

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Pakistan: An Exploration of Issues, Challenges and Solutions

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ABSTRACT

In this study, Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Pakistan was examined in terms of its issues, challenges, and solutions. This study aimed to examine relevant problems and difficulties and offer solutions and suggestions to strengthen the standard of ECCE in Pakistan. A content analysis methodology was employed in the research and based on relevance criterion 81 studies conducted from 2015 to 2022 were selected which included 51 quantitative, 18 qualitative, and 12 mixed-methods research papers. The study's significant portion is based in Australia, the US, the UK, France, Germany, and Pakistan which restricts the findings' applicability on a global level. The results were illustrated in nine comprehensive themes namely: early childhood education's historical perspective, the significance of early care and education for children's development, the importance of ECCE: a global perspective, ECCE in Pakistan: present situation, ECCE in Pakistan's public schools, the present educational trends in Pakistan's public sector schools, implementation issues with Pakistan's early childhood education program: suggestions and solutions. This study has a direct bearing on researchers, government leaders, politicians, school administrators, teachers, parents, and community people who are interested in learning about the problems and difficulties associated with ECCE and also finding solutions.

Keywords: ECCE, Issues of ECCE, Challenges of ECCE, ECCE in Pakistan

Introduction

The paper examines the importance of ECCE programs that highlight the current scheme of Pakistan—one of the highest populated country with young children. The initial stage of a child is significant in upbringing in terms of personality, social behavior, cognitive development, and building attitudes and dispositions that will endure a lifetime, according to a study (Elango et al., 2015). Early childhood education participants have superior academic results and later make greater societal contributions, while children not getting quality education in ECCE could possibly drop out, receive welfare assistance, and involve in criminal activity (Bakken, Brown & Downing, 2017).

Furthermore, a person's long-term intelligence, creativity, behavior, and talents are determined by their early brain development, whereas bad development during the first few years impacts all bodily tissues, including the immune system (Cantor et al., 2019). By the time a child is five years old, the whole brain is developed. Whether a youngster has a strong or weak brain depends significantly on their family and local surroundings (Johnson, Riis & Noble, 2016). These circumstances affect a child's capacity ultimately towards upcoming problems in future, such as everyday difficulties and rise up a child's susceptibility to current issues as well as future health issues such as high blood pressure and diabetes (Bhutta, Guarrant, & Nelson, 2017). The World Health Organization (WHO, 2018) reflects parenting education, skill development, family support, proper nutrition, and improvement in the health department, which are considered as the fundamental factors for children's development and their success in future. Throughout the years before attending school, children enjoy a variety of learning opportunities by interacting with their peers and family members.

However, both internal and external factors provide continuous progress for children's development. Poverty, hunger, and limited access to school are just a few of Pakistan's environmental issues, which consider ECCE to be the most essential learning environment when their sensory actions are very strong (Hunzai, 2007). Recognizing the strategic and continuous significance of high-quality ECCE, public and private organizations in Pakistan have introduced several programs. The Teachers' Resource Center (TRC), Released Confidence and Creativity (RCC) project, Children's Resource International (CRI), AKU-IED, UNICEF, AKESP, and save children (UK) are a few organizations that have been taken the lead in this regard (Hunzai, 2007).

Therefore, the evidence of the international push for ECCE, the recent past and current circumstances of ECCE in Pakistan, and issues and challenges with their solutions are briefly reviewed and discussed in this paper.

Problem Statement

Worldwide complicated web of components of risk and inadequate approach to basic amenities, 250 million children worldwide are unable to reach their potential capabilities in their initial stage of life. As per the World Bank, more than 150 million young children in developing nations do not

have access to early childhood education. The majority of those affected are children from very low or normal income families. Pakistan was ranked 109th out of 126 nations for providing ECCE of the lowest quality (Yoshikawa & Kabay, 2014). In Pakistan, poverty is a big constraint in provision of ECCE (Singal, 2016). Therefore, Pakistan made an effort to resolve the situation by establishing ECCE in schools (Alam et al., 2022).

Yet, regrettably, Pakistan's ECCE still faces different issues which consist of lack of qualified teachers and resources, and a lack of understanding of its significance (Ahmad, 2011). Naz and Sharjeel (2020) explored the lack of a clear policy for ECCE, concerns about different teaching methodologies, parental involvement, a well-prepared curriculum, as well as inadequate awareness of the advantages of ECCE including stakeholders that affected the quality of education in ECCE in Pakistan historically.

Similar issues were raised in Chen and Corak's (2008) study on the inadequacy of private and public sector training as well as the lack of administrative resources for ECCE programs at provincial, district, and school levels (Bartlett & Smith, 2019). Hence, this paper aimed to review the literature on ECCE in Pakistan and also highlights the Issues and Challenges along with their Solutions.

Method

Research methodology and literature search steps

A content analysis methodology was used in this research. In content analysis, keywords related to the variable under study are selected according to the objectives of the study and then a literature search is done to find relevant research articles, reports, and theses on a pre-defined criterion.

Keywords like "ECCE", "ECCE in Pakistan", "Issues and Challenges of ECCE", and "dimensions and factors of ECCE" were used to search on the databases such as Taylor & Francis, Elsevier, Sage, Springer, Emerald, and Eric. Through scanning these various databases, 326 articles, 31 theses, and multiple reports were located.

Procedure and requirements for inclusion

The downloaded theses, research papers, articles, and reports were scrutinized and shortlisted through the following process: the publications were categorized according to the developed and developing countries and then a complete review of the publications was done. Out of 357 research publications, based on the common topics, variables used, methodology, and analysis conducted only 81 were finalized. According to their titles and the type of study, nine common themes were used to club the shortlisted publications.

Table 1

Articles according to themes and areas of study.

S. No	Themes	Articles
1	Historical Perspective of Childhood Education.	15
2	Importance of ECCE	8
3	Significance of ECCE in child development	5
4	Worldwide Scope of ECCE	15
5	Current Scenario of ECCE in Pakistan	10
6	Education for Young Children in Public Schools of Pakistan	5
7	The Current Educational trends of Public sector schools in Pakistan	10
8	Pakistan's ECCE program implementation problems	6
9	Recommendations and Solutions	7
		81

Results and Discussion

The findings are discussed under each theme separately.

Historical Perspective of Childhood Education

The study of Lowenthal (2015) highlighted that the extent to which early children particularly females were frequently seen as liabilities and exposed to indifference rather than care is demonstrated by various histories of ECCE. In fact, it wasn't until the 1900s that some widespread practices looked at infanticide by disclosure or refined practice of “potting” newborns (which the infant Moses underwent) was questioned. These methods of disposing of children were eventually recognized as being unlawful, and governments made efforts to curtail the practice (Ehrensaft et al., 2015). However, issues remain in different countries, even though the ways that people are rejected or neglected have changed. In many regions of the world, infant girls and children with disabilities continue to face neglect and disregard (Ishii-Kuntz, 2016). Moreover, in the past, farms and industrial places appreciated the labor of young children. Even though the working circumstances for children were usually atrocious, they frequently preferred starvation and poverty that most of the families experienced (Lloyd, 2018). Therefore, people started to understand that youth is distinct from adulthood and that kids aren't just little grownups but are assets for our nation. Froebel and the McMillan sisters were pioneers who had an impact on how programs were structured for a large number of young children starting in 1837 and 1913, respectively (Saif, Inam & Abiodullah, 2020). Additionally, Rao et al. (2019) looked at the early infancy histories of 14 countries, ranging from Germany and China to Nigeria. It is abundantly obvious that each of the history that consideration of ECCE has only existed since the 2nd World War period. The current

position of ECCE, however, has evolved gradually over a considerable amount of time in the majority of the countries. True transformation in the USA, according to Brain et al. (2019), started in the 1950s when individuals realized that something needed to be considered to help out children in academic institutions. The disabilities were focused initially and broadened to include more young children. In this era, China began with the founding of the People's Republic of China for Early Childhood Education and Care. Kindergartens were converted into centers for the care and instruction of children (1990's) in accordance with the New Democracy educational concept (Wu, 2017). When people discovered that poverty and society's disdain for children's needs were to blame for their problems, the word "culturally deprived" converted to "economically disadvantaged." Even though ECCE was initiated and Kindergarten started in the 1800's, in the last ten years more attention was given to it (Tudge et al., 2017).

Importance of ECCE

ECCE presents numerous advantages in the cognitive development and emotional adoption of children. several Neurological studies posited that at the age of three years the brain and intellectual development of the child are essentially high at this stage because at this stage child's brain haven't made so many networks of the brain, and their absorption and intellectual capacity are high (World Health Organization, 2018). Additionally, a suitable stimulating learning environment where a child can play activities also leads to an increase in the physical size of the brain (Gottschalk, 2019). According to a study by Singal (2016), ECCE plays a positive role in labor force participation, earnings, and employment and it put long term positive effect on the overall economy. Despite the economic factor, researchers identified that early childhood schooling especially three to five years of life remarkably impact the development of individual and their contribution to society (Winston & Chicot, 2016). The result of the longitudinal study estimated that a single dollar invested in the quality of ECCE by educationists and policymakers will return 2 to 13 dollars to them. After developing the concept of child development most organization provides the foundation for children's health development to most families (Sciaraffa, Zeanah & Zeanah, 2018). However, the report of the World Health Organization (2018) explored another factor related to child development which is parents' education, Parents' schooling ability is essential for families. Parents and people who are taking care of children will help them to get enough nutrition, proper health, and proper awareness and education to improve their children's life (Vinayastri & Handayani, 2017).

Significance of ECCE in Child Development

ECCE promotes a child's cognitive growth as well as improves social and emotional development. According to neurological studies, children's sensory actions are strong, and they can catch things easily when engaging in proper learning activities that could be equally good to play resultantly, it enhances the size of the brain (Lamrani & Abdelwahed, 2020). ECCE has long-term very extreme benefits on employment, labor force participation, and incomes from an economic perspective (Cruz & Diaz, 2016). Due to changing economic and social trends, children are

attending early childhood educational settings at younger ages. In addition, research has indicated that initial stage of learning is very important for a Child's growth and social interaction (Bakken, Brown & Downing, 2017). Today, there is a rising recognition of the significance of a child's formative years for future development and the value of early access to a top-notch education.

Worldwide Scope of ECCE

In this Era, ECCE is becoming increasingly focused on changing. Early childhood care is frequently seen as the most important obligation of families in all countries around the globe. Learning and development are significantly impacted by parenting techniques (Melhuish et al., 2015). The preparation of children for primary school can be significantly increased by families and communities providing high-quality early development programs (Richter et al., 2017).

Globally, the initial stage of Education is an emerging field more and more children are getting formal and informal education at an early age. More than half of children in Europe are participating in non-formal and formal elementary schooling, with up to 50% of children (4 years old) attending classes with trained teachers in educational centres (IKesako & Miyamoto, 2015). These practices frequently have been adopted in Belgium, France, and Italy too. Around 90% of children (3 years old) have an approach to primary level of education (Fleer, 2001). Australia also paid attention to the field of ECCE and experienced fast progress to access early childhood services for children. Children's access to early childhood services has also increased quickly in Australia, with 11.2% (3 years old) and 8.34% participating in academic programs in 2004-2005 (Sims & Waniganayake, 2015). Tasks that were once seen as being the sole duty of families and parents are now shared by the larger society. At an early age children are protected, nurtured, and educated in early childhood settings, such as nurseries, daycare centers, family daycare homes, kindergartens, and preschools (Neuman & Powers, 2021).

Current Scheme of ECCE

Education and a country's development are associated, even at the initial school level, and early childhood initiatives have a lasting effect. Unfortunately, there are far too many effects of child mortality proxies on primary education. For suppose, unfavorably correlated with maternal education, fundamental medical issues like sanitization, and doctors to serve humanity. Due to a shortage of infrastructure in the field of the health department, Pakistan is ranked 47th in terms of mortality rates for children under age of five years (Khan, Azhar & Shah, 2011). Moreover, it's usually found that early weddings make it difficult to ensure prenatal care, a secure pregnancy, and the delivery of healthy newborns. The majority of Pakistani communities do not place a high priority on female education. As a result, it's crucial to take parental education into account as part of an all-encompassing strategy for a Child's growth (Krishna et al., 2018). Proper health, proper nutrition, strong social support, and stimulating support externally and internally for mothers and children, all contribute to the best chances for a child's healthy growth. To meet the national educational goals, ECCE is considered the most important vision. Pakistan decided to promote a national plan of action as well as a social program for children. One of the priority sectors to be

taken into account in the national plan of action was ECCE (Asim & Nawaz, 2018). Its responsibility is to increase young children's enrolment and retention in their initial childhood to contribute different opportunities to them for future growth. Additionally, in the past, Pakistan's government didn't formally recognize ECCE.

ECCE was formally established in Pakistan in the 1970s. Although this practice was technically stopped in the 1980s, government elementary schools frequently hosted *Katchi* classes for kids between the ages of three and six. These programs were extremely formal and instructive in their original sense, which was not familiar with early childhood (Black et al., 2017). The number of enrollments could not be tracked by any mechanism. The 1992 National Educational Policy acknowledged writing-focused *Katchi* sessions. But the implementation of this policy never truly got underway. As a result, aside from textbooks, sufficient educational resources and facilities have not been built, nor have adequate educational facilities and services been provided. As a result, just 10% students with age of 3-5 got enrolled (Ashiq & Asad, 2017). In 2000, 8.61 million children were anticipated. (There are 4.21 million girls and 4.40 million boys). This information emphasizes how much work must be put into funding early childhood education (Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Education, 1999, 2003). It represents a substantial demand for ECCE that has attained endorsement from the government's national policy.

Education for Young Children in Public Schools of Pakistan

Baluchistan and North-West Frontier Province are two of Pakistan's four provinces, along with Sindh and Punjab (FATA, FANA). Although Urdu is the official language and each province and tribal territory has its language, English is also used widely (Khan, 2018). With 130.58 million people, this country is the seventh most populated in the world and is home to more than 70 different languages and dialects. The anticipated literacy rate is 43.9 percent, and the enrollment rate in elementary schools is 42 percent (Yazdani, 2004). Moreover, both public and private schools offer instruction, and each one has different strategies for advancing ECCE. A government initiative pilot programme is currently running under several districts and schools (Zaidi et al., 2018). Certain private school systems in Pakistan are working to raise the professional qualifications of their teachers, though more needs to be done to develop this capability. While some private groups offer ECCE-specific training, the government does not recognize these programs, and teachers who take part in them do not receive any further financial benefits, which serves as a deterrent to participation (Neuman & Powers, 2021). These private schools are for-profit businesses with expensive tuition. On the other side, government teachers believe they receive insufficient support and encouragement and are consequently unmotivated to pursue more professional development. In any event, they already have stable positions, and no quality control might serve as a motivator for them to pursue further advancement (Juma, 2004).

The Current Educational trends of Public sector schools in Pakistan

The *Katchi* classes are considered to be the first step moving up for formal schooling in government schools. Children having age 3-5 may be enrolled for this class when they get years

old. Although there is no tuition, there can be a minor entrance fee. The following example illustrates a typical *Katchi* classroom in a public school and emphasizes specific elements of learning, facility provision, and service.

Scenario of Government Schools

At Great Government Primary School (a made-up school), the admissions process starts in August and lasts until March. The children above 5 years old, or some of 6 or above 6, get admission. This *Katchi* class frequently has more than 50 students, depending on demand in the area (Hussain, Malik & Ali, 2020). In addition, this classroom has 40 wooden benches, with three or four kids seated on each one. Children should instruct to bring their boiled water bottles to stay healthy. The conditions of toilets are not so encouraging and dim lighting in these facilities makes using them a terrifying experience for young children (Lloyd, Mete & Sathar, 2005).

Provision and Physical Environment

It depends on the area, a school with larger area caters a lot of students; the school does provide a classroom for the *katchi* class. Water, bathrooms, and other amenities often work as described earlier (Nawaz, Ashraf & Siddique, 2021). Urban schools have the wooden benches mentioned here, in contrast to certain rural locations where pupils sit on mats. Only a chalkboard and chalk are used as teaching tools. The textbooks to kids of *katchi* class are provided free of cost by the Government. Although few NGOs provide toys, building blocks, and number lines for active learning, these schools do not receive additional financing. Moreover, the lack of storage makes it difficult to keep the equipment safe and secure (Hunzai, 2007).

Teachers and Instructors

The government often prefers female staff to teach *Katchi* lessons. These teachers hold a primary teaching certificate (PTC) and a secondary education degree, although they are inexperienced. Due to their poor knowledge of child development and lack of subject matter expertise, teachers may provide inaccurate information and concepts (Kim, 2020). In addition, as was already said, there is a shortage of essential training and professional growth. The commitment of instructor should be sincere and dedicated which can aid or impede growth efforts in ECCE (Whitebook et al., 2018). Each year, teachers are often promoted in public schools. A teacher of the *Katchi* class one year might teach class I the next year, as an illustration. Because of this, teachers are less likely to individually invest in professional development initiatives (Hussain, Malik & Ali, 2020).

Learning and Teaching

In Pakistan, majority of the teachers follow traditional teaching methodologies and rote learning. Memorization and writing (copying from the blackboard) are given precedence over other forms of education. Urdu, math, and English are the only three subjects taught in *katchi* schools solely by memorization and repetition. Teachers only lecture and lead pupils while

inspecting their hands after assemblies and before they begin their work; there are few further learning opportunities, not even about fundamental health and hygiene (Hussain, Malik & Ali, 2020). Only during drawing courses are pupils required to work creatively; the teacher will sketch pictures on the board and give the class instructions to copy and colour them. Young children need to learn academic knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors that will help them move in society effectively, but creativity and critical thinking are not stressed. Instead, both parents and teachers exclusively focus on academic knowledge. School management couldn't find out their home schedule and preschool as a result, which might enhance kids' general development.

Management, Administration and Parents

Most of the parents are uneducated who have enrolled their children in government schools. There are no measures for aiding parents to assist their children in learning and even they don't know their role in their upbringing and their future growth. The administrative procedures used to support classroom instruction and learning are not provided by the institution or the government's education ministry (Tahira et al., 2021).

Pakistan's Early Childhood Education Programme Implementation Problems

Early childhood professionals in Pakistan have a significant challenge attempting to convert a child-centered philosophy in practice. Yet as was already stated, there are still additional obstacles to surmount (Nikolopoulou, 2021; Haslip & Gullo, 2018; Qureshi, Bhutto & Mahar, 2019; Tahira et al., 2021; Johnson-Staub, 2017; Murithi, 2016). They include

- 1) The benefits of ECCE are only known by a small number of stakeholders.
- 2) The absence of a comprehensive ECCE policy with components including early childhood-appropriate curriculum design, parental involvement in their learning, and teaching strategies for young children;
- 3) The government often considers ECCE as the least priority. Even National Educational policy acknowledges ECCE as a formal system spanning elementary education but in spite of it just a few implications are attempted for it.
- 4) The budget is also distributed for Pre Primary Education.
- 5) Education sector, compulsory, is neglected and no satisfactory actions are taken to meet the needs of children in and out of school (Yousafzai & Gul, 2019).
- 6) A lack of proper access to essential amenities like toilets, clean water, and medical care.
- 7) The lack of supervision and coordination networking and coordination of government departments, agencies, and institutions. This means no necessary actions have been taken for it.
- 8) A lack of funding for setting up and overseeing ECCE programs at the provincial, local, and educational levels.
- 9) Lack of training programs in public and private sectors.
- 10) Scarce infrastructure for educational institutions.

Recommendations and Solutions

1. Early childhood programs that are well-planned encourage advancements in education, equality, health, and providing immediate and long-term benefits for the children. Well-targeted and implemented programs serve as benchmarks for measuring human progress. When money is invested in this field, both society as a whole and an individual experience rapid economic growth, yielding rewards in the form of achievement and success in the marketplace (Woodhead, 2016).
2. In terms of funding, ECCE requires adequate funding. Therefore, ECCE should be kept apart from primary and elementary education. Enough financing should be authorized, disbursed, and optimally utilized for the execution of ECCE programs, plans, and projects at all levels, including national, provincial, and district. The budget which has been given for ECCE should not be neglected. Additionally, donors, non-governmental organizations, and communities should be used to mobilize resources. (Somerville & Williams, 2015)
3. The government should support private organizations, institutions and NGOs to launch ECCE programs and provide services at the province and district levels to raise awareness of the value of early childhood education among decision-makers, planners, managers, administrators, teachers, and parents. (Kilonzo & Thinguri, 2017)
4. The government and private organizations should launch campaigns for innovative educational programs like local songs, poems, and storybooks in both the local and the national languages, as well as videos that provide parents and teachers with training on early childhood-related topics (Hunzai, 2009).
5. All businesses, whether public or private, ought to cooperate. Another issue that can be solved by implementing integrated ECCE programs is the compartmentalization of ECCE components within industries like health, education, and others (Begin, 2014)
6. Education-related Organizations and CBOs are required to offer ECCE services, such as networking, coordination, and a forum for practice for the quality of ECCE. Through networking, programs based on real-world experience may be shared (Kilonzo & Thinguri, 2017).
7. ECCE depends upon political will because it requires encouraging public awareness, adopt necessary legislation, facilitate and appropriate the financial resources required for it, and supervise that whether have been provided or not (Vannoy, 2004).
8. Our Government should provide quality education from the initial stage as it basic learning for every child. It is suggested that ECCE curriculum and teacher guidelines and teaching methodologies should be improved with innovative ideas (Ahmad, 2011).

Conclusions and Implication

We conclude, based on the results and critical analysis of the selected studies, that the overall condition of ECCE in developing countries is homogeneous with few differences like the early childhood programs. However, in Pakistan situation is not satisfactory. The main factors which are affecting the early childhood education are Poverty, inadequate budget, lack of a clear ECCE

policy, the benefits of ECCE are only known by a small number of stakeholders, ECCE is at lowest priority of the government. Moreover, restricted access to basic social services, the majority of children under the age of five suffer from malnutrition, poor health, and a lack of access to safe drinking water and insufficient hygiene are also some common issues in most of the schools, Limited training options available in the public and private sectors, lack of trained and qualified teachers, limited availability of data needed for ECCE programme planning, limited accessibility to local language learning and teaching resources are some major issues which are creating hindrance in quality of ECCE in schools. Additionally, this literature review paper is a road map for policymakers and administration to be aware of the challenges and solutions of ECCE program, this review paper is also helpful for the management of schools to understand the whole scenario of ECCE in Pakistan. Moreover, this paper will be helpful for the curriculum developer's stakeholders and NGOs to be aware of the current issues and challenges faced by ECCE institutes and also provide them with solutions.

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