Teachers' Perspective on Early Childhood Education Initiative in Public Sector Schools

Nuzhat Iqbal[*]
Ahmad Bilal[**]

Abstract

Early Childhood Education promotes development for children through learning related activities to foster development of their cognitive, emotional, social and physical aspects. Since early childhood education encompasses from below eight years, this has a great impact on the children. The School Education Department in Punjab is equally working for the enhancement and expansion of ECE opportunity. This research aimed at evaluating teachers' perspectives on early childhood education initiative. For this reason, Qualitative research method was employed. Phenomenological research design was used with the assumption of providing observation of the teachers engaged in ECE initiative in Punjab. Qualitative data were obtained through face-to-face interviews with six participants selected by purposive sampling technique. The results highlighted the fact that overall, the teachers had a positive attitude and awareness about ECE and its contribution in laying as the foundational stage of education. However, issues with curricular equity, standardization of resource distribution, teachers' training and program support were found out. The study suggests periodic training for teachers and financial support for ECE programs to enhance children's skills. Focus on teachers' training and duration of training may be enhanced. Parental involvement may also be increased in parent-teacher meetings and prioritize the health, hygiene and safety of children.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education initiative; ECE Teachers; Perspectives

[*] Institute of Education and Research, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan. Email: inuzhat174@gmail.com

[**] Department of Advanced Studies in Education, IER, PU. Email: drahmadbilal.ier@pu.edu.pk

Introduction

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is essentially the care and learning that young children get from individuals who are not their relatives, below the age of eight years. Early childhood development programs such as preschools, day care among other programs that act as caregivers and educational institutions for children. Therefore, the process of young children learning some essential skills and information prior to the age they begin attending school formally (Folari, 2020). In a relative context, early educators are prepared for the education of preschool children in an organized manner before children attempt going to early school. ECE is mandatory in over 80 countries to children aged 3-5 years while the primary education typically serves ages 6-10 (Government of Pakistan, 2017). The overwhelming majority of psychologists and researchers who have contributed towards the development of ECE also largely define childhood as a period that signifies the importance of this particular sector to further learning and development.

As the Pre-school Teacher Organization of the United States of America in their understanding of early education state (2017), early education is education for children within the preschool age. Setting at this stage may receive massive opportunities, or even a lack of them, thus, experience at this stage can affect an individual for life. Early childhood education is not a relatively recent concept. In its practice, this form has existed for thousands of years back in ancient communities and civilizations. It was such a society that practiced such baronial activities as infanticide. In the seventeenth century, children were looked at as miniature adults, thus made to be legally responsible as adults.

Preschool Education or ECE as known, means the education of the young child from birth to eight years of age, which is vital in molding young children's psychological, social emotional development. Globally, there is a growing concern in quality ECE since it sets a learning foundation for future education and learning. Consequently, scientific articles pertinent to this issue indicate that good ECE enables to eradicate students' learning insufficiency, enhance their capabilities and contribute to given number of educational and socio-economic effects. Therefore, the quality ECE must be approved and funded by the public sector since in this area the permission and access of resources often appear to be a constraint. The importance of such programs ensure that every child receives an equal chance regardless of the diversity.

There are several problems which Pakistan encounters in education for early childhood that hinder its progress. Full and quality early childhood education is not attainable in every community

equivalent programs, particularly in areas that are underserved and in remote rural settings. In this way, it functions to contribute to the separation between major demographic categories in the nation. A major task that is difficult to accomplish is maintaining a consistent level of standard and quality for all ECE centers because of differences in curricula that are followed, preparation done to the teachers and other facilities. There are inadequate trained teachers who are acquainted with approaches to ECE and there is limited career advancement prospects are the sole reasons for aspiring professionals not to achieve their dreams. Realization of early childhood education to its optimum.

Literature Review

There are several issues that Pakistan has to address in the context of early childhood education that hinder its progress. There are several communities to which children have no access to early childhood education, equivalent courses, particularly in areas which are remote and in the countryside. In this way, it also has the aim to stress out the differences between the biggest categories of the population. In this respect, it is even difficult to maintain some kind of equalization and have high quality throughout all ECE, the centres may be at variance with each other in terms of curriculum, teacher training, and other facilities. absenteeism of trained teachers with previous exposure to ECE approaches.

Several things require to be done in order to solve the problems; curriculum needs to be changed, facilities required to be constructed, community has to be involved, teacher preparation programmes have to be enhanced, and laws must be altered. It requires collaborative efforts of the government agencies, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations. The main streaming of ECE can only be done by joint efforts to ensure equal opportunities for children in Pakistan irrespective of their socioeconomic standard, the geographic location they live in to ensure quality educational setting for all children's.

Early Childhood Education and Globalization

Many of the phenomena affecting global society have changed their character and forms with the emergence of globalization: population growth, environmental problems, international relations and humanitarian activities, rights and freedoms, development, health, poverty, work, and education (Grant & Grant, 2007). The elements of globalization begin with early childhood education and even goes on to higher education. However, the effects of globalization were seen most profoundly from the mid-1980s with incidence of the internet and

general use of computers in the field of education and information all over the world (Eliason & Jenkin, 1990). The power of knowledge means that countries reshape their national curricula for building the competency of people in the context of globalization and the dominant role of technology and multilingualism. This redesign starts at the early childhood education level.

Thus, there is a necessity in early childhood education as more people are equipped with an ability to work on the global level. More abundantly wealthy parents strive to provide their children with the best education as early as possible which reveals rising significance of Early Childhood Education (Morrison, 2007).

Early Childhood Curriculum

Historical perspectives of learning in early childhood education entails learning aspects that have been influenced by various cultures, politics, economy, as well as religious beliefs. Rousseau in his "Emile" followed the natural development concept whereby children's development is natural, and they progress at this staged development patterns (Morrison, 2007). Pestalozzi also maintained that the child learns by sensations and grows by development of one's innate ability through realization; love and respect for the child was an important element of his method (Clough, Nutbrown & Selbie, 2008).

Goals of early childhood curricula as indicated target the preparation of children for life. Currently, there is a lack of consensus regarding what these curricula entail and what roles they should play in Pre-primary education across the world despite many advocating for the Pre-primary curricula to address children's needs and interests (Bertram & Pascal, 2016). Curricula are decision-making processes in terms of what and how contents are to be delivered and learned; these choices reflect societal, empirical, and local demands and beliefs.

Froebel laid strong emphasis on the practice of learning through play; he put forward a curriculum that involved guidance as well as active learning (Gordon & Browne, 2004). Today's practices of early childhood education are to some degree informed by the knowledge he left in this world.

Early Childhood Education in Pakistan

Pakistan, early childhood education (ECE) faces significant accessibility challenges, particularly for children from low-income families, as it is often expensive and predominantly available in private schools. Despite the recognition of ECE's critical role in child development and national progress since the National Education Conference in 1947, many children remain under-served. ECE, or katchi, encompasses formal and informal education services for

children aged 3-8 years, overlapping with compulsory education starting at age 5. Various ministries, including Health Women Development and Education, oversee different aspects of ECE, but coordination among these entities is lacking. Public ECE classes in government schools are known as katchi, while private schools in urban areas offer nursery, kindergarten, or Montessori-style education for children aged 2-5 years, with Montessori requiring specialized training and materials. Private school ECE teachers are typically well-qualified and trained, supported by non-teaching staff such as ayas (maids). In contrast, public school ECE teachers must meet primary school teaching qualifications, which include a higher secondary education certificate and a one-year teaching certificate, though these criteria may be relaxed if suitable candidates are unavailable.

Teach ECE Areas

Teach ECE is divided into three main areas to evaluate important aspects of early childhood education

Classroom Culture

This area concerns the overall effectiveness of the teacher in establishing a good learning climate. The first assesses whether a teacher defines acceptable behavior, confronts students' misconduct, demonstrates equal appreciation of all children, uses appropriate language, and handles stereotyped gender and disabled children.

Guided Learning

This area focuses on the teacher's role in guiding learning. It evaluates how clearly the teacher states learning goals, explains concepts, connects activities to real life, models activities, and adjusts teaching methods based on students' needs. It also examines how the teacher uses critical thinking exercises, asks open-ended questions, and provides feedback.

Socio-emotional Skills

The ability of the instructor to help students develop their socio-emotional abilities is assessed in this section. It examines the ways in which the educator fosters independence, persistence, and social competencies including empathy, collaboration, and problem-solving. Additionally, it evaluates whether or not students use these abilities in the classroom by supporting one another and collaborating to achieve common objectives.

Conceptual Framework

Key developmental elements are integrated into the conceptual framework of Early Childhood Education (ECE) projects in public schools to enhance young learners' overall growth. The goal of personal, social, and emotional development (PSED) is to foster a conducive learning environment by enhancing social skills, emotional regulation, and self-awareness. The foundation for future academic achievement is laid by the development of language and literacy, which is essential for increasing vocabulary, communication, and early reading and writing skills. Children's creative thinking, self-expression, and awareness of culture are all enhanced by the creative arts. Understanding the World Around Us encourages curiosity about the environment, society, and basic science, fostering a sense of connection and responsibility. Basic Mathematical Concepts introduce fundamental math skills, pattern recognition, and problem-solving abilities, preparing children for more advanced learning. Health, hygiene, and safety education emphasize the importance of cleanliness, healthy habits, and safety practices. Together, these elements form a comprehensive ECE program that meets the diverse developmental needs of children and prepares them for future academic and life challenges.
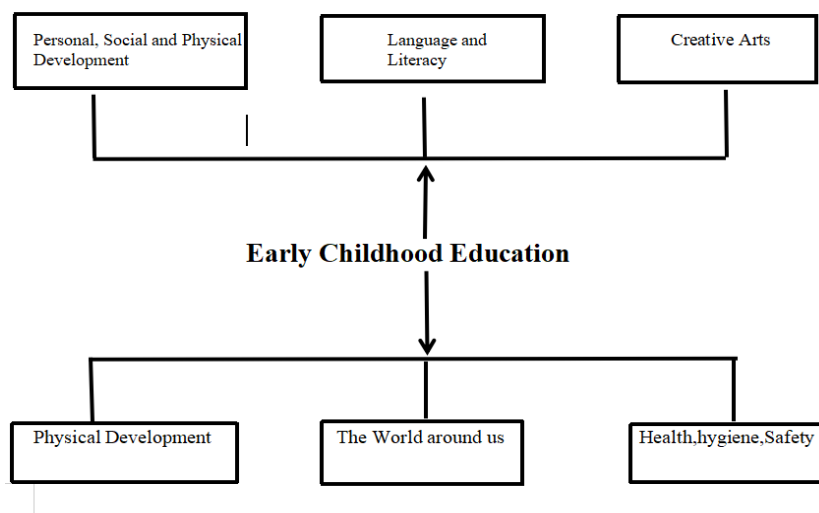
Purpose of the Study

To Explore the perspectives of Teachers on early childhood education initiative in the public sector schools in Punjab, Pakistan.

Research Questions

1. How do the teachers in public sector schools view the ECE's impact on children's social and emotional development?
2. 2. How do teachers perceive ECE initiative with regards to the student's language advancement in public sector schools?
3. In what ways do teachers view the classroom learning environment in influencing the early childhood education initiative in public sector schools?
4. What is the attitude of teachers towards the role of early childhood education initiative regarding the improvement of the student's health, hygiene, and safety in public sector schools.
5. What difficulties do teachers encounter while teaching in the public sector schools within the context of the early childhood education initiative?

Research Design

Phenomenological research methodology was used in a qualitative research paradigm to understand teachers' views regarding the Early Childhood Education (ECE) in public sector schools. Phenomenology focuses to produce a description of perceptions and experiences that individuals have about a given phenomenon (van Manen 1990).

Research Paradigm

The study was done using an Interpretivist paradigm since the intention was to capture the objective experiences being held by the individuals and the meanings they give to their social world. This approach is suitable for exploring the multiple views that ECE teachers have concerning their lessons, as well as looking at the subjectivity of people's experience (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2007).

Sample of the Study

The sample consisted of six schools randomly chosen from the Kasur district; each was chosen independently and held an equal chance of being selected. The researcher selected Kasur district as the population for data collection because it contains a rich cross-section of rural and urban demographics. Consequently, the district was chosen due to the uniqueness of the area and its ease of access when attempting to solicit information about teachers' views and perceptions related to Early Childhood Education. In these schools,

participants (i.e ECE Teachers) were identified purposively to get individuals who could offer detailed qualitative data.

Instrumentation

Face to Face interviews were conducted to get the participants' views. This is helpful in that it provides flexibility and in considering the topics in detail (Babbie, 2005; Flick, 2002). Interview protocols were developed with the help of research experts on the particular questions related to the ECE initiative.

Question For ECE Teachers

1. How long have you been involved with early childhood education classroom in
    your school, and what roles have you played?
2. How does this initiative influence your teaching methods and classroom management?
3. What training did you receive to effectively implement the early childhood
    education in classroom?
4. In your opinion, how ECE affected the learning outcomes of the children?
5. In your opinion, how does ECE affect the social development of children?
6. How do you assess the progress of students in ECE Classroom?
7. What specific activities are used to promote emotional intelligence in young
    children?
8. Can you share any significant changes you have observed in students' learning and
    development since the introduction of early childhood education program?

Data Collection

All participants read and signed the informed consent statements; interviews were conducted in English and Urdu. Overall, six face-to-face interviews were recorded verbally and identified by coded names to ensure participants' anonymity (e.g., ER for Teachers).

Data Analysis Process

Semi structured interview questions were analyzed by Thematic Analysis as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). The

procedure included interactions that are transcribing, coding and reviewing the data to analyze the patterns. Themes were made more distinct and identified in a written documentation that offered relevant and useful analysis concerning the research questions (Abdullah & Ikram, 2019).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines included scheduling interviews at participants' convenience, sharing research objectives and interview questions in advance, and obtaining consent for recording the interview. Participants' anonymity was ensured, and they were free to withdraw at any time. Data was used solely for research purposes.

Data Analysis

1. Analysis of Roles and Experiences in Early Childhood Education

Classroom Teaching and Management: Most early childhood educators focus on supervising and teaching young children. The responses show a strong commitment to both academic and personal growth of students.
Curriculum Development and Lesson Planning: Several educators highlighted their roles in curriculum development and lesson planning. ET4, ET5, and ET6 emphasized these as key responsibilities, noting their experience in designing activities that meet children's developmental needs and mentoring new educators.

2. Training for Effective Implementation

Child Psychology and Development: Training in child psychology is crucial for understanding children's needs. ET1 and ET4 mentioned specific training, with ET1 focusing on child psychology and ET4 on broader workshops.
Engaging Learning Activities: Training in engaging children was mentioned by ET2 and ET3, focusing on methods to make learning enjoyable and interactive.
Interactive Teaching Methods and Classroom Management: Most participants received training in interactive teaching and classroom management, highlighted by ET1, ET4, and ET5.

3. Impact of Early Childhood Education (ECE) on Teaching Methods

Play-Based Learning: ECE has shifted teaching strategies towards play-based learning, noted by ET2, ET3, and ET4.

*Child-Centered Teaching:*ET1, ET4, ET6, and ET2 emphasized child-centered methods, with individualized learning plans and activities.

Hands-On and Collaborative Learning: The ECE program promotes teamwork and hands-on activities, making classrooms more engaging.

4. Impact of ECE on Learning Outcomes

Lifelong Learning: All participants agreed that ECE has a lasting impact on children's learning and development.

Improved Learning and Readiness: ECE positively impacts children's readiness for primary school, improving skills in reading, writing, and math.

*Confidence and Self-Esteem***:** Many respondents noted that ECE boosts children's self-esteem and confidence, aiding their overall development.

5. Impact of ECE on Social Development

Confidence and Communication: ECE helps children become confident communicators, as noted by ET1, ET4, and ET5.

Social and Ethical Skills: ECE is key in teaching social skills, cooperation, and ethical behavior, emphasized by ET2 and ET3.

*Teamwork:*ET2, ET3, ET5, and ET6 highlighted the role of ECE in developing teamwork skills.

6. Assessing Children's Learning and Development

Observation and Assessment Tools: Most participants use observation and various activities to assess development. ET1 and ET3 highlighted the use of storytelling and play, while ET5 and ET6 mentioned structured assessments and parent-teacher meetings.

Role of Educator: Educators are crucial in assessing and supporting development. ET6 emphasized the importance of parent-teacher collaboration, while ET4 and ET5 focused on emotional support.

7. Activities to Promote Emotional Intelligence

Emotion Recognition: Many educators use activities like "Feelings Charades" and "Emotion Cards" to help children identify and express emotions (ET1, ET2).

Storytelling and Role-Playing: These activities are used to develop emotional intelligence, with ET3 and ET5 highlighting creative arts and cooperative activities as key methods.

8. Observed Changes in Students Since ECE Introduction

Adaptation to School: Significant improvements in children's ability to adapt to the school environment were noted, especially by ET1 and ET2.

Social and Communication Skills: Participants observed better social interactions and communication skills, with children becoming more curious and eager to learn.

Enthusiasm for Learning: ET4 and ET6 noted increased enthusiasm and motivation for learning since the introduction of the ECE program.

Findings

- Present approaches to teaching language in public schools really do not assist the learners to learn languages as required. In each area, a large number of the respondents commented that traditional ways are no longer as effective as earlier assumed. Therefore, there is a need to consider other approaches that can be used to enhance language acquisition. Thus, enhancing these methods and implementing new approaches, educators will be able to make the process of learning a new language more effective.
- Training for effective implementation in early childhood education focuses on key areas: child psychology, effective learning experiences, and teacher created activities as strategies of teaching.
- ECE initiatives were heavily inclined towards the classroom environment in earlier days. Such aspects as layout, resources, methods of handling students, and the kind of environment that is provided were critical in determining how young children learned. The physical environment, specifically, the well-designed, stimulating classroom environment fostered engagement, motivation as well as a student's performance. Thus, there is vital need of cultivating positive environment which enable students to success in ECE programs by educators.
- The participants' consensus showed that ECE plays a key role in children's learning and development throughout their lifetime and enhances learning. They also pointed out that ECE boost children's school readiness through the development of key competencies such as reading, writing and math at a higher level before joining primary school. Moreover, many of the

respondents stated that ECE enhances children's self-esteem and confidence hence the development of the young ones.

- In another aspect, it was noted that the early childhood education (ECE) had a positive impact in shaping the social and emotional development of children. Moreover, in safe and supportive context, children built numerous competencies which include communication, empathy, and self-regulation. Using games and emotions, positive peer relationship and anger management, friend making skills, and angry management, conflicts were addressed. Higher investment in quality ECE does not only help children to be ready for school but also to face life in future.

- After the implementation of the ECE programme the researcher noted that children experience better transition in the school setting. Participants also mentioned there were social benefits such as improvement in communication, children were observed to be curious and wanting to learn.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm all the previous studies conducted on the role of early childhood education where ECE is believed to have a significant impact on kids' social, emotional, and cognitive development. This study is evidence that children need to be provided with a secure environment in which they develop into adults and achieve valuable traits such as understanding of others, self-regulation, and effective speech. The present research is consistent with the studies of Aga Khan University and UNICEF, which suggests the target models which are sustainable, practice-based professional development, and the ECCE programme that is culture-friendly and community-based (AKDN, 2019 & UNICEF Pakistan, 2020).

With regards to the findings of the ITA (Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aaghi) in terms of the benefits of integrated programs and moving mobile ECE centers for the hard-to-reach beneficiaries, this type of established SEL is also occasionally utilized in this study. A study of early learning programmes by PIDE and Harvard University shows that superior education in the early years of schooling yields social and economic returns for children in terms of educational attainment and employment in the future (Hahn & Barnett, 2023; Harvard University, 2020).

In conclusion, results from the current study and those of previous studies show the importance of early childhood education in shaping young children in the future. Policy makers, teachers and other partners can develop policies that will provide an environment to transforms early Childhood Education (ECE) into the best practice that will meet the needs of children and transform society by learning from research issues and finds.

Conclusion

ECE can change children's future as stated by a study. ECE or Preschool education helps in language acquisition, social emotional development, and positive classroom attitude. Nonetheless, challenges such as resource constraint, weak funding, and other issues might cause them to be less effective. So, to strengthen ECE, institutions and policymakers should bring resource investments, staff training, and administration. There is also a need to ensure safety, health as well as cleanliness of children as a way of enhancing their welfare. It is possible to build ECE for equal and best opportunities for all children and for the children in their individual and academic future by focusing on these areas and supporting educators.

Recommendations

1. More Resources may be provided to ECE classrooms to enhance students learning.
2. The duration of in-service training programs may be enhanced.
3. Training may be provided to ECE instructors periodically so they can updated about current innovative teaching techniques.
4. Monthly parent-teacher meetings may increase family participation in public schools.
5. Give health, cleanliness, and safety-first priority in ECE settings to protect children's well-being.
6. ECE may have led to improved adaptability, communication, and enthusiasm for learning in children.
7. Teachers may encourage the use of play-based, child-centered, and hands-on learning strategies.

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