

Impact of ECE on Social Competencies and Language Learning

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Abstract

Early childhood education (ECE) addresses holistic development of the children brings positive experiences and enhances academic and social competencies. In Pakistan, ECE program was started in last two decades with limited budget. Recent educational policies and projects have focused ECE by developing rooms, play facilities and learning kits, learning material and Teachers training etc. This casual comparative study compared the public ECE and Public non ECE students in social development and language learning. Sample of 300 students from public ECE and public non ECE institutions was selected for studying level of social competency and 500 for measuring academic achievement in English and Urdu language by two stage stratified random sampling technique. To compare mean social competencies scores and language achievement scores of public ECE and public non ECE students, t-test was used. The study found that students studying in public ECE institutions are better in social competencies and language learning than that of students in public non ECE schools.

Keyword: social competencies, academic achievement, early childhood education, junior primary students,

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Introduction

Learning is a life-long process which is the product of several intrinsic features of the learner, environment and leaning experiences. Children learn basic skills in their early years along with cognitive, linguistic and social skills. To support learning to the kids in early years of life Early Childhood Education (ECE) is adopted. There are several themes, included in ECE with respect to skills, knowledge and span of age of learner. Corresponding to the definition of International Standard Classification of Education, ECE is a program for providing pre-school education with planned/disciplined and useful learning activities for school education by the age of 3 to 6 years old children (ISCED, 2011). The formal shape of ECE appeared in European and North American economies in the beginning of 20th century due to increased labor demands and change in family structure of these industrial economies, where mostly no one was at the home to care and educate the children in early years before the formal schooling age. Most of the developing countries adopted ECE as a component of formal education system in last decade of twentieth century. Still now the quality of ECE curriculum, learning materials, coverage of facilities to children, especially in the under privileged schools is quite unsatisfactory in those countries. Countries like Pakistan who is in low-income or lower-middle income slot are not taking adequate measures to provide minimum one year of quality pre-primary education for every child that is one of the targets of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) to be met by 2030. In Pakistan early childhood education sector is facing several challenges like lack of budgetary allocation, absence of national ECE policy and deficiency of trained teachers (Arshad & Zamir, 2018).

Early childhood education programs have many paramount benefits for children (Barnard, 2001). Evidence from research studies shows that children who are not admitted in good quality programs are less successful in life as compared to children who enrolled in such programs. Studies on early childhood have found that investing in young children has many vital benefits for children. ECE is increasingly viewed as cost efficient and cost effective strategy whose benefits are reaped both during the school careers of children, in their later life and in the future economy.

ECE is the basic driving force which makes the child more capable in academic achievement and provides the opportunity to learn the rules of behavior. Early childhood education has a great effect on the pupil's advancement in spoken and written English, Mathematics, social studies and integrated science (Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Bernard, 2001;

Barnett, Lamy & Jung 2005; Gormely, Gayer, Philips & Dawson, 2005, Aurangzeb, 2019) and several social skills which enhance their social capabilities through the nourishing pre-school environment (Jordan, Carlile & Stack, 2008). In the early years of a child's life formal academic performance is highly linked with social, emotional development. Young children's social development sets the stage for later social functioning and plays a vital role for successive academic outcomes. Thus, ECE programs are connected to more social-emotional competence (Campbell et.al, 2002) which is theoretically divided in to three major disciplines; attachment, initiative and self-control.

The fast changing world due to globalization and technologies has influenced all aspects of life, with no exception of education. Therefore, the developed countries do prior planning in order to enable their upcoming generation to compete with technological world. For this purpose, they are planning to build strong foundation of children in early years through education (Gupta, 2014;). Developed countries have launched various ECE programs namely nursery school, Daycare center, pre-primary school, kindergarten and Head Start etc. to enhance the early childhood education. ECE is recommended by policy makers as a tool for poverty elevation (Waldfogel, 2017). Due to the successful learning outcomes in the later life of a child (McCoy et al, 2017), educationists have much interest in ECE programs. ECE has gained much attention in the last few years especially in third world countries.

Pakistan being one of the developing countries realized the importance of Early Childhood Education and started planning different policies after 2000. Therefore, early childhood education became a subject of interest in Pakistan when it was concentrated by the world as dominant Millennium Development Goal (MDG). Till now the ECE has improved in terms of quality and excess to the population (Sarwar & Khan, 2010). Due to policy guidance, Universities and colleges have started diploma, graduate and post-graduate programs in ECE. Parents are also lenient about the importance of ECE for academic development of a child. Government of Pakistan is also putting efforts in nourishing the programs of ECE in Pakistan. A national curriculum was developed in 2007 in order to streamline the ECE in all private and public institutions throughout the country (Government of Pakistan, 2007).

In the National Educational Policy (2009), great stress was given on grooming of ECE in all public schools. Likewise Provincial Institute of Teacher Education (PITE) and Directorate of Staff Development (DSD) renamed as Quaid E Azam Academy of Educational Development (QAED) arranged different training workshops for educational

Managers, Educators, and Caregivers regarding ECE respectively in almost all districts of the Punjab. So, pre-school Education program has been started by the Government of Punjab with the aim to enhance the capabilities of a child in academic performance and social competencies.

Socialization is the process of preparing children to live in society, to assimilate its culture and to be its functioning members. Every culture has some plan, a system of positive and negative sanctions, formal and informal agencies, in harmony with its moral, religious, economic and other values for accomplishing that plan. Socialization is also learning of one's social role, which is a pattern of behavior, expected of an individual by others in a social system. School should perform at least four clear functions regarding a child's social development. It should develop appropriate social skills, attitudes, interests and understandings which help him to adjust in society. It should prepare children for change. It should also make children open minded, democratic, responsible and creative in their behavior, outlook and loyalties (National Research Council 1997).

A child with the age of two years can be socialized by the interactions with others, showing empathy, modify his responses to others emotional expressions and trying to make others feel better (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Children in pre-school (03-06 years old) must acquire understanding of emotions and become highly capable for managing their feelings. So, this study aims to find benefits of ECE in academic and social achievement by comparing public ECE students with non ECE. During early childhood the most rapidly growing ability is relevant to language. It includes ability to focus, respond, understand, and to produce language to communicate. Infact, that is the phase of language explosion by expansion of vocabulary from approximately 900 at age of three years to 8000 to 14000 words at the age of 6 years. One of the major factor influencing this is the social experiences of the kids with the fellows, caregiver and parents (Arnon, McCauley, & Christiansen, 2017). Reading and writing skills of the language are included in early language and literacy development stage, which begins in the first 3 years. Books, images, toys, letter blocks, posters and stories become the children's early experiences for language and literacy development (Brown, 2014).

According to constitutional framework, Education is provincial matter to deal with. In Punjab, even at ECE involves development of multiple languages e.g. Urdu and English besides Punjabi/ Saraki (mother language). In this situation ECE may become the first and most influential factor in development of language learning of Urdu and English, especially for the kids in the families where native language is other than Urdu or English. It may be beneficial in learning of Urdu and

English for the families with lower socio-economic status where factors associated with development of 2nd or 3rd language are not available at home and in native environment. The theoretical frame work of this study is based on the notion that accurate descriptions are required regarding the potential benefits of implementing specific pre-school programs in Pakistani environment where family and cultural aspect are different to developed world.

The present study may be of interest to policy maker by finding empirical evidence for further planning and implementation of ECE programs. It might provide insight for Educational Managers, teachers, social researchers and parents who are still in doubt about the potential benefits of ECE in Pakistani rural based society. It may guide the public school management to enhance its role in ECE by providing quality education and expands its access to the masses. It may enhance share of public school in ECE which is mostly thought to be specialized field of private sector, especially for rural and less deprived community.

Present study was casual comparative, designed to explore the impact of ECE in the context of students' development of social competencies and language learning in grade-2, which is reflected in term of academic achievement in those languages. Public ECE school were the state owned schools where ECE facilities were provided and implemented curriculum since 2015, while Public Non-ECE schools were state owned school where no formal setup was available for ECE age specific students

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study were;

1. To compare social competencies of 2nd grade students enrolled in public ECE and Non ECE schools.
2. To compare the language achievement of 2nd grade students in Public ECE and non ECE Schools.

Research Questions

Following research question were designed to orientate the study.

1. If there is any difference in social competencies of the 2nd grade students studying in public ECE schools and the students in public Non-ECE school?

2. If there is any difference in academic achievement in languages of the 2nd grade students studying in public ECE schools and the students in public Non-ECE schools?
3. What are the patterns of academic achievement of 2nd grade students in English studying in public ECE and Non ECE schools?
4. What are the patterns of academic achievement of 2nd grade students in Urdu in public ECE and Non ECE schools?

Methodology:

Research Design

Casual comparative research design was used to compare the social competencies and academic achievement in English and Urdu languages of students of public ECE schools with Public non ECE schools.

Population and Sample

In this research study, all Public ECE and Public non ECE School students from Bhakkar District were taken as accessible population.

Sample Size

The students who participated in this research were randomly selected by multistage sampling technique. At first stage thirty public schools located in Bhakkar District, were selected randomly including fifteen school each from public ECE and Non ECE schools. In the second stage 150 students were randomly selected from each stratum of Public ECE and Non-ECE schools which comprised 300 as sample size quantification and analysis of social competencies. Another sample of 500 students, including 250 from each public ECE and Non-ECE schools, was randomly selected from the selected 30 schools for measuring academic achievement in languages

Delimitation of the Study

Due to limitation of time and financial resources the study was delimited to 2nd grade students of age 6-7 years in public schools in district Bhakkar. Besides this, the quantification of social competencies was delimited to the teachers' views about the social skill and performance of students.

Research Instrumentation

There were two research instruments; one was an adopted social competency scale for teachers about social competencies of 2nd grade

students developed by the Harrisburg Academy of England (2016) and other instrument was an achievement test for English and Urdu language.

Social Competence Scale

The researcher adopted social competence scale. This scale consisted of behavioral statements and four descriptors that measure social competence in youngsters. The scale comprised of the themes social participation, taking social initiative, following rules, involvement in play and group work, respecting and helping others. Response format of the scale involved four points to be filled by the teacher regarding each sampled student from his/her class. Teacher awarded 4 if he/she found specific skill as an area of strength in student, 3 if the skill is appropriate according to his/her age, 2 marks if the student on the way of improvement in the skill, while 1 mark was awarded if the absence of the skill with issue of concern. Pilot testing of this scale was carried out on 100 students randomly selected from four public ECE and non ECE schools which were not included in actual sample. The reliability coefficient of this tool in pilot testing was 0.79.

Language Achievement test

Language achievement test was designed to measure the academic ability of the 2nd grade students in subjects of English, and Urdu according to the table of specification. Objective type and restricted response items were used to assess the knowledge comprehension and application level of cognitive domain. Each part of the achievement test consisted of 10 marks. A two-way table of Specification was developed according to the instructional objectives, content and levels of cognitive domain to ensure content validity of the achievement tests. Items were selected from 2nd grade English and Urdu text books prepared by Punjab Textbook Board Lahore.

The students learning outcomes addressed in achievement test of English were, recognition of items, differentiating vowels and consonants, making sentence and translating English sentences to Urdu. In the test of Urdu, concepts of writing names of the object, word synonyms, breaking words into letters, and making sentences were covered. The test included both MCQs and restricted response questions. 22.7% item were designed to measure knowledge level and 33 % for Comprehension level while 33.3% to address application level of cognitive domain. For ensuring evaluation process of student responses, rubrics were prepared and used.

Pilot testing of the achievement test was done with the sample of 100 students randomly selected from four public ECE and non ECE schools that were located in Bhakkar District. Internal consistency reliability coefficient was 0.844. Difficulty index was 0.53- 0.92, while discrimination index was 0.12 -1 which are quite suitable for an achievement test for grade 2 students.

Data Collection

Data were collected through personal visits to the selected schools with the permission of Heads of institutes in five months. The data were collected through research instruments, considering all ethical considerations.

Data Analysis

Mean scores and standard deviation was calculated to run independent sample t-test for comparison of social competency, and academic achievement of the students in public ECE and Non-ECE schools.

Results and Discussion

Data collected through social competence scale and achievement test was analyzed through applying mean scores, standard deviation and t-test.

Analysis of Social Competencies

Social competencies analysis of three hundred (n=300) sampled students from public ECE and non-ECE institutions were done. This analysis had a significant importance in understanding the impact of ECE on social development.

Table 1

Comparison of public ECE and Non ECE students on social competency Analysis

Group	N	Mean	S.D	t	df	Sig. (p-value)
Students in ECE schools	150	49.74	7.23	5.162	298	0.000
Students in Non- ECE Schools	150	45.46	7.11			

Table 1 shows the comparison of public ECE students with public non ECE on the basis of social development analysis. A significant difference

($t=5.162$, $df= 298$, $\text{Sig.}(p\text{-value}) = 0.000 < 0.001$) was found by this comparative analysis in development of the 2nd grade students having ECE Mean score ($M=49.74$, $SD=7.23$) and Non-ECE Mean score ($M=45.46$, $SD=7.11$) indicate that students of public schools with ECE had higher social competencies.

Analysis of Academic Achievement in Languages

For academic achievement analysis, three hundred ($N=300$) sampled students from public ECE and Public non ECE institutions were assessed in English and Urdu subject on the basis of knowledge, comprehension and application level of cognitive domain and compared.

Table 2

Comparison of public ECE students with Non ECE students in academic achievement in languages

Group	N	Mean	S.D	t	df	Sig. (p-value)
Students in ECE schools	150	15.75	3.89	7.758	498	0.000
Students in Non- ECE Schools	150	12.76	4.71			

Table 2 shows the comparison of public schools with ECE students with non-ECE public schools students on the basis of academic achievement in languages i.e English and Urdu. It depicted that there is a significant difference ($t=7.758$, $df = 498$, $\text{Sig.}(p\text{-value}) = 0.000 < 0.001$) in academic achievement of the students studying in ECE environment ($M= 15.75$, $SD=3.89$) and studying Non ECE background ($M=4.71$, $SD=4.71$). Result of this analysis shows that students studying in public ECE schools gained better in overall academic achievement in languages than that the students in public non-ECE schools.

Analysis of English Language Achievement

Third research question was regarding exploring the patterns of academic achievement of 2nd grade students in English in public ECE and Non-ECE schools.

Table 3
Comparison of academic achievement in English of public ECE students and Non ECE students

Level of Cognitive domain	Group	N	Mean	S.D	t	df	Sig. (p-value)																																
Over all test Scores of English	ECE	250	7.23	2.46	6.210	498	.000																																
	Non ECE	250	5.81	2.64				Knowledge	ECE	250	1.93	0.28	0.753	498	0.452	Non ECE	250	1.91	0.31	Comprehension	ECE	250	2.56	1.71	4.825	498	0.000	Non ECE	250	2.03	1.29	Application	ECE	250	2.74	1.59	5.92	498	0.000
Knowledge	ECE	250	1.93	0.28	0.753	498	0.452																																
	Non ECE	250	1.91	0.31				Comprehension	ECE	250	2.56	1.71	4.825	498	0.000	Non ECE	250	2.03	1.29	Application	ECE	250	2.74	1.59	5.92	498	0.000	Non ECE	250	1.87	1.70								
Comprehension	ECE	250	2.56	1.71	4.825	498	0.000																																
	Non ECE	250	2.03	1.29				Application	ECE	250	2.74	1.59	5.92	498	0.000	Non ECE	250	1.87	1.70																				
Application	ECE	250	2.74	1.59	5.92	498	0.000																																
	Non ECE	250	1.87	1.70																																			

Table 3 shows the comparison of public ECE students with public non ECE on the basis of overall scores and scores in the knowledge, comprehension and application levels of cognitive domain in the subject of English. Table indicated that there is a significant difference ($t=6.210$, $df=498$, Sig. (p-value) = $0.000 < 0.001$) in achievement of students with ECE background ($M=7.23$, $SD=2.46$) and students with non-ECE background ($M=5.814$, $SD=2.64$). Further analysis depicts that there was no statistically significant difference ($t=0.753$, $df=498$, Sig. (p-value) = $0.452 > 0.001$) on the items relevant to knowledge level while there was a significant difference in items relevant to comprehension ($t= 4.825$, $df=498$, Sig. (p-value) = $0.000 < 0.001$) and Application level ($t= 5.92$, $df=498$, $p = 0.000 < 0.001$). It is clear that, students studying in ECE environment in Public schools have better academic achievement in English than the students in Non-ECE schools; even this difference is more evident in learning outcomes of meaningful learning.

Analysis of Urdu Language Achievement

It was an important research question to explore the patterns of academic achievement of 2nd grade students in Urdu in public ECE and Non-ECE schools. For this purpose analysis was done on the academic

achievement total scores in Urdu, and the items related to Knowledge, Comprehension and Application level of cognitive domain.

Table 4
Comparison of public ECE students with Non ECE students in academic achievement in Urdu language

Level of Cognitive domain	Group	N	Mean	S.D	t	df	Sig. (p-value)																																
Urdu -Over all test Scores	ECE	250	8.52	1.95	7.801	498	0.000																																
	Non ECE	250	6.94	2.53				Knowledge	ECE	250	1.52	0.68	7.394	498	0.000	Non ECE	250	1.01	0.84	Comprehension	ECE	250	3.68	0.86	3.466	498	0.001	Non ECE	250	3.35	1.22	Application	ECE	250	3.31	0.98	6.902	498	0.000
Knowledge	ECE	250	1.52	0.68	7.394	498	0.000																																
	Non ECE	250	1.01	0.84				Comprehension	ECE	250	3.68	0.86	3.466	498	0.001	Non ECE	250	3.35	1.22	Application	ECE	250	3.31	0.98	6.902	498	0.000	Non ECE	250	2.62	1.21								
Comprehension	ECE	250	3.68	0.86	3.466	498	0.001																																
	Non ECE	250	3.35	1.22				Application	ECE	250	3.31	0.98	6.902	498	0.000	Non ECE	250	2.62	1.21																				
Application	ECE	250	3.31	0.98	6.902	498	0.000																																
	Non ECE	250	2.62	1.21																																			

Table 4 depicts the comparison of public ECE students with students of public non ECE on the basis of knowledge, comprehension and application level of cognitive domain in Urdu subject. Analysis showed that there is a significant difference ($t=7.801$, $df=498$, Sig. (p-value) = $0.000 < 0.001$) in achievement of students with ECE background ($M=8.52$, $SD=1.95$) and students with non ECE background ($M=6.94$, $SD = 2.53$). Further analysis depicts that there was statistically significant difference in the academic achievement of student with ECE background on the items related to knowledge ($t=0.753$, $df=498$, Sig. (p-value) = $0.000 < 0.001$) Comprehension ($t= 4.825$, $df=498$, Sig. (p-value) = $0.001 < 0.001$) and Application ($t= 5.92$, $df=498$, Sig. (p-value) = $0.000 < 0.001$) than that of the students who did not have ECE in public school. It may be concluded that the students studying in ECE environment in Public schools are performing better in Urdu; Even this trend of better performance is persistent in all levels of cognitive domain that are measured in achievement test.

Conclusions and Discussions

The major conclusion of the study is that Early childhood education improves social competencies of the children in grade 2 (6-7 years) of age. This aspect explained the importance of early childhood education both in public schools which are serving the children from lower economics status. Results were also found to be consistent with Driessen (2017) who studied the influence of Early Childhood Education (ECE) intervention program in Netherland. This study involved children who did not get quality education at their homes and mainly belonged to poor socioeconomic background and showed a positive influence of ECE on social development. Results were also found to be consistent with Hunzai (2007) conducted a case study, in Pakistan, on children of “*katchi*” (Pre-primary) class that is before entering into grade-1 and found that the proper implementation of ECCE (Early Childhood Care and Education) is better in improving the academic achievement and social development of children. Our results also support the same evidence. Schweinhart and Weikart (1997) also found that the students who did not receive proper early childhood education remained far behind the once who received ECE and also students belong to ECE groups survive well in society and do not commit crime scene.

Another conclusion was that ECE improves student academic performance measured in terms of academic achievement in English and Urdu language. It was also found out that academic achievement of students in these subjects was better at the Knowledge, Comprehension and Application level of cognitive domain. English test students of both groups performed equal at knowledge level items which involved identification of items. However, at the items of compression and application results of ECE students were better than non-ECE students. In case of Urdu there was significant difference even at knowledge level. This reflects the impact of ECE on the overall scenario of results. This is because Urdu is much more complicated language both in writing and reading for children. The children who are coming from pre-nursery system are more trained in writing and reading Urdu as compared to the students of Public non ECE schools. Pre nursery curriculum is formulated in such a way that in three levels of pre-nursery including playgroup, kindergarten level 1 and 2, Early year children learn Urdu writing and reading gradually. In addition, when the same data was compared for students learning at comprehension level and application level of cognitive domain, results were found to be significantly better as compared to students of Public non-ECE schools. This actually explained

the impact of early childhood education on academic achievement of students. Students who are coming from pre-nursery were better capable or followed the instructions as compared to student who did not have ECE background in public schools. The results of this study were also consistent with Anderson et al, (2003) and Nelson, Westhues & Macleod (2003) who found that ECE was associated not only with better academic performance but also its differential effects remain present till grade 8th effects. This conclusion is also supported by Grindal (2011), and Weiland and Yoshikawa (2013) who studied the influential role of early childhood education on social, competencies and academic outcomes.

Recommendations

- i. On the bases of findings and discussion it is recommended that ECE facilities may be enhanced to all public schools, in Punjab and other provinces. State should devise a clear ECE policy, and suitable funding to reach the targets set in Sustainable Development Goals.
- ii. Quaid Academy for Teachers (former DSD) may train the teachers in ECE classes to adopt such participative teaching learning strategies to involve young learner where they can interact and communicate to develop their social skills.
- iii. Parents may be motivated through electronic and print media as well as by parents' teacher meetings to take interest in ECE program for the better future performance of their children.
- iv. Long-term evaluation on ECE program may be carried out, with other demographic and academic variables.

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