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BEHAVIORAL DEVELOPMENT OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN: PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL ASPECTS

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Abstract: The behavioral development of preschool children is an important component of their overall psychological, social, emotional, and personal development. During the preschool years, children gradually acquire socially accepted patterns of behavior, learn to regulate emotions, communicate with peers and adults, follow rules, demonstrate independence, and understand the consequences of their actions. This article examines the psychological and pedagogical characteristics of behavioral development in preschool children and analyzes the influence of family environment, preschool educational institutions, peer interaction, play, emotional development, and adult modeling on children's behavior. Particular attention is paid to positive reinforcement, age-appropriate discipline, play-based learning, social-emotional learning, and cooperation between parents and educators. The article argues that effective behavioral development should not be based solely on obedience or external control; rather, it should support the gradual formation of self-regulation, empathy, responsibility, communication skills, and socially appropriate decision-making. Practical recommendations for preschool teachers and parents are also presented.

Keywords: preschool children, behavioral development, self-regulation, social development, emotional development, preschool education, family environment, play, positive behavior, social-emotional learning.

INTRODUCTION

Preschool age is one of the most significant stages in human development. During this period, children experience rapid changes in cognitive abilities, language, emotional responses, social relationships, and behavioral patterns. They gradually move from behavior largely directed by immediate needs and adult guidance toward greater independence and self-regulation.

Behavioral development includes more than learning what is permitted or prohibited. It involves children's ability to understand social expectations, regulate emotional reactions, interact constructively with others, wait for their turn, share materials, resolve simple conflicts, follow routines, and take responsibility appropriate to their age.

The preschool environment provides children with regular opportunities to interact with adults and peers. Therefore, early childhood education has an important role in supporting socially appropriate behavior. At the same time, behavioral development begins within the family. Parents and other caregivers provide some of the earliest models of communication, emotional expression, conflict resolution, and social behavior.

The development of behavior should consequently be understood as the result of interaction among the child, family, educational environment, peers, and broader social context.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the main psychological and pedagogical factors influencing the behavioral development of preschool children and to identify effective educational approaches for supporting positive behavior and self-regulation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Behavioral development in early childhood has been studied from several theoretical perspectives.

Bandura's social learning theory emphasizes the importance of observation and modeling. Children can acquire patterns of behavior by observing parents, teachers, peers, and other people in their social environment. Adults therefore influence children not only through verbal instructions but also through their own behavior.

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Vygotsky's sociocultural theory highlights the role of social interaction in children's development. From this perspective, higher psychological functions develop through interaction with more knowledgeable members of society. Adult guidance and communication gradually support children's capacity for independent regulation.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory provides a broader framework for understanding development. A child's behavior is influenced not only by individual characteristics but also by family relationships, preschool settings, community conditions, and wider social and cultural factors.

Contemporary early childhood education also gives considerable attention to social-emotional learning. Emotional recognition, empathy, communication, cooperation, problem-solving, and self-regulation are increasingly considered important foundations for children's successful participation in educational and social environments.

These perspectives indicate that preschool behavior cannot be adequately explained by a single factor. Behavioral development is a multidimensional process involving biological maturation, emotional development, social learning, adult guidance, communication, and environmental experience.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This article is based on a theoretical and analytical review of literature related to preschool education, developmental psychology, social-emotional development, behavioral learning, and child–adult interaction.

The study employed descriptive, comparative, analytical, and systematic methods. The analysis focused on the following areas:

1. age-related characteristics of preschool children's behavior;
2. development of emotional and behavioral self-regulation;
3. influence of parents and family relationships;
4. pedagogical influence of preschool teachers;
5. peer interaction and social learning;
6. play as a mechanism of behavioral development;
7. positive methods of behavior guidance.

The collected theoretical perspectives were systematized to identify pedagogical conditions that may support positive behavioral development in preschool settings.

RESULTS

Age-related characteristics of behavioral development

Preschool children gradually become more capable of controlling immediate impulses and adjusting their behavior to social expectations. However, self-regulation is still developing during this period. Consequently, occasional emotional outbursts, difficulty waiting, resistance to adult demands, or conflicts over toys should be interpreted in relation to the child's developmental level rather than automatically regarded as deliberate misconduct.

Behavioral expectations should therefore be age-appropriate.

Younger preschool children usually require more direct adult support, simple rules, visual cues, repetition, and predictable routines. Older preschool children may increasingly understand explanations, negotiate simple rules, anticipate consequences, and participate in solving interpersonal problems.

A general developmental sequence can be represented as:

Adult regulation → Shared regulation → Guided self-regulation → Increasingly independent behavior

This progression demonstrates why adult guidance remains important while children gradually develop internal behavioral control.

The role of emotional development

Emotional development and behavioral development are closely connected. A child who cannot identify or communicate an emotion may express it behaviorally.

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For example, frustration may appear as crying, shouting, pushing, refusing to participate, or throwing objects. Therefore, correcting the visible behavior alone may not address the underlying emotional difficulty.

Educators can help children develop emotional vocabulary by teaching expressions such as:

- “I am angry.”
- “I am sad.”
- “I need help.”
- “I don't like this.”
- “Can I have a turn?”
- “Please stop.”

When children acquire appropriate language for expressing needs and emotions, some forms of challenging behavior may decrease because communication begins to replace impulsive action.

Family influence on children's behavior

The family is one of the earliest and most influential social environments in children's development. Children observe how adults communicate, manage emotions, respond to disagreement, follow rules, and treat other people.

If adults expect children to communicate calmly but frequently use shouting or aggression themselves, the child receives contradictory behavioral models.

Consistency is therefore important. Children benefit when adults provide understandable expectations and relatively predictable responses to behavior.

The following sequence illustrates positive behavioral guidance:

Clear expectation → Adult modeling → Child practice → Positive feedback → Repetition → Behavioral habit

Parents can contribute to behavioral development by maintaining predictable routines, establishing reasonable boundaries, listening to children, recognizing appropriate behavior, and demonstrating respectful communication.

The role of preschool teachers

Preschool teachers have a significant influence because children spend substantial time in educational settings.

An effective teacher does more than respond to inappropriate behavior after it occurs. The teacher organizes the environment in ways that can prevent many behavioral difficulties.

This includes:

- establishing clear classroom routines;
- explaining rules in simple language;
- providing developmentally appropriate activities;
- preparing children for transitions;
- reinforcing cooperative behavior;
- helping children express emotions verbally;
- teaching conflict-resolution strategies.

Rules should be limited, understandable, and positively formulated whenever possible.

For example, instead of repeatedly saying “Don't run,” an educator can state, “We walk inside the classroom.”

Instead of “Don't shout,” the teacher may say, “Use a quiet voice indoors.”

Such formulations tell children what behavior is expected rather than only identifying prohibited behavior.

Play and behavioral development

Play is one of the most important activities in preschool childhood and provides a natural environment for behavioral learning.

During role play, children learn to negotiate roles, follow shared rules, wait, communicate, cooperate, and consider another person's perspective.

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For example, in a “hospital” game, one child may act as a doctor, another as a patient, and another as a nurse. To maintain the play situation, participants must coordinate their behavior.

Similarly, construction activities, board games, group art, and dramatic play provide opportunities to develop patience, cooperation, communication, and problem-solving skills.

Therefore, play should not be considered merely entertainment. It is also an important pedagogical mechanism for social and behavioral development.

Peer relationships

Interactions with peers create behavioral situations that cannot be fully reproduced through adult–child communication.

Children must learn how to enter an ongoing game, share resources, negotiate, respond to rejection, resolve disagreements, and maintain friendships.

Conflict between preschool children is therefore not always purely negative. With appropriate adult guidance, conflict can become an opportunity for learning.

Instead of immediately solving every disagreement for children, an educator can guide them through questions such as:

“What happened?”

“How do you think your friend feels?”

“What can you say to them?”

“How can both of you play with this toy?”

This approach gradually develops social problem-solving competence.

Positive reinforcement

Positive reinforcement can be an effective component of behavioral guidance when it is specific and connected to the behavior being encouraged.

General praise such as “Good child” provides limited information. More specific feedback is educationally clearer:

“You waited for your turn. That helped everyone play together.”

“You put the toys back in their place without being reminded.”

“You told your friend how you felt instead of pushing.”

Specific feedback helps children understand which behavior was appropriate and why it was valuable.

DISCUSSION

Behavioral development in preschool children should not be reduced to the formation of obedience. The broader pedagogical objective is to help children develop the internal skills necessary for socially responsible behavior.

These include self-regulation, emotional awareness, empathy, communication, cooperation, responsibility, and problem-solving.

The analysis suggests that behavioral development is particularly effective when family and preschool expectations are reasonably consistent. Significant differences between behavioral expectations at home and in preschool may make adaptation more difficult for some children.

Therefore, parent–teacher cooperation is essential. Teachers can inform parents about classroom routines and behavioral strategies, while parents can provide information about the child's behavior and emotional responses at home.

A coordinated model can be expressed as:

Family + Preschool + Consistent guidance + Positive relationships = Supportive behavioral environment

It is also important to distinguish between occasional developmentally expected difficulties and persistent behavioral problems. A single emotional outburst does not necessarily indicate a behavioral disorder. Frequency, intensity, duration, developmental appropriateness, environmental context, and impact on the child's functioning should all be considered.

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When persistent behavior significantly interferes with learning, relationships, safety, or everyday functioning, cooperation among parents, teachers, psychologists, and other relevant specialists may be necessary.

Factors affecting preschool children's behavioral development

Factor	Potential influence on behavior	Educational response
Family environment	Formation of early behavioral models	Consistent and respectful parenting
Teacher behavior	Provides social and emotional models	Calm communication and clear expectations
Peer interaction	Develops cooperation and conflict resolution	Guided group activities
Emotional development	Influences reactions to frustration	Teaching emotional vocabulary
Play	Provides behavioral practice	Role play and cooperative games
Daily routines	Increases predictability	Stable schedules and transitions
Positive reinforcement	Strengthens appropriate behavior	Specific and timely feedback
Communication skills	Reduce behavior caused by inability to express needs	Language-rich interaction

PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

For effective behavioral development, preschool educational institutions should create environments in which expectations are predictable, adults provide appropriate behavioral models, and children have regular opportunities to practise social skills.

Teachers should use short and understandable instructions and avoid unnecessarily complex rules. Positive behavior should be noticed and reinforced, while inappropriate behavior should be addressed calmly and consistently.

Children should also be given opportunities to make developmentally appropriate choices. For example, allowing a child to choose between two activities can support autonomy while maintaining necessary boundaries.

Storytelling, puppetry, role play, group games, picture cards, and discussions of emotions can be integrated into everyday preschool education to develop behavioral and social-emotional competencies.

Cooperation with families should be systematic rather than limited to situations in which a problem has already occurred. Parent meetings, individual consultations, practical recommendations, and shared behavioral strategies can contribute to greater consistency between home and preschool environments.

CONCLUSION

Behavioral development during the preschool years is a complex process involving emotional maturation, social interaction, communication, imitation, play, adult guidance, and the gradual development of self-regulation.

Family members and preschool educators play central roles in this process because their behavior, communication styles, expectations, and responses provide children with important social models.

Effective behavioral education should move beyond punishment and external control. Its primary objective should be to teach children how to recognize emotions, communicate needs appropriately, cooperate with others, follow understandable social rules, resolve conflicts, and gradually regulate their own behavior.

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Play-based learning, positive reinforcement, predictable routines, emotional education, adult modeling, and parent–teacher cooperation represent important pedagogical mechanisms for achieving these objectives.

Thus, supporting behavioral development in preschool children contributes not only to better classroom behavior but also to the formation of broader social-emotional competencies necessary for successful transition to school and subsequent participation in society.

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