



## Effects of Educational Reforms and Policies on the Quality of Early Childhood Education: Teachers' Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

The research aimed to assess how educational reforms and policies influence the quality of early childhood education. The study was descriptive in nature. All the teachers of public schools in Punjab were population of the study and data was collected from a sample of six hundred and sixty-five teachers using a questionnaire as a tool. The study revealed that awareness of early childhood education reforms and policies supported teachers in its implementation and ECE fostered a healthy learning atmosphere. Teachers encouraged activity-based learning and explored new effective learning concepts. Early childhood education played a role in decreasing student drop-out rates, teachers and caregivers received professional and in-service training. It was suggested that developing an appropriate framework for implementing various reforms and policies is crucial for improving quality of early childhood education. Measures should be taken to assure access of funding, resources, physical facilities and collaboration. Improvements to early childhood education program can only be succeeded if they are linked to ongoing research accompanied by constructive feedback.

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## 1. Introduction

Early Childhood Education is considered as a vital component of education as it emphasizes development of child's abilities, setting the groundwork for their learning in future. The early stages of a child's education can lead to significant change and are particularly crucial, as they lay foundation for his/her later life. Children who develop well have potential to live more satisfying lives and contribute positively to society. They are essential elements for the future of any community, and investing in children during their formative years is a commitment to the social and economic growth of society (Young, 2002). ECE give emphasis to early years of a child's life, covering education from infancy up to age six or eight years. It provides a planned learning setting with various activities that are crucial for child's development. It prioritizes needs of children and incorporates different methodologies and processes to promote holistic growth. This approach allows children to enhance their intellectual, emotional, and social aspects pertinent to their developmental stage.

Thus, it serves as a foundation for overall expansion of the child, fostering a pathway for continuous learning. It indicates that a child's education is interconnected across different contexts, aimed at facilitating substantial development, progress and learning (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2004). Preschool/ECE is moving forward with various reforms that emphasize holistic development, learning through play and inclusive education. The development of policies and reforms in ECE reflects a growing global recognition of the essential role that early childhood experiences play in shaping lifetime learning and development. As ECE continues to evolve, current reforms seek to address disparities, integrate services, and ensure that all children have opportunity to thrive. It has a rich and

vibrant history, shaped by cultural, philosophical, and pedagogical shifts that have ensued throughout the centuries. Over the years, significant changes in policies and reforms in ECE have been driven by greater understandings of child development, societal needs and economic considerations. The study is an effort to evaluate effects with the goal of improving usefulness and quality of early childhood education. It seeks to understand the perception of ECE teachers and assesses resources and provisions that government schools provide to enhance quality of ECE. Pakistan faces various challenges and inconsistencies regarding expansion of quality early childhood education. Educational reforms and policies related to ECE in Punjab have achieved goals of key quality measures to some extent. The government launches ECE initiatives positively but it encounters difficulties in providing sufficient teaching and learning necessities due to its own strategies.

## **2. Literature Review**

Several phenomena impacting global society have transformed in character and manifestation due to the rise of globalization: demographic expansion, environmental issues, international diplomacy, humanitarian efforts, rights and liberties, progress, health, poverty, employment, and education (Grant & Grant, 2007). The phases of globalization start with early childhood education and extend to higher education. Nevertheless, the impacts of globalization became more evident from the mid-1980s, coinciding with the rise of internet and widespread adoption of computers in education and information globally (Eliason & Jenkins, 1986). The influence of knowledge has led nations to modify their educational programs to enhance the capabilities of individuals in light of globalization, as well as the significant impact of technology and multilingualism. This transformation begins in early childhood education.

Consequently, there is an increasing demand for early childhood education, as more individuals are being prepared to operate on a global level. Some parents are increasingly eager to ensure their children receive the highest quality education from an early age, highlighting the growing importance of early childhood education (Morrison, 2004). ECE is regarded as a crucial phase in a child's development. It is during this period that a child can gain significant advantages, but it can also pose risks for young children (UNESCO, 2010). ECE can provide a strong base for a child's future. Consequently, it is vital to prepare well-trained teachers and educate parents of children. Additionally, it is important to clarify and outline the practices that have been incorporated into the rigid educational system in Pakistan. Undoubtedly, policymakers have given minimal attention to ECE in Pakistan (Dahlberg & Moss, 2004).

Ministry of Education (2009) stated that early childhood education has not received appropriate recognition in Pakistan. Awareness of ECE is relatively low in public institutions, where it is often viewed as an unofficial class (Prep) prior to grade one (Shakil, 2002). The National Education Policy (1998–2010) brought back Prep as a pre-primary class in public sector institutions, extending the duration of primary education to emphasize the importance of early childhood education for children. On the other hand, pre-primary education is systematically structured from the beginning in private sector institutions. Almost all of these institutions provide ECE through programs like KG-I and KG-II kindergarten, as well as pre-nursery and nursery levels (Shami, 2009). Early development helps children enter school, perform better academically, and achieve noticeable success in their future learning endeavors (Morgan, 2011; Murtaza, 2011). The early years are most crucial stage of a child's development. ECE has yet to be fully established or widely recognized as a developed area of education within Pakistan's public institutions (Malik, Sarwar, & Khan, 2010).

There are several obstacles regarding the expansion of quality early childhood education. Students have not been given sufficient educational tools, trained teachers, services and resources. Approximately one third of children of primary school age are not enrolled in school, and nearly forty-two percent of children over ten years old are out of school. There are notable disparities in educational indicators across different regions, as well as between urban and rural areas (Education for All, 2015). Pakistan faces various challenges in early childhood education that hamper its advancement. Numerous actions are needed to tackle these issues, such as revising curriculum, innovative methodologies, improving resources, enhancing community participation and developing teacher training and skills. Collaborative efforts among all stakeholders are essential. The integration of early childhood education can only be achieved through combined efforts to guarantee equal opportunities for children across Pakistan,

regardless of their socioeconomic status or geographical location, ensuring a high-quality educational environment for every child.

### 3. Research Methodology

The research methodology used in this study was descriptive aimed to understand teachers' perspective about effects of educational reforms and policies on the quality of early childhood education in Punjab. It was delimited to public school (having ECE classes) of two districts, Rawalpindi from upper Punjab and Bahawalpur from southern Punjab and all the teachers of stated districts were population of this study. A sample size of three hundred and seventy five from Rawalpindi and two hundred and ninety from Bahawalpur with a total of six hundred and sixty five respondents was taken through random sampling technique. A questionnaire was developed to collect the opinions of respondents and the response rate was hundred percent. The data was evaluated on SPSS by using regression and correlation tests and then results were tabulated and interpreted.

### 4. Results

The study was focused on teachers' perspective about effects of educational reforms and policies on the quality of early childhood education. The results of this study were arranged according to the objectives and displayed in the subsequent section:

**Table 1: Effect of Educational Reforms and Policies on the Quality of ECE**

Independent variable	Dependent variable	$\beta$	$t$	$f$	$R^2$	Sig.
Educational reforms and policies	Quality of ECE	.168	18.876	80.644	.108	.000 <sup>b</sup>

According to table 1 the effect of educational reforms and policies on the quality of early childhood education. The goodness of fit values ( $R^2 = 0.108$ ) indicated that 10% of the variance in the quality of ECE (dependent variable) explained by educational reforms and policies (independent variable). The  $f$ -value of 80.644 and the  $p$ -value of .000b revealed a significant effect. This suggests a linear relationship between educational reforms, policies, and the quality of early childhood education. The ( $\beta = .168$ ) coefficient for the independent variable highlighted the effect on the dependent variable resulting from its change. The findings indicated that educational reforms and policies were primarily responsible for the variation in the quality of early childhood education (ECE), with a one-unit increase in these reforms and policies leading to a 16% rise in the quality of ECE. The preceding table further detailed how much the independent variable contributed to the dependent variable, specifically the quality of ECE. The  $t$ -value ( $t = 18.876$ ,  $P = .000b$ ) is also significant, demonstrating that educational reforms and policies positively influenced the quality of ECE. This illustrated the positive effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable.

**Table 2: Correlation of Educational Reforms and Policies with the Quality of ECE**

Sr. No	Correlation	ECE quality standards/measures	Policy practices and provisions
Factor 1	Pearson correlation	1	.329**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	665	665
Factor 2	Pearson correlation	.329**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	665	665

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The table above outlines the detailed correlation among the factors highlighted in the research tool. The significant correlation (2-tailed) value and Pearson correlation assessed both the strength and weakness (positive/negative) of the relationship between ECE quality standards/measures and reforms/policies. According to the above table, a notable strong positive correlation is present between ECE quality standards/measures and reforms/policies, as evidenced by the significant value (.000).

## 5. Discussion

Early childhood education is essential in nurturing early literacy skills and laying a solid foundation for a child's academic journey. It plays a significant role in building basic literacy skills and improving child's learning capabilities. ECE provides children with helpful beginnings at the entry level. Awareness about ECE reforms and policies helps teachers in its implementation and public institutions focus on creating a safe and healthy educational atmosphere for children. The arrangement of ECE classrooms is designed to be interactive to encourage activity-based learning among students. Teachers foster activity-based learning to introduce fundamental concepts of early childhood education. Student-teacher ratio is aligned with appropriate standards. ECE program plays a part in decreasing student drop-out rates and children who participate in the program perform better in subsequent educational levels. Mostly teachers receive professional or in-service training, and curriculum provided by the Government of Punjab is deemed suitable, however the absence of minimum quality standards poses challenges for effectively running an ECE program. Insufficient resources, funding, and facilities within the ECE program, contribute to inadequate infrastructure and social challenges, all of which are closely linked to child's access to ECE program. Pakistan's budget distribution has been skewed due to the nation's increasing international debts, which has led to a reduced share of budget for crucial sectors like education. Relative to neighboring countries, the education sector has been given less emphasis, causing a deterioration in the quality of education in public schools. Consequently, schools have been forced to solicit financial support from community members, notable figures and parents of students, damaging the image of this honorable profession.

## 6. Conclusion

Educational reforms and policies enacted in Pakistan's early childhood education program have made partial progress towards achieving essential quality indicators. ECE has made a positive start but has encountered obstacles in providing necessary teaching and learning resources to fulfill the demands of contemporary education and employment. Many policy documents related to early childhood education have been developed, and various programs have been initiated to focus on enhancing access and improving quality through different reforms. However, despite these advancements, only a small number of ECE policies are being fully and effectively put into practice. There are still considerable gaps in a systematic approach to ECE at both the national and provincial levels, along with a lack of clearly defined and measurable indicators that outline what constitutes a successful and effective ECE system. According to the findings, it is suggested that Government of Punjab has enacted extensive reforms and policies to transform early childhood education, therefore the government should create an appropriate framework for effectively implementing these various reforms and policies to improve quality of ECE. The availability of funds and resources has a notable effect on the quality of early childhood education. It is crucial to develop adequate infrastructure and specific measures should be taken to designate funds for ECE provisions in public sector.

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