



Proposed Strategies for the Effective Implementation of Early Childhood Education Programme in Punjab

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Abstract *The present study aimed to propose strategies for the effective implementation of Early Childhood Education Programme in government schools in Punjab. A sample of 300 heads of educational institutions was taken from the 36 districts of Punjab to evaluate this programme. A questionnaire was used to collect the opinion of the heads of educational institutions. The findings of the study show that physical facilities were provided by the government for the implementation of ECE programme in only 1000 schools in Punjab. The curriculum developed by the Federal Government is used for the development of the students. The heads of educational institutions and ECE teachers were provided training for effective implementation. The school council members/parents required to involve for the effective implementation of the ECE programme. The appointment of teachers on merits basis, having professional degree in Early Childhood Education is also required to make the ECE programme more effective and successful.*

Key Words: Early Childhood Education, Physical Facilities, Head's Training, Teacher's Training, School Council Members/Parents

Introduction

Early Childhood Education (ECE) has very important role in the development of young generation of any nation. The development of all the nations heavily depends upon their education system. In other words, the development we see around the world is all because of effective education systems. For the last few decades all the countries have been giving special emphasis to the ECE programmes for the development of their future generations.

Home environment has a very effective and long-lasting effect on the whole life of a student. The school learning in the form of ECE, and home environment for learning can be helpful to make a student successful not only during his studies but in his future life as well (Murtaza, 2011).

Keeping in view the targets of Education for All (EFA), Directorate of Staff Development, Punjab also initiated a project in Punjab to make schools child friendly and to overcome the dropout rate and enhance enrolment. Under this initiative the Government of Punjab recommended the introduction of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in 1000 Primary schools in Punjab with highest enrolment and improvement of environment of school to convert them into child friendly schools (DSD Punjab, 2014).

The Government of Punjab started an Early Childhood Education Programme under the supervision of Directorate of Staff Development (DSD) in 1000 primary schools having highest enrolment to improve the overall enrolment of the school by converting the school in a child friendly school (CFSS). The DSD has developed ECE classrooms in 36 districts of Punjab through District Training and Support Centres (DTSCs). The major purpose of the project was to increase the enrolment and retention rate of the students. For this the ECE rooms were decorated by colourful paintings and learning material provided in accordance with the National Curriculum of ECE 2007. Caregivers are appointed to facilitate the ECE teachers, to look after the students and to keep the

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ECE classroom in order. The training of heads of the institutions, ECE teachers, caregivers and school council members was also provided before the implementation of the programme in the schools, selected for ECE in the first phase of the programme.

The ECE programme provides the students an opportunity of the utilization of physical infrastructure like learning material, play grounds, books etc. Secondly, most of the parents at home are unaware of the modern methodologies of learning to support their children. In school, they are looked after by the professionally trained teachers.

Objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

1. To proposed strategies for the effective implementation of the ECE programme in Punjab
2. To suggest measures for the improvement of this programme for making it more effective and useful to achieve the programme targets.

Research Questions

To achieve the objectives of the study, these research questions were formulated.

1. Which salient features of ECE stand out as strengths of the programme?
2. Where are the weaknesses within the implementation phase which can hinder the achievement of the goals of the programme?
3. What strategies can be proposed for better implementation of the ECE programme and to achieve the targets?

Literature Review

It has been acknowledged for the last 2000 years that the early years of life are very important and valuable regarding the educational development of children. From the last few decades public awareness, increase in incomes, developed family life and education have had a profound effect on early child hood Education and Development.

Historically Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programmes reminds that in Europe, North America, China and India, kindergartens and nurseries were established in the 19th century on the pattern of Pestalozzi, Montessori. Earlier kindergartens were famous for education and nurseries for the provision of care (Kamerman, 2006).

Good ECE programmes not only improve the lives of the children and their families, but are also very helpful for their economic development as an individual and a useful member of the society. Although, ECE programmes are expensive, but good investment for the future.

After the downfall of the colonialism and the emergence of independent countries in Africa, and the participations rate of female as labour force urge the importance of ECE. The U.S and European countries developed policies to protect the child and family life (Kamerman, 2006).

Early Childhood Education in Pakistan

After the independence from the British Rule in 1947, the first education conference was held in November 1947 at Karachi. In this conference, the primary education was given special attention and the conference urged the establishment of Nursery Schools under the supervision of the provincial governments.

The Education Policy 2009 has also given special emphasis on ECE to achieve the targets of Education for All by the end of 2015.

As a signatory of the Dakar conference, EFA Declaration in 2000, the Government of Pakistan is trying hard to achieve the goals of EFA. The sixth goal of EFA has given special emphasis to the Early Childhood Education and Development and the increase and improvement of the ECE programme. However, much more efforts and

commitment are required from the Government of Pakistan to achieve the set target in the area of Early Childhood Education. (National Education Policy, 2009)

For the similar perspectives and promotion of ECE, The World Education Forum, held in Dakar in 2000, strived to achieve the targets of Education for All. The sixth goals of the EFA urge the expansion of Early Childhood Education. Pakistan is also the signatory of this conference.

Early Childhood Education in Punjab

Most of the schools working under the umbrella of the Government of Punjab have traditional “kachi” class as pre-primary schooling. There are no trained teachers for the “Kachi” class. The teacher of “class 1” are generally responsible for the teaching of “kachi” class as well. The “kachi” class is not given any special attention due to the shortage of teachers for other classes as there is no teacher appointed for this class. Moreover, there was no specific curriculum or teaching material for “kachi” class before 2002. The teachers were never trained before 2002 to teach at this level.

The National Curriculum on Early Childhood Education was developed by the Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan in 2003. Like all the other provincial governments, the Government of Punjab was able to implement this programme in a few selected schools. The traditional “kachi” class is available for the pre-schoolers which is unable to match the requirements of ECE as defined by the national Curriculum (The Government of Punjab, 2013).

The ECE programme in Punjab is initiated by the Directorate of Staff Development (DSD) in 2009. DSD prepared a module for the training of teachers to teach at “kachi” ECE level. Later, in 2011, DSD developed ECE rooms in 1000 schools in Punjab for the implementation of ECE programme in an effective way. The DSD also arranged a 3 day training workshop of ECE teachers, the head teachers of the schools and for three effective members of school council at district level.

Effectiveness of ECE Programme

The effectiveness of an Early Childhood Education programme mostly depends upon the quality of staff, an appropriate learning environment, healthy educational activities, involvement and interest of parents. The characteristics of a high quality ECE programme are as follows:

Learning Environment

A safe and appropriate learning environment under the supervision of a competent and kind staff is very helpful for the success of any Early Childhood Education programme. It helps the administration to develop the natural abilities of the students in an effective way.

The classroom environment has a key role in an effective learning process. The provision of favourable environment in school is one of the major responsibility of the school administration (Hannah, 2013).

The classroom environment provides the students an opportunity to improve their skills and knowledge for the achievement of predetermined goals and objectives. The provision of a comfortable learning environment is one of the major responsibilities of the school administration. The conducive environment helps the young generation to develop their capabilities in an effective manner.

Balanced Time Table/Plan

A balanced plan for the learning activates helps the learners to learn without any fatigue and ill feelings. The interest of the learners continues during the whole learning process and the required results can be achieved successfully.

The time table of the school is like a framework used to stream line all the activities of the school. The smooth functioning of the school heavily depends upon the school time table.

The school time table helps the school administration to give equal importance to all the activities organized for the development of the students. It helps them to ensure the objectives and goals of the learning process completed in time and all the activities were given due time according to their importance.

The school time table is very important to plan and implement the whole teaching learning programme. It regulates all the activities in the school according to the planning of the school administration (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2006).

The time table is helpful to school administration to organise learning activities according to the physiological needs and interest of the students. It also provides the opportunity to school administration to give ample time to the co-curricular activities like sports, and other such activities.

Strong Foundation

The ECE programme provides strong foundation for formal schooling. It prepares the 3 - 5 years old children for future studies and learning. It helps them to complete the different levels of education.

By providing a strong foundation in the form good learning opportunities, secure and caring environment under the supervision of educators and caregivers help the students for formal schooling in future (American Federation of Teachers, 2002)

The ECE programmes provides the opportunity of learning under the guidance of trained caregivers. These experiences learnt by the students at ECE level are really helpful for formal schooling.

Comprehensive Child Development

The ECE programmes contain different activities, according to the mental and physical level of 3-5 years old children. These activities help the children for a balanced and comprehensive development in all the area of life like physical, mental and social development. The comprehensive development programme prepares the children for a successful future life. The ECE programmes are playing very effective role in the comprehensive and balanced development of the ECE level children all over the world. All the nations of the world are giving special attention to ECE programmes and trying their best efforts to make them effective and useful for their future generation.

Learning under Teacher Guidance

The children take part in different learning activities under the supervision of trained teachers. The teachers organize learning activities and lesson according to the mental level of the students, keeping in view their developmental requirements.

A favourable environment is very important for an effective teaching and learning process. Teacher guidance is one of the major components of a useful learning environment. The guidance and counselling facilities provided by the school help the students in future studies. These activities enhance the performance of the teachers and help them to make the learning process more effective (Chinonyelum, 2013).

A favourable environment is very important for an effective teaching and learning process. Teacher guidance is one of the major components of a useful learning environment.

The students enrolled at ECE level have the opportunity of guidance and counselling under the supervision of trained teachers. This opportunity helps them to perform better in the future life

Involvement of Parents

The Children's educational career starts from the period of Early Childhood Education. The involvement of parents at this level of learning allows them to know the strengths and weaknesses of their children. They can get awareness about the interest of the children which help them for future planning.

If parents are involved in their children education, they can create a connection between the school and home activities. It provides the opportunity for the parents to prepare their children keeping in view the school learning programmes. They can increase their confidence and competency by providing them the opportunities in the home to overcome their shortcomings indicated by the school teachers.

The students' parents are regularly informed about the performance of their children. So, the caregivers and parents can help each other for the better look after of the ECE level children.

Importance of Early Childhood Education Programme

ECE programmes are very important and helpful for the students. The following points highlight its importance as well:

Good Investment

The Early Childhood Education programmes are a good investment for future development of the nation. These programmes prepare the students for higher studies and later higher income.

Investing in early Childhood Education programme is a long term investment. It is more valuable to invest in an ECE programme than the development of roads, bridges and other long-term projects (Mustard, 2002).

ECE programmes affect the life of the future generation in respect of financial development then all the other steps taken for economic development. Although, ECE programmes are expensive, but good investment for the future.

Early Childhood Education is helpful to increase future earnings. The ECE can increase the earnings of an individual by 1.3 to 1.5 % in his professional life. The earnings gained are higher than the investment in an ECE programme (Council of Economic Advisors, 2014).

The rate of return of the ECE programme is higher than any other education programme. The ECE programme helps the students to perform better at formal schooling level. As a result, it increase their earnings at adulthood level. So, the earnings of ECE programmes are greater than their costs.

Preparation for Future Studies

Early Childhood Education is also called pre-schooling. The early Childhood Education prepares the students for future studies. It provides good foundation for future studies. Pre-schooling programmes helps the students to perform well when they register for formal schooling. The ECE programmes are good preparation for future studies.

Mental Development of the Students

Early childhood education has an important role in the cognitive development of the students. The process of mental development is very high during the period of 3 – 5 years. The early childhood education can be helpful for the balance and rapid cognitive development of the students.

The ECE programmes are very effective for cognitive development. The Cognitive development has very profound effects on the linguistic performance of the students. It really helps to increase the language abilities of the students, which also help to increase their literacy performance in education (Olson, 2002).

A combination of adequate, orderly and well-organized playground spaces, developmentally-appropriate play equipment, proper playground surfacing, regular and adequate playgrounds maintenance inspection and properly organized supervision of children in the playground enable preschool children to effectively participate in outdoor activities (Macharia, 2012).

To achieve the targets and successful implementation of ECE programme, outdoor activities must be organized by the schools for mental and physical growth of the children. The children should take part in these activities under the supervision of trained supervisors and teachers.

Reduction of Poverty

Poverty is one of the major factors in the lack of ECE facilities. People could not send their 3 - 5 years old children in the pre-school institutions due to lack of financial resources required in the form of fee for these institutions.

Poverty limits the chances of educational attainment, yet at the same time, educational attainment is one of the prime mechanisms for escaping poverty. Improving school readiness and child development will reduce poverty-related disparities. ECE programmes are helpful for cognitive, social and emotional development especially for poor family children (Anne Smith, 2014).

A high quality Early Childhood programme can be very effective for the reduction of poverty. It has very useful role for all the developments occurred in early years of life.

Increase National Productivity

Most of the development seen all over the world is all because of education. The Early Childhood Education provides strong footing for the learning process in future life. So, it is helpful for the development of human resources and inevitably increases the nation's productivity.

Investing in education is also good for state budgets in the long run, since workers with higher incomes contribute more through taxes over the course of their lifetimes (Berger, 2013).

The investment in Early Childhood Education Programme contributes towards increase in budgets in the long run due to increase in the form of income and taxes.

Preparation for Formal Schooling

The main responsibility of the school is to prepare the students for future. They enhance their abilities and prepare them to become good workers for the development of the country and responsible and honourable citizens. The ECE programme helps the formal schools to achieve their targets easily. The ECE programme prepares the students in a way that they help the schools for better outcomes.

The Early Childhood Education helps the students to acquire basic skills like counting and speaking. Pupils without ECE have problems in counting skills and simple language skills. Their performance is poor to interact with their fellow pupils as well.

Early childhood education programmes are helpful to enhance the educational achievements and to develop new competence according to age level of the students. It provides them the opportunity of early access to knowledge and skills that are helpful to improve their performance at primary level (Jacinta, 2015).

ECE programmes provide an opportunity of accruing the knowledge and skills before the entrance of formal schooling i.e. primary schooling. This programme helps the students to perform better during their formal schooling. So, ECE programme helps to decrease dropout rate and increase the retention rate.

Decrease Dropout Rate

ECE programmes are helpful to increase literacy rate, decrease dropout rate, improves retention rate and enhance the learning outcomes for all the students enrolled at ECE level belonging to different sectors of the society (Farooq, 2013).

Due to lack of ECE programmes in developing countries, the dropout rate at primary levels is very high. One of the major reasons of high dropout rate is lack of ECE. Students leave their education mainly because they are not well prepared for primary education levels.

These programmes are helpful for the mental development of the students. The performance of the students enrolled at ECE level is increased. It helps to decrease the dropout rate. The dropout rate badly affects the literacy rate in a developing country like Pakistan. So, an effective ECE programme is not only helpful in decreasing the dropout rate but is helpful in increasing the literacy rate as well.

Reduce Repetition Rate

ECE programme prepares the students for formal education. Due to this the performance of the students is good in their studies. They can easily clear different levels of education.. ECE can be helpful in decreasing the repetition rate and preventing the state and individual from the loss of resources.

The Early Childhood Development prepares the students for formal schooling. They are very helpful to reduce repetition rate of the students during the future study life. So, the literacy rate is increased because of the ECE programme (Kudakwashe, 2012).

ECE programmes are very helpful in reducing dropout rate and increasing the retention rate. So, in a country like Pakistan the problem of dropout can be easily addressed by effective ECE programmes. In Pakistan the dropout rate is very high due to non-satisfactory performance of the students during their formal schooling. So, ECE programmes are very helpful for formal schooling and as a result the issue of dropout can be addressed in effective way.

High Achievements and Completion Rate

The ECE programmes are helpful for the future performance of the students in learning. The performance of the students is enhanced according to the expectations and the degree or levels of education completion become high. The learning process becomes a joyful activity for students.

The Early Childhood Education has positive effects on the academic achievements of the students. They also help the students from the low income background and help to ameliorate poverty. These programmes have positive impact on the cognitive development of the students as well. (Smith, 2014).

ECE programmes are very helpful for the mental and cognitive development of the students. These programmes are very helpful for the children of deprived classes as these programmes help the children of deprived classes in learning and are resultantly helpful for poverty reduction.

Early Childhood Education Curriculum

ECE curriculum refers to all the learning experiences required to develop in the students of age 3 - 5 years. This period of life requires special attention regarding the social, emotional, physical and cognitive development. So, a specifically designed curriculum is required for a balance and quality development of the ECE levels children to prepare them for the future learning process. The ECE programmes required an effective curriculum which helps the students to be ready for the formal schooling as a successful learner.

The learning for young children is very important for their future. The pace of learning is very high during the age of 3 - 5 years. For the balanced development of the students and their preparation for future learning process, the arrangement of ECE is crucial. Keeping in view its importance, the Government of Pakistan started thinking regarding the ECE from the first education conference in 1947. But unfortunately, no step was taken till 2001, regarding the development of ECE curriculum (Federal Ministry of Education, 2002).

In 2002, the first National Curriculum for ECE was developed under the supervision of Federal Ministry of Education in Pakistan, and later distributed to the provincial governments for implementation.

Methodology

The main purpose of the research study was to propose strategies for the effective implementation of the Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Punjab. The survey research design was used for the study. Survey questionnaire was developed for the collection of data from the respondents. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select the sample for the study.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collected through questionnaires was tabulated and interpreted. The percentages and mean scores were used for thematic and quantitative data. The findings were made on the bases of the data analysis, and conclusions were drawn accordingly. The recommendations were finalized on the bases of conclusions of the study.

Table 1. The effectiveness of ECE programmes in the government schools in Punjab. N=300

S. No	Statements	Yes	No	Don't Know	Yes %	No %
1	Government provide sufficient physical facilities for the ECE programme	87	212	1	29	71
2	Government been successful in establishing separate classroom(s) for ECE programme in all schools	93	206	1	31	69
3	Government provides required washrooms for ECE programme in all schools	79	219	2	26	73
4	Government follows a specific recruitment plan for ECE Teachers	78	221	1	26	74

5	The appointment of teachers based on merit policy	111	189	0	37	63
6	Parents agree to send their children to school at the age of 3 years	113	181	6	38	60
7	Effective role School council members/Parents	123	177	0	41	59
8	Curriculum Developed for Early Childhood Education programme	218	82	0	73	27

The provision of physical facilities for the ECE programme according to the needs and requirements was one of the main challenges faced by this programme. The schools may be provided the learning material according to the enrolment of the students at the ECE levels. As most of the material is based on consumable goods, it may be provided on educational year bases.

The establishment of separate ECE classrooms was another challenge faced regarding the ECE programme in Punjab. The provisions of washrooms according to the age level of the ECE students was another main requirement of the institutions selected for ECE programme.

To make the ECE programme effective and efficient, the provision of trained ECE teachers was also required. As the ECE programme is a pre- primary education programme, the parents of the students require special incentives and motivational efforts to send their 3-5 years old children in the schools. The appointment of the ECE teachers on merit bases was also one of the main issues faced by the management of ECE programme in Punjab.

The results of the study also indicated that qualified teachers in the field of ECE must be appointed. The curriculum for ECE programme may be organized and developed keeping in view the local needs of the society.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to find out the effectiveness of ECE Programme in the government schools in Punjab and to propose strategies for its improvement. The findings of the study showed that the ECE programme in Punjab is very help for the improvement of education at preschool level. There are some improvement areas as well.

The study also found a lot of opportunities available to make this programme more effective and useful. For the effective implementation of the ECE programme, the government of Punjab must face some challenges as well. This study provides a strategic framework in the form of proposed strategies for the successful implementation of and further planning in ECE in Punjab.

The population of the study comprises the heads of educational institutions working at 1000 ECE schools selected for the ECE programme at 1st phase in the Punjab. A representative sample of 300 heads of schools were randomly selected by using the cluster sampling techniques. A questionnaire was developed for the collection of quantitative data from the heads of educational institutions working in the ECE schools.

For the collection of data from the heads of educational institutions, the District Teacher Educators and Teacher Educators working at District Training and Support Centre were involved. As the collection of data from all divisions of Punjab was difficult for the researcher due to time constraints, therefore, the percentages and mean scores were used for thematic and quantitative data.

Conclusions

On the bases of the findings drawn from the data analysis, it is concluded that the Government of Punjab has planned the ECE programme in an effective manner. This programme was helpful to provide the opportunity of ECE to the 3-5 years old children in the schools. Physical facilities and learning material were provided for the implementation of ECE programme. Specific rooms were developed for ECE activities for the mental development of the students. The heads of the schools, ECE teachers and school council members were provided training for the successful implementation of this programme. The School Council members/parents were given

training for their effective participation in the ECE programme. Federal ECE curriculum plans are followed for the development of the students.

Recommendations/Proposed Strategies

The provided physical facilities by the Government of Punjab are substandard and unable to fulfil the required needs according to the enrolled students at ECE level. The level of physical facilities i.e. classrooms, washrooms and playground may be upgraded.

ECE curriculum was developed in 2007 by the Federal Ministry of Education, Pakistan. An updated curriculum according to the mental level of the 3 - 5 years old children may be developed keeping in view the local needs and social values of Pakistani nation.

At the 1st phase of ECE programme, the teachers were selected for the ECE training by school administration without any merit or qualification criteria. Those teachers who received the ECE training are declared as ECE teacher without keeping in view their will or qualification. So, it is suggested that the teachers for the ECE level may be selected on merit bases keeping in view their personal will and professional qualification.

Before the implementation of ECE programme, the head teachers of the ECE schools were given 6-day orientation training and the ECE teachers a 4-day training by the Directorate of Staff Development under the supervision of District Training and Support Centre at District level. The said training was good for the implementation of the programme but for the effective implementation and the success of ECE programme, the in-service training of head of schools and ECE teachers may be organized on regular bases.

One of the major stakeholders of ECE programmes are the parents of students. The success of this programme heavily depends upon the cooperation of the parents of 3-5 years ECE level students. So, it is suggested that the motivational incentives for the parents of students, can play an effective role for the successful implementation of ECE programme in Punjab.

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