

Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Education in Punjab: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

This study was aimed to explore the perspectives of parents about the effectiveness of the ECE program and the provision of opportunities for parental involvement in the prevailing early childhood education program in public schools of Punjab. The qualitative research approach was deployed through the application of semi-structured interviews. Twelve parents from the rural and urban areas of Punjab were selected through the convenient sampling technique. Interviews conducted with parents highlighted the desire of parents regarding the need for quality ECE programs for children at an early age and the creation of a child-friendly environment in public schools. The participants of this study have complained about the reluctant behavior of teachers in public schools. Mostly, ECE teachers show less concern with the child's performance in schools. Participants reported to be not informed about the daily performance of their children by school. The play has a vital role in the process of active learning. But public schools have not enough play facilities reported by the participants of this study. This study was a comprehensive report about the parental perspectives about ECE program in Punjab which will be very useful and informative for policymakers, researchers, and administration of the Quaid-Azam academy for education development, Punjab to modify the program according to the needs for achieving goals of ECE.

Key-words: Early Childhood Education, Parental Involvement, Child-friendly Environment, Parent Teacher Meeting, Punjab.

1. Introduction

Parental involvement is vital for student's achievements. It has been utilized as a predictor of future academic achievement in lower grades by researchers (McDowall, Taumoepeau, & Schaughency, 2017). Researchers in early childhood education (ECE) have found that when parents are involved in their child's education, student outcomes improve (Badri, Al Qubaisi, Al Rashedi, & Yang, 2014; Burke, 2013). Regardless of socioeconomic position, school parental engagement programs have a positive impact on children's academic progress (Burke, 2013). Low parental involvement in prekindergarten can result in problem behaviors and maladaptive behavior, which can obstruct the transition to kindergarten and future academic success (Welchons & McIntyre, 2015). "The cornerstone for long-term success in schools" is the transition from preschool to kindergarten (Harris, 2011). Parental involvement in school activities enhances children's conduct, attitudes, and emotional and well-being management, as well as their social ability (Daniel, Wang, & Berthelsen, 2016). Parents of preschool children, according to Otter (2014), become involved in the school because they believe education is critical to academic success. Internationally, prior research on parental involvement in ECE has been limited by a broad focus on preschool students' complete families, a focus on a low-income kids, and a focus on disparities between mother and father involvement patterns (Hilado, Kallemeyn, & Phillips, 2013).

In Pakistan, formal schooling begins in grade one at the age of five years. At the age of three to five years, working and/or financially well-off parents prefer to send their children to day-care facilities, nurseries, or kindergarten schools. In urban regions around the country, the private sector appears to be providing this service on a commercial basis. In public schools, children attend pre-primary (Kachi Class) in multi-grade classrooms that lack adequate facilities. Lack of educated teachers and inadequate facilities in preschool education centers cause challenges for both parents and children. Furthermore, the majority of research studies have focused on primary education and its various aspects. As a result, a research study on contemporary preschool practices and challenges appeared to be a relevant field of study in the Pakistani setting (Hussaina & Sultan, 2010; Hunzai, 2007). There is limited evidence on the association between parental involvement in ECE and child development in Pakistan. The majority of this field's study has been done with elementary school kids(). These flaws create a void in the discussion of parental involvement in ECE.

Investigation of parental involvement in ECE is important to understand beyond exploring other dynamics of ECE in Pakistan as well as Punjab too. This study aimed to investigate the opportunities of parental involvement in ECE in public schools of Punjab and may provide an in-

depth look at the component of parental involvement and challenges faced by parents in their children's academic activities of preschool. The existing literature review lacks this topic and thus the current study would likely to fill up this knowledge gap.

Objective

The objective of this study was to:

- Explore the perspectives of parents about the effectiveness of the ECE program and the provision of opportunities for parental involvement in the prevailing early childhood education program in public schools of Punjab.

Research Questions

1. How does the ECE program motivate parents to participate in their children's education?
2. What are some of the obstacles to parental participation in ECE in public schools?

2. Literature Review

Parenting is considered to be a powerful factor in a child's academic progress (Smith & Sheridan, 2019). Parental involvement is reflected an affluent resource and a useful tool because it could provide rich information about young child's' individual needs and positively help the child's teachers to improve their instructional skills (Liu, Sulaimini & Henning, 2020). UNESCO (2000) states that "Early childhood care and education (ECCE) is more than preparation for primary school. It aims at the holistic development of a child's social, emotional, cognitive and physical needs in order to build a solid and broad foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing. ECCE has the possibility to nurture caring, capable and responsible future citizens." Nations around the world are becoming aware of the importance of early childhood education as well. Many researchers hypothesized that improved academic achievement and active engagement of children in schools are the outcome of active parental involvement (Epstein, 2018). There are many positive advantages of the parental engagement in the child's development, growth and learning. According to Mahmood (2013), the relationship of early childhood teachers with parents and other family members are getting restricted in many countries in the current learning environment of answerability and performance infusing in early childhood education.

In the Kocyigita (2015) study, teachers solved their problems during educational activities by talking to parents, providing more frequent educational activities, adjusting the times of educational activities, getting help from the school counsellor and allowing parents to participate in decision-making.

Factors like poverty, race, ethnicity or socioeconomic position in low-income countries prevent parental involvement in early education of their children in schools (Cameron, Grimm, Steele, Castro-Schilo, & Grissmer, 2015). These imbalance and inequalities in the society often lead to the academic achievement gaps amongst learners.

Mendez (2010) highlights three important domains that affect the parent involvement which is a multifaceted phenomenon in the child's education. These factors include personal features (age of parents, education and employment); contextual elements (neighborhood, community, resources), and learning opportunities (frequency and duration). Early child hood education, however provides openings for parents and teachers to construct mutual respect and understanding, in the form of regular parent-teachers meeting, supporting school events and teachers or volunteering at the school (Owen, 2016).

Waanders (2007) mentioned that due to the weak economic status and suffering, the low-income parents show least motivation and engagement in the educational activities of their pre-school children. Parents who do labour work have inflexible work schedules, and have no extra time to participate or involve themselves in the academic activities of their school going children work, negating its significance.

Parent's own education level is considered as one of the key retarding factors preventing them to be involved in their child's schooling (Perriel, (2015). A research study by Froiland, Peterson & Davison, (2013) on 641 parents established that parents with good educational background were considerably found more involved and engaged with their children's school based activities. Although the importance of parent involvement throughout the educational career of the child is widely cited. However, a little is known about the factors toting to involvement of parents at this young age because of scarcity of researches in early childhood and parental involvement (Arnold, Zeljo, Doctoroff, & Ortiz, 2008; Huang & Mason, 2008). The significance and benefits of parental involvement in early childhood education cannot be overlooked, as parents and teachers both may work in collaboration with each other to enhance different skills of the children at early stages, ultimately leading to the cognitive, social and emotional development of the children (Blair, 2002). The workable opportunities are expected from the administrators and teachers of the schools to encourage parents to be a part of the learning environment of their children for this purpose (Powell,

Son, File, & San Juan, 2010). According to Mata (2018) parents' role is so critical in the early phases of their children play a critical role in children' s early life, as parents' words, actions and beliefs would have a great deal of influence on their children' development and education (Mata, 2018). Involving parents in their children's education not only increases the child's achievement, but also helps parents to understand their children and teachers better to improve their instruction (Pineda, 2018). Research has shown that communication, collaboration and unity between the parent and the teacher manifest desired outcomes in the young child at early stages of life (Sandberg & Vuorinen, 2008).

Epstein (2018) states that engaging and involving parents in early childhood education benefit the student in his/her academic performance in the form of increased better grades, school attendance and scores in tests. It also enhances the social and emotional development of the child in the learning environment. According to Daniel, (2015) it seems difficult for the teachers to select between engagement of parents and outcomes of curriculum as they feel overburdened because both engage their time. Parents and families have this misconception that their voices in early learning and development of their children will not be comprehended, realized, or heeded. Huang, & Mason (2008) report that most parents are in favour of family education programs, offering viable opportunities to the parents to interact with each other offer support material.

Powell, , File, & Froiland, (2012) reports that parents have a key role to play in the successful transition of their children as educational learning environment gets stricter and complex with each passing day. The success of these pre-school learners is directly related to their behavior directive skills ans and learnt attention provided by teachers and parents, both.

Through ECE, students are motivated to perform better as it helps in channelizing enhancement of discussion and close interaction between children and their parents. Parents are more thoughtful and prepared to counter when they get a clear picture of the emotional, social and cognitive developmental needs of their children at home and schools (Silinskas & Kikas, 2019). Ahmad, (2011) reports that continuous support is required for nurturing children to the parents, families, guardians and other caregivers. All of them have a leading role and responsibility for the well-being of children in hastening their performance at all levels. The shared responsibility of parents, family, care-givers and society as a whole should be promoted by all programs and policies to advocate significance of ECE. All-inclusive, cohesive longstanding and abiding policies on ECE development should be framed in discussion with all concerned stake holders at priority basis for the betterment and future success of the pre-school children.

Pakistan is lagging behind in early childhood education as policy makers are not giving sufficient attention to this domain, therefore parental involvement is not considered significant which is the strongest pillar at the pre-school levels. (Matthews, 2011). ECE seems to be the last priority of the government. The budget for ECE is minor and the funds allotted for ECE under the education sector reforms are too scanty and scarce to cater to the needs of approximately 8 million children in the respective age group (UNESCO, 2015).

3. Methodology

The purpose of the study was to examine the responses of parents regarding parental involvement by using the interview guidebook. A qualitative case study research approach was used by the researchers. Twelve parents from ECE schools in Punjab's urban and rural areas participated in semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interview ables to capture experiences, opinions, knowledge, and perceptions of the participants as a data collection tool (Merriam & Tisdell 2016). The researcher selected participants through a convenient sampling technique. A thematic analysis approach was used to analyze the data. Thematic data analysis focuses on identifying main themes from a systematic arrangement of similar and opposing concepts coming from the data sets obtained (Yin, 2014). Different themes were presented in a sequence according to the order of the purpose and research questions of the study.

4. Findings

The data gained from parents has been divided into the following broad categories and a few subcategories after transcription.

Table 1 - Broad Categories and Subcategories

Broad Categories	Subcategories
Advantages of ECE Program	Child-friendly Environment Childs' Performance Difficulties of ECE children
The behavior of the ECE teacher	Relationship between teacher and student Teachers' teaching Methodology Parents' Teacher Meeting (PTM)
Suggestions for the Improvement of ECE school	Surprise visits

Advantages in ECE Program

The satisfaction of the parents is the key pillar of any school system. When there is a nest of private schools in surroundings then there is a strong need emerged to satisfy the parents of a child in public school. The need and importance of ECE are recognized by all the participants of this study. ECE is the foundation of learning. A mind of a young child is easier to be filled with knowledge at an early age as compared with later stages of life. One of the parent participants stated that: *“It is the basic pillar of future education for a child. This is the stage when if a child gets friendship with education then it can be long-lasting for his educational journey”* (Participant 2).

ECE can be the greatest productive when there will be an attractive environment in the schools. Learning is to be done best when a child is willing to do it. All the participants of this study are at the standpoint that children of ECE should know English and Urdu alphabets along with mathematics numbers. One of the participants elaborated that *“He should read the Urdu, English and Math Kaeeda (book) and talk about Islamic education”* (Participant 1).

Contemporary researches have proved the need for a child-friendly environment at school for attaining the settled targets. Public schools are trying hard to maintain it within the premises of schools for the accomplishment of objectives for ECE. All the participants of this study emphasized building a child-friendly environment in ECE schools. One of the participants mentioned the excitement of his child for going to school such as: *“He enjoys his time at school and wants to go school even on Sunday”* (Participant 5).

The award of the best performance of children goes to the teachers because of their hard work at the stage of ECE. All the parent participants have complained about the reluctant behavior of teachers. One of the participants indicated that : *“Teacher remains absent mostly. She doesn’t bother to pay attention to students”* (Participant 6).

Most of the participants have objections to the arrogance of teachers at the ECE level for example one of the participants illustrated:

“There is no attention given to my kid at school. Only a caregiver attends 100 students in the classroom alone. We pay to focus on him at home. There is no lesson of ethics at school. My son does not receive homework from school. These are the major flaws of public schools. That’s why parents want to get admission of their kids at private schools as compared with public schools”. (Participant 3)

The Behavior of the ECE Teacher

A strong relationship between teachers and students makes the learning process productive. Harsh behavior on the part of teachers leads towards drop out of students from schools. Our public schools have been suffered from this dilemma for decades. Most of the participants have addressed the same problem in our schools even in this era. One of the participants defined that: *“Teacher remains absent mostly. She doesn’t bother to pay attention to students. Children spend their time playing in school. When she comes to school off and on then show harsh behavior with children”* (Participant 10).

One of the participants has shown a level of satisfaction regarding the attachment of her kid with the teacher. *She explained that: “The teacher of my kid is very affectionate. She pays her full attention to children. Although she has huge strength of kids in her class”* (Participant 5).

Most of the participants have complained about the teaching methodology of teachers. *One of the participants said that:*

“She doesn’t know how to teach. She is hired privately on RS: 4000/ per month. So, she does not bother what is going on in the classroom (Participant 4). One of the participants has shown her satisfaction with the opted teaching methodology of the teacher. She stated that *“She understands the level of kids. My daughter likes her very much. She asks me to visit her teachers’ house on weekend”* (Participant 9).

To be informed properly about the performance of children by the institution is the core right of every parent. Public schools ignore this fact and develop the causes of displeasure on the part of parents. All the participants have immense objections to the non-commencement of parents’ teacher meetings in public schools. *One of the participants described that “No, there is no mechanism about the information of his performance from the school. Even when I visit the school for inquiry then his teacher dislikes it”* (participant 12).

5. Suggestions for the Improvement of ECE Schools

The perspectives of parents are very important and enable them to have insightful information on what public schools’ children need to thrive in such schools. It also offers to understand that what teachers need to support the development and learning of children, and what administrators who oversee such programs need to effectively manage and promote positive long-term change in the lives of public schools’ children. All the participants of this study strongly recommend the need of

providing a quality educational environment at public schools so that they could reject the private schools with heavy fees. One of the participants said that: *“There should be provided good environment like private schools in our public schools. Government is paying thousand rupees to teachers. If they don’t like to teach then give them pre-retirement”* (Participant 2).

Learning through play makes the learning environment cheerful and attractive for the kids of preschools. A proper playground strengthens the outdoor play activities. All the participants have pointed out the deficiency of having these flaws in our public schools. One of the participants explained that:

There should be planned regular parents’ teacher meetings at school. The number of students should be not more than 50 in an ECE class. The principal of the school should focus on the conduction of activities in the classroom. Playgrounds should be well maintained with swings for the enjoyment of kids. (Participant 1)

Proper check and balance make the system organized and leads towards the achievement of targets. There is a strong need to assess the outcomes of the prevailing ECE program in public schools. All most all the participants have highlighted this fact. One of the participant notified that: *“There is need to do surprise visits at schools by higher authority. When they do planned visit then all the teachers are present. This surprise visit should be done per month on regular basis”* (Participant 4).

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This study was aimed to investigate the perspectives of parents about the effectiveness of the ECE program and the provision of opportunities for parental involvement in the prevailing early childhood education program in public schools of Punjab. Interviews conducted with parents highlighted the desire of parents on the need for ECE for the children at an early age. They think that ECE can be ultimately productive when there will be an attractive environment in the schools. A child-friendly environment engages the children longer in the process of learning. The participants of this study have complained about the reluctant behavior of teachers in public schools. Mostly, ECE teachers show less concern with the child’s performance in schools. Participants reported to be not informed about the daily performance of their children by school. The play facility has a vital role in the process of active learning. But public schools have not enough play provisions for their children reported by the participants of this study. There is a strong need to assess the outcomes of the

prevailing ECE program in public schools by high authorities to improve the program and achieve the desired outcomes.

Parents enrolled their children in early childhood education for receiving the social, emotional, and academic skills. In particular, parents are looking for preschool programs where they would focus on literacy through activities (Elkins, 2019). Empirical studies have motivated to increase parental involvement and the strength upon the need for the relationship between school and home (Elkins, 2019; Reutlinger et al. (2015); Provoast, 2020; Wood, 2019). According to Rafiq et al., (2013), there is a link between parental involvement in their children's academic activities and their academic accomplishment. Epstein's (1995) paradigm of six forms of parental involvement in their children's academic achievement was also verified by the outcomes of this study. The study conducted by Bano, jabeen, and Qutoshi,(2018) emphasized the establishment of a strong relationship between parents and teachers contexts through parent-teacher meetings, close monitoring, and facilitation that could turn further contribution towards the high academic achievement of the students.

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