



The International Need for Parent-Engaged Early Intervention Models for Young Children with Developmental Disabilities

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Introduction

All individuals with disabilities are ethically entitled to receive intervention services in order to reach their maximum potential. While not perfected through practice, there is movement to ensure these individuals receive appropriate services [1]. To date, many countries practice human rights for those with disabilities as outlined in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [2]. Although countries have ratified these treaties, a substantial need remains for effective early intervention models that are culturally transferable and suitable for diverse audiences and their needs. In other words, early intervention strategies that are effective for children and families in America are not necessarily equally effective for children and families in Africa. Thus, it would be appropriate to have empirically supported intervention models that are more transferable to a variety of cultures and sensitively meet the international needs. By addressing this lofty aspiration of having such early intervention models, better services would optimally be provided to the vast amount of children with disabilities and their families.

The Global Need of Early Intervention Models for Disabilities

Currently, there is no reliable estimate of children diagnosed with a developmental disorder or having a developmental disability [3] however, as evidenced by reports from the WHO and the World Bank (2012), there are one billion people worldwide living with a disability, which reflects approximately 15% of the world's population. These estimates and the knowledge of beneficial long-term effects when young individuals are provided early intervention spotlight the need for global early intervention curriculums and programs.

Furthermore, there is a rising prevalence of specific disabilities such as a neuro-developmental disorder known as

autism spectrum disorder (ASD) [4]. To date, one in 68 American children will be diagnosed with ASD [5]. This spectrum disorder is one among many disorders that is not geographically confined rather propagates throughout the world. These estimates of disabilities and reports of rising incidences profoundly support the global concern and call for both developing and expanding effective early intervention models that have global relevance in order to meet the early intervention needs of young children living with such conditions.

Parent Involvement and Family Engagement

There are various existing interventions programs that are implemented in industrialized countries to treat young children with developmental delays and disabilities. An importantly effective aspect of these interventions is parent involvement [6,7]. In particular, parent involvement and family engagement [8-10] in early childhood intervention have shown an array of benefits in children from improved social skills, better academic skills [11,12], and increased play skills [13-15], among many other benefits. Various existing early intervention programs emphasize the important role parents have in their children's developmental progression by focusing on equipping parents with useful strategies to help their children in conjunction with coaching them through implementation of these strategies. For example, Pivotal Response Training (PRT) [16,17] trains parents to increase motivation, social initiations, responsivity, and self-management in children. Another program known as The Early Social Interaction Project (ESI); Wetherby & Woods [13], Wetherby et al. [14] teaches parents to support active engagement in their natural environments by targeting social communication and play behaviors in young children. Jasper [18] helps parents target children's joint attention, symbolic play, and emotional regulation, and The Early Start Denver Model (ESDM) [19] helps parents focus on children's communication, imitation,

play, cognitive, social, and motor skills. Lastly, the Early Bird Program provides parents with strategies to improve their children's communication skills and address their children's challenging behaviors [20]. These aforementioned intervention models, while a few among many, prepare parents to be heavily involved in their children's developmental progression. While early intervention programs can require much time of parents during training and implementation, it is relevant to note that even minimal parent training (i.e., 1 hour/week) has shown improvements in children's developmental and social skills [21]. This highlights the powerful impact of parent involvement in children's developmental growth and to invite parents to be involved in early intervention services for young children.

A Global Early Intervention Model

In conjunction with parent involvement and family engagement, young children with disabilities also often need additional intervention services delivered by professionals (e.g., speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists). One common platform in America through which young children with developmental delays and disabilities and their families are involved and seek professional services is through Early Childhood Intervention (ECI). ECI provides State and federally mandated services, as identified by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [22], to qualifying children with developmental delays and/or disabilities from birth to three years old (e.g., children with cerebral palsy, Down syndrome).

ECI is a national organization that is comprised of many agencies, in which these agencies and their early intervention service providers assist the qualifying children that are proximally located by delivering services in the children's homes. Having a global model like ECI-delivering intervention services in naturalistic settings that infuse parent involvement along with qualified professionals-would be an optimal, worldwide outcome. In the interim, it is important for researchers and practitioners to consider avenues to reach this outcome and raise awareness for such importance.

Conclusion and Importance of Current Address

There is a vast amount of children living with disabilities throughout the world and that deserve early intervention services. Furthermore, parent involvement and family engagement are valuable components for effective early intervention models for young children with developmental delays and disabilities. This is a call for researchers to develop early intervention models that collectively are:

- a. Mindful of the needs of children with disabilities and their families.
- b. Embedded with cultural sensitivity.
- c. Empowering parents to deliver intervention techniques.
- d. Inviting parent involvement and family engagement.

Optimally, there will come a time when intervention models are not culturally confined or geographically limited and internationally propel young children with disabilities to their best potential while individually meeting each child's needs and simultaneously involving parents.

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