language he at least come across the process through which he/she can learn a language. So before going to school every child has already learned the ample use of first two skills of language. This **knowledge of child about language before learning the use of language formally is called Emergent Literacy**.

With the introduction of concept of ECCE, now it is recommended that before going to formal schools a child should have sufficient knowledge of a language so that he/she can easily understand the instructions given in the schools which make it easy to adjust him with the scholastic and co scholastic activities being performed in the schools.

Any language should be learned in its natural manner that before speaking one should have mastery over listening, before reading one should have done with listening and speaking that language and only after mastering all the three LSR skills, writing should be introduced. But ironically when formal language is taught to the children the focus of the language learning is laid only on last two skills, reading and writing. All the education system promotes these skills and examination system that tends to check the proficiency of a child on the basis of only these two skills. This is the basic reason that creates the children who 'know about the language but do not know the language'.

As a result, we commonly found the news like, in Delhi schools, 74 per cent students could not even read a paragraph from their own Hindi textbook (ASER). The data of the survey in Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2014, clearly indicated that basic reading levels remain "disheartening" in Indian schools, as only a one fourth of total students of class III children are able to read Class II text fluently. Further, half of the students of class Vth are able to do so. Moreover about 25 per cent of Class VIII children could not read Class II level text. In 2016 also ASER pointed out that, the proportion of all Indian children in Class V who can read a Class II level text book is declined in two years from 48.1% in 2014 to 47.8% in 2016.

It clearly indicates that, the language learning ability of students is decreasing day by day. So, there is an emergent need of introducing the language in that way which can attract the attention of its learners and motivate them to learn better language in a easy manner. The inculcation of emergent language at early years of the child can work as one of the important ways to teach language interestingly to the students at very early stage without the burden of text book and even the rules and regulation of the grammar. For this we have to work upon the introduction of emergent literacy at early childhood care centers as well as in our homes also.

Emergent Literacy in Early Years of Education

Emergent Literacy at Initial Level

At initial level emergent literacy can be seen in the following action of the child,

- Child's first behaviour as reader can be understood as he/she plays with the book or hold the book.
- Parent's talk about various books can be a powerful literacy event for the child.
- Watching the pictures from book and try to read the pictures to make a story or explanation of the scene leads the child towards read before the actual reading.

Emergent literacy at ECCE level

Emergent literacy recognises the importance of language experiences in supporting literacy development among children during talk, reading stories and even during play. In ECCE centres care should be done in developing emergent literacy at following levels:

- **Visual Thinking**

Visual thinking refers to making pictures in mind of what one listens or read. As while the word 'forest' creates a picture in the mind, of a land area covered with trees and bushes as well as have many animals. Thus, during telling a story many pictures are visualised by the pupils about different scenes, people, things etc. So, through visual thinking one should try to associate the words, alphabets with the pictures these refer to. When the students will learn to visualize the letters with their corresponding words and pictures at early stage it becomes very easy to teach them language at later stage. Thus, methods like story telling with full expression using skill of stimulus variation can help a lot in the development of visual thinking among children while introducing the language.

- **Phonological Awareness**

Phonological awareness refers to the ability to focus on sounds of speech as distinct from meaning on its rhythm, pattern of intonation and the most important on the individual sounds like: sound of 'a' in cat, bat, rat, fat, mat etc. To provide phonological awareness among children at early childhood stage i.e. 3 to 6 years, they should be trained for it through various activities at child care centres.

Activities for Developing Phonological Awareness:

Rhymes: to understand spoken words of a language rhymes can be used beautifully. These are the best way to enjoy the beauty of any language in a rhythmic form. The children focus on the music of the rhyme but also go through certain phonological sounds i.e. letters and words of that language. For example, rhyme:

Ba Ba Black sheep, have you any wool?
Yes sir, yes sir three bags full.
One for my master, one for my dame,
And one for the little boy who lives down the lane.

While enjoying the music of the rhyme the child tries to imitate it and come across the various phonological sounds like /b/, /a/, /s/, etc.

Picture related to a specific sound: to provide much listening of a sound it can be made related to a picture. The children understand much in concrete form so picture helps in fixing the sound in the minds of the children at this early age.

Emergent Literacy in Early Years of Education

For Sound of D, it can be provided while showing picture like:



Likewise pronouncing the specific sound while showing pictures related to that sound provides a lot of practice of phonological sounds among children.

Matching Sound with the Picture

To fix the phonological sound, such worksheets can be given in which the children may be asked to match the sound with the picture it relates.

- **Alphabetic Awareness**

Alphabetic awareness refers to knowledge of alphabets. After having knowledge of sound certain knowledge of alphabets should be introduced in such a manner that can attract their attention in a playful manner.

Activities For Alphabetic Awareness

ABC books: to give alphabetic knowledge books having written alphabets with lots of pictures related to that particular alphabet should be selected. The children get attracted towards the colourful pictures in the book and try to watch it more and more, for attention is given to the alphabets also. Here the idea is to introduce the letters or alphabets with the help of association of letters with some known things which are found near to child. So, pictures are more important here rather than the words, spellings or names of those things.



Magnetic L-letters: to introduce the shape of alphabets magnetic letters can also be used. Magnetic letters are the letters made of plastic or wood having magnet under it. Children can have fun by throwing or applying it in some iron surface or slate. As these are handy, so children can touch and feel the curves and loops in each and every letter while playing with these.

Blocks and Puzzles: blocks and alphabets are good educational games for introducing alphabets to the young learners especially at early childhood stage of letters.

Emergent Literacy in Early Years of Education

Blocks:

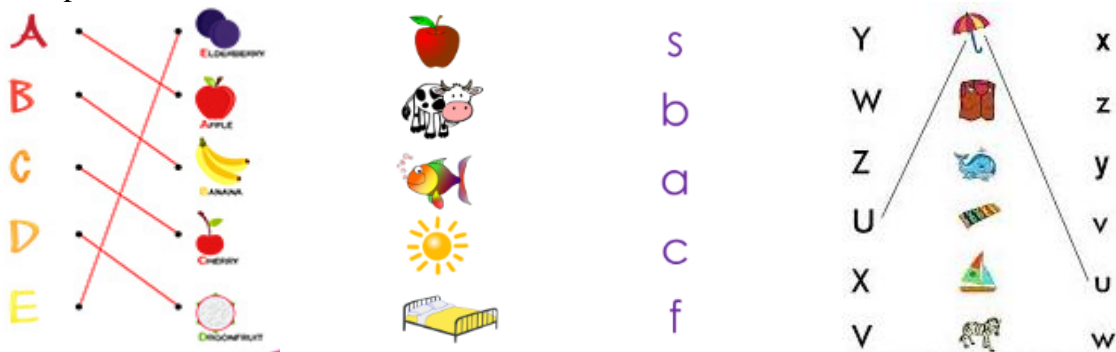


Puzzles:



Charts: Charts can also be used to show the various alphabets to the children. Beautiful charts with colourful pictures on the walls of the room attract children's attention towards them. They will look again and again to the charts and hence towards the letters also.

Matching letters with pictures: To facilitate more reading and enhancing the knowledge of alphabets, we can make use of many tricks like matching the letter with the pictures that start from that letter. By doing this the children learn to differentiate the letters as well as fix the shape as well as sound of different letters.



- **Print Awareness**

As the child has to read the print material in the forms of books and others at later stages of his study so during emergent literacy it is very necessary to introduce print material also. Although during phonetic and alphabetic awareness children will come across to the written material yet at this stage focus will not be given only to letters but also to the words and spellings. For this ECCE centre should provide that environment where children can get more and more exposure to the print material.

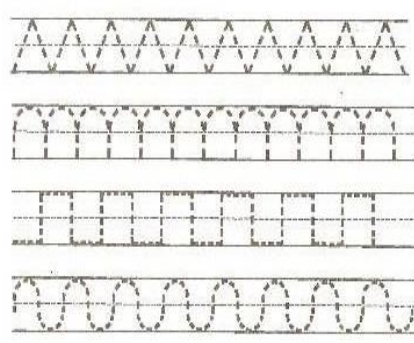
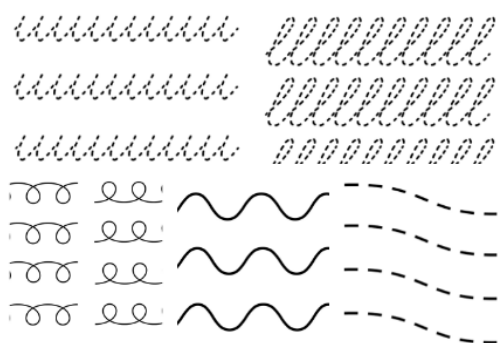
Activities to Provide Print Awareness

1. **Label Play Area:** Children spend much time in the play areas so to give maximum exposure to the print material the walls of the play area should be well labelled describing area to play different games, names of different play items like balls, bats, puzzles, blocks, books, clay etc. This way we can initiate to develop the active vocabulary of the child. As many words they will go through daily these will add to the active vocabulary of the child.
2. **Write Text Besides Work of Photos of Activities:** Children love to see photographs of their activities. So, record of photographs can be kept in such a manner that text can be written beside the activity explaining objective of the event. Pictures can also be labelled with the name of activity along with the name of the children performing activity if possible.
3. **Book Label Area:** in the room there can be an area where books of stories, pictures and rhymes are kept for the children. That area should be labelled properly.
4. **Labelling of child's area:** in the room there should be specific area belonging to specific childlike: child's table, child's chair, child's locker to keep books and other play material etc. All these should be labelled properly with the name of the child which will symbolise the belongingness of child with different things at inculcate possessiveness among the children.
5. **Draw the Daily Routine:** routine of activities can be drawn in pictorial form so that association between written form and pictorial form of activity can be made and the child learn to read the activity firstly in the form of pictures or drawings and then gradually the text written for it.

• **Writing Awareness**

Next step to the print awareness is to be aware about the writing or start writing. At the early childhood stage, the child should learn to use his fine motors, for this grip over the pencil should be taught. To train the child for this, step by step written practice should be there. It can be done through various activities:

1. **Free hand Drawing:** Just to introduce pencil and writing to the child firstly it should be given freedom to draw anything freely. By drawing freely, he/she will learn to hold the pencil and movement of pencil on paper also.
2. **Draw circles:** child's natural tendency is to draw in circular wherever and whenever he/she finds time. They should be encouraged to draw circle as it gives him free writing exercise which leads to the proper shape of letters.
3. **Draw straight and slant line:** after circles child should encouraged drawing straight and then slanting lines, these will help to write the other letters. Most of the letters are written by using circles, straight and slant lines.



Emergent Literacy in Early Years of Education

1. **Matching letter:** child can be given to match the alphabets and letters with the pictures of the objects they relate to, with the pictures of objects that start with the first letter etc.
2. **Puzzles:** puzzles can be given in which child can arrange different parts of a letter to make a letter and even different words can be made by using puzzles.

Books that Promote Emergent Literacy

Good books that promote emergent literacy should be kept nearby the child so that he can use books easily and stimulate him to learn more and more while playing. The books should have the following qualities can encourage emergent literacy:

- High level of support between pictures and text.
- Clear printing.
- Suitable sentence structure according to the level of child in which change of only one or two words on each page.
- Not much lengthy.
- A balance between oral language and story language.

CONCLUSION

It is clear from above discussion that language learning is a fundamental process that begins early in a child's life before formal education commences. The concept of emergent literacy underscores the importance of nurturing language skills from a young age. By Fostering listening, speaking, visual thinking, Phonological awareness, alphabetic knowledge and writing skills in a child, a strong foundation can be laid for lifelong learning and literacy. The current educational practices prioritize reading and writing at the expense of the other linguistics skills. These practices have led to significant gap in students' language proficiency as highlighted in the findings of the ASER reports. There is urgent need to rethink approach to language education in early in childhood settings. Holistic understanding and mastery of language of children can be ensured by integrating emergent literacy practices into Early Childhood Care and Education programs. Language-rich environment can be created both at home and in educational settings. Emergent literacy not only enhances academic outcomes but also enriches children's ability to interact with the world around them, contributing to their overall cognitive and social development.

REFERENCES

- ASER (2016) (Rural) findings. (n.d.). ASER. <https://img.asercentre.org/>
- Banerjee, R., & Nag, S. (2013). Literacy Development and Language Support in Multilingual Contexts: A Study of Early Literacy in India.
- Breeden, A. (2019). *Why Any Adult Can Learn a Second Language Like Their Younger Self*. Fluent Language Learning. <https://www.fluentu.com/blog/can-adults-learn-a-second-language/>
- How young children learn English as another language*. (n.d.). Learn English Kids; British Council. <https://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/parents/helping-your-child/how-young-children-learn-english-another-language>
- Kaul, V., & Sankar, D. (2009). Early childhood education in India: A snapshot. *The World Bank South Asia Human Development Sector Report*.
- Makin, L., & Whitehead, M. (2004). How to Develop Children's Early Literacy: A Guide for Professional Carers and Educators.
- Neuman, S. B., & Dickinson, D. K. (2001). *Handbook of Early Literacy Research*. New York: Guilford Press.

Emergent Literacy in Early Years of Education

- Over 70% of Class 6 govt school students can't read a paragraph, assessment survey reveals.* (2016, August 9). The Indian Express. <https://indianexpress.com/article/education/over-70-of-class-6-govt-school-students-cant-read-a-paragraph-assessment-survey-reveals2964111/>
- Read “Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children” at NAP.edu. (n.d.). In *www.nap.edu*. <https://www.nap.edu/read/6023/chapter/5>
- Silvia. (2017, February 13). *Silvia Lawrence*. Heart My Backpack. <https://www.heartmybackpack.com/blog/foreign-language-learning-tips/>
- Some basic facts about ASER 2014.* (2014). <http://img.asercentre.org/docs/Publications/ASER%20Reports/ASER%202014/National%20PPTs/aser2014indiaenglish.pdf>
- Tara, S., & Kumar, R. (2020). Emergent literacy development in Indian pre-schoolers: Role of socio-cultural factors. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 20(3), 412-430.
- The National Picture.* (n.d.). Retrieved September 2, 2024, from <http://img.asercentre.org/docs/Publications/ASER%20Reports/ASER%202014/nationalfindings.pdf>
- Wikipedia Contributors. (2018, July 15). *The Human Use of Human Beings*. Wikipedia; Wikimedia Foundation. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Human_Use_of_Human_Beings
- Wong, F. (2022, March 29). *10 Steps to Becoming Fluent in a Language in 6 Months or Less*. Matador Network; Matador Network. <https://matadornetwork.com/abroad/10-steps-to-becoming-fluent-in-a-language-in-6-months/>
- World languages - local or global? Биолетова 11 класс - English for everyone.* (2014, August 22). English for Everyone. <http://teachershelp.ru/world-languages-local-or-global-biboletova-11-klass/>
- Writing - Literacy: the uses of writing.* (n.d.). Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/writing/Literacy-the-uses-of-writing>

Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Bala, I., Bala, A. & Singh, A. (2024). Emergent Literacy in Early Years of Education. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 12(3), 1831-1838. DIP:18.01.179.20241203, DOI:10.25215/1203.179