



## PRACTICES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT: CHALLENGES AND ISSUES IN PAKISTAN

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**Abstract** - Recognition of Early Childhood Development (ECD) is a crucial element in the educational process. Many countries have pursued to disseminate this mission and its practices. A compromised quality practice has been made in under developing countries due to several issues and challenges. By addressing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs: 4) to ensure all children have access to early childhood development with quality. The expected practices of quality ECD are high standards input by the country that produce higher quality outcomes. There are many ways for ECD quality assessment practices through threshold quality standards. This fundamental dimension has become important to the proliferation of early childhood education. It is, therefore, quality assurance of ECD practices should be ascertained in the national education policy framework. The present study analyzed the situation of ECD quality linking to ECE's challenges and issues. A qualitative research design was conducted using document analysis, observation, and interviews of participants. It is found that the current situation in Pakistan regarding ECE quality practices is less satisfying. Private sectors are more attentive towards early education in comparison to public sectors. Pakistan is still struggling to implement quality standards, monitoring systems, access and equity, funding, and assessment of ECE due to economic crises, lack of pieces of training, resources, awareness, no agreed definition of ECE/ECD, and implementation of policies on early education.

**Keywords:** Early Education, Quality, Private and Public, State, Practices

### I. INTRODUCTION

The early years of a child are catalytic for overall development. During the early years of life, special care with proper attention is necessary for children including health, education, nutrition, affection, and protection. Early childhood care and development (ECCE) provide seeds for later education and health. A variety of definitions and terms are used to represent Early childhood care and development such as the United Nations (UN) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) used the term "Early Childhood Development" (ECD) as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) used it as "Early Childhood Care and Education" (ECCE), Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2006) uses the term "early childhood education and care" (ECEC), and some organizations used this as "Early Childhood Care and Development" (ECCD) (Ang & Wong, 2015). These terms are holistic approaches that define the pre-schooling of children. Early Childhood Education (ECE) is an integral element of early childhood development (National Education Policy, 2017). ECD concentrates on the provision of good health and education to children from birth to eight years of age. ECE can be explained as the education of children from birth to adolescence. ECD is a broader concept than ECE with attention to emotional, psychological, behavioral, and physiological development.

Many developed and under-developed countries, governing bodies, and growing researches deliberately highlight the importance of ECD for life success (McCoy, Waldman, & Fink, 2018; Peet et al., 2015). Proper childhood development is fragmented between early education and health.

The concept of capacity building, child's overall development, ECD, tackle under the ECD (Nores & Fernandez, 2018). ECD deliberately focuses on pre-primary education and transition to primary education with healthy measurements (Black et al., 2017). Early childhood education and development have been recognized by governmental and non-governmental organizations under Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target 4.2, and "window of opportunity". It is clearly stated in the national policy of Pakistan (2017) that "by 2030, all children have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education" for future life education and success. The government should provide free compulsory quality

pre-primary and primary education, and access to quality early childhood development. A cluster-randomized control approach by the World Bank is used to monitor and evaluate ECD/ECE in Pakistan. Several ECE centers are operated by the government and NGOs to promote ECD.

The intense brain development and functioning (85%) occur in the first five years of a child's life. The foundation of emotional, cognitive, behavioral, lifelong learning, social, and individual development laid in the early years from pre-conception to 8 years. However, ECD is greatly influenced by many factors as nutrition, socio-economic status, environment, insecurities, stimulation to grow and develop, and learning experiences. ECD reflects the SDGs target 4.2 frameworks. It is included in that all the member countries ensure that their children must "survive and thrive". All the countries must implement how to deliver goals of SDGs relate to ECD in collaboration with civil society, NGOs, and other stakeholders. The quality ECD has marked under ECE that fruitful for later schooling, participation, preparation for higher education, achievements, and completion of tasks.

Early Childhood Education encompasses before class one and it refers to multiple names as pre-primary, Katchi, Paki, pre-nursery, nursery, KG-1, KG-2, and prep. In Pakistan, every educational policy has emphasized the importance of education with the aim of a 100 percent literacy rate. In the early years of the independence of Pakistan, the "Katchi" class was presented as informal education. ECE organized in educational sectors in the 1970s. Public schools offered "Katchi" classes for children aged 3 to 6 years. During the 1980s, ECE practices are neglected by the government of that time. In educational policy 1992, the ECE was again recognized at the national level as Katchi class. However, it is not fully represented ECE that adequately promotes ECD (Situation Analysis of Children in Pakistan, 2017). National education policy (NEP-2009) became a milestone to recognize pre-schooling as formal education in public schools. This policy recommends the age (3-5) for ECE, accompany private schools by ECE, training for ECE's teachers, and ECE curriculum with resources allocation (Arshad & Zamir, 2018; MoE, 2009). The most progressive move was the National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Curriculum (2017). After the 18th amendment, ECE has been made one of priority at the national and provisional level as well. The education sector reforms Action Plan (ESR 2001-2005) has guaranteed that the allocation of resources shall be implemented across the country. Sindh developed the ECCE policy in 2015. After Sindh, Punjab developed a policy on ECE in 2017 (Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), 2019).

### **Strengthening ECD/ECE in Pakistan**

The Early Childhood Development Network of Pakistan (ECDNP) is a formally organized national alliance of ECD stakeholders in Pakistan. Registered under the Society's Act, ECDNP works to create a platform to promote a holistic and inclusive ECD practice in Pakistan. ECDNP strives to promote ECD as a foundational tool of national development. (ECD Dialogue Meeting,

Islamabad, 2016). Pakistan has taken interest in ECD under the supervision of Pakistan's National Planning Commission. Pakistan joined the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement (2013) to improve the nutrition life cycle. Education sector plans (ESPs) are developed to highlight the need for a cluster approach to lifelong education, as from ECD to later education. However, ESPs works with coordination mechanism, organizations, and appropriate stakeholders to enhance services from birth to primary school (UNESCO Islamabad, 2017). Teachers resources centers (TRCs) developed an intervention program as TRC's early childhood education project (ECEP) in rural and urban public schools. Pakistan Alliance for Early Childhood (PAFEC) is a national alliance stakeholder organization that works to promote ECD approaches. PAFEC practices across Pakistan with research, experience sharing, learning, networking, policy, awareness, and professional growth in ECD. PAFEC is registered at the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) under section 42-Act, 2017 ('About - PAFEC', 2019). Parwaan is the center of excellencies to promote and work for ECED under the umbrella of the ministry of federal education and professional training, children's global network in Pakistan, and open society foundation. Parwaan has the mandate to develop strategies on ECED at the national level. Children's Global Network Pakistan, CGN-P requires consultancy firm services to assess the quality of ECD centers opened under the Parwaan Preschool. Releasing Confidence and Creativity (RCC) is a sound foundation for early education in support of NGOs, schools, society, and government. RCC is being implemented to promote ECD in collaboration with Aga Khan Foundation Pakistan (AKFP) funded by USAID

('Providing Quality Early Childhood Development in Pakistan', 2018). Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA) works to promote and develop ECE in Pakistan incorporation with Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC). ITA focuses on educational reforms in public schools. It also works for non-formal and literacy programs for ECE. ITA organizes volunteer ECE programs and ECD centers with trained teachers and lady health workers (LHW) (Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA), 2019).

## State of ECD/ECE in Pakistan

Despite all practices, the health condition of infants in Pakistan is not as much better as required. Only 38 percent of infants breastfed in the first six months. As a result, fifty percent of children are deficient in vitamin A, forty percent deficient with zinc and vitamin D, and sixty-two percent are anemic. Ten million children are suffering from stunting. Eight out of ten children do not eat proper and adequate food. The prevalence of malnutrition is shared overall population as stunting 40.2 %, wasting 17.7 %, underweight 28.9%, and overweight 9.5% ('Nutrition', 2019). The state of education is also not much satisfied in Pakistan. Pakistan is in 2nd position with the highest out-of-school children (Five million) at the primary level. 24% of children are not being able to recognize alphabets of the local language, 48% being able to identify but cannot read words, only 25% can read sentences in public schools of Pakistan. In the area of arithmetic, 21% of children are not being able to identify single digits/numbers after completion of pre-schooling (Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), 2019).

## Objectives and Research Questions

ECD has many approaches and dimensions that encompassing the well-being of children.

Investigating and examining all dimensions are indefinite practices. The present research exploring the estimation of participants based on proxy indicators namely teaching and learning for preprimary children. The objectives of this study were: to explore the state and practices of ECD under the ECE in public and private schools, explore the context of teachers to highlight their challenges and issues regarding ECE, and teachers-children interaction in the learning environment. The following research questions were developed for this study:

1. What is the present situation of early childhood education as an integral part of early childhood development in Pakistan?
2. What is the level of teachers' satisfaction to provide quality ECE in comparison to public and private institutes?
3. To what extent educators interact with children in a conducive environment for pre-primary learning?
4. What are the main challenges and issues faced by the ECE teachers in public and private schools?

## II. METHOD

The qualitative approach used in this study. The data were gathered through official document analysis, observation, and interviews of participants. The researchers reviewed the literature in terms of developing themes and dimensions for quality practices of ECE/ECD, as The ECD Quality Reflection Tool (Bradley, M Caldwell, & Corwyn, 2003), Quality indicators in pre-school education (Vonta, 2000), The ECD quality toolkit (BRIDGE ECD Community of & Practice, 2016), Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) (Setodji, Schaack, & Le, 2018).

Ten public and ten private girls' schools located in district Faisalabad were randomly selected for this study. Two sections of classes were selected (Katchi in public, and nursery in private) from each school. Forty teachers (twenty from public and twenty from private) of randomly selected classes have participated in this study. The detailed research design is presented in the following pages.

### Document analysis

Document analysis was conducted to review the national context and state of ECD/ECE in Pakistan (Arshad & Zamir, 2018). The researcher reviewed the published documents from the official websites under the government of Pakistan and its relative (inter) national organizations. The documents, reports, statistics, and news were analyzed associated with ECD and ECE in Pakistan. The researcher included the documentation of ASER national report 2018, National

Education Policies, Curriculum for ECCE by MoE Pakistan 2017, Innovation of Katchi as ECE research report TRC, Situational analysis of children in Pakistan by UNICEF 2017, and ECE in Pakistan by AEPM 2017. The documents were analyzed under the following themes: Policy on ECE, Teachers' Training, Teachers' awareness of ECD, Teaching Quality, Resources for ECE, Curriculum of ECE, Institutional Support, Social awareness, and Monitoring.

## Observational protocol

The researcher used the Classroom Assessment and Scoring System (CLASS) for the Pre-K assessment scale to identify an interaction between pre-school education teachers and children followed by the study of Tonge, Jones, & Okely (2019). CLASS Pre-K assessment scale is useful to observe outdoor environment interaction in ECE based on real-life situations (Pianta et al. 2008). CLASS Pre-K is a 10-dimensional scale on 7-point Likert measurement scales (from low to high). The researcher visited two schools (1 public & 1 private) per day to gather data in two consecutive days of observation. The researcher spent an average of thirty minutes of observation in each class. The ECE teachers selected to be observed on three domains of the CLASS Pre-K scale. The three domains and their dimensions are Emotional Support (Positive Climate, Negative Climate, Teacher Sensitivity, Regard for Student Perspectives), Classroom Organization, (Productivity, Behavioral Management, Instructional Learning Formats), and Instructional Support (Quality of Feedback, Concept development, Language Modelling). The timing and visits are varied from institute to institute depending on the institutions' routine, availability, presence, and convenient environment. All the observational data were recorded manually according to the themes. To ensure unbiased and accuracy the researcher remained close to class and interact with children and interviewed ECE teachers. The dimension "negative climate" scored reversed as per assessment scale (Pianta et al. 2008). The recorded data were scored as per the CLASS implementation guide (Bridge K., Stacie G., & Marcia Kraft, 2009). The reliability of CLASS Pre-K was ensured at 81% at scores 1 to 7 point of the Likert scale. Previous studies scored interrater reliability from 80% (Jamison et al. 2014; Sandilos et al. 2014) to 82 % ((Tonge et al., 2019).

## Interview protocol

The semi-structured interview schedule was comprised of ten main themes (table 1) related to ECD/ECE practices in public and private institutes.

Table 1

### *Main themes of semi-structured interview*

Themes	Sub-themes
Policy on ECE	Satisfaction On Government Policies Regarding ECD/ECE
Teachers' Training	Emotional Development, Cognitive Development, Learning Environment, Use Of AVs, Innovative Pedagogies Techniques
Teachers' awareness	Learning Theories On Early Education, Motivational Approaches , Concept Of ECD/ECE
Teaching Quality	Teachers' Role Play, Teaching Methodologies, Communication Skills, Instructional Support, Emotional Support, Language Modeling, Behavioral Management, Feedback
Resources for ECE	Classrooms, Accessories, Playing Objects, AVs
Curriculum of ECE	Quality Of Curriculum, Reforms, Implementation

Institutional Support	Administrative Supports, Resources Allocation
Social awareness	Parent Teacher Meetings
Monitoring	Evaluation Of ECE Teachers, Children's Learning Process And Outcomes
Challenges & Issues	Current state of ECE teachers, children, and system

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The current study aimed to examine the ECD practices of quality ECE in private and public institutes. The data were gathered through document review, CLASS Pre-K observational assessment, and interviews. The results from the CLASS assessment indicate that there are clear gaps between public and private institutions towards ECE (table 2). There are significant mean differences in each dimension of CLASS. The high mean score is found at the positive climate in public schools ( $M = 3.65$ ,  $SD = 1.663$ ) in comparison to private schools. Private schools are better in quality feedback ( $M = 5.05$ ,  $SD = 1.619$ ) than that public schools. It can be concluded that private schools are better representative to provide quality ECE to the society in comparison to public institutes.

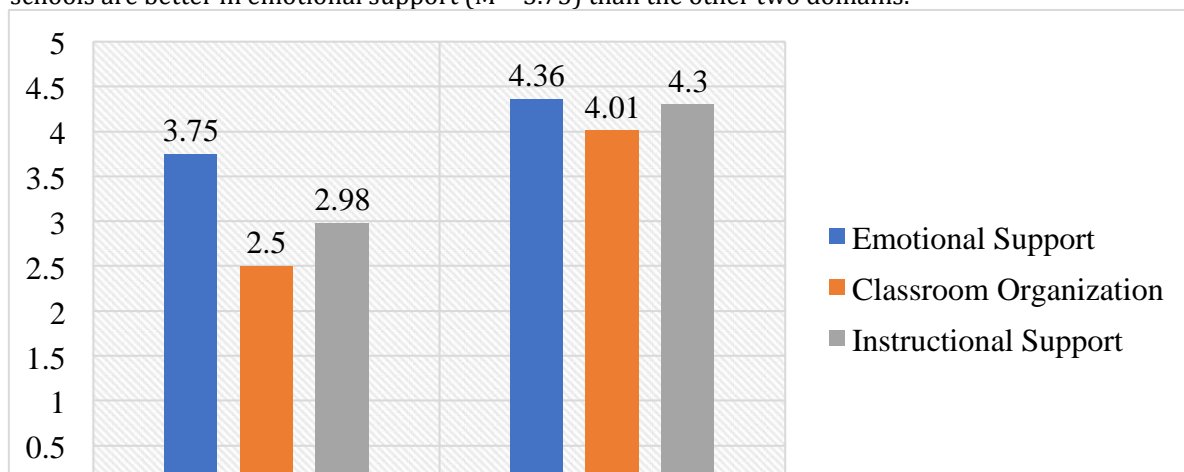
Table 2.

*Mean difference between perception of teachers regarding public and private schools' practices*

Dimensions	Public (n = 10)		Private (n = 10)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Positive Climate	3.65	1.663	4.25	1.743
Negative Climate	1.80	.894	2.05	1.538
Teacher Sensitivity	2.85	2.110	5.05	1.605
Regard for Student Perspectives	2.70	1.559	4.10	2.075
Behaviour Management	1.95	.826	4.20	1.765

Productivity	1.80	.951	4.10	1.971
Instructional Learning Formats	1.95	.945	3.75	1.333
Concept Development	1.85	.875	4.95	1.849
Quality of Feedback	2.15	1.089	5.05	1.701
Language Modelling	1.95	.887	3.90	1.619

Figure 1 illustrates the sector-wise comparison of schools based on CLASS domains. The mean scores of private institutes are higher than those of public schools. Private schools perform well in all three domains emotional support (M = 4.36), classroom organization (M = 4.01), and instructional support (M = 4.3). Public schools are better in emotional support (M = 3.75) than the other two domains.



*Figure 1. Comparison of CLASS Pre-K data across sector*

Figure 2 represents the cloud of words that frequently used by the interviewees. The large size of words highlights the context and perception of participants regarding quality ECD and ECE practices in institutions. Table 3 demonstrates the respondents' coding under the main themes of the interview. The perceptions of respondents associated with the public sectors show less satisfaction towards quality ECD/ECE. While, respondents associated with private sectors are much confident in teaching quality, learning environment, curriculum, administrative and social support. The key findings of this study suggest that there is a policy framework according to the UN and UNICEF



Teachers' Training	TRCs/CPD/Teacher /Workshops/ NGOs	Training	NGOs /Volunteer practices.
Teachers' awareness	Less understanding to ECD/ECE. Awareness required		Misconception between ECD and ECE Seminars required
Teaching Quality	Qualified Weak quality Personal and professional issues Old methods		Qualified Good quality of presenting Professional issues Young teachers are devoted
Resources for ECE classroom	Limited resources Poor infrastructure Unfair allocation Missing facilities		Quality facilities Playing areas, toys, Toddler learning stuff, Learning objects, proper
Curriculum of ECE	Unrealistic curriculum Urdu versus English medium Difficult to implement No Periodic upgrading		International level of curriculum Updated books Activities Periodic upgrading
Institutional Support	Average level. Take less interest in ECE		Good level. High priority to ECE
Social awareness	Lack of parent-teacher meeting Discussion and sharing are rare		Time cycle for parent-teacher meeting Scope for Discussion and sharing
Monitoring Challenges & Issues	Institutional/divisional Lack of resources, Teacher training, upgrading, Administrative attention, Shortage of teachers, Student-teacher ratio, Implementation of policies, regarding ECD/ECE, Community support.	Awareness	Institutional Proper resources, Teacher training, Participation of community, Teacher's appreciation, CPD Implementation of policies for equality and equity, Awareness regarding



## CD/ECE

There are many challenges and issues posed to practice quality ECD and ECE as overpopulation, low income, poor socioeconomic status, illiteracy, the war against terrorism, political instability, lack of equity and access to basic education, lack of resources, untrained teachers, lack of facilities, poor quality of education, disparities in public sectors, lack proper evaluation system, lack of ECD/ECE awareness, and weak governers (Arshad & Zamir, 2018; Khan, 2018; Syeda & Hong, 2013).

## IV. CONCLUSIONS

A conducive learning environment provides several opportunities for children to develop their cognitive, arithmetic, social, personal, emotional, and language. The environment for children for the early years of education is much productive in private sectors than the public sectors. However, children with poor backgrounds, social negligence, and low-income status are treated and facilitated in public schools than in the private sectors. based on research findings, it is concluded that the competencies in teacher-children interaction, teaching practices, and quality ECE are better in private sectors than the public sectors. The use of managerial behavior, learning environment, tasks completion, communication skills, language capacity, social and individual development is structured in private sectors. The generalizability of findings in this study is limited to the data and location only. The scale used in the study CLASS Pre-K only assessed the interaction of teacherstudents and the quality of educators for outdoor ECE. The future researcher can be used indoor quality of early education through other instruments and sampling.

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