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Attitudes of Head Teachers towards Early Childhood Care and Education in Elementary Schools of Kasur District

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Abstract

The main objective of this descriptive research study was to analyze the elementary schools' head teachers' attitudes towards the early childhood care and education (ECCE) against seven factors: Scope, Curriculum Expediency, In-service Training, Policy Implementation, Parents Involvement, Inclusion, and Budgeting. Seventy headteachers (32 males and 38 females) were randomly selected as a sample from 80 elementary public schools of Kasur district. A survey questionnaire consisting of 35 (thirty-five) statements was designed to collect data and attitudes were analyzed against a 5-point Likert scale. Non-parametric statistical analysis was conducted for data analysis by using SPSS and interpretations were made accordingly. The received data were analyzed in the light of seven investigated factors; according to the experience, gender, and qualification up-gradation. The study found a significant difference in the attitudes of headteachers gender-wise. However, no significant difference was found in the attitudes regarding the experience and qualification up-gradation during their service. The study revealed that the participants considered ECCE a good program, but they had shown concerns related to the budgeting condition allocated for the ECCE program. The study recommended that government should allocate a sufficient budget and provide in-service training to public school teachers according to international standards on ECCE.

Keywords: *Attitudes, Head Teachers, Early Child Care, Elementary Schools.*

Introduction

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), acts as a foundation for producing well-formed physically and psychologically vigorous children ready to join schools (Ebrahim, 2011). ECCE curriculum is usually designed to integrate emotion and intellect for exploration and creativity (Yang, n.d.; Mbugua, 2012). Nagayama & Gilliard (2005) have suggested that ECCE programs should be designed to meet the needs of diverse children and families based on investigation of early childhood practices and philosophies in international settings. Equity to ethnicity, culture, language, and literacy must also be focused (Jalongo, Fennimore, Pattnaik, Laverick, Brewster & Mutuku, 2004).

If a teacher is fair to all children and recognizes the positive aspects of childhood, ECCE can provide an essential foundation for successful lifelong learning, social integration, personal development, and later employability (European Commission, 2011; Johnson, 2011). Even a most highly skilled teacher needs adequate material, curriculum support, skilled teaching assistants, and a physical setting that is appropriate to meet the needs of young children. "Teachers are imperative in ECCE because children at that level are young and need special care" (Lge, 2011). Similarly, funding and support at the local, state and national level (Clark & Stroud, 2010), effective leadership and advocacy (Taylor, 2012), national policies and standards, teachers' professional development and on-going training, Parents' partnership (Herczog, 2012), curricula, assessment, and instructional practices (Takanishi & Bogard, 2007) are some other factors influencing the quality of ECCE.

The importance of ECCE has also been recognized in Pakistan. The Government has planned to enroll more than 50% ECCE population in schools. To achieve this target, various policy decisions have been made. But the schooling system of Pakistan entirely depends on textbook curriculum and conventional teaching-learning practices. Rote learning is the only learning tool among students. The same practices are adopted in ECCE; making it rigid, isolated, and ineffective (Rizvi, 2014). This study is an attempt to understand the issues related to ECCE in Pakistan. For this purpose, the study aims to explore the attitudes of elementary headteachers, as head teachers' role has always been considered very crucial in any education system, towards the effectiveness of ECCE in their schools(Yousafzai et al., 2018).

Objective

Following are the key objectives of this study:

- To analyze the attitudes of elementary male and female headteachers towards different factors of the ECCE program.
- To find out the difference between the attitudes of elementary headteachers who improved their qualifications or those who did not improve their qualifications during the service.
- To find out the difference between the attitudes of elementary headteachers and their years of experience.

Literature Review

Children's physical, cognitive and psycho-social development demands quality care and education (Lge, 2011). Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) have been advocated as early prevention and intervention (Dinehart, et al., 2013). Well-designed ECCE programs produce positive effects on children's learning and development (Bernett, 2008). Structuring curriculum goals & contents is a very crucial component of well-designed ECCE programs. They must be planned in a manner that reflects children's development and early classroom practices in true meanings and yield to sustainability (Chopra, 2012; Agul, Ull & Minguet, 2013). Plum (2011) has identified some important areas of ECCE learning, including "personal competence, social competence, language skills, the competence of the body and movement, the competence of nature and science, and the competence of cultural experience and cultural values" (Plum, 2011). Personal care and routine, language reasoning abilities, fine and gross motor abilities, creative abilities, and social development are some other areas of competence (Chan, 2018).

The National ECCE Curriculum 2007 adopted a holistic approach for children's physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and moral development through active learning, critical thinking, decision making, tolerance, citizenship, self-reliance, lifelong learning, respect for diversity, sense of identity, understanding of Islam and Islamic society(Little, 2017).

The quality of experiences at home and the quality of experiences in early childhood settings are two key factors influencing children's development and could affect children's cognitive and language skills, as

well as behavior (Rosenthal, 2007). Rosenthal (2007) has identified two parameters to check the quality of ECCE: process and structure. Process refers to children's social interaction and education, whereas structural aspects include child-teacher ratio, teachers' attitude, teachers' education & training specific to children's early years, etc. (Tsangaridou, 2017).

Teachers' role has always been considered very crucial in ECCE (Eduese, 1996, as cited in Lge, 2011; Plum, 2011; Happo, Maatta & Uusiautti, 2013). Parents' involvement in ECCE has always been appreciated as the children's outcome depends on parents' characteristics, like financial conditions, maternal employment, parental education, and marital status (NIEER, 2008; Farquhar, 2008; Ntuli, Nyarambi & Traore, 2012). Parents need to be made aware of what occurs in child care and kindergarten classrooms(Pérez & Saavedra, 2017). Parents usually have an incomplete picture of ECCE as they have limited opportunities to observe specific aspects of daily classroom life which drive them to presume that the services provided to their children are of high quality (La Paro, Van Schagen, King, & Lippard, 2018)
Head teachers' attitude is an important factor for the success of ECCE policies in school. Their positive attitude can motivate teachers, create a congenial environment, increase children's enrollment (Leseman, 2009). Through mentoring, monitoring, and supervision, they can take care of pedagogical matters which are essential for children's positive growth (Soumya et. al ., 2007). A headteacher with a positive attitude could develop a good relationship between school and families (Carpentieri, Fairfax-Cholmley, Litster & Vorhaus, 2011), create an inclusive environment for all children (Leseman, 2009), improve teachers' expertise and capabilities through arranging in-service training, and establish effective relationships with government organizations, private institutes, NGOs, parents, and the society (Chong & Lu, 2019).

Early Childhood Care and Education in Pakistan

In Punjab, almost 35% of children drop out between ECCE to Grade 1 whereas, the Road Map to Reforms mandate for 100% enrollment and retention in schools (Syed, Asif &Yousaf, n.d.). Such concerns have also been shown in Medium-Term Development Framework (MDTF) 2005-2010 (UNESCO, 2006). Similarly, the attitude of the school administration, universal nature of ECCE curriculum, lack of teacher training, lack of resources, insufficiently trained staff to fully embrace ECCE as a holistic program, lack of sufficient and ongoing research on ECCE are some key challenges that are hindering the success of the ECCE program (Khan, 2018)

The Government of Pakistan has started a provincial ECCE scaling up strategy with a focus to spread ECCE in 60000+ schools. The importance of ECCE has been acknowledged in both National Education Policy 1998-2010 and National Education Action Plans 2001-2005. Being the signatory of the Education for All (EFA) declaration and the Millennium Development Goal (MDG)(Yousafzai et al., 2018), Pakistan is striving to provide ECCE services all over the country. In 2002, the government realized the importance of ECCE and formulated the National ECCE curriculum; the curriculum was revised in 2007. In 2011-12, the Punjab government established ECCE classrooms in all schools across Punjab. To achieve this target, the government announced Provincial Education Sector Plans 2011-2012, Scaling up strategy (2011-2021), and Global Partnership for Education (GPE) programs(Franchett et al., 2019).

Methodology and Instrumentation

The population of this study was elementary school headteachers of the district Kasur. A sample of 70 head teachers, 32 (45.7%) Male, and 38 (54.3%) Female, was selected from rural and urban elementary schools where ECCE was offered. A survey questionnaire of thirty-five (35) statements was designed to collect data from the participants. The instrument was validated by the subject experts. The responses were analyzed in the light of seven factors according to the experience, gender, and qualification up-gradation. Of these 70 respondents, 58(83%) respondents were working in BPS 17 and 12 (17%) in BPS 18. Qualification wise 16(23%), 37(53%), and 17(24%) were holding B. A &/or B.Ed., Masters &/or M.Ed., above Masters'

Degree respectively. With respect to job experience, 5 (7%) 1-3 years, 22 (31%) 4-6 years, 10 (27%), 7-9 years, 18 (26%) 10-12 years, and 5 (9%) having 13-15 years of experience.

A research questionnaire, consisting of 35 items, was designed using a 5-point Likert Scale; i.e. Strongly Agree (DA), Agree (A), Neutral (N), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The participants' responses were collected according to seven key factors of ECCE: (i) Scope (5 items); (ii) Curriculum Expediency (5 items); (iii) In-service Training (5 items); (iv) Policy Implementation (5 items); (v) Parents Involvement (5 items); (vi) Inclusion (5 items); and (vii) Budgeting (5 items). For the internal consistency and reliability of the research questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted on 35 headteachers. The questionnaire yielded satisfactory internal consistency and reliability; the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was .88. The data were collected, tabulated, and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Mann Whitney U test was used to differentiate the attitudes of elementary headteachers gender-wise. Similarly, Mann Whitney U test was used to differentiate the attitudes of headteachers who upgraded or did not upgrade their qualifications during their service. Kruskal Wallis test was used to differentiate the attitudes of elementary headteachers according to their years of experience.

Results

The interpretation of the statements is as below

Table-1 shows the frequencies and percentages of the participants' responses to 35 items related to seven key factors: Scope, Curriculum Expediency, In-service Training, Policy Implementation, Parents Involvement, Inclusion, and Budgeting. Results show that 40% of the respondents improved their qualifications during service; whereas, 60 percent of the respondents did not improve their qualifications during the service occupants agreed with this statement; however, 31% remained neutral.

Table 1: The difference in attitudes of elementary headteachers who upgraded or did not upgraded their qualification during service

Test Statistics			
			Total score
Mann-Whitney U			552.500
Wilcoxon W			1455.500
Z			-.427
Ranks			
Qualification up gradation	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Did not up grade	42	34.65	1455.50
Up graded	28	36.77	1029.50
Total	70		

Table 1 depicts the difference in the attitudes of elementary head teachers towards ECCE who upgraded or did not upgrade their qualifications during the service.

Mann Whitney U test was conducted to find the difference between the attitudes of both groups. A Mann-Whitney U test revealed no significant difference between the attitudes of elementary head teachers towards ECCE who upgraded (Md = 107.5, n = 28) or did not upgraded their qualification during service (Md = 107.5, n = 42), U = 552.50, z = -.427, p = .67, r = .05. Results indicated that there is no difference between the attitudes of elementary head teachers towards ECCE either they upgraded their qualifications during service or not.

Table 2: Experience the wise difference in attitudes of elementary head teachers towards ECCE

		Total score
Chi-Square		1.498
Df		4
Asymp. Sig.		.827
Ranks		
Experience	N	Mean Rank
1-3 years	5	38.80
4-6 years	22	34.32
7-9 years	19	32.47
10-12 years	18	39.83
13-15 years	6	33.67
Total	70	

Table 2 depicts the difference in the attitudes of elementary head teachers towards ECCE by their years of experience. A Kruskal Wallis test was conducted to find out the difference between the attitudes of elementary head teachers towards ECCE and their years of experience. A Kruskal Wallis test revealed no significant difference in the attitudes of elementary head teachers towards ECCE across five different experience groups (Gp1, n = 5: 1-3 years, Gp2, n = 22: 4-6 years, Gp3, n = 19: 7-9 years, Gp4, n = 18: 10-12 years, Gp5, n = 6: 13-15 years), χ^2 (4, n = 70) = 1.49, p = .82. The first experience group (1-3 Years of experience) recorded a higher median score (*Md* = 110) than the other four groups which all recorded median values of 105 to 108.

Table 3: Gender wise difference in the attitudes of elementary head teachers towards ECCE

Test Statistics

	Total score
Mann-Whitney U	332.000
Wilcoxon W	860.000
Z	-3.261
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.001
a. Grouping Variable: Gender	

Ranks

	Gender	**N**	**Mean Rank**	**Sum of Ranks**
Total score	Male	32	26.88	860.00
	Female	38	42.76	1625.00
	Total	70		

Table 3 depicts the gender-wise difference in the attitudes of elementary head teachers towards ECCE. A Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to gender-wise differentiates the attitudes of elementary head teachers towards ECCE. A Mann-Whitney U test revealed a statistical significant difference in the attitudes of male (Md = 106, n = 32) and female (Md = 110, n = 38), U = 332, z = -3.2, p = .001, r = .3 elementary headteachers. Results revealed that there is a significant difference between the attitudes of male and female headteachers towards ECCE.

Discussion

The responses suggested that ECCE is an alternate to the early intervention program. It covers the needs of the child in his/her most sensitive period of life, provides the structural learning activities and experiences in early years, and eliminating the learning disparities of coming years' child growth. The respondents disagreed that ECCE services in educational centers supplemented the parents' care.

The participants felt that the contents of the curriculum are developing the social and emotional competencies of pre-school children. They also develop the pre-school children's language competencies. However, the contents of the ECCE curriculum do not fulfill the standards of quality. Also, the curriculum activities do not meet the developmentally appropriate practices which can enhance physical development and health.

The study found that the govt. the teaching staff was not properly trained before the start of the ECCE program. Therefore, untrained teaching staff could not facilitate learning and nurture appropriate growth and development. However, their experiences in the classroom have raised their competencies. The study found that the headteachers encouraged their teaching staff to upgrade their qualification of ECCE. But they were not sure that teaching staff will be trained in the program is upgraded.

The study found that the program is not implemented following the international standards. Even, the participants were having a difference of opinion that the ECCE program has been implemented according to policy recommendations. However, the study found that the government is considering and upgrading the program following each year's needs. Also, the ECCE policy implementation has brought dramatic changes in the experiences of pre-school children and extending access to ECCE programs for children belongs to underdeveloped areas of Pakistan.

The study found that parents were prioritizing the ECCE program for their children. The staff was cooperative with parents to provide the quality upbringing of their children. The parents' participation was enhanced through arranging collaborative problem-solving sessions; however, financial difficulties and language/cultural differences were found serious barriers.

The results of the study found that the ECCE program ensured inclusion. Classrooms were friendly to meet the needs of all children. The participants had a positive attitude towards inclusion. However, the classroom environment was unable to offer better experiences to all children. The majority of the schools did not admit special needs students. The study found that the majority of the participants were not satisfied with government funding and believed that their school budget was not enough to offer quality education. However, the majority of the participants believed that the government will improve the funding with time.

Results revealed no significant difference in the attitudes of elementary head teachers towards ECCE who upgraded or did not upgrade their qualifications during the service. The results indicated that there was no difference between the attitudes of elementary head teachers towards ECCE either they have upgraded their qualification during service or not. Results revealed no significant difference in the attitudes of elementary headteachers regarding their years of headship experience. The results revealed that there was a significant difference in the attitudes of male and female elementary headteachers. The second research question significantly proved that head teachers' attitudes affected the development of early childhood care and education both in public and private schools.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The research was a rigorous attempt to analyze the attitudes of elementary head teachers towards ECCE against seven factors: Scope, Curriculum Expediency, In-service Training, Policy Implementation, Parents Involvement, Inclusion, and Budgeting. Their attitude was also analyzed against gender, qualification up-

gradation, and experience. The study found a clear difference between the attitudes of male and female headteachers. However, qualification up-gradation and experience do not affect the attitude of elementary head teachers towards ECCE.

Keeping in view the conclusions, the study strongly recommends that

(1) The headteachers should provide an optimal learning environment for children through their professional expertise and qualifications to promote ECCE.
(2) The headteachers arrange in-service training to raise the teaching staff competencies towards ECCE.
(3) The government should invest more in the ECCE program that could meet the needs of the program in true letter and spirit.

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