

## Status of Katchi Class in Relation to Early Childhood Education Policies and practices in Punjab

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### Abstract

The study aimed at identifying the present conditions of ECE or traditionally termed 'katchi class' at government schools in Punjab (specifically targeting Okara city), while reviewing educational policies and available literature to assess the reasons for non-implementation of the same. After failing to achieve its targets for EFA and MDG's in regard to ECE specifically, spending a mere 2.3% of its GNP on education (UNESCO, 2014) the status of the katchi class, the most critical stage of learning remains deplorable in government schools of Punjab. Analysis of the physical facilities, classroom practices and teacher assessment, along with interviews of headmasters and 3 district officials, the DCO, EDO (education) and DEO (primary schools) were performed using observation checklists and questionnaires respectively. The quantitative data was represented through simple percentages to draw conclusions to research questions while the qualitative data was thematically analyzed to find out the reasons for non-implementation of NCECE. The results indicated an overall low quality of katchi class both in terms of physical environment and quality of education being offered, along with a lack of government interest and contribution in the field. Financial, organizational and cultural restraints were identified as barriers in the implementation of the policies and recommendations suggested for overcoming them.

**Keywords:** *Katchi class, educational policies, classroom practices, NCECE, Punjab.*

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## Introduction

Leading economists Heckman (2008), researchers (Gormley, 2011 & Woodhead, 2006) and scientists Mustard (1999) & Shonkoff (2011), provide evidence-based conclusions on the significance of early childhood education (ECE), supporting that the development of key neural pathways and functions early in life, can put young children on a positive trajectory, reaping future benefits not only for the individual, but also the economy of a nation. This has resulted in a changing trend in ECE recognition and practices worldwide in the last few decades. Being a member state of the United Nations, Pakistan is a signatory of the Education for All (EFA) movement since 1990, the earlier Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) since 2000, and current Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's/ Global goals) since 2015. Pakistan is struggling to fulfill its global commitments toward the traditionally termed 'katchi class' or early childhood education, which is the first goal of EFA, an almost ignored agenda of the MDGs and Target 4.2 of the SDG's.

The katchi class was introduced in the 1970's as an informal gathering of children aged between 3-6 years, accompanying their elder siblings to school. A small portion of the class 1 syllabus was taught in a strict didactic nature comprising mostly of 'chalk & talk' and rote-learning (Mahmud, 2014), opposing the true essence of ECE. The pre-primary (katchi) level was officially discontinued from the public education system in the 1980s due to lack of government interest in the then internationally blooming branch of education (Mahmud, 2014). While the philosophies of Montessori, Dewey, Piaget and Froebel are thriving around the world to present date and a large number of educational experts like Barr (2003), Grunewald & Rolnick (2004) all emphasize the importance of a nurturing learning environment for these younger children and its overall benefit to society, Pakistan fails to adopt the same, practically, into its education policies. Khan, Tahir and Aurangzeb (2019) have stated that classes of Kachi or Paki were integrated into the government schools through the seventh (7th) five years plan called Awal-adna, and Awal-aala.

Until 1992, katchi class was not included in any education policy, after which too, its implementation was not properly initiated until due recognition in NEP (1998-2010). In a report published in 2009 titled 'The State of Pakistan's Children', the Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC) highlighted minimal budget allocations and lack of legislation as major causes for poor ECE facilities. In Pakistan,

the education system remained in crisis since 1947, with multiple policies and five-year plans all failing to achieve the UPE targets (Mahmud et al., 2006).

In 2000, the Government of Pakistan estimated the total population of 3-5 year olds to be 8.61 million (Ahmed, 2011). Hunzai (2007) states that these young children learn from experiences within the environment and interactions with family. She continues to suggest that in Pakistan, for majority, the environment offers poverty, malnutrition, and limited access to education, whilst the families are composed of uneducated mothers and sharing of burden of household chores from an early age. All this and the recognition of long term benefits of good quality pre-primary education (UNESCO, 2014) led to the dire need to uplift the katchi class and formalize pre-primary education in Pakistan for the under privileged masses, who could not afford or access the flourishing urban centered private Montessori's, Kindergartens and Pre-schools.

The first step toward this investment was the introduction of a national curriculum for the early years in 2002, followed by its revision in 2007, but sadly, its implementation in government schools still remains in question. The overall purpose of ECE national curriculum 2007, is to provide a holistic development of children as mentioned by Syed, Asif & Yousaf (2011). This marked the great shift in recognition of the katchi class or pre-primary education by the government and their initial efforts for provision of education to its youngest members of society.

To date, the government runs katchi class is in no way comparable to the private sector ECE schools according to Naz, Yousaf and Arshad (2019), which of course come with a higher price tag, limiting their access to the privileged few, but, it is assumingly improving with increasing government recognition and non-government support. Not only has the government started teachers' training to better equip them on how to tackle this delicate stage of development, but also set up 1000 katchi classes within already existing primary schools in Punjab, costing more than Rs. 192 million (GoP, 2003).

The study assessed the current condition of katchi class in government schools at Okara district in Punjab, Pakistan's largest province. In Okara city, 35 schools having the provision of katchi class were selected as the study's sample. The reason for selection of Okara district in particular was due firstly, to the district authority's interest in the uplift of early education, observed through attainment of 100% enrollment target in the Universal Primary Education Campaign 2013-

2014, and an increase in the percentage of children attending preschools from 56.2% in 2013 to 58% in 2014 in Okara (ASER, 2014).

The objectives of the study were:

1. To review the education policies of Punjab limiting to Early Childhood Education/katchi class exclusively.
2. To analyze existing status of katchi class at the government schools
3. To analyze the qualifications and competencies of Early Childhood Education teachers at the government schools
4. To determine reasons for non-implementation of government policies at the government schools of Punjab and NCECE in the classrooms

The study being a first of its kind for the populated city of Okara may possibly be a pilot project in helping to improve katchi class in the district and may even serve as a model for other cities or districts to follow, to assist in uplifting the current scenario of ECE in Pakistan.

## **Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to find out the current status of katchi class in Okara city and the extent to which the education policies relating to ECE are under practice in the districts government schools, including the presence and implementation of the NCECE. A mixed method design involving both quantitative and qualitative methods was utilized. Both are explained independently providing clarity in the steps involved for data collection and analysis.

## **Quantitative Tools of Data Collection**

### **1. Observation checklists (indoor, outdoor, physical facilities)**

A pre-tested and validated checklist “Checklist Observations about Physical Facilities” created by Shah & Mukhtar (2013) was used with permission to assess the current status (physical facilities) of the katchi classes. It served to find the presence or absence of major physical facilities inside and outside the classrooms, while also looking into the provision and usage of variety of resources and teaching materials by the students and teachers as instructed in the NCECE. The observation checklists were divided into three categories. Checklist 1 (Outdoor facilities) contained 23 items about outdoor facilities, Checklist 2 (Indoor Facilities) comprised of 38 items relating to the outdoor amenities, while

Checklist 3 (Physical facilities and Resources) consisted of 13 items concerning the facilities, provision of resources and usage of learning materials inside the classroom. Checklists 1 and 2 had two options to choose from, YES or NO. Checklist 3 however consisted of three options, namely, YES, SOMEWHAT or NO. All three Checklists were 'researcher-completed' instruments hence the researcher herself filled in all the items. It is noteworthy, that for completing some items on Checklists 2 and 3, the researcher sought the help of the Katchi class teacher verbally.

## **2. Katchi Class Teacher Questionnaire**

A researcher developed questionnaire consisting of 20 questions was used to assess the competency and qualification of the katchi class teachers in the sample schools. The questions were formulated based on the guidelines for teacher qualification and competence in the NCECE. Since it was a 'subject-completed' instrument, the teachers were to fill in the questionnaire by themselves. It was divided into two sections. The first part was constructed to identify the qualification of the teachers including items like gender, education, experience etc. and the second part consisted of required competencies of teachers for ECE as stated in the NCECE 2007, like ECE knowledge, attitudes and skills. The results were displayed in simple percentages.

*Keeping in mind the broader aspect of the research question, to not only identify the status of the teachers in Okara city, but also compare it with the literature in an attempt to uncover the overall status of the katchi class teachers in Punjab, the researcher applied qualitative analysis to this data set as well. Through this approach, the information gathered was used to support or contrast with the existing literature and results concluded by means of a semantic thematic analysis.*

## **Qualitative Tools of Data Collection**

### **1. Review of literature and content analysis**

A review of literature and content analysis on policies and work done for education in the province of Punjab. This helped the researcher in identifying the claims the government made in the past relating to ECE, whether targets set were achieved or not, and where ECE stands in political, national and international recognition today. This information was used in the construction of the second qualitative tool for data collection - the questionnaires.

## **2. Protocol interviews with the School Heads, DCO, EDO and DEO Okara**

Two separate questionnaires were developed by the researcher, one targeted at the School Heads and the other at government officials in the district of Okara (DCO, EDO (education) and DEO (primary schools)), both aiming to address the same issue. They were conducted by the researcher for identifying the reasons of non-implementation of the NCECE in schools and the barriers faced in the implementation of education policies for ECE in Punjab specifically. This assisted in either agreeing/disagreeing with, or adding on to previously available literature on early childhood educational policy implementation.

A question and answer session between the researcher and the Head of every primary school surveyed, and then one with the three government officers of the district (DCO, EDO, DEO), targeted to identify the problems/barriers they encounter in implementing the practices of katchi class at school level were conducted. To address the real problems and form practical questions for these interviews, the researcher paid close attention to the guidelines for effective implementation of the curriculum of ECE from the NCECE (2007) and the information gathered through the literature review.

The information gathered from both interviews was compiled into one data set of a semantic origin, and existing literature of the review from the data corpus was added to support it. This enabled the researcher to combine the answers of the interviews and the evidence from the literature and narrow them down into relevant themes. The data was then summed up into five sub categories namely: (a) teacher training not provided, (b) financial resources inadequate, (c) physical infrastructure limitations, (d) inconsistency in implementation of policies and (e) insufficient teacher recruitment. The tables below (in the result section) describe how the themes were created through the coding process.

### **Quantitative Analysis**

The Observation Checklists and a Questionnaire addressing the teachers of the katchi classes were used to collect data and was analyzed mathematically. Simple percentages of each item on the lists were displayed in tabular form through the use of Microsoft Excel software. These percentages proved beneficial in the clarity of results displayed and drawing of conclusions from these results. They proved helpful in assessing the current status of the katchi class in Okara city. Some items

on the checklists and others in the questionnaire which shared the same theme were compared through cross-tabulation on the software IBM SPSS Statistics 23. The percentage of respondents giving similar answers in the interviews with the Heads and District Authorities was also mathematically analyzed.

### **Justification for use of Quantitative Analysis**

The use of quantitative analysis although ran short alone, was still essential in obtaining the answers to some of the research questions of the study. Without the quantitative measurement of the physical facilities, indoor and outdoor environments and teacher qualification, it was not possible to draw conclusions reporting the current status of katchi class at Okara. The calculation of percentages in the above mentioned areas of the research assisted in providing an overall idea of the conditions prevalent in the katchi classes and in the schools that provide katchi facilities.

### **Qualitative Analysis**

The data corpus was divided into data sets and further broken into data items and data extracts for a thorough and explicit thematic analysis. The guidelines given by Braun & Clarke (2006), in their paper "*Using thematic analysis in psychology*" were used in the formation of codes and themes, manually.

The interviews conducted with the Heads of the schools and the district authority officers, along with the thorough review of literature were the primary components of the qualitative data sets. However, selection of other data sets was made on the basis of analytical interest in a particular topic (answering a research question), thus catering to all the instances the topic was referred to within the corpus.

Following the six-phase guidelines given by Braun & Clarke (2006), the analysis was conducted in a six step process after the data collection was completed.

1. Familiarization with the data
2. Transcription of verbal data
3. Creating initial codes
4. Search for themes
5. Reviewing the themes
6. Defining and naming the themes

Throughout the analysis, coding and theming was done in two places. Firstly there was the creation of themes for the data corpus aiming to address each research question through a relevant theme. The second third and fourth themes namely, (ii) Classroom practices and school environment, (iii) NCECE: Implementation within classrooms, (iv) Model teachers: Vision vs practice were created by combining results of the literature review and the quantitative data collected through the schedule interviews and the observation checklists. However, the first (i) ECE; policies and programs: Quantity vs quality and fifth theme (v) Blockades in implementation were created using primarily the qualitative data comprising of the content analysis and the protocol interviews.

### **Justification for Qualitative Analysis**

To find out the issues being faced in the implementation of education policies firstly within the school, and secondly at the provincial and district levels, interviews with the head teachers/headmasters and district authority figures, the DCO, EDO (education) and DEO (primary schools) were conducted by the researcher. The DCO being the administrative head of the district has full authority to allocate funds (from the percentage share his district is given by the provincial budget) and make decisions for elevating and sustaining his districts position. He works with a governance team, and when limiting their work to the area of education alone, the EDO (education) and DEO (primary schools) assist him. These authority figures are of greatest importance in the educational uplift of schools and they steer the public into the direction they consider best. They act as a bridge between the ministries that are formulating the policies and the schools that must follow them. Therefore, interviewing these officers of the Punjab government was a significant step in finding out the barriers/reasons of non-implementation of the policies and NCECE.

### **Results**

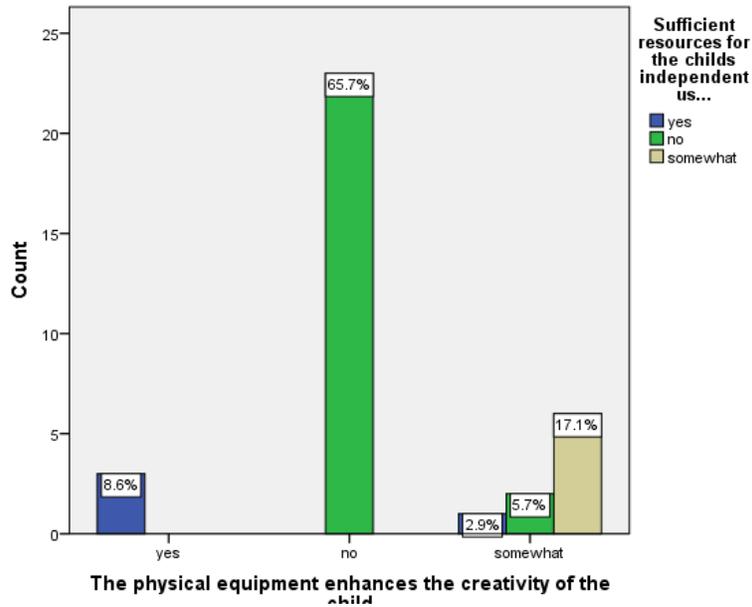
The themes formulated through the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data were utilized in providing findings and consequently answering the objectives of the study.

1. ECE Policies and Programs: Quantity Vs Quality (1<sup>st</sup> research objective)

**FINDINGS:** Punjab government introduced multiple reforms, programs and plans addressing the issue of ECE in the last few decades and although faced issues in implementation, it has become the pioneering province to shift policy focus from quantity (enrollment) to quality (curriculum and learning environment) education.

Through a thorough year by year review of the government of Punjab’s policies and proposed plans in regard to education of the katchi class and the extent of implementation of stated plans, it was obvious that ECE recognition on the policy level occurred after the NEP (2009), and more seriously following the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment in the constitution, which shifted responsibilities on matters of education in the hands of the provincial governments.

Introduction of provincial reforms and programs in Punjab to facilitate in the implementation of the NEP led to major development in ECE, with the long awaited shift in policy from quantity to quality. Enrollment and student retention wasn’t the only focus and the government probed for better quality of katchi class by desiring a need for a curriculum for ECE and proper teacher training for this age group.



*Figure 1:* The Physical Equipment enhances the Creativity of the Child \* Sufficient Resources for the Child’s Independent Use.

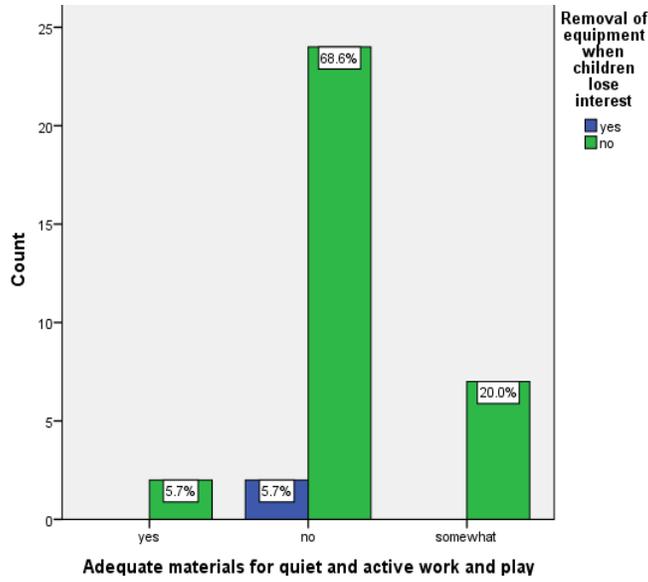


Figure 2: Adequate Materials for Quiet and Active Work and Play \* Removal of Equipment when Children Lose Interest.

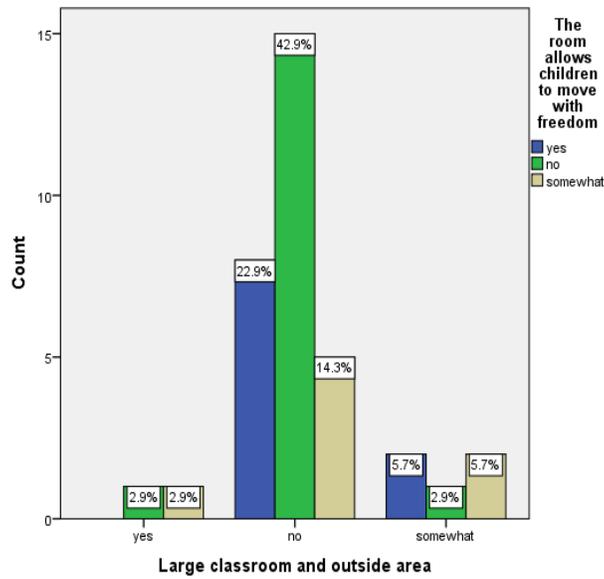


Figure 3: Large Classroom and Outside Area \* The Room Allows Children to Move with Freedom.

Table 1:  
Assessing the Implementation of the NCECE (%)

Sr.#	NCECE Key Areas	Yes	No
1	Copy of National ECE curriculum	9	91
2	Teachers who have studied the NCECE	6	94
3	Classroom has comfortable child-sized furniture	28.6	71.4
4	Clean environment, well-kept and safe	34	66
5	Children feel safe and secure	100	0
6	Class is provided with learning centers/Goshas	17.1	82.9
7	Teachers familiar with term 'learning environment'	23	77
8	Learning materials are adaptable for the needs of the child (DAP)	8.6	91.4
9	Use of ELO for designing classroom activities	26	74
10	Teachers required to assess student performance twice a year	23	77

2. NCECE: Implementation within Classrooms (2<sup>nd</sup> research objective)  
 FINDINGS: The NCECE continues to be an ignored document and its implementation within the classrooms remains a challenge, primarily due to teachers lacking the needed skill-set and inadequacy of the available learning materials.

Table 1 displays the extent of NCECE implementation in the katchi classes observed. Surprisingly, a large majority (91%) of the sample did not possess a copy of the curriculum in the school premises. An exceptionally low percentage (6%) of teachers had studied the NCECE whereas only 23% were familiar with the term learning environment. Provision of child sized furniture was only found in 28.6% of the schools visited and the significant absence of goshas/learning centers (82.9%) pointed to a low quality in the overall learning environment.

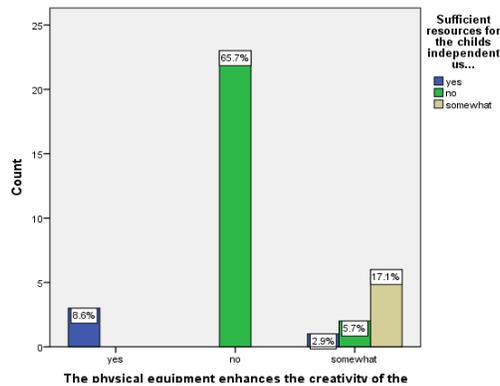


Figure 5: The physical equipment enhances the creativity of the child \*  
 Sufficient resources for the child's independent use.

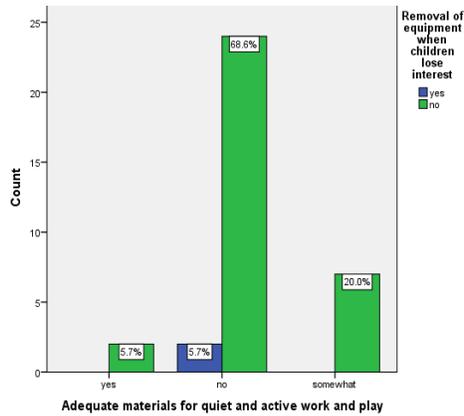


Figure 6: Adequate materials for quiet and active work and play \* Removal of equipment when children lose interest.

3. Classroom Practices and School Environment: (2<sup>nd</sup> research objective)

FINDINGS: Primary schools providing katchi class show a poor and low quality of education which lacks basic infrastructure facilities, trained teachers and a holistic learning environment as instructed in the NCECE.

Assessment of the classroom practices indicate majority classrooms (65.7%) lack adequate material to enhance creativity of the child (Figure 5 and 6 respectively) and materials for work and play (74.3%). Other deficiencies found in school environment include low quality outdoor facilities with 85.7% schools not having maintained or equipped playgrounds, majority (64.3%) without provision of electricity, and a shocking 65.7% schools have located the katchi class outdoors due to scarcity in available physical space indoors. However, majority (94.3%) have availability of individual chalkboards for every student and 60% classrooms have different displays on the walls which sadly are not on the child’s eye level (85.7%).

Table 2  
*Academic Qualifications of Kachi Teachers*

	Below Matric	Matric	Intermediate	Bachelors	B.Ed	M.Ed
Qualification of Teachers	0%	77%	14%	0%	9%	0%

4. *Model teacher: Vision vs practice (3<sup>rd</sup> research objective)*

**FINDINGS:** The katchi teachers meet the government requirement of minimum matriculation and Primary Teaching Certificate to qualify for teaching, but lack the competencies that the NCECE identifies as essential.

As seen in Table 2, majority (77%) teachers in the schools observed had merely a matriculation certificate, 14% had an intermediate degree, 9% had completed their B.Ed. and none of the teachers (0%) held a Master’s degree.

Table 3  
*Major Barriers/Problems identified for Non-Implementation of NCECE*

Responses	Teacher training not provided	Financial resources inadequate	Physical infrastructure limitations	Lack of (ECE) recognition in national/provincial policies	Insufficient/Incorrect teacher recruitment
<b>Head Teachers %</b>	9	74	6	0	11
<b>Govt. Officials %</b>	0	55	0	27	18

Table 4  
*Barriers in Implementation of Educational Policies as Identified in Existing Literature*

Barriers Identified	Resource
Lack of awareness of ECE benefits	Bano Ayub & Mukhtar (2000)
Lack of comprehensive ECE policies	UNESCO (2015)
Teacher skill-set deficiency	IGC (2010)
Lack of data and rigorous research studies	KhanZada (2014)
Corruption	Malik (2011)
Weak governance	UNESCO (2015)
Law and order	UNESCO (2015)
Natural disasters	UNESCO (2015)

*Blockades in Implementation of NCECE and Educational Policies(4<sup>th</sup> research objective)*

**FINDINGS:** Major reasons for non-implementation of educational policies and NCECE include low budgetary allocations, insufficient teacher recruitment, lack of comprehensive ECE policies and issues in governance.

Table 3 shows results of responses from Head Teachers (of the schools visited) and the Government Officials (DCO, EDO education & DEO

primary schools). It displays in percentage the responses of the above stated persons indicating that majority of the Head teachers (74%) and majority of the officials (66%) consider the greatest reason for non-implementation of educational policies and NCECE is inadequacy of financial resources. Only 27% of the government officials believe inconsistency in the implementation of education policies is one of the reasons, while none (0%) of the Head Teachers think so. However, 9% of the Head teachers consider no provision of teacher training as an issue, while none (0%) of the government officials think this way. Moreover, 6% Head teacher answers reflect limitations in the infrastructure as a reason, whereas only 2% of the government officials believe this to be so. Lastly, 11% of the Head teachers point towards insufficient/incorrect teacher recruitment as a problem, while only 5% of the government officials mark this as a reason. Review of literature helped to enlist some other barriers identified by earlier studies which are shown in Table 4.

The findings of the study conclude a significantly low quality of available katchi classroom facilities and practices in the government schools at Okara, with multiple reasons for non-implementation of NCECE and educational policies identified.

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

The present study was conducted to investigate the current status of Katchi class and review educational efforts made by the provincial government in early childhood policies and programs. Initially, effort was directed at providing access to education (enrollment/quantity) through various reforms, but the recent shift from quantity to quality provision and assessment in early years' education is a landmark. This novel study for the populated city of Okara can serve as a pilot project (as no prior research work was found on status of katchi class linking it to both learning environment and policies) to uplift the katchi class and may even serve as a model for other cities or districts to follow, highlighting issues in and benefitting overall ECE within Pakistan.

Other obstacles concluded in the present study were also mentioned by Hunzai (2006), including the lack of trained teachers with pre-service qualifications and availability of only a few institutions for ECE pre-service training. Furthermore, Hussain (2015) points to the present limitation of resources needed to expand ECE in about 50,000 Schools in Punjab, as the policy aims to.

These obstacles are not new. They have been present for many decades and passed on from one policy to another, from one government in power to

another. Lack of government interest and attention, with ECE standing at last place on the governments' priority list as stated by Ahmed (2011), is undoubtedly the greatest hindrance on the way to successful ECE policy implementation and improved status of katchi class. The need to realize ECE as a force to empower the nation and not only presenting it as an 'international slogan' is what Pakistan needs to begin with.

Although the research reached its aims, there was an **unavoidable limitation** worth mentioning. The conclusion of the reasons for non-implementation of policies and NCECE were limited to the answers of a few individuals of only one district. Considering the vast exposure and experience of the DCO, EDO and DEO, and their prominence in the feedback to and from the government political authority figures over shadowed all doubts, as they act as the voices of the government. Available literature on the subject was also extensively studied before narrowing down the reasons for non-implementation.

### **Recommendations**

At Government level, an increase in the GDP spending on education is the first and foremost step that must be taken to ensure better quality of education is available to the masses with allocation of separate funds for ECE/katchi class within the school budget. Work should be done in collaboration with researchers and international organizations to design a locally acceptable tool for assessing quality in the ECE/katchi classroom settings and learning outcomes of the students.

School administrators should offer in-school training sessions for teachers of Katchi and hold workshops to cater to problem areas teachers face when teaching. The teachers must realize the importance of studying the NCECE and aligning their lesson plans and teaching methodologies according to it. Awareness must be created so all teachers respect the freedom of the child in activities inside and outside the classroom while acting as a bridge between school, child and parents to link them as closely as possible for optimal growth and development of all children.

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