

# Review Journal of Social Psychology & Social Works

Volume :2, No:2

<http://socialworksreview.com>

Print ISSN:3006-4716

Online ISSN: 3006-4724

## An Exploration of Parents' Experiences about Early Childhood Education in Primary Schools

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### Abstract

The main purpose of the current study was the exploration of parents' experiences about early childhood education in primary schools. For this, approach of research was used as qualitative and interviews were conducted from twelve parents belongs to rural area at the government girl's primary schools in Jhang, district Attock. The participants of the study were the parents of those students who were admitted in early childhood education in primary schools. The data were audio recorded; later on transcribed and coded. Most parents highlighted that public schools do not have enough playground facilities, and the shortage of ECE staff, which is not adequate for monitoring the performance of all children. They suggested that there should be at least one trained ECE teacher for ECE students.

**Keywords:** ECE, Primary Schools, Parents' Experiences

### Introduction

Early childhood education includes programs that support children's growth and lifelong development. Therefore, all children of early age i.e., 2 to 8 years depend on their caregivers, extended family members, parents, teachers, daycare providers, etc. (Evans, 2021). Children learn from parents, family members, or from schools at this early age. School is the place that makes every child's life in a specific direction. Transitioning from preschool to kindergarten is a key step in setting children up for long-term success in school (Harris, 2011).

Parent involvement in preschool boosts children's development and lays the groundwork for future academic success (McDowall, Taumoepeau, & Schaughency, 2017). Students' outcomes improved and gave better results in every emotional or physical field when parents were involved in children's education (Badri, Al Qubaisi, Al Rashedi, & Yang, 2014; Burke, 2013). Conversely, the absence of parental involvement or less engagement in different pre-kind activities can affect children's behaviour, future academic success, and maladaptive behaviour, obstructing the transition to kindergarten. Parental contributions, either through experience or exchanging opinions, enhance children's social abilities, attitudes, conduct, well-being management, and psychomotor skills. The role of parents in their children's development and success is incredible, both in and out of school. Parents can change the life of their children by doing their best to teach infants to walk and talk and help toddlers learn and play with the information they have or receive from others. Teachers also play a key role in fostering children's social, emotional, and academic achievement by working diligently. Parents and

teachers play an important role in shaping children's early education, though they often face challenges (Van et al., 2013).

The government also has a key role in supporting Early Childhood Education (ECE), but it is often underfunded and overlooked. Policies recognize ECE as part of the formal education system, yet there is a lack of resources like trained teachers, classrooms, and essential facilities. Poverty and limited access to basic services like clean water and health care further impact children's development (Iqbal, Kalid, & Tufail, 2021; Ahmad, 2011). Awareness about ECE is critical, and organizations and media can help by educating families and communities. Policies should encourage collaboration between parents, society, and NGOs to improve ECE access and quality. ECE is vital for children's cognitive, social, and emotional growth, especially during the early years when brain development is at its peak. Research also shows it has long-term benefits, like better academic achievement, social skills, and future job opportunities (Government of Pakistan, 2008). Parental involvement is key, leading to better outcomes in learning and behavior (Huang & Mason, 2008). This study explores parents' experiences with ECE and their role in their children's learning.

### **Objectives**

The present study was conducted to:

- Explore parent's experiences about ECE in primary schools.
- Identify problems faced by parents in continuing ECE for their children.

### **Research Methodology**

The current study was adopted the qualitative approach and conducted using a phenomenology research design. The interviews were conducted from parents to explore their experiences about ECE. The data were collected from 12 parents. The participants were selected based on the single criteria that their children currently studying at ECE level in primary schools. The parents attached to the rural Government girls' primary schools in Jhang, district Attock were included in semi-structured interviews. The main objective of a semi-structured interview is to get the participant's experiences, opinions, knowledge, and perceptions as a data collection tool (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Researchers developed the interview questions in light of the literature review, and the protocol was validated through expert opinion. The parents were selected purposively. The essential research tool used for the current study included interviews only. The interview was designed to obtain data from the parents regarding their perceptions of facilities and activities in ECE at the primary level, and the problems they are facing while their children were studying at ECE level. Interviews require less time and money than other methods like focus group discussions (Moser & Kalton, 2017). Interview protocol was developed and following questions were asked from parents:

- Are you satisfied with the provisions of physical resources in ECE classrooms?
- Are you satisfied with the learning activities in ECE classrooms?
- What are your experiences with teachers of ECE classrooms?
- What problems are you facing in continuing ECE for your children?
- What do you suggest to improve the ECE in primary schools?

In order to obtain the purpose of the study, it was necessary to be consistent with the study's research design and the qualitative data collected. The qualitative data were transcribed and analysed using the descriptive coding method, where a detailed literature description of the respondent's views was presented to the reader.

### **Results**

The information gathered from parents has been organized into broad categories and subcategories after being transcribed.

**Table 1****Broad Categories of Parents' Responses**

<b>Broad Categories</b>	<b>Details</b>
Physical resources in ECE classrooms	All the material which helps in teaching for better understanding, such as Toys, audio- visual aids, and furniture.
Learning activities in ECE classrooms	Play-based learning activities such as flashcards, wall decorations, stories, poems, etc.
Experiences with teachers of ECE classrooms	Parent-teacher meeting (PTM) Relationship between teacher and student Teaching methodology
Problems you are facing to continue ECE for your children	Long distance from school to home, poverty, lack of trust in teachers etc.
Suggest improving the ECE in schools	To improve the ECE in schools, focus should be on surprise visits from higher authorities, provide playgrounds, allocate funding for ECE, review the teacher and student ratio, and Provide at least one trained ECE teacher in the primary schools.

Parent satisfaction, opinions, experiences, participation and suggestions play a vital role in any school system like a pillar. There are so many public schools in the surrounding area, and it is imperative to satisfy the parents of children. Early childhood is the foundation of learning because, at an early age, a child's mind is easier to fill than in later stages. ECE is the stage for any child who can be friends with education. So, it's our duty to supervise and look after the children, give awareness about health and hygiene, provide a structured and beneficial learning environment, have a fun and enthusiastic attitude with children and efficiently communicate and share their problems. The data were summarised, carried and placed into the following broad categories as mentioned in table 1,

Satisfaction with the provisions of physical resources in ECE

Satisfaction with the learning activities in ECE classrooms

Experiences with teachers of ECE classrooms

Problems faced during continued ECE for their children

Suggestions to improve the ECE in schools

**Satisfaction with the Provisions of Physical Resources In ECE**

When the parents inquired about satisfaction with the provisions of physical resources in ECE, different parents had different opinions and experiences about material resources. Most of the parents said I am delighted with the requirements of physical resources in ECE because my child showed positive feedback on a daily basis. Children have been learning any concept from available resources. About four parents explained that our children had not appropriately learned due to the absence of audio-visual aids like LCD. Children need attention and interest in using these modern and latest technologies. One of the parents said our children learnt about

new things and knowledge of children is enhanced after admission to this public school. In past decades, such massive changes in public schools due to the selection of professional teachers and using physical resources for the clear concept of students. Innovative ideas can change the future of children. One of the parents has explained that all the materials hanging on the four sides of the walls are attractive and informative for children's learning.

### **Satisfaction with the Learning Activities in ECE Classrooms**

Most parents thought, based on daily observation, that play-based learning activities such as flashcards and poems have commonly been used in ECE classrooms. Teachers should use different classroom tactics, methods and techniques to create a learning environment. These modern techniques easily engage the child, building and developing interest in the children's education. One of the parents described a massive strength in my kid's classroom. At some points, the teacher neglected my child and did not participate well in learning activities. During the interviews, approximately two parents pointed out that trained teachers should be given priority by our government because tackling at a young age child is much more difficult compared to the later age of life. The teacher should learn the new learning activities and use them in the ECE classrooms.

### **Experiences with Teachers of ECE Classrooms**

During the interviews about parents' experiences with teachers of ECE classrooms, most of the parents described how the teacher conducts the monthly meeting and discusses the behaviour, attitude, and skills of a child. Even as a parent, we don't bother and know the importance of our child's weaknesses, which is an outstanding and positive response from the teacher. Then parents also focused those points on the betterment of their children. Approximate two parents were of the view that they complained about the reluctant behaviour of teachers. The teacher has not listened to the suggestions, given any feedback throughout the month and used their style. About three of the parents highlighted the teaching methodology. These parents are not well educated and are less aware of new techniques. These parents cannot afford the relevant material used in ECE classrooms and are not satisfied with teacher behaviour due to a lack of understanding or a language barrier between teachers and parents.

### **Problems Faced During Continued ECE for Children**

During interviews, one of the parents said that the government does not allocate specific funding for ECE in public schools, which is a big problem. Due to poverty, we cannot fulfil the demands of children. So many problems have been faced in continuing ECE for children. The basic needs like notebooks, colourful dresses and other helping materials used in ECE classrooms cannot afford it. Poverty is the biggest obstacle and constraint to meeting the needs and protecting and promoting children's rights. About two of the parent's said teachers are not trained and do not understand young children's mentality. Therefore, parents know better than untrained teachers about children's emotions, attitudes, and social abilities.

### **Suggestions to Improve the ECE In Schools**

Most of parents view it as a playground for ECE students. Due to the absence of a playground, children do not play well in this school. Learning through play creates a cheerful and engaging environment for preschoolers, while a proper playground encourages outdoor activities. Parents have highlighted the lack of such facilities in public schools, which are essential for supporting children's social and emotional development. Multimedia should be provided to the ECE classrooms to engage and easily learn. One of the parents mentioned that the teacher should create a child-friendly environment and make the learning process productive. Then children are interested in education and want to go to school even on Sunday. One of the parents' views is that there should be regular parents and teaching meetings at school. There is an acute shortage of staff. There must be one dedicated ECE teacher. Moreover, most

important, we must keep the student and teacher ratio within definite limits. Because in this school, there are more than 40 students in an ECE class, which is not beneficial for future young children.

## **Conclusions**

This study explored parents' views on the effectiveness of ECE programs and opportunities for their involvement in public schools. Parents emphasized the importance of starting ECE early and creating a child-friendly, engaging school environment. They believe an attractive environment and play facilities are key to active learning. However, many public schools lack adequate play areas, as highlighted by the parents. There is an urgent need for authorities to evaluate current ECE programs in public schools to address these gaps and improve outcomes. The parents also highlighted the shortage of ECE staff, which is inadequate for monitoring the performance of all children. Therefore, student-teacher ratios should be planned in all public schools. One of the parents highlighted the availability of physical resources in schools. Teachers cannot achieve their goals and not fulfil the purpose of education. One of the parents explained to untrained teachers that they could handle the situation and understand preschool children's emotions, behaviour, and skills.

## **Recommendations**

The current study makes the following recommendations that teacher and parent meetings should be important and helpful for children in early education. Because parents can understand the children's behaviour, attitude and skills, teachers should deeply involve themselves in organising school-related tasks. They should also keenly take charge of the activities because they are the students' immediate supervisors while at school. The teachers should also keep proper records after understanding the level of students. All the needs of a child at this age should be provided for building interest in the child in education for long life. Teacher training should be held to keep the teachers aware of the needs of students regarding their role as role models. Teachers have a great influence on the student's personality, so they should be able to morally train the students so that the nation's youth should be confident and represent moral attributes in its character. There should be at least one dedicated trained ECE teacher in classrooms.

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