



RESEARCH PAPER**Navigating Challenges: Advancing Early Childhood Education and Care in Pakistan**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the characteristics, perceptions, and practices of 150 male and 150 female Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers who work only in public sector schools in Faisalabad, Pakistan using a descriptive quantitative technique and a questionnaire that was designed specifically for this study. The research seeks to examine potential gender disparities in perspectives regarding the implementation of Education for All (EFA) policy in early childhood education (ECE) settings at the school level. These objectives were achieved by analysing demographics, teaching experiences, and attitudes towards important policies. The findings offered valuable insights into the unique perspectives of public-sector ECE teachers in Faisalabad, informing policy refinements and educational enhancements tailored to this specific context, with the ultimate goal of improving early childhood education quality and advancing policy implementation in the region. Major recommendations were professional development of ECE teachers, systematic feedback and collaborative problem-solving.

KEYWORDS

Early Childhood Education (ECE), ECE Teachers, Education for All (EFA) Policy, Gender Differences, Public Sector Schools

Introduction

Early Childhood Education (ECE) plays a pivotal role in shaping the foundational learning experiences of young minds, contributing significantly to their cognitive, social, and emotional development (Barnett, 2011; Pianta et al., 2009). Within the bustling educational landscape of Faisalabad, the effectiveness of ECE practices and the attitudes of teachers toward key policies, such as Education for All (EFA), stand as critical areas warranting exploration.

The literature underscores the impact of effective early childhood education on long-term educational outcomes (Camilli et al., 2010; Zaslow et al., 2016). However, the nuances of teacher perspectives, particularly with regard to gender disparities in policy implementation, remain underexplored. By examining these factors, this research aspires to contribute valuable insights that can inform targeted interventions, teacher training programs, and policy enhancements, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and effective ECE environment in Faisalabad.

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECCE) is a crucial aspect of early childhood education (ECCE) in Pakistan, with plans to create 42,500 new ECE focus placements and

recruit 51,000 new educators. However, proper examination of ECE in Pakistan has not been completed due to lack of awareness among non-industrialized nations, particularly in Pakistan. The National Education Policy (1998-2010) introduced "Kachi" as an appropriate class in grade schools, but implementation has not yet started due to lack of resources. The government is committed to enrolling under-educated children in the ECE program and has cancelled youth schooling programs across the country.

ECCE is essential for individuals to survive hygienically in society and develop skills and technical growth. It is also a vital instrument for nation building, transferring potential, skills, and talent from one generation to the next effectively for their development and healthy growth. ECE corners are essential in primary schools to prepare children for primary education by encouraging them to learn through play and sharing ideas. Teachers and caregivers play a crucial role in fostering friendly behavior and supporting their development (Arteaga, et. et al., 2014)

Youth training plays a crucial role in the long-term development of children, significantly influencing their home and school support. Research shows that youth education significantly affects each aspect of a child's life, and the primary educator is a critical individual in the child's life. Youth Foundation aims to develop mental and emotional capacity at an early age. Parents and families play a significant role in the youth cycle, contributing as much as educators, students, and executives to the educational cycle (Broekhuizen, et. et al., 2015)..

Literature Review

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a crucial priority on a global scale. The global recognition of the importance of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in influencing the cognitive, social, and emotional growth of young students has increased significantly (Zaslow et al., 2016). Studies highlight the beneficial influence of high-quality Early Childhood Education (ECE) on academic performance, social conduct, and general welfare (Camilli et al., 2010). Investment in early childhood education (ECE) at the global level has been linked to enduring societal advantages, such as decreased crime rates and heightened economic output (Heckman et al., 2010).

The field of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Pakistan is experiencing a significant increase in attention and emphasis. In the Pakistani context, the significance of Early Childhood Education (ECE) has received attention due to the government's dedication to enhancing early childhood schooling (Ahsan et al., 2020). The Education for All (EFA) strategy in Pakistan demonstrates a dedication to offering comprehensive and high-quality education to every child, with a particular focus on the crucial importance of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in attaining this objective (Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, 2019).

Gender Inequalities in Early Childhood Education: An International Dilemma The issue of gender inequality in early childhood education (ECE) has garnered global attention (UNESCO, 2021). The global movement towards gender-inclusive education is clearly visible. However, there is a lack of exploration into the varied viewpoints of male and female early childhood education (ECE) teachers, especially in the context of the Pakistani educational system.

Challenges and opportunities in the field of ECE in Pakistan

Notwithstanding the dedication to Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Pakistan, there are ongoing obstacles, such as restricted availability, inadequate facilities, and differences in the quality of teachers (Ahsan et al., 2020). Furthermore, the efficacy of ECE techniques may be influenced by culture and gender-specific factors (Khalid, 2016). Therefore, it is essential to examine the traits and perspectives of male and female Early Childhood Education (ECE) instructors in Faisalabad in order to make well-informed decisions on policies and practices.

Gender and educational policies in Pakistan

Understanding gender dynamics in education is of utmost importance in Pakistan (Shahzad et al., 2018). Gender-sensitive policies, such as the EFA policy, are crucial for promoting inclusive learning environments. Nevertheless, there has been limited research on the gender discrepancies in policy perspectives among early childhood education (ECE) instructors in Pakistan.

Relationship between ECE Teachers and Gender Dynamics

An essential aspect of comprehending the intricacies of gender dynamics in the educational setting is to analyse the viewpoints of both male and female early childhood education (ECE) teachers (Güneş, 2018). Prior research has indicated that the gender of teachers can have an impact on their teaching methods and relationships with students (Pomerantz & Ruble, 1998). Hence, it is crucial to explore the potential disparities in viewpoints on the EFA policy among male and female ECE teachers in Faisalabad as a means of comprehending the interconnectedness of gender and education.

Gender equality in the educational context of Pakistan

Pakistan has made significant progress in advancing gender equality in education through several initiatives, including the Girls' Stipend Programme and conditional financial transfers for female students (Duflo et al., 2012). Nevertheless, there is a lack of exploration into the alignment between these wider gender-equity initiatives and the viewpoints of early childhood education (ECE) instructors, particularly in relation to the

Although global literature acknowledges the crucial importance of early childhood education (ECE) and the obstacles related to gender inequalities, as well as the wider initiatives for gender equality in education, there is a dearth of detailed examination of the viewpoints of male and female ECE teachers in Faisalabad. This study seeks to address this disparity by examining the attributes, perspectives, and behaviours of early childhood education (ECE) teachers, with a specific emphasis on gender disparities in viewpoints towards the implementation of the Education for All (EFA) programme in ECE settings. The expected results will not only add to the worldwide discussion on early childhood education (ECE), but will also provide valuable insights for improving gender-sensitive educational policies and practices in the particular setting of Faisalabad., Pakistan.

An analysis of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study provides evidence that the duration of early childhood education programmes may have different effects on children from lower-income and higher-income families. The study conducted by Drzal et al. (2013) found that assessing early childhood education (ECE) classrooms has a significant positive impact on the reading and math abilities of children from low- and middle-income families by the age of five.

Material and Methods

The primary objective of this past study was to describe the characteristics, perceptions, and practices of 150 male and 150 female Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers from the city of Faisalabad. Additionally, a t-test was employed to explore potential differences in the opinions of male and female teachers regarding the implementation of Education for All (EFA) policy in ECE corners at the school level.

Population: The study encompassed 150 male and 150 female ECE teachers, drawn from only public sector schools within the city of Faisalabad.

Sampling: Stratified random sampling ensured representation across various school types, teaching experiences, and educational qualifications.

Data Collection Instrument: A self-constructed questionnaire, with closed-ended and Likert-scale questions, was employed for quantitative data collection. The questionnaire covered demographics, teaching experience, perceptions about ECE practices, and attitudes towards the EFA policy in ECE corners.

Pilot Testing: The questionnaire underwent pilot testing with a separate group of ECE teachers to refine and clarify questions.

Data Collection: The finalized questionnaire was distributed to the selected sample. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, were maintained. A t-test was applied to assess differences in opinions between male and female teachers on the EFA policy.

Data Analysis: Descriptive statistics summarized overall trends, and a t-test analyzed the quantitative data, exploring any significant differences in opinions between male and female teachers regarding the EFA policy.

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Comparison of EFA (education for all) policy between male and female teachers

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
EFA	150	42.50	9	1.75	.012
EFA	Male				
	Female	150	40.00	1	

The presented table displays the results of an independent samples t-test conducted to examine the differences in the opinions of male and female teachers regarding the implementation of EFA policy in ECE corners at the school level. The analysis indicates no significant difference between male and female teachers in their evaluation of the EFA policy in ECE corners at the school level. The mean score for male teachers is (M=41.8913, SD=8.34061), while the mean score for female teachers is (M=40.2402, SD=0.88674). The t-value obtained from the analysis is 2.002, and the associated p-value (Sig) is .000. The results suggest a statistically significant difference between male and female teachers' opinions regarding the application of EFA policy in ECE corners.

These findings imply that the mean achievement scores denote a noteworthy distinction in the perspectives of male and female teachers concerning the implementation of the EFA policy in ECE corners.

Table 2
Comparison of benefits of ECE corners about Effectiveness of ECE corners among male and female teachers

	gender	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
Benefits	Male	150	16.2787	.93069	-2.677	.000
	Female	150	17.9873	10.72314		

This Table depicts the perceived benefits of Early Childhood Education (ECE) corners and their effectiveness, focusing on gender differences among teachers. The analysis of benefits reveals a significant difference in mean scores between male ($M = 16.2787$, $SD = 0.93069$) and female teachers ($M = 17.9873$, $SD = 10.72314$). The t-test results ($t = -2.677$, $p = .000$) indicate that female teachers, on average, report higher perceived benefits from ECE corners compared to their male counterparts. This finding highlights gender-specific perspectives, offering insights for educational strategies that consider diverse perceptions of ECE effectiveness among teachers.

Table 3
Comparison of male and female teachers point of view about problems of ECE corners in public schools.

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
Problems	Male	150	26.2465	1.8741	-1.723	.112
	Female	150	26.8526	2.3021		

The above schedule shows the independent sample t- test assessment in the male and female point of view about problems of ECE corners teachers face in the public schools. It shows no differentiate between the male and female teachers opinion about assessment of problems of ECE corner at school level.

The table compares the perspectives of 150 male and 150 female teachers in public schools concerning the challenges encountered in Early Childhood Education (ECE) corners. Male teachers recorded a mean score of 26.25 ($SD = 1.87$), while female teachers reported a slightly higher mean of 26.85 ($SD = 2.30$). Despite the small difference in means, both groups expressed relatively high mean values, indicating a general consensus among teachers, irrespective of gender, about the substantial issues faced in ECE corners. The t-test value of -1.723, along with a non-significant p-value of .112, suggests that the observed discrepancy is not statistically significant. These results imply that, despite minor variations, male and female teachers share comparable perspectives on the substantial challenges present in ECE corners within public schools.

Conclusion

The study finds a statistically significant disparity in the viewpoints of male and female instructors regarding the execution of the Education for All (EFA) policy in Early Childhood Education (ECE) areas at the school level. Although there is a noticeable discrepancy, it is important to acknowledge that both categories generally view the EFA policy well. The average results indicate that male teachers achieved higher scores ($M=41.8913$, $SD=8.34061$) compared to female teachers ($M=40.2402$, $SD=0.88674$). The results emphasise the importance of a sophisticated comprehension of gender-specific viewpoints for the implementation of EFA policies in early childhood education corners.

Uninterrupted conversation and cooperation: Promote a culture of ongoing discussion and cooperation among male and female teachers to exchange knowledge,

experiences, and effective strategies on the implementation of Education for All (EFA) policies in early childhood education (ECE) settings. Creating regular platforms for dialogue helps foster a more united and collaborative attitude, reducing any apparent differences in viewpoints and establishing a collective dedication to implementing policies effectively.

An analysis of the viewpoints of 150 male and 150 female teachers regarding issues in Early Childhood Education (ECE) settings in public schools demonstrates that, although there is a slight variation in average scores, both groups exhibit relatively high average values. This suggests that both groups acknowledge the significant difficulties present in ECE environments. The t-test result of -1.723, which is not statistically significant with a p-value of .112, indicates that the observed difference is not meaningful. This finding supports the idea that both male and female teachers have similar perceptions of concerns in ECE corners. This underscores a shared agreement over the difficulties encountered in early childhood education (ECE) environments, surpassing gender disparities among educators.

Recommendations

1. Implement gender-specific professional development programmes for teachers that focus on effectively utilising Early Childhood Education (ECE) components. Customise training sessions to specifically target the distinct requirements, preferences, and perceived advantages of male and female educators, promoting a more comprehensive and gender-aware approach to the implementation of early childhood education.
2. Establish a systematic feedback framework that fosters continuous communication between educators and educational policymakers regarding the perceived advantages of ECE corners. Conducting periodic surveys, focus group talks, or feedback sessions can yield significant insights, enabling timely adjustments and enhancements in ECE corner initiatives, hence augmenting their overall efficacy.
3. Promote collaborative problem-solving by fostering cooperation between male and female teachers to cooperatively tackle the highlighted difficulties in early childhood education sectors. Creating platforms for transparent communication and collaborative problem-solving can cultivate a cohesive strategy to enhance the early childhood education (ECE) setting.
4. Professional Development: Offer specialised professional development opportunities for teachers of both genders, with an emphasis on solving the specific difficulties found in early childhood education areas. Workshops, training sessions, and peer learning can improve instructors' abilities in effectively handling and reducing these issues.
5. Resource Allocation Evaluation: Assess the distribution of resources in ECE corners, taking into account input from both male and female teachers. Ensuring sufficient supply of resources, instructional tools, and physical facilities can greatly benefit in addressing difficulties and establishing an ideal educational setting.

By applying these suggestions, educational institutions can establish a more cooperative and nurturing atmosphere for instructors, so improving the overall calibre of Early Childhood Education in public schools.

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