

Early Childhood Development in Pakistan: Opportunities & Challenges

R E D I S C O V E R I N G

C H I L D H O O D

Booklet

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Early childhood is generally referred to the period from birth till age eight. Research has proven that critical brain development and development of intelligence takes place before the age of eight, particularly in the first three years of the child's life ("Early Childhood Counts", 2006). This process is dependent upon the nutritional and health status of the child and the kind of interaction that the child develops with people and objects in the environment ("Early Childhood Counts", 2006). It has been proved that the child develops crucial skills such as pre-reading, language, vocabulary and numeracy from a very early age ("The Importance of Early Childhood", 2006). Early childhood has been claimed to be the time that cognition, nutrition, intelligence and problem solving abilities come together to shape the personality of the child (Cox, 2006). Interestingly, psychologists have found out that the brain acquires language skills much before infants can speak; before the child properly knows how to speak he/she can comprehend the tempo and rhythm of the spoken word and can combine these sounds to create phrases ("The Importance of Early Childhood", 2006). Early experiences are also crucial as they lay neural pathways in the brain that facilitate later learning ("The Importance of Early Language", 2006).

Early Childhood Development (ECD) programs are a response to the fact that the first few years of a child are the most important in terms of his/her overall development. A "good start in life" in terms of affection and appreciation, opportunities to communicate, play and learn, good food and healthcare is critical. ECD programs are about ensuring support for all aspects of children's development, i.e. their social, emotional, intellectual and physical growth. Their aim is to ensure

that children grow up as healthy, capable, confident and caring people – able to lead fulfilling lives and contribute to their families, communities and eventually the wider society. ECD programs work to influence the different environments in which children are growing up so that these are supportive of their overall development. Parental involvement is also an important constituent of ECD as it aims to improve the home environment and make it more feasible keeping in mind that the development of the child is in a more culturally appropriate framework (Cox, 2006).

Early Childhood Education (ECE), a component of Early Childhood Development (ECD), is a term frequently applied to the education of young children from birth through age 8. Although early childhood education has existed since the creation of kindergarten in the 1800s, the last decade has seen a tremendous amount of attention devoted to the subject of early education for young children.

The opportunities provided to a child in the first few years are crucial in determining lifelong outcomes. ECD programs, as a result, lay the foundation for all later learning. Successful ECD interventions have wide-ranging benefits for the children, their families and the communities they belong to. Some indicators of effective ECD programs are:

- Confident & creative learning skills
- Improved nutrition & health status
- Improved social & emotional behavior
- Improved parent-child relationship
- Higher school completion rates



ment



ECD Programs educate mothers and caregivers to nurture children during the early years. Studies have shown that children who are cared for are more likely to trust people, enter school and be eager to learn and get along well with other children (“Early Childhood Education”, 2006). Researchers have claimed that without parental support children are vulnerable to physical and psychological stress which can lead to delinquency (Cox, 2006).

Parents also play a critical role in the infant’s language and brain development. Over the first few months of life, infants pay particular attention to their parent’s speech and to the sound of their culture and language (“The Importance of Early Language”, 2006). Pathways that are not heard in the infant’s culture are pruned back or diminished. Thus experience activates the neural pathways or the synapses that are part of the structure of the brain (“The Importance of Early Language”, 2006). These experiences are crucial determining factors for emotional as well as intellectual development and the child’s performance in the school depends upon them (“Early Childhood Education”, 1999).

Therefore it is of integral importance that adequate attention is paid to early childhood development efforts so as to produce healthy and productive citizens in the future. Many economists have been enthusiastic about the long term impact of quality early childhood development on the human development of the nation.

Studies have shown that appropriate programs for young children can make a difference in the economic, social and academic arena. Children in early childhood development programs exhibit better school achievement which in turn lowers the likelihood of children repeating classes. Moreover, though these programs are designed for educating children but they are holistic in the sense that they include health, nutrition, childcare, education and parent support. Not only do they stress on the importance of nutrition in the classroom these programs aim on enhancing the nutritional status by improving factors such as mothers’ nutrition, health and childcare practices.

Despite having such immense benefits, early childhood programs have not been replicated at large within the country. In Pakistan as acknowledged by the Ministry of Education, there is no formal provision for Early Childhood Education (ECE); the National Plan of Action aims to institutionalize and formalize *katchi* class and further expand ECE facilities for the *katchi* class. Furthermore, the NGOs/private sector, albeit dynamic and innovative, are restricted in scope and scale. Understandably, NGOs and private sector do not have the financial and human resources required to implement a program on the scale that the public sector can, especially for widespread accessibility and long-term sustainability.

Source:
www.whitehouse.gov
www.gwu.edu
www.talkingpage.org
www.cppp.org

Discourse on Early Childhood Development in Pakistan: Opportunities & Challenges

Speakers contended that the first eight years of the child's life form a crucial component of his/her overall growth. These years are also responsible for forming the foundations of language and it has been researched that Early Childhood Development (ECD) principles applied during this phase are formative in the development of important skills such as problem solving and reading. Since ECD principles are child-centered and focus on learning through non traditional means; a case in point being that of play, research has shown that children who enter schools focusing on early childhood development develop a strong interest in learning. This is witnessed by an increase in the enrollment rate in schools and a downward trend in the dropout ratio.

It was argued that in Pakistan more focus was paid on education rather than the holistic development of the child hence missing out areas such as on child health and care. Panelists however argued that Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Pakistan is still in its infancy despite of the fact that the concerned authorities are aware of its potential benefits. Most of the government schools have yet to either develop material or incorporate ECE material that has been prepared by other non governmental organizations in mainstream education. The panelists pointed out that a vast majority of people were of the opinion that early childhood principles should be adopted on a wider setting for a larger majority to derive benefit from it. The panelists

also pointed out that there were only a handful of schools which are being operated on the principles of ECD by a few non governmental organizations. These organizations are constrained in terms of both scale and size so that only a selected few reap benefits from such programs leaving the vast majority at the mercy of mainstream education.

The speakers also suggested that the government should replicate successful ECD models implemented by the NGO sector. The speakers also shared the experiences of the Releasing Confidence & Creativity (RCC) Programme - an Early Child Development programme which has been successfully implemented in 155 government schools across the provinces of Pakistan, Sindh & Balochistan. The programme aims at imparting Early Childhood Development services with the collaboration of parents, teachers and the wider community. The speakers recommended that similar to the RCC Programme, early childhood development programs should be of high quality and they should form collaborative relationships with the government as well as the community for sustainability of efforts.

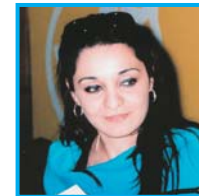
The panelists also pointed out that the private sector was mainly undertaking efforts within the Early Childhood Development arena. However for any fecund outcome, the initiatives undertaken in early childhood development whether in terms of networking, material





development, learning solutions or capacity building should be a joint exercise of both the public and the private sector. Speakers also realized that with the joint partnership of the public and the private sector the benefits of Early Childhood Development would not only stay within the confines of the urban areas but would also be disseminated in the rural regions of the country, where a vast majority of the population resides. Speakers also highlighted on the need of providing an enabling and vibrant environment to educators within the private sector. Some of the panelists stressed on the need of infrastructural development, capacity development and learning material provision in this regard.

The panelists also pinpointed that early childhood education should not be perceived in a disconnected way; the *katchi* class should not be thought of as a segment in itself rather it should be perceived as the first step towards a continuing education. The panelists contended that early education is not a small category of education but is part of the bigger picture and counts towards the overall development of the child.



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Learning Sessions

Session 1

Significance of Children's Physical Development

Dr. Afroze Rehman, Director of the National Institute of Child Health (NICH), elaborated upon the physical health of children and its importance in the overall development of the child. Ms. Rehman also shed light on some of the key steps that should be taken to ensure healthy physical development of children focusing primarily on preventive health practices. One of the key points that she emphasized during her presentation was how crucial personal hygiene was for children and their families.



Session 2

Cognitive and Emotional Development in Children

Ms. Rubina Feroze from the Department of Psychology, University of Karachi, effectively encapsulated the notion of cognitive and emotional development in children in her presentation. She stressed on the role of parents in providing an emotionally nurturing environment for the child. She shed light on some of the significant variables in a child's cognitive and emotional development.



Session 3

How to Make Classrooms ECD Ready? Experiences from the Field

Presentations were made by the implementing agencies of the Releasing Confidence and Creativity (RCC) Programme – An Early Childhood Development Program supported by the Aga Khan Foundation and USAID. The implementing partners of the programme, Aga Khan Education Services, Pakistan (AKES, P), Health and Nutrition Development Society (HANDS), the Society for Community Support for Primary Education in Balochistan (SCSPEB), presented the field level experiences of the RCC Programme. The presentation also focused on presenting some of the key characteristics that should be present in a classroom to make them ECD ready. The agencies emphasized on the need of community participation in ECD initiatives, provision of creative and learning-friendly environments and capacity building of teachers in the area of early childhood development.



Dialogue on Early Childhood Development in Pakistan: Opportunities & Challenges

As part of the conference, a roundtable discussion was held which brought together government, donors and NGOs to deliberate on policy issues, challenges and strategies vis-à-vis Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Pakistan.

The roundtable dialogue was a pioneering effort to understand different ECD initiatives currently underway across the country and to explore possibilities of harmonizing experiences and resources for effective and integrated ECD programming in Pakistan.

Specifically the objectives of the roundtable were to:

- Facilitate in creating synergies amongst various organizations working in ECD in Pakistan;
- Review existing challenges vis-à-vis ECD in Pakistan and discuss their possible solutions;
- Advocate for improved strategies for ECD practices in Pakistan.

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT MAPPING STUDY

The Sindh Education Foundation has undertaken a mapping study which elucidates the extant scenario of early childhood development in Pakistan, sheds light on the opportunities, challenges and shortcomings and gives recommendations to effectively address gaps to enhance the provision of ECD in Pakistan.

The study documents the efforts of organizations working in the field of early childhood development within Pakistan. The study explores the geographical coverage of the organization, type of operation in the ECD sector and the major activities undertaken in this regard.



Issues & Challenges within the ECD Sector

To set the premise of the roundtable conference and discussion amongst the participating members the Sindh Education Foundation presented the macro and micro level issues and challenges vis-à-vis ECD implementation based on the experiences of the Releasing Confidence and Creativity Programme. These entailed:

MACRO LEVEL

- Lack of understanding of the concept of ECD and its efficacies at the policy level.
- Lack of long-term support for the ECD sector at the policy level.
- Lack of synergy amongst various government departments required (Education, Health, Women's Welfare, Works Department) for ECD service provision.
- Need of integrating ECE training for all teachers' trainings by the government
- Lack of holistic approach towards ECD implementation (ECE vs. ECD).

MICRO LEVEL

- *Katchi* classes are not regularized.
- Unavailability of ECD Curriculum within schools.
- Lack of ECD trained teachers.
- Lack of vertical progression of ECD learnings from *katchi* class to grade 1 and onwards.
- Disparity between the *katchi* class and the entire school.

Agencies present at the roundtable dialogue stressed on the need of synergizing their efforts towards advocating for greater support in ECD sector within Pakistan.



Presentations by Stakeholders of ECD Sector in Pakistan

Representatives from government, NGOs, academics and donor agencies presented their ECD portfolios including achievements, sector specific issues and challenges and future course of action. Presentations were made by government functionaries from Sindh and Punjab, AKF, UNICEF, USAID, AKU-IED, Catco Kids, CRI, College of Home Economics and Plan Pakistan.

Government

Representatives from the Sindh and the Punjab government presented their efforts in regard to early childhood education within the public education sector. Both the provincial governments decided upon institutionalizing the *katchi* class gradually and progressively into mainstream education.

Donors

Aga Khan Foundation

The Aga Khan Foundation has been implemented an Early Childhood Development program titled Releasing Confidence and Creativity (RCC) Programme since 2001. The program aims to enhance early learning in 155 government schools across Sindh and Balochistan. The Aga Khan Foundation also undertakes policy advocacy to influence policy makers for inclusion of early childhood development in mainstream education.

UNICEF

UNICEF is playing a significant role in the promotion of early childhood education in the country. UNICEF works with the provincial and the district governments for the integration of Early Childhood Education (ECE) curriculum within schools and capacity building of teachers in the area of early childhood education. The agency also works towards implementing an extensive health strategy to improve maternal health and child health care and development.

USAID

USAID is funding the Releasing Confidence & Creativity Programme which is working towards integrated early learning initiatives within 155 government schools across Sindh and Balochistan. USAID is also supporting a program on creating democratic schools in partnership with the Children's Resources International (CRI).



Implementing Agencies

Aga Khan University Institute for Educational Development (AKU-IED)

AKU-IED is committed towards the improvement of teaching and learning practices in schools within Pakistan. The organization undertakes capacity building of teachers in areas of early childhood development. AKU-IED not only focuses on improving learning opportunities but also focuses on areas of health and care within and outside the school environment.

CATCO Kids

CATCO Kids has played an integral role in establishing corporate childcare centers, large community based centers and home based centers. It also organizes standardized training programs on Early Childhood Development principles. CATCO Kids imparts vital ECD related information amongst community members including information on pre-natal care, breastfeeding, hygiene and other developmentally appropriate practices through its various training programs and publications.

Child Care Resource Center, College of Home Economics, Lahore

The Child Care Resource Center at the College of Home Economics, Lahore works for the holistic development of the child by disseminating early childhood development information in selected rural and urban districts of the country. For this purpose the center has also developed Information, Education and Communication material (IEC) and strategies. Currently, the organization also works with the government to bring early childhood education in mainstream education in accordance with the targets outlined by the Education for All project.

Children's Resources International (CRI)

The Children's Resources International is implemented a project on democratic schools which is being supported by USAID. The organization has played a formative role in the composition of a curriculum and various learning material which is based on the principles early childhood development. The organization also organizes teachers training programs on early childhood development.

Plan Pakistan

The organization has a quality Early Childhood Development program which focuses on establishing ECD centers for children particularly from disadvantaged areas. The organization also focuses on health and provides training to health workers and establishes health centers in rural communities of Pakistan.

The conference was a landmark event in bringing together the government as well as the non-governmental organizations on a single platform to discuss various issues pertaining to early childhood development in Pakistan. It was in this event that successes, opportunities and challenges were shared so as to apprise everyone of the existing scenario of early childhood development and to coordinate for a more effective outcome in the early childhood development sector.





Rediscovering Childhood

Also included in this series

- Gain an understanding on what childhood is ideally meant to be and learn about the challenges of childhood in today's world.
- Explore the role of traditional and modern social institutions i.e. family, community and schools on children's intellectual and social development in today's consumer society.
- Learn about how media and technology are changing children's concepts of self, community, family, nature, time, and distance; and about the grave implications of media and technology on children's health.
- Examine the detrimental impacts of economic development and corporate led globalization and learn about the importance of replenishing traditional knowledge systems, social relationships, and wisdom frameworks for childhood and children.



Introduction to the
Symposium & Conference



Social Institutions
& Childhood



Media, Technology
& Childhood



Globalization,
Development & Childhood

This booklet is based on the discourse held during the
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SINDH EDUCATION FOUNDATION

Plot 9, Block 7, Kehkashan, Clifton 5, Karachi, Pakistan.

Ph: (92-21) 111 424 111 (Ext. 216), Fax: (92-21) 9251671

E-mail: info@sef.org.pk Website: www.sef.org.pk

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