

Early Childhood Education in Pakistan: Issues and Challenges

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Abstract: *This study aimed at exploring different issues and challenges of Early Childhood Education in Pakistan. The objectives of the study were to analyze the existing status, facilities and practices at ECE level in public and private sector schools. Stratified sampling technique was used to select the branches of schools from both public and private sector. Sample of 32 administrators was selected, including sixteen each from public and private sector schools. Three teachers from each school (32x3=96) were selected from public and private sector schools. Two different questionnaires were developed, each for administrators and teachers. For statistical analysis of data, arithmetic mean, percentage was used. Results showed that streamlining of existing status, practices and facilities at ECE level is very necessary because it is very useful for children for future success and also in enhancing literacy rate, so that children can enter in the main stream of the society more successfully.*

Key words: Early Childhood Education, issues, Challenges, practices

1. Introduction

Education in Pakistan is divided into various levels including Primary grades (one to five); Middle grades (six to eight); High grades (nine and ten); Intermediate grades (eleven and twelve); Graduate level (thirteen and fourteen); Post-graduate level (fifteen and sixteen); Kindergarten or nursery or Montessori or Pre-school level has also been included in various levels of education in Pakistan. In Government schools, preparatory classes Kachi or Paki were formally incorporated into the system in 1988 with the seventh five years plan which are called Awaladna and Awalaala. A child begins his schooling in pre-school at the age of 3 ([www.wikipedia.org/wiki/educationin Pakistan](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/educationin_Pakistan)).

Gordon and Browne (2000) have defined early childhood education as "pre-school, Kindergarten, Nursery, Montessori and primary education from two to eight years". In the same way, Essa (2005) has defined early childhood education as a term encompassing developmentally appropriate programs that serve child from birth through age eight, a field of study that trains students to work effectively with young children".

Rehman (2006) quoted Bertam and Pascal (2002) says that it is now widely accepted that first eight years of a child are probably the most critical in determining an individual life experiences. Long term attitudes and deep-seated pathways of thinking are laid down in this critical period, laying the foundation of a child's future life is to be a complex, skillful and very responsible task. In recent years, there has been an increasing emphasis on early childhood education, focusing on the skills of literacy and numeracy as well as promoting a formal and adult-led pedagogy.

The early years of a child's life are the prime time for the parents, teachers, administrators and caregivers to provide positive experience that will affect the rest of the child's life. Children will develop faster during these early years than at

any other time of their lives (Gordon and Browne, 2000). It is important for the parents, teachers, administrators and caregivers to understand children need at each stage of their early lives to promote progress to the next level (Mishra, 2005).

Hunzai (2006) quoted Mustard (2002) states that poor development during early childhood years affects key aspects of brain development. According to Carter (1987), there is effect on early childhood education due to change in economy, family life, public awareness and public support.

Ayub, Bano and Mukhtar (2006) quoted Margrat (2000) that the present system of education in Pakistan is a continuation of colonial system of pre-independence and it does not match with our ideology.

It is generally noted that in Pakistan, early childhood education (ECE) is not getting attention of the policy makers. In Pakistan many schools are being opened in the name of Montessori, Kindergarten etc, without understanding their true spirit. It has added to the problems. There is however some pre schools, from which one could learn lessons to, develop more effective programs. These programs brought out an awakening in the field of ECE. But there is lack of co-ordination and co-operation among these programs, institutions, organizations, public, and private providers.

In this situation, streamlining of early childhood education (ECE) seems essential for the sake of economy, proper utilization of man power and benefitting the target group of the children in the possible way. At the same time, streamlining is needed to make the ECE system consistent one as in Pakistan it is being carried out on varied and hazards lines without any co-operation among the providers. According to Wortham (1998), without accepting the concept of ECE as an ecosystem we cannot meet present and future needs of children in early childhood as well as economic and

human development for national progress according to the needs of changing world.

The above said target can only be achieved if ECE programs work under a common support system that guide public and private sector for effective provision of ECE because the basic purpose of such programs is that children will enter in the main stream of the society more successfully.

2. Objectives of the study

1. To explore the existing status of ECE in Pakistan.
2. To analyze ECE facilities in public and private sector schools.
3. To analyze existing practices of ECE in public and private sector schools.

3. Methodology

The population of the study was all the teachers (male & female) teaching at ECE level from public and private sector schools. Total number of teachers teaching at pre-school level was 1359. (Public=1011, private=348). Stratified sampling technique was used to select eight branches of each school system. Total number of branches was (32) including (16) from public sector (male/female) and (16) from private sector. Thus, the sample size for administrators was thirty two (32) including (16) from public schools and (16) from private schools. Randomly selected three teachers from each branch of the selected schools, thus sample size for teachers was ninety six (96) including (48) from public school and (48) from private school.

4. Research Instrument

Two separate questionnaires were developed for the administrators as well as for the teachers to explore the problems of ECE in Pakistan and their solutions. The questionnaires were modified after pilot testing and consultation of professional experts. These experts were university professors involved in Early Childhood Education department. The data were analyzed on the basis of percentage of the opinion of administrator and teachers of both public and private sector schools.

4.1 Administrator's views about problems at ECE level.

No	Problems Indicated by Administrators	F	%
1	Lack of ECE trained teachers (male & female).	10	38.5
2	Parents are not aware about the importance of ECE and hence there is lack of their co-operation.	10	38.5
3	Number of schools for ECE is less as compared to population.	5	19.3
3	Special funds for ECE are not allocated by government.	20	77
4	Some ECE students made admission after summer vacation.	2	7.7
5	Lack of proper guidance and supervision at ECE level.	5	19.3
6	Proper physical facilities are not provided at ECE level.	15	57.5

7	Proper audio visual aids are not provided in public sector schools.	12	46.2
8	Proper attention is not given to ECE at elementary schools.	10	38.5
9	Refresher courses for ECE teachers are not arranged regularly.	20	77

Note: Total number of responses may exceed from sample size as one administrator may indicated more than one problem of this level.

4.2 Administrator's views to solve the problems at ECE level

No	Measures for Solution Of Problems	F	%
1	ECE teachers should be trained at mass level with the co-operation of public and private sector.	10	38.5
2	Create awareness among parents about the importance of ECE by conducting parent teacher meetings regularly.	10	38.5
3	Separate schools for ECE students should be established, meanwhile use existing schools (male/female) with the concept of co-education at ECE level.	10	38.5
4	Government should allocate special funds separately for ECE level to cope with the challenges.	20	77
5	Proper guidance and supervision should be provided so that problems can be solved properly at this level.	5	19.3
6	Physical facilities should be provided at top priority in public sector schools to attract the parents and students.	15	57.5
7	Government should provide audio visual aids at ECE level with technical assistant.	12	46.2
8	Create co-ordination and co-operation among ECE providers, so that existing practices can be improved in public sector schools.	5	19.3
9	Refresher courses for ECE teachers should be regularly arranged.	15	57.5
10	Separate classrooms with playing facilities should be provided at ECE level for proper growth and development of students	10	38

Note: Total number of responses may exceed from sample size as one administrator may provide more than one measure to solve the problems.

4.3 Teachers' view about the problems at ECE level

No	Problems indicated by teachers	F	%
1	Salary rate is low as compared to work load.	15	22
2	Special funds are not allocated especially for ECE level.	16	23.5
3	Teachers of ECE level are not given additional allowance.	20	29.4
4	ECE students are not present regularly.	10	14.7
5	Lack of parent's co-operation and co-ordination with teachers.	20	29.4
6	Audio visual aids are not provided properly in the classrooms.	20	29.4

7	Separate playing grounds are not available for ECE students.	10	14.7
8	Refresher courses for ECE teachers are not arranged.	25	36.8
9	Lack of proper physical facilities especially at classroom level.	15	22
10	Problem of students that made admission after summer vacation.	10	14.7
11	Lack of special classrooms for ECE students in public sector.	25	36.8
12	Lack of physical activities in the curriculum.	20	29.4
13	Transport problem for female teachers in public sector.	10	14.7

Note: Total number of responses may exceed from sample size as one teacher may indicate more than one problem.

4.4 Teachers views to solve the problems at ECE level

No	Measures for effective teaching	F	%
1	Refresher courses should be arranged regularly for ECE teachers.	50	73.5
2	Good salary should be given to ECE teachers for reinforcement.	45	66.2
3	Audio visual aids should be provided for effective teaching.	30	44.1
4	Playing facilities should be provided for play way method.	40	58.8
5	Female teachers should be appointed at ECE level.	20	29.4
6	Parent teacher meetings help in effective teaching.	15	22
7	Pick and drop facilities should be provided for students and teachers.	20	29.4
8	There should be arrangement for pre-service and in-service training at mass level.	20	29.4

Note: Total number of responses may exceed from sample size as one teacher may indicate more than one measure for effective teaching.

5. Conclusions

In the public sector schools no attention is given to the physical needs of students at (ECE) level but situation is a little bit better in private sector schools. Trained teachers are not available for ECE in both the public and private sector. Facilities like drinking water pick and drop service, audio visual aids, play grounds and toileting are provided to the ECE students in the private sector schools only. Parents are not pursued by the public sector institutions to make them aware of the importance of ECE. No refresher course is arranged for them in public sector schools, but situation is a little bit better in private sector schools. Specific curriculum exists for ECE. Specific study material in public and private sector schools is available. Individual attention is given to the ECE students in private sector schools and their classes are well decorated, but situation is worse in public sector schools.

6. Recommendations

Physical needs of ECE students should be properly catered in the public sector schools. There should be provision of physical facilities like drinking water, pick and drop service, audio visual aids, separate play grounds and toilets. Government of Pakistan as well as Provincial Government should support ECE programs by allocating special budget for it practically. Measures should be adopted by government to pursue parents for creating awareness about the importance of ECE at mass level by using print and electronic media. Trained female teachers should be appointed at ECE level with paying them special additional allowances for motivating them. Universities and Elementary Teachers Training Colleges should launch short term training courses especially for ECE level.

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