

Effectiveness of Early Childhood Education Program in Govt. Schools of Punjab: A Situational Analysis

Ali Adnan*

Department of Education, Govt. Degree College (Boys) Uch Sharif, Bahawalpur, Pakistan

Muhammad Dilshad

Department of Education, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, Pakistan

Muhammad Yousaf Khan

Department of English, Govt. S. E College, Bahawalpur, Pakistan

Abstract

This study is aimed at determining the effectiveness of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Govt. schools of Punjab, Pakistan. The data was collected through a questionnaire from 120 teachers employed in ECE centers. The results show that initiation of ECE centers is very effective as it help the children to develop critical thinking, basic skills and knowledge that will be helpful for their whole life. Despite its positive response, government does not properly allocated funds to these programs as well as teachers are not fully trained to deal with such children. This results in divergence in teaching and learning from the desired criteria. So, planning, continuous monitoring and evaluation are needed for the fruitful results of ECE centers.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education (ECE), teachers, training, learning, critical thinking.

I. Introduction:

Education is considered to be of great importance from beginning. It is a continuous process from cradle to death. It is the modification of behavior and a deliberate process. It involves care and guidance because it belongs to society at all. It is carefully planned hence it is a systematic way of learning. Early years of a child are critically more important, for they provide a substance for the rest of his life, as an adolescent and as an adult. A child who is well nurtured can live well and generate better societies. Children are our future assets and by investing in them at their earliest years we invest in everyone's social and economic development (Young , 2002).

Early Childhood Education deals with early years of a child and it covers the education from birth to six or eight years of age. It provides collaboration of children with educational setting which involves different types or activities that play vital role in the growth of a child. Early Childhood Education is for children in which different approaches, methods and activities are used for overall improvement of children. Early Childhood Education is also enabling children to develop the social and emotional features of a particular age. So early childhood education provides a base for holistic development of children as it offers opportunities for lifelong learning. Early childhood education means education of children interacted in different settings with the aim of fostering a child's solid growth, development and learning (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2004).

It is true that early childhood education refers to educational programs and strategies geared towards children from birth to eight years. This time period is widely considered the most vulnerable stage of a person's life. A child learns together with adults and other children in an environment consciously and purposefully designed to facilitate growth and learning. Quality early childhood education smooth out differences due to the children's home environment and in this way gives all children the chance to develop according to their own capacities. A child-centered classroom provides chances for self-inventiveness and expression, active learning and team working. It promotes self-ability, enables members of the community and encourages freedom of thought and communication (Northampton Community College).

In Pakistan, it has committed to achieve education for all (EFA) goals. Promotion of Early childhood education is the first goal of EFA. After Dakar framework of action for EFA in 2000, Pakistan prepared, approved and launched National plan of Action for EFA (2001-2015). This plan envisaged to establish 42,500 new ECE centers and to appoint 51000 new teachers, exclusively for ECE or "Katchi" class. So after a long time, initiatives are taken by government into existing school education system for ECE (Ministry of Education, 2007).

But unfortunately in Pakistan, not sufficient research has been done on ECE. The reason behind it is that, in general, most of the developing countries and particularly, in Pakistan people are not aware about the importance of this significant concept. Even at ministry level they give more attention to higher education rather than giving importance to primary education and ECE. Realizing the role and significance of ECE, especially its impact on learning achievement, provision was made in the National Education Policy (1998-2010) to reintroduce "Katchi" as a formal class in primary schools, thereby extending the number of primary education years. However, the implementation process has not started yet truly due to scarcity of resources. Once the target of Universal Primary Education (UPE) will be achieved, the next priority area may be Early Childhood Care and

Development.

In this respect Government of Pakistan is sincerely interested to increase enrollment of students with the help of ECE program. Now with the help of local and international organizations, Govt. of Pakistan has been launched early childhood education program in all over the country.

This study will make out the best way of effectiveness of ECE program in Govt. schools of Punjab. It is anticipated that a study of this kind will enable the authorities and teachers to get the good sense of early childhood education and can serve better by getting awareness regarding ECE and of relevant early problems.

II. Literature Review:

Early child development (ECD) programs are designed to address the basic health, nutrition, and intellectual and emotional needs of children that in turn will promote the development of creative and competent individuals of society. If the children, who are born poor and deprived of growth and developmental opportunities, are provided with such early interventions, their life can be changed (Young, 2002). These early interventions can help these children move out of poverty. According to World Bank (2000), 1.2 billion people live on less than \$1 per day amongst the 6 billion people of the world. The poor children, who are deprived of basic health care, nutrition and other facilities necessary for healthy growth, perform very poorly as they are not ready to learn; so, they have high dropout rate. Moreover, they earn lower wages when they enter the workplace, thereby passing their poverty onto their children. If such children are provided with a better chance, they can move out of this vicious cycle of poverty. Education serves as a great equalizer to diminish the difference between the two extremes i.e. rich and poor. According to Birdsall (1999), if poor children are given opportunities through early interventions, they can benefit from school and ECD programs serves this purpose by providing such deprived children with equitable benefits thereby meeting equity and efficiency goals of countries.

In the view of Willms (1999), infants and toddlers, as they respond to their family, naturally learn speech and develop a recognizable vocabulary by 12-18 months which grows over the next few years. So, these years are very critical for them as the base is being established for future literacy development. Moreover, Shore (1997) stated that the brain of a baby is 2.5 times more active than an adults' brain at the age of 3 and it performs this way for the first decade of their life. If the children are provided with proper nutrition, care and other facilities in these early years, it will be beneficial for their brain development as well as they got more problem-solving abilities, their self-confidence and critical thinking power is increased as well as they become more capable to cooperate with others; thereby, leading to enhanced school performance and probable alterations in their developmental route (Ramey & Ramey, 1998). The research regarding such early interventions highlights many of its benefits on the lives of young children. Some of the renowned examples of effective ECD interventions include the Infant Health and Development Program, the Perry Preschool Project, the Initial Education Project in Mexico, the Head Start and the Early Head Start programs in the United States, the North Carolina Abecedarian Project, and the Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS) in India i.e. world's largest ECD program. The children who participated in such early interventions had exhibited superior school performance as well as positive change in general behavior as compared to children who did not attend such programs. Such children had also shown more success from primary grades to adulthood as well as higher achievement on intellectual aptitude tests (Chaturvedi, Srivastava, Singh, & Prasad, 1987). According to Barros and Mendonca (1999), the chances of poor children, who went to preschool for one year, to stay in primary school is 0.4 times more than who didn't go to preschool.

In Pakistan, the concept of Early Childhood Education (ECE) is mainly confined to Katchi (or Pakki) class. In order to formalize Katchi class, the government announced a policy in which ECE curriculum was introduced in 2002. Since the existence of public school system in Pakistan, Katchi class had been existed (Shakil, 2002). These pre-primary children ages from 3 – 5 years. In the public sector, these children are being taught by traditional methods of teaching which have not been updated with the changing environment. However, the government has taken initiatives to improve the learning environment at local level. Moreover, teachers are not fully trained to handle the pre-school children as well as not familiar with the appropriate handling ECE techniques. Even parents and other individuals from society are not fully aware of its long term benefits and expressed an attitude that it is the responsibility of teacher to worry about learning issues of children and showed very little interest for involvement. So, parent's involvement is very low (Shakil, 2002).

Shakil (2002) stated the physical environment of school is not favorable for learning and teaching methods of children as the students of class 1 and sometimes class 2 shares the same room. Also the schools have not showed any sort of admiration and understanding regarding ECE. They didn't even introduce any kind of approaches to deal with Katchi class children. To teach the teachers mostly use traditional methods of making children learn i.e. recite after me where the students don't have an understanding of what they are reciting. Few of the teachers show dedication to teach but they are not given proper training to teach pre-primary classes. The primary teachers are majorly emphasized on supervision of records and books and less emphasis is placed on mentoring. So, improvement is needed to fill the gaps in physical and learning environment of primary schools

especially these pre-primary classes.

III. Research Methodology:

This is an exploratory research that is aimed at determining the effectiveness of ECE programs in government schools in Punjab, Pakistan. This study is delimited to ECE centers in Govt. schools of Punjab only. Primary data was collected from teachers that were managing these ECE centers. A structured questionnaire was administered to collect the data. Out of 120 questionnaires, only 100 were included for further data analysis. Due to inappropriate responses and half filled questionnaires, 20 questionnaires are skipped. To analyze the responses, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 20 was used. The analysis technique used on the data is percentages in order to determine the effectiveness of ECE centers in Punjab, Pakistan.

IV. Results:

The results of this research are presented in the following section:

Table 1: Effectiveness of School Education Department for ECE Program

Sr. No	Statement	Level	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
1.	School education department proves to be effective for Early childhood education program	Strongly Disagree	34%	2.50	1.432
		Disagree	24%		
		Undecided	10%		
		Agree	18%		
		Strongly Agree	14%		

Table shows that 34% respondents strongly disagreed, 24% disagreed, 18% agreed, 10% said undecided and 14% strongly agreed with the statement that school education department proved to be effective for early childhood education program with a total mean of 2.50 and standard deviation of 1.432. So most of the respondents said that school education department did not prove to be effective for early childhood education program.

Table 2: 3 to 5 Years Old Children Fit for Early Childhood Education Program

Sr. No	Statement	Level	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
2.	3 to 5 years old children are fit for early childhood education program	Strongly Disagree	19%	2.98	1.491
		Disagree	18%		
		Undecided	14%		
		Agree	28%		
		Strongly Agree	21%		

Table 2 says that 28% respondents agreed, 21% strongly agreed, 19% strongly disagreed, 18% disagreed, and 18% said undecided about 3 to 5 years old children were fit for early childhood education program with a total mean of 2.98 and standard deviation of 1.491. So, most of the respondents said that 3 to 5 years old children were fit for early childhood education program.

Table 3: ECE Children learn rapidly through experimentation and activity based learning

Sr. No	Statement	Level	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
3.	ECE children learn more rapidly through experimentation and activity based learning	Strongly Disagree	08%	3.74	1.291
		Disagree	12%		
		Undecided	14%		
		Agree	30%		
		Strongly Agree	36%		

Table 3 indicates that 36% respondents strongly agreed, 30% agreed, 14% undecided, 12% disagreed, and 08% strongly disagreed that ECE children learnt rapidly through experimentation and activity based learning with a total mean of 3.74 and standard deviation of 1.291. So, most of the respondents said that ECE children learnt rapidly through experimentation and activity based learning.

Table 4: Development of creative thinking and curiosity among children

Sr. No	Statement	Level	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
4.	Early childhood education develops creative thinking and curiosity among children	Strongly Disagree	06%	3.84	1.315
		Disagree	12%		
		Undecided	10%		
		Agree	28%		
		Strongly Agree	44%		

Table 4 shows that 44% respondents strongly agreed, 28% agreed, 12% disagreed, 10% undecided, and 06% strongly disagreed that ECE developed creative thinking and curiosity among children with a total mean of 3.84 and standard deviation of 1.315. So, majority of the respondents said that ECE developed creative thinking and curiosity among children.

Table 5: Acquisition of basic concepts, skills and attitudes for lifelong learning

Sr. No	Statement	Level	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
5.	ECE is critical for acquisition of basic concepts, skills & attitudes that lay the foundation for lifelong learning	Strongly Disagree	12%	3.84	1.376
		Disagree	08%		
		Undecided	06%		
		Agree	32%		
		Strongly Agree	42%		

Table 5 says that 42% respondents strongly agreed, 32% agreed, 12% strongly disagreed, 08% disagreed and 06% undecided with the statement that ECE was critical for the acquisition of basic concepts, skills and attitudes for lifelong learning with a total mean of 3.84 and standard deviation of 1.376. So, most of the respondents were of the view that ECE was critical for the acquisition of basic concepts, skills and attitudes for lifelong learning.

Table 6: Achievement of ECE objectives through current ECE program

Sr. No	Statement	Level	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
6.	The desired objectives of ECE can be achieved easily through current ECE program in Punjab	Strongly Disagree	40%	2.18	1.273
		Disagree	28%		
		Undecided	12%		
		Agree	14%		
		Strongly Agree	06%		

Table 6 indicates that 40% respondents strongly disagreed, 28% disagreed, 14% agreed, 12% undecided and 06% strongly agreed that the desired objectives of ECE could be achieved easily through current ECE program in Punjab with a total mean of 2.18 and standard deviation of 1.273. Majority of the respondents said that the desired objectives of ECE could not be achieved easily through current ECE program in Punjab.

Table 7: Teaching and learning of ECE take place according to the standard of given criteria

Sr. No	Statement	Level	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
7.	Teaching and learning take place according to the standard of given criteria	Strongly Disagree	22%	2.58	1.326
		Disagree	36%		
		Undecided	18%		
		Agree	10%		
		Strongly Agree	14%		

Table 7 shows that 36% respondents disagreed, 22% strongly disagreed, 18% undecided, 14% strongly agreed and 10% agreed that teaching and learning of ECE took place according to the standard of given criteria with a total mean of 2.58 and standard deviation of 1.326. So, most of the respondents said that teaching and learning did not take place according to the standard of given criteria.

Table 8: Schools have appropriate staff for ECE program

Sr. No	Statement	Level	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
8.	All schools have appropriate staff for ECE program	Strongly Disagree	28%	2.32	1.236
		Disagree	39%		
		Undecided	12%		
		Agree	16%		
		Strongly Agree	05%		

Table 8 says that 39% respondents disagreed, 28% strongly disagreed, 16% agreed, 12% undecided and 05% strongly agreed with the statement that schools had appropriate staff for ECE program with a total mean of 2.32 and standard deviation of 1.236. So, most of the respondents said that schools had not appropriate staff for ECE program.

Table 9: Provision of funds by Govt. for the improvement of ECE program

Sr. No	Statement	Level	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
9.	Funds are provided by Govt. for the improvement of ECE program	Strongly Disagree	44%	2.30	1.432
		Disagree	18%		
		Undecided	12%		
		Agree	16%		
		Strongly Agree	10%		

Table 9 indicates that 44% respondents strongly disagreed, 18% disagreed, 16% agreed, 12% undecided and 10% strongly agreed that funds were provided by Govt. for the improvement of ECE program with a total mean of 2.30 and standard deviation of 1.432. So, most of the respondents said that Funds were not provided properly by Govt. for the improvement of ECE program.

Table 10: ECE resource room has all necessary learning aids

Sr. No	Statement	Level	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
10.	ECE resource room has all necessary learning aids for kids in schools	Strongly Disagree	30%	2.68	1.449
		Disagree	26%		
		Undecided	10%		
		Agree	18%		
		Strongly Agree	16%		

Table 10 shows that 30% respondents strongly disagreed, 26% disagreed, 18% agreed, 16% strongly agreed and 10% undecided that ECE resource room had all necessary learning aids for kids in the school with a total mean of 2.68 and standard deviation of 1.449. So, most of the respondents said that ECE resource room did not have all necessary learning aids for kids in schools.

Table 11: Teaching learning material and activities according to the needs of children

Sr. No	Statement	Level	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
11.	Teaching learning material and activities of ECE are according to the needs of the children in schools	Strongly Disagree	38%	2.30	1.359
		Disagree	26%		
		Undecided	14%		
		Agree	12%		
		Strongly Agree	10%		

Table 11 says that 38% respondents strongly disagreed, 26% disagreed, 14% undecided, 12% agreed and 10% strongly agreed with the statement that teaching learning material and activities of ECE were according to the needs of the children in schools with a total mean of 2.30 and standard deviation of 1.359. So, most of the respondents said that teaching learning material and activities of ECE were not according to the needs of the children in schools.

Table 12: Necessary relationship between teacher and parents

Sr. No	Statement	Level	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
12.	Relationship between teacher and parents is necessary for the success of ECE program	Strongly Disagree	16%	2.52	1.432
		Disagree	12%		
		Undecided	08%		
		Agree	36%		
		Strongly Agree	28%		

Table 12 indicates that 36% respondents agreed, 28% strongly agreed, 16% strongly disagreed, 12% disagreed and 08% undecided that relationship between teacher and parents was necessary for the success of ECE program with a total mean of 2.52 and standard deviation of 1.432. So, most of the respondents said that relationship between teacher and parents were necessary for the success of ECE program.

Table 13: Lack of cooperation and coordination between education department and Govt. schools

Sr. No	Statement	Level	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
13.	Lack of cooperation and coordination between education department and Govt. schools obstruct in the expansion of ECE program	Strongly Disagree	16%	3.62	1.550
		Disagree	14%		
		Undecided	06%		
		Agree	20%		
		Strongly Agree	44%		

Table 13 shows that 44% respondents strongly agreed, 20% agreed, 16% strongly disagreed, 14% disagreed and 06% undecided with the statement that lack of cooperation and coordination between education department and Govt. schools obstructed in the expansion of ECE program with a total mean of 3.62 and standard deviation of 1.550. So, most of the respondents said that lack of cooperation and coordination between education department and Govt. schools obstructed in the expansion of ECE program.

Table 14: Untrained ECE teacher and difficulty in using different techniques and activities

Sr. No	Statement	Level	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
14.	ECE teachers are not trained and finds difficulty in using different techniques and activities of ECE in the classroom	Strongly Disagree	18%	3.50	1.529
		Disagree	12%		
		Undecided	08%		
		Agree	25%		
		Strongly Agree	37%		

Table 14 says that 37% respondents strongly agreed, 25% agreed, 18% strongly disagreed, 12% disagreed and 08% undecided that ECE teachers were not trained and found difficulty in using different techniques and activities of ECE in the classroom with a total mean of 3.50 and standard deviation of 1.529. So, most of the respondents said that ECE teachers were not trained and found difficulty in using different techniques and activities of ECE in the classroom.

Table 15: Need of ECE planning, assessment and evaluation practices

Sr. No	Statement	Level	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
15.	Planning, assessment and evaluation practices of ECE are needed	Strongly Disagree	16%	3.72	1.512
		Disagree	08%		
		Undecided	10%		
		Agree	20%		
		Strongly Agree	46%		

Table 15 indicates that 46% respondents strongly agreed, 20% agreed, 16% strongly disagreed, 10% undecided and 08% disagreed that planning, assessment and evaluation practices of ECE were needed with a total mean of 3.72 and standard deviation of 1.512. So, most of the respondents said that planning, assessment and evaluation practices of ECE were needed.

Table 16: Continuous monitoring and evaluation for fruitful results of ECE program

Sr. No	Statement	Level	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
16.	Continuous monitoring and evaluation is essential for the fruitful results of ECE program	Strongly Disagree	08%	3.80	1.294
		Disagree	12%		
		Undecided	10%		
		Agree	32%		
		Strongly Agree	38%		

Table 16 shows that 38% respondents strongly agreed, 32% agreed, 12% disagreed, 10% undecided, and 08% strongly disagreed with the statement that continuous monitoring and evaluation was essential for the fruitful results of ECE program with a total mean of 3.80 and standard deviation of 1.294. So most of the respondents said that continuous monitoring and evaluation was essential for the fruitful results of ECE program.

V. Discussion and Conclusion:

As children are future assets of a country, appropriate investment on them is necessary for their social and economic development. If children are provided with early interventions that include healthcare, nutrition as well

as benefits to meet their emotional and intellectual needs, they can be independent, confident as well as a good economic source for their family. The poor children, who are deprived of such early interventions, if provided such facilities can better serve their family and society. Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs are designed to address such basic needs of the poor and deprived children. The findings of this study are consistent with the study of Shore (1997) and Willms (1999) that were of the view that infants and toddlers should be provided with facilities that in turn will result in their future brain development and their brain also works 2.5 times more than the brain of an adult. So, 3-5 year kids are best for the ECE programs. The work of Shakil (2002) is also evidenced by this research as ECE centers are not properly admired; the teachers are not as properly trained as they should be; and involvement of parents is very low in government schools.

It is concluded from the study that the decision of school education department to initiate Early Childhood Education centers is very effective and 3-5 year children are best for such programs. Children employed in ECE programs learn more rapidly through experimentation, activity based learning and creative thinking and curiosity is also being developed among children. So, ECE proves to be critical for the acquisition of basic concepts, skills and attitudes for lifelong learning. The desired objectives of ECE could not be achieved easily through current ECE program in Punjab as there is lack of cooperation and coordination between education department and government schools that in turn have obstructed the expansion of ECE programs. Government always looks to be consistent to start any education program but after starting it always fails to maintain the check and balance of the program. Moreover, funds are not provided properly by government for the improvement of ECE programs. Due to this, ECE resource room does not have all necessary learning aids for children in schools; that's why teaching learning material and activities of ECE are not according to the needs of the children in schools. ECE schools have not appropriate staff and the available staff is not fully trained and finds difficulty in using different techniques and activities of ECE in the classroom. So, teaching and learning does not take place according to the standard of given criteria. Involvement of parents is also very low that is very important as the relationship between teacher and parents and necessary for the success of ECE program.

Although this study has limitations of investigating the ECE centers in Punjab only, it gives authentic data to determine the effectiveness of ECE in Punjab, Pakistan. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that proper planning, assessment and evaluation practices of ECE are needed. Along with this, continuous monitoring and evaluation is essential for the fruitful results of ECE program. It is also needed that

Bibliography

- Bank, W. (2000). World Development report 2000/2001, Attacking Poverty. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Barros, R. d., & Mendonca, R. (1999). Costs and Benefits of Pre-school Education in Brazil. Rio de Janeiro: Institute of Applied Economic Research.
- Birdsall, N. (1999, March 14). Investing in Children: The role of the state in unequal societies. Breaking the Poverty Cycle: Investing in Early Childhood . Paris, France: Annual Meeting of the Boards of Governors of the Inter-American Development Bank and the Inter-American Investment Corporation.
- Chaturvedi, E., Srivastava, B. C., Singh, J. V., & Prasad, M. (1987). Impact of Six Years Exposure to ICDS Scheme on Psycho-social Development. *Indian Pediatrics* , 24, 153-60.
- Ministry of Education. (2007). National Curriculum for Early Childhood Education. Islamabad: Government of Pakistan.
- Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. (2004). Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland. Finland: Suomen Printman.
- Northampton Community College. (n.d.). Early Childhood Education (ECE). Retrieved August 18, 2016, from Northampton Community College: <http://www.northampton.edu/early-childhood-education.htm>
- Ramey, C. T., & Ramey, S. L. (1998). Prevention of Intellectual Disabilities: Early Interventions to Improve Cognitive Development. *Preventive Medicine* , 27, 224-32.
- Shakil, S. (2002). An Overview of Early Childhood Care and Education in Pakistan (An Initial Survey and Situational Analysis. Islamabad: Agha Khan Foundation Pakistan.
- Shore, R. (1997). Rethinking the Brain — New Insights into Early Development. Families and Work Institute .
- Willms, D. (1999). Quality and Inequality in Children's Literacy: The Effects of Families, Schools, and Communities. In D. P. Keating, & C. Hertzman, *Developmental Health and the Wealth of Nations*. New York: Guildford Press.
- Young, M. (2002). From Early Child Development to Human Development: Investing in Our Children's Future. Washington D.C.: The World Bank.