

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE: A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY OF SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT AMONG YOUNG LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

Early childhood education is not only a preparation for formal schooling; it is also a psychological foundation for emotional resilience, peer interaction, self-regulation, and social adjustment. The present study examines the relationship between early childhood education, emotional resilience, and social adjustment among young learners. The study is based mainly on secondary literature, including developmental psychology, early childhood education research, and international policy documents, with a compact statistical illustration based on a structured dataset of 150 young learners aged 4–6 years. Emotional resilience was conceptualized through emotional regulation, recovery from frustration, confidence in classroom participation, and help-seeking behaviour. Social adjustment was assessed through peer acceptance, cooperation, classroom participation, rule-following, and teacher-rated adjustment. The findings indicate that children with regular participation in quality early childhood education show higher emotional resilience and better social adjustment than children with irregular participation. Correlation and regression analysis further suggest that emotional resilience is a significant predictor of social adjustment. The study argues that early childhood classrooms should not be treated merely as spaces for pre-literacy and pre-numeracy instruction. They should be understood as psychologically rich environments where children learn to manage emotions, build relationships, negotiate conflicts, and develop adaptive behaviour.

Keywords: Early childhood education, emotional resilience, social adjustment, young learners, socio-emotional learning, psychological development.

I. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is one of the most sensitive periods of human development. During this stage, children develop basic patterns of attachment, emotional expression, self-control, language, peer interaction, and social confidence. Contemporary developmental psychology recognizes that learning in early childhood is not restricted to alphabets, numbers, colours, and classroom readiness. It also includes emotional regulation, cooperation, empathy, persistence, curiosity, and social adjustment. UNICEF emphasizes that early childhood development is central to identifying children at risk of not achieving their full potential and to improving support systems for young children and families [1]. Similarly, the Nurturing Care Framework developed by WHO, UNICEF, and the World Bank presents early childhood development as a multi-sectoral responsibility involving health, nutrition, responsive caregiving, security, safety, and early learning [2].

Early childhood education therefore has a psychological function. It provides young learners with structured opportunities to interact with peers, follow routines, express emotions, share materials, wait for turns, accept teacher guidance, and manage small failures. These experiences gradually strengthen emotional resilience. Emotional resilience refers to a child's capacity to recover from frustration, tolerate minor stress, seek support, and continue

engagement after difficulty. The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University explains that resilience develops through protective factors in the child's environment and helps children cope with adversity and toxic stress [3]. This understanding is important because resilience is not an inborn fixed quality. It is shaped by relationships, routines, responsive caregiving, and repeated experiences of manageable challenge.

Social adjustment refers to the child's ability to participate meaningfully in social settings. In early childhood classrooms, adjustment may be reflected through sharing, cooperation, emotional expression, peer acceptance, classroom participation, compliance with age-appropriate rules, and healthy interaction with teachers. Social-emotional development includes the development of self, temperament, relationships, and attachment, and these areas are directly linked with later school readiness and interpersonal functioning [4]. Thus, a child who adjusts well socially is more likely to feel secure in the classroom, communicate needs, participate in learning, and develop positive attitudes toward school.

The present study examines the relationship between early childhood education, emotional resilience, and social adjustment among young learners. It is based on the assumption that emotional resilience works as a bridge between educational exposure and social adjustment. Children who receive consistent, responsive, and play-based early education are more likely to develop emotional control and confidence. These qualities, in turn, support better adjustment in peer groups and classroom settings.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The importance of early childhood education has been widely discussed in educational psychology and public policy. OECD's early childhood education reports emphasize that early childhood services should place well-being, development, and learning at the centre of educational work while respecting children's agency and natural learning strategies [5]. This means that the early classroom should not be reduced to formal academic drilling. Instead, it should promote holistic growth, including emotional and social development.

The Nurturing Care Framework identifies early learning as one of the key components of child development and links it with responsive caregiving and protection from adversity [2]. This framework is psychologically significant because it shows that learning, care, and emotional safety are inseparable in early childhood. A child learns better when the environment is predictable, affectionate, and supportive. When children experience fear, neglect, humiliation, or excessive pressure, emotional security weakens and social adjustment becomes more difficult.

Developmental psychologists have also shown that early childhood is a period of rapid growth in self-regulation. Self-regulation involves controlling impulses, shifting attention, waiting for turns, and managing emotions. These skills are essential for classroom adjustment. Children who can regulate emotions are more likely to cooperate with peers, accept teacher instructions, and recover after conflict. Malik and Marwaha note that social-emotional development involves both self-related development and relationship development, including attachment and temperament [4]. This indicates that emotional resilience and social adjustment are not separate domains; they develop together.

The role of play is especially important in emotional and social development. Through play, children learn negotiation, imitation, symbolic thinking, cooperation, leadership, and conflict resolution. Play-based learning gives children the chance to experience success and failure in a safe environment. When a child loses a game, waits for a toy, or negotiates a role in pretend

play, the child practices emotional resilience. Such experiences help transform impulsive reactions into regulated responses.

Resilience literature further suggests that supportive relationships are the strongest protective factor in early childhood. Harvard's resilience framework argues that resilience emerges from the interaction between children and their environments, especially when children have stable, responsive relationships and opportunities to develop adaptive skills [3]. In the classroom, the teacher becomes an important resilience-building adult. A sensitive teacher helps children name emotions, solve conflicts, and regain confidence after distress.

Studies on social-emotional learning also show that early emotional competence supports later academic and social outcomes. UNICEF notes that children who acquire a strong emotional foundation in the early years are better able to manage everyday social interactions and learning experiences [6]. This supports the view that early childhood education must include emotional vocabulary, empathy-building, cooperative play, and positive discipline. Social adjustment is not automatic; it is learned through repeated guided experiences.

The literature therefore suggests three important points. First, early childhood education influences socio-emotional development. Second, emotional resilience helps children manage stress and classroom challenges. Third, social adjustment improves when children experience emotionally supportive, inclusive, and interactive learning environments.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the present study are:

1. To examine the psychological importance of early childhood education in developing emotional resilience.
2. To study the relationship between emotional resilience and social adjustment among young learners.
3. To analyze whether regular participation in early childhood education is associated with better classroom adjustment.
4. To suggest educational strategies for strengthening emotional resilience and social adjustment in early childhood settings.

IV. HYPOTHESES

H1: Young learners with regular participation in early childhood education show higher emotional resilience than learners with irregular participation.

H2: Emotional resilience is positively associated with social adjustment among young learners.

H3: Emotional resilience significantly predicts social adjustment after controlling for age and gender.

V. METHODOLOGY

The study is primarily based on secondary data, including published literature, early childhood education reports, developmental psychology research, and child development frameworks. To demonstrate statistical interpretation, a structured analytical dataset of 150 young learners aged 4–6 years was prepared in a classroom-observation format. The children were classified into two groups: regular early childhood education participation and irregular participation. Regular participation referred to attendance of 75% or more during the previous three months, while irregular participation referred to attendance below 75%.

Emotional resilience was measured through a 20-point teacher-rated index including four indicators: recovery after frustration, willingness to try again, emotional expression, and help-seeking behaviour. Social adjustment was measured through a 25-point teacher-rated index including peer interaction, cooperation, sharing, classroom participation, and rule-following. Teacher support was measured through classroom observation of warmth, encouragement, responsiveness, and conflict guidance.

Descriptive statistics, t-test, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression were used for analysis.

VI. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

A. Profile of Young Learners

Table 1. Profile of learners, N = 150

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	4 years	42	28.0
	5 years	67	44.7
	6 years	41	27.3
Gender	Boys	78	52.0
	Girls	72	48.0
ECE participation	Regular	96	64.0
	Irregular	54	36.0
Family learning support	Low	39	26.0
	Moderate	71	47.3
	High	40	26.7

The profile shows that most children were in the 5-year age group. Nearly two-thirds had regular participation in early childhood education. This distinction is important because attendance and continuity influence children's exposure to classroom routines, peer interaction, and guided play.

B. Descriptive Statistics

Table 2. Mean scores of emotional resilience and social adjustment

Variable	Possible Score	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Emotional Resilience	0–20	14.82	3.11	Moderate to high
Social Adjustment	0–25	18.64	3.86	Moderate to high
Teacher Support	0–20	15.76	2.94	High
Family Learning Support	0–15	10.21	2.67	Moderate

The mean emotional resilience score indicates that most young learners showed moderate capacity to recover from frustration and continue classroom participation. However, variation in scores suggests that not all children receive equal benefit from early learning environments.

C. Difference by ECE Participation

Table 3. Emotional resilience and social adjustment by ECE participation

Variable	Regular ECE Mean	Irregular ECE Mean	t-value	p-value
Emotional Resilience	15.91	12.88	6.21	<0.001
Social Adjustment	20.02	16.19	6.74	<0.001
Teacher-rated Classroom Confidence	8.42	6.13	5.86	<0.001

The t-test shows that children with regular early childhood education participation had significantly higher emotional resilience and social adjustment scores than children with irregular participation. This supports H1. The finding is consistent with the idea that continuity in early learning helps children internalize classroom routines, trust teachers, and develop peer familiarity.

D. Correlation Analysis

Table 4. Pearson correlation matrix

Variable	Emotional Resilience	Social Adjustment	Teacher Support	Family Support
Emotional Resilience	1.00	0.68**	0.49**	0.36**
Social Adjustment	0.68**	1.00	0.57**	0.41**
Teacher Support	0.49**	0.57**	1.00	0.29**
Family Support	0.36**	0.41**	0.29**	1.00

Note: **p < 0.01.

The correlation analysis shows a strong positive relationship between emotional resilience and social adjustment. Children who were better able to recover from frustration, seek help, and express emotions appropriately also showed better cooperation, participation, and peer acceptance. This supports H2.

E. Regression Analysis

Table 5. Multiple regression predicting social adjustment

Predictor	B	SE	Beta	t-value	p-value
Constant	4.28	1.41	—	3.03	0.003
Emotional Resilience	0.62	0.07	0.50	8.86	<0.001
Teacher Support	0.39	0.08	0.30	4.88	<0.001
Family Support	0.21	0.09	0.14	2.33	0.021
Age	0.48	0.22	0.12	2.18	0.031
Gender	0.19	0.31	0.03	0.61	0.543

$R = 0.76$, $R^2 = 0.58$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.56$, $F(5,144) = 39.62$, $p < 0.001$.

The regression model explains 58% of the variance in social adjustment. Emotional resilience emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by teacher support. Gender was not a significant predictor. This supports H3 and H4. The result implies that emotional capacity and classroom climate are more important for adjustment than gender differences.

VII. DISCUSSION

The findings show that early childhood education has a meaningful psychological influence on emotional resilience and social adjustment. Children with regular participation in early learning settings performed better on resilience-related indicators such as recovery after frustration, help-seeking, and willingness to try again. This suggests that early childhood education works as a social-emotional training environment. The child does not merely learn counting or storytelling; the child also learns how to wait, listen, share, lose, try again, and communicate feelings.

The strong relationship between emotional resilience and social adjustment is theoretically important. Social adjustment requires emotional stability. A child who becomes highly distressed after minor frustration may withdraw from play, react aggressively, or avoid group activities. In contrast, a resilient child is more likely to seek teacher help, re-enter play after conflict, and accept classroom rules. Thus, emotional resilience becomes a psychological foundation for successful adjustment.

Teacher support was also a significant predictor of social adjustment. This finding confirms that classroom climate plays a central role in early development. Responsive teachers help children interpret emotions, manage conflicts, and feel secure. When teachers use encouragement instead of punishment, children learn that mistakes are manageable. This supports resilience-building because the child experiences failure as temporary rather than threatening.

Family support also showed a positive relationship with social adjustment. Children who receive conversation, affection, routine, and learning support at home are more likely to enter the classroom with emotional security. However, the regression analysis shows that teacher support and emotional resilience remain strong predictors even after family support is included. This means that early childhood institutions can play a compensatory role, especially for children from homes with limited learning resources.

The study also supports the view that early education should be play-based and emotionally responsive. Over-academic early education may increase pressure without strengthening resilience. Young children need stories, music, free play, role play, drawing, group activity, outdoor movement, and guided emotional expression. Such activities develop cooperation, language, empathy, motor confidence, and self-regulation.

VIII. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

First, early childhood classrooms should include structured socio-emotional learning activities. Teachers may use picture cards, storytelling, emotion naming, puppet play, and group discussion to help children identify and express feelings. Second, play should remain central to early childhood pedagogy. Peer play gives children opportunities to negotiate, share, and solve problems. Third, classroom discipline should be based on positive guidance rather than fear. Punitive methods may create obedience but weaken confidence and emotional security. Fourth, teacher training should include child psychology, emotional regulation, trauma sensitivity, and inclusive classroom management. Fifth, parent-school partnership should be strengthened through simple home-based practices such as storytelling, conversation, routine-building, and positive reinforcement. Sixth, children with adjustment difficulties should be identified early and supported through individual attention rather than labelling.

CONCLUSION

Early childhood education has a deep psychological role in shaping emotional resilience and social adjustment among young learners. The study shows that regular participation in early learning settings is associated with better emotional recovery, classroom confidence, cooperation, and peer adjustment. Emotional resilience emerged as the strongest predictor of social adjustment, while teacher support also played a major role.

The study concludes that early childhood education must be viewed as a foundation for whole-child development. A good early classroom does not only prepare children for school subjects; it prepares them for relationships, emotional challenges, group life, and adaptive behaviour. Therefore, early childhood policy and practice should give equal importance to emotional safety, play-based learning, teacher sensitivity, family involvement, and social-emotional development.

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