Pakistan Social Sciences Review
www.pssr.org.pk

RESEARCH PAPER

Parental Perceptions of Early Childhood Education (ECE) Benefits in Punjab, Pakistan: A Mixed Methods Study

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the factors influencing parental perceptions of Early Childhood Education (ECE) benefits and enrollment decisions in Punjab, Pakistan. Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs offer numerous benefits for children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. However, parental perceptions and enrollment choices can be influenced by various factors. This study explores these factors within the context of Lahore District, Punjab, Pakistan. A mixed methods approach was employed, utilizing a descriptive survey questionnaire administered to 150 parents and focus group discussions to gain deeper qualitative insights. The study identified limitations in Lahore's ECE school infrastructure, parental background (particularly education level) influencing enrollment decisions, and teacher qualifications and motivation as key factors impacting parental perceptions. Based on the findings, recommendations are made to improve Lahore's ECE system. These include strategic resource allocation for infrastructure development, targeted outreach programs to educate parents about ECE benefits, and investments in teacher quality through professional development and competitive compensation packages.

| **KEYWORDS** | Early Childhood Education, Parental Perceptions, Punjab Pakistan, School Infrastructure, Teacher Quality |

Introduction

Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs have emerged as a foundation for raising a child's cognitive, social, and emotional development during their most critical years (Barnett, 2010; Susman Stillman et al., 2018). These well-thought-out learning environments provide fertile ground for nurturing a child's natural curiosity. Through play-based learning activities, ECE programs promote the development of critical cognitive skills and facilitate valuable social interactions (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Grace et al., 2014). By encouraging exploration and discovery, ECE equips children with the foundational skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in their future academic endeavors.

Despite the recognized advantages of ECE, achieving widespread participation in these programs remains a challenge in Punjab, Pakistan. Lahore District, holding the distinction of being the big district in Punjab, presents a valuable case study for understanding the factors hindering ECE enrollment. Research suggests that several factors contribute to low enrollment rates in Lahore, including the socioeconomic background of parents, family income levels, and the inadequate infrastructure and resources within public schools (Molloy et al., 2020). Limited access to essential resources like reading materials, study supplies, and proper furniture can further hinder the quality of the learning environment. These shortcomings can create a perception among

parents that public ECE programs are not well-equipped to provide a valuable learning experience for their children.

Literature Review

Early Childhood Education (ECE) plays a critical role in fostering a child's holistic development, encompassing physical growth, cognitive skills, social-emotional well-being, and a sense of responsibility within society (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2012). During the early stages, a balanced diet is crucial for physical development (Biddle & Seth-Purdie, 2013). Parental influence significantly impacts a child's mental development throughout this period (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2012). ECE serves as the foundation for a child's lifelong learning journey, encompassing all experiences during the early years (Baxter & Hand, 2013). This period is characterized by significant physical, mental, intellectual, and social development (Baxter & Hand, 2013). Children acquire knowledge through structured learning environments like schools and unstructured play (Baxter & Hand, 2013). During this critical phase, children require significant attention and care from their parents (Baxter & Hand, 2013).

This literature review examines the landscape of Early Childhood Education in Punjab, Pakistan. It explores the significance of ECE, challenges to access and quality, and potential strategies for improvement. The review is structured around key research themes:

- Importance of Early Childhood Education Programs
- Accessibility Challenges and Socioeconomic Disparities
- Parental Perceptions and Cultural Attitudes
- Quality of Early Childhood Education Programs
- Investing in Infrastructure and Learning Environments
- Enhancing Parental Awareness and Addressing Disparities
- Investing in Teacher Quality: A Ripple Effect
- Policy and Resource Allocation Strategies
- Importance of Early Childhood Education Programs
- Early Childhood Education at a Glimpse in Pakistan

Early childhood education programs offer numerous benefits for children's development. Studies highlight the positive impact on cognitive skills, language development, and social-emotional well-being (Barnett, 2010; Bassok et al., 2010; Jackson et al., 2020). High-quality ECE programs provide stimulating environments with developmentally appropriate activities that promote exploration, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills (Bassok et al., 2010). Research by Jackson et al. (2020) emphasizes the importance of ECE in promoting children's social-emotional growth and school readiness. Additionally, ECE programs can play a role in mitigating the effects of poverty on a child's development (Bassok et al., 2016).

Qayyum et al. (2024b) conducted a comparative analysis of methods to enhance social-emotional skills in early childhood education. The study revealed that integrating social-emotional learning (SEL) into early education curricula can significantly improve children's interpersonal and self-regulation skills. SEL programs were shown to enhance children's ability to manage emotions, establish positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. This research underscores the importance of incorporating SEL into ECE programs to support holistic child development and prepare children for future social and academic challenges (Qayyum et al., 2024b).

Accessibility Challenges and Socioeconomic Disparities

Several factors contribute to access disparities in ECE programs. A significant challenge is the availability and accessibility of educational facilities, particularly in rural areas (Smith et al., 2018). Limited preschool options and transportation constraints often hinder families from enrolling their children (Smith et al., 2018). This disparity disproportionately affects low-income families who may lack the resources to travel long distances or afford private alternatives (Smith et al., 2018).

Socioeconomic factors also significantly influence enrollment choices. A study by Brown and Jones (2017) suggests that families with higher incomes are more likely to enroll their children in ECE programs compared to those with lower incomes. This disparity can be attributed to factors such as registration fees, tuition costs, and additional expenses like supplies and transportation (Brown & Jones, 2017). Furthermore, parental employment and childcare availability influence enrollment decisions. Research by Garcia and Martinez (2016) indicates that working parents may prioritize programs offering longer hours or full-day care to accommodate their work schedules.

Qayyum et al. (2024d) examined the digital divide in early childhood education, focusing on teachers' perceptions. The study highlighted the challenges and opportunities presented by digital technologies in early education. Teachers reported that while digital tools could enhance learning experiences and provide access to a wealth of educational resources, there were significant barriers to their effective use. These barriers included limited access to technology, lack of training, and socio-economic disparities. The research stressed the need for equitable access to digital resources and adequate training for teachers to effectively integrate technology into ECE (Qayyum et al., 2024d).

Parental Perceptions and Cultural Attitudes

Cultural beliefs and societal norms play a role in shaping attitudes towards ECE enrollment. Research by Johnson and Lee (2019) highlights that some communities prioritize traditional parenting practices over formal early childhood education, resulting in lower enrollment rates. This underscores the need to address cultural attitudes and raise awareness of the long-term benefits of ECE programs (Johnson & Lee, 2019). Additionally, the influence of parental background, particularly education level, on enrollment decisions necessitates targeted outreach and awareness campaigns (Melzer et al., 2008). Framing these campaigns to emphasize the potential of ECE programs to prepare children for future academic success and social-emotional well-being can be a powerful strategy for increasing enrollment rates, particularly among families with lower education levels (Focus Group Discussions, Lahore District, Pakistan, 2024).

Qayyum et al. (2024c) emphasized the importance of parental engagement in ECE programs in Punjab, Pakistan. The research identified several barriers to parental involvement, including socio-economic factors, lack of awareness, and cultural attitudes. The study also suggested strategies to enhance parental engagement, such as providing parent education programs, creating opportunities for parent-teacher collaboration, and fostering a supportive community environment. This research highlights the critical role of parents in supporting early childhood education and the need for targeted interventions to enhance their involvement (Qayyum et al., 2024c).

Quality of Early Childhood Education Programs

Parents prioritize program quality when making decisions about ECE enrollment (White et al., 2020). Studies indicate that parents tend to favor programs with well-trained teachers, engaging content, and adequate facilities (White et al., 2020). However, disparities exist in program quality across different locations, with urban areas often offering more resources and opportunities compared to rural or underserved communities (White et al., 2020). These discrepancies exacerbate existing inequities in access to education and perpetuate socioeconomic divisions (White et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has further impacted the landscape of ECE programs. The shift towards distance learning and virtual preschool programs has raised concerns about the effectiveness and equity of online early childhood education (Jackson et al., 2020). Further research is required to examine the influence of these evolving models on enrollment trends, the quality of education delivered, and the well-being of children (Jackson et al., 2020).

Qayyum et al. (2024e) explored early childhood educators' experiences in teaching math to toddlers. The qualitative study revealed various strategies and challenges in fostering enthusiasm for math among young children. Educators reported using hands-on activities, interactive games, and real-life examples to make math engaging and accessible. However, they also faced challenges such as varying levels of math readiness among children and limited resources. The study suggests that early positive experiences in math can lead to sustained interest and proficiency, highlighting the importance of effective math instruction in early childhood (Qayyum et al., 2024e).

Investing in Infrastructure and Learning Environments

The limitations identified ECE school infrastructure, including a lack of teaching materials and inadequate facilities, can be addressed through strategic resource allocation. Studies by Barnett (1997) and Boyce & Estrada (2005) highlight the importance of high-quality learning materials and safe, stimulating environments for children's cognitive and social-emotional development. Allocating resources towards improving classrooms, acquiring age-appropriate learning materials, and ensuring proper sanitation facilities can create more inviting and developmentally appropriate spaces for young learners (Barnett, 1997; Boyce & Estrada, 2005).

Enhancing Parental Awareness and Addressing Disparities

The influence of parental background, particularly education level, on enrollment decisions underscores the need for targeted outreach and awareness campaigns (Melzer et al., 2008). As documented by Melzer et al. (2008), such programs can be instrumental in educating parents, especially those with lower education levels, about the benefits of ECE. Framing these campaigns to emphasize the potential of ECE programs to prepare children for future academic success and social-emotional well-being, as suggested by parents in the focus groups, can be a powerful strategy for increasing enrollment rates (Focus Group Discussions, Lahore District, Pakistan, 2024). Furthermore, addressing social disparities in access to ECE programs is crucial to ensure equitable opportunities for all children (Bassok et al., 2010).

Qayyum et al. (2024a) analyzed problem-solving skills among university students through numerical methods. Although the primary focus of this research is on higher education, the findings highlight the long-term benefits of developing problem-solving

skills from an early age. The study found that students with strong problem-solving skills were better equipped to navigate complex academic and real-life challenges. These findings reinforce the need for robust ECE programs that foster critical thinking and problem-solving abilities from a young age, setting the foundation for future academic success (Qayyum et al., 2024a).

Investing in Teacher Quality: A Ripple Effect

The concerns raised by parents regarding teacher qualifications and motivation highlight the importance of investing in ECE workforce. Studies by Hamre & Pianta (2005) and Howes (2011) demonstrate the positive impact of qualified and motivated teachers on child development and learning outcomes. Providing professional development opportunities for ECE educators in areas like child development and effective teaching methodologies can equip them with the necessary skills to create stimulating learning environments (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). Additionally, implementing competitive compensation packages and fostering positive work environments can enhance teacher motivation and retention (Howes, 2011). Ultimately, these investments in teacher quality will have a ripple effect, leading to improved quality of care for children enrolled in ECE programs.

Aboagye et al. (2018) conducted a cross-cultural study on teacher burnout in preschools using the Maslach Burnout Inventory, Educators Survey (MBI-ES). The study highlighted the prevalence of burnout among preschool teachers and its impact on their professional efficacy. The researchers identified several factors contributing to burnout, including high workload, lack of support, and emotional exhaustion. The findings underscore the importance of creating supportive work environments to mitigate burnout and improve educational outcomes. This research is relevant to understanding the broader context in which early childhood education takes place, as teacher well-being directly influences the quality of education provided (Aboagye et al., 2018).

Qayyum (2019) explored the stress levels among early childhood teachers and examined the role of psychological capital (PsyCap) in moderating and mediating this stress. The study found that teachers with higher levels of PsyCap experienced lower levels of stress and were better equipped to manage their professional responsibilities. PsyCap, which includes elements such as self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism, was shown to have a protective effect against the adverse impacts of stress. This research highlights the importance of fostering psychological well-being among teachers to enhance the effectiveness of ECE programs (Qayyum, 2019).

Policy and Resource Allocation Strategies in Early Childhood Education

Early Childhood Education (ECE) has garnered increasing attention as a pivotal factor in shaping children's lifelong development and societal progress. Recognizing the substantial returns on investment in this sector, policymakers and education leaders are tasked with the complex challenge of allocating resources effectively to maximize the impact of ECE programs.

A cornerstone of successful ECE policy is evidence-based decision-making. Rigorous research on the efficacy of various ECE models, such as Head Start and Early Intervention programs, provides invaluable insights for resource allocation. For instance, the Abecedarian Project demonstrated the long-term benefits of high-quality early intervention for disadvantaged children, underscoring the importance of investing in early childhood programs (Ramey, Bryant, & Yoshikawa, 2000). By prioritizing evidence-

based practices, policymakers can ensure that limited resources are directed towards programs with proven outcomes.

Equity is another critical dimension of ECE resource allocation. Disparities in access to quality ECE programs persist across socioeconomic, geographic, and demographic groups. To address these inequities, policymakers must adopt targeted strategies, such as increasing funding for ECE programs in underserved communities and providing additional support for children with disabilities. Furthermore, implementing universal preschool programs can help to mitigate disparities and ensure that all children have access to high-quality early learning experiences (Yoshikawa, Brooks-Gunn, & Love, 2012).

Investing in the ECE workforce is essential for program quality and sustainability. This includes providing adequate compensation, professional development opportunities, and support systems for early childhood educators. A well-prepared and supported workforce is crucial for creating engaging and stimulating learning environments that promote children's development (Pianta, Hamre, & Allen, 2007). The effective policy and resource allocation in ECE requires a multifaceted approach that prioritizes evidence, equity, and workforce development. By investing strategically in this critical sector, policymakers can lay the foundation for a brighter future for children and society as a whole.

Early Childhood Education Research at a Glimpse in Pakistan

Parental insights into early childhood education (ECE) are critical for shaping effective educational policies and practices. In the context of Punjab, Pakistan, understanding these perceptions can significantly impact the development and implementation of ECE programs. The reviewed literature underscores the multifaceted nature of early childhood education, encompassing teacher well-being, parental engagement, linguistic environment, and digital access. Dr. Abdul Qayyum's extensive research contributes significantly to understanding these aspects, providing a comprehensive foundation for studying parental insights on ECE in Pakistan. These insights are vital for developing effective, contextually relevant ECE programs that cater to the needs of children, parents, and educators.

Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Pakistan, as evidenced by the works of Dr. Abdul Qayyum Rumi a pioneering figure in the field of ECE in Pakistan, and other scholars has made significant contributions through research, presents a complex interplay of factors influencing its landscape. This review delves into the critical areas of teacher well-being, parental engagement, and the broader context of ECE in Pakistan. His work on teacher stress and burnout (Aboagye et al., 2018; Qayyum, 2019) underscores the importance of addressing the psychological well-being of educators in early childhood settings. Qayyum's emphasis on the role of psychological capital (PsyCap) in mitigating teacher stress highlights the need for holistic approaches to support teacher resilience and job satisfaction. By drawing attention to the challenges faced by early childhood educators, Dr. Qayyum's research contributes to a broader understanding of the factors influencing the quality of ECE programs in Pakistan.

Beyond teacher well-being, Dr. Qayyum's research has also expanded to explore the significance of parental engagement and the development of essential life skills in early childhood. Studies on problem-solving skills (Qayyum et al., 2024a) and social-emotional learning (Qayyum et al., 2024b) emphasize the importance of holistic child development. Moreover, Qayyum et al. (2024c) underscore the crucial role of parental

engagement in supporting ECE outcomes. These studies collectively highlight the need for a comprehensive approach to early childhood education that addresses the interconnectedness of teacher well-being, parental involvement, and child development.

While Dr. Qayyum's research provides valuable insights into specific aspects of ECE in Pakistan, the broader context of early childhood education requires a multidisciplinary perspective. Studies on the linguistic environment (Tanveer et al., 2020) and the challenges of the digital divide in ECE (Qayyum et al., 2024d) offer additional dimensions to consider. These studies highlight the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy and the need for equitable access to technology in early childhood settings.

Teacher Burnout and Stress: Aboagye et al. (2018) and other scholars conducted a cross-cultural study on teacher burnout in preschools using the Maslach Burnout Inventory, Educators Survey (MBI-ES). The study highlighted the prevalence of burnout among preschool teachers and its impact on their professional efficacy. The researchers identified several factors contributing to burnout, including high workload, lack of support, and emotional exhaustion. The findings underscore the importance of creating supportive work environments to mitigate burnout and improve educational outcomes. This research is relevant to understanding the broader context in which early childhood education takes place, as teacher well-being directly influences the quality of education provided (Aboagye et al., 2018).

ECE and PsyCap: Qayyum (2019) explored the stress levels among early childhood teachers and examined the role of psychological capital (PsyCap) in moderating and mediating this stress. The study found that teachers with higher levels of PsyCap experienced lower levels of stress and were better equipped to manage their professional responsibilities. PsyCap, which includes elements such as self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism, was shown to have a protective effect against the adverse impacts of stress. This research highlights the importance of fostering psychological well-being among teachers to enhance the effectiveness of ECE programs (Qayyum, 2019).

Linguistic Environment and ECE: Tanveer et al. (2020) conducted a corpus-based study on Urdu affixes, providing a morphological perspective. While not directly related to early childhood education, this research contributes to understanding the linguistic environment in which ECE occurs, particularly for Urdu-speaking children. Understanding the structure and use of Urdu affixes can inform the development of age-appropriate language learning materials and curricula. This research underscores the importance of considering the linguistic context in the design and implementation of ECE programs (Tanveer et al., 2020).

Development of Problem-Solving Skills: Qayyum et al. (2024a) analyzed problem-solving skills among university students through numerical methods. Although the primary focus of this research is on higher education, the findings highlight the long-term benefits of developing problem-solving skills from an early age. The study found that students with strong problem-solving skills were better equipped to navigate complex academic and real-life challenges. These findings reinforce the need for robust ECE programs that foster critical thinking and problem-solving abilities from a young age, setting the foundation for future academic success (Qayyum et al., 2024a).

Social-Emotional Learning: Qayyum et al. (2024b) conducted a comparative analysis of methods to enhance social-emotional skills in early childhood education. The study revealed that integrating social-emotional learning (SEL) into early education curricula can significantly improve children's interpersonal and self-regulation skills.

SEL programs were shown to enhance children's ability to manage emotions, establish positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. This research underscores the importance of incorporating SEL into ECE programs to support holistic child development and prepare children for future social and academic challenges (Qayyum et al., 2024b).

Parental Engagement: Qayyum et al. (2024c) emphasized the importance of parental engagement in ECE programs in Punjab, Pakistan. The research identified several barriers to parental involvement, including socio-economic factors, lack of awareness, and cultural attitudes. The study also suggested strategies to enhance parental engagement, such as providing parent education programs, creating opportunities for parent-teacher collaboration, and fostering a supportive community environment. This research highlights the critical role of parents in supporting early childhood education and the need for targeted interventions to enhance their involvement (Qayyum et al., 2024c).

Digital Divide in ECE: Qayyum et al. (2024d) examined the digital divide in early childhood education, focusing on teachers' perceptions. The study highlighted the challenges and opportunities presented by digital technologies in early education. Teachers reported that while digital tools could enhance learning experiences and provide access to a wealth of educational resources, there were significant barriers to their effective use. These barriers included limited access to technology, lack of training, and socio-economic disparities. The research stressed the need for equitable access to digital resources and adequate training for teachers to effectively integrate technology into ECE (Qayyum et al., 2024d).

Teaching Math to Toddlers: Qayyum et al. (2024e) explored early childhood educators' experiences in teaching math to toddlers. The qualitative study revealed various strategies and challenges in fostering enthusiasm for math among young children. Educators reported using hands-on activities, interactive games, and real-life examples to make math engaging and accessible. However, they also faced challenges such as varying levels of math readiness among children and limited resources. The study suggests that early positive experiences in math can lead to sustained interest and proficiency, highlighting the importance of effective math instruction in early childhood (Qayyum et al., 2024e).

In conclusion, early childhood education in Pakistan is a multifaceted field with significant implications for child development and societal progress. The research alongside scholarly contributions, provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities within the ECE landscape. By addressing teacher well-being, fostering parental engagement, and creating supportive learning environments, Pakistan can strive to provide high-quality ECE programs that benefit all children.

Material and Methods

Research Design

This mixed methods study employed a descriptive survey design to gather quantitative data on factors influencing early childhood education (ECE) enrollment in Lahore District, Pakistan. The survey component complemented a qualitative approach using focus groups to gain a deeper understanding of parental perceptions and decision-making processes.

Quantitative Component

A survey questionnaire was developed and distributed to a representative sample of 150 parents with children eligible for ECE programs in Lahore District. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure the sample reflected the district's socioeconomic and geographic variations.

Qualitative Component

Two focus groups were conducted, each with 8-10 parents from geographically distinct areas within Lahore District. A semi-structured interview guide was developed to explore parental experiences with ECE programs, their perceptions of ECE benefits, and factors influencing enrollment decisions. This combined approach provided a comprehensive picture of parental perspectives and enrollment barriers in Lahore District.

Data Collection

Participants

Quantitative: A stratified random sample of 150 parents with children eligible for ECE programs (ages 3-5) was recruited from Lahore District that includes five tehsils that are Lahore Cantt, Lahore City, Model Town, Raiwind and Shalimar. Stratification ensured representation based on socioeconomic background (using a proxy measure of parental education level) and geographic location (urban, rural).

Qualitative: Two focus groups were conducted, each with 8-10 parents from geographically distinct areas within Lahore District. Parents were recruited through community centers, schools, and advertisements.

Methods

Quantitative: A self-administered survey questionnaire was developed to collect data on the School factors (infrastructure, resources, and facilities); Parental background (education level, income level); Teacher qualifications; Parental perceptions of ECE benefits; Enrollment decisions and influencing factors.

Qualitative: Semi-structured focus group discussions explored the Parental experiences with ECE programs; Perceptions of ECE benefits for children's development;

Factors influencing enrollment decisions (e.g., cost, convenience, quality concerns) and Suggestions for improvement.

Instruments

Quantitative: The survey questionnaire was developed based on relevant literature and piloted with a small sample to ensure clarity and reliability. It included a mix of closed-ended and open-ended questions to capture both quantitative data and allow for some elaboration from participants.

Qualitative: A semi-structured interview guide was developed to guide the focus group discussions. The guide included key themes and open-ended questions to encourage rich discussions and explore the lived experiences of parents.

Procedure

Quantitative: The survey was distributed to participants through a combination of methods, such as online administration, paper-based distribution through schools or community centers, and interviewer administered options for those with limited literacy skills.

Qualitative: Focus groups were conducted in a comfortable and private setting. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and the discussions were audio-recorded with permission. After each session, the recordings were transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data Analysis

The data collected through both quantitative and qualitative methods were analyzed to address the research questions and objectives.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, and means) were used to summarize data on school factors, parental background, teacher qualifications, and parental perceptions of ECE benefits.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring themes and patterns in the focus group discussions. Transcripts were coded and categorized to identify key themes related to parental experiences, perceptions, and decision-making regarding ECE.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Quantitative findings were used to describe the prevalence of various factors and perceptions among parents in Lahore District. Qualitative findings provided a deeper understanding of the underlying reasons and motivations behind parental decisions, enriching the quantitative data. Triangulation was used to compare and contrast findings from both methods, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the research questions.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to high ethical standards to ensure the protection of participants' rights and privacy. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. Participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality of their responses.

Results and Discussion

This study employed a mixed methods approach to investigate factors influencing parental perceptions of Early Childhood Education (ECE) benefits in Lahore District, Pakistan. A descriptive survey questionnaire was distributed to a representative sample of 150 parents with children eligible for ECE programs. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to understand the prevalence of various factors and their influence on parental enrollment decisions. In addition, two focus groups were

conducted with parents from geographically distinct areas within Lahore District to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences and perspectives.

School Factors

The analysis of school factors revealed that a significant portion of parents expressed concerns about the learning environment in Lahore District's ECE programs. Table 1 summarizes these findings.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics on School Factors

School Factors	%
1. Lack of facilities in school	13
2. Poor infrastructure of the school	20
3. Lack of teaching material	35
4. Poor Learning Environment	32

The table and figure delineate the sub-factors within the school environment that impact early childhood access. The primary factor at the school level is inadequate facilities, which have a significant impact on admission. The inadequate infrastructure and instructional methods, as well as the quality of teachers, contribute to the low enrollment rate in early childhood education in the District of Lahore. Figure 1 visually depicted these findings, highlighting the prominence of school infrastructure and resource limitations as barriers to enrollment.

Qualitative Findings on School Factors

Focus group discussions provided further insight into parental concerns about school factors. Parents expressed frustration with overcrowded classrooms, a lack of age-appropriate furniture and learning materials, and inadequate sanitation facilities. Several parents mentioned feeling hesitant to enroll their children in environments that seemed unsafe or unstimulating.

Parental Factors

Parental background also emerged as a factor influencing enrollment decisions. Table 2 summarizes these findings. While the specific reasons behind "attitude-wise change" (19%) and "ignorance from Parents" (31%) require further exploration, the data suggest that parental education level (34%) plays a significant role. Parents with higher levels of education may be more aware of the benefits of ECE and more likely to prioritize their children's enrollment. Figure 2 provided a visual representation of these parental factors.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics on Parental Factors

Parents Factors	%
1. Age factor	13
2. Attitude-wise change	19
3. Level of Parental Education	34
4. Ignorance from Parents	31

The table and figure shape the sub-factor of parental influence, specifically how parents' educational backgrounds impact their children's admission to schools.

Enrollment in early childhood education in the District of Lahore was influenced by factors such as age, attitude, and parents' ignorance. The sector mentioned above is also represented in a visual style.

Qualitative Findings on Parental Factors

Focus group discussions elaborated on the influence of parental education level. Some parents with lower education backgrounds expressed a lack of awareness about the importance of ECE or questioned its value compared to traditional religious schooling. Conversely, parents with higher education levels often emphasized the potential of ECE to prepare their children for future academic success. Several parents in this group also highlighted the social and emotional development benefits they associated with ECE programs.

Teacher Factors

Teacher qualifications and motivation were identified as key factors influencing parental perceptions. As shown in Table 3, 41% of respondents expressed concerns about the lack of teacher training. Additionally, 33% indicated that teacher motivation levels were a consideration in their enrollment decisions. While a smaller percentage (14%) reported negative teacher attitudes as a concern, these findings suggest that teacher quality is a significant factor for parents. Figure 3 visually depicted these teacher-related factors.

Table 3
The Descriptive Statistics on Teachers Factors

	Teachers Factors	%
1.	Lack of teacher training	41
2.	Attitude from teachers in school	14
3.	Motivation level at job place	33
4.	Remuneration level	06

The table and figure outline the various characteristics related to instructors that have an impact on admission rates in the District of Lahore at the early childhood level.

Qualitative Findings on Teacher Factors

Focus group discussions revealed that parents often gauge teacher quality by observing interactions with their children. Parents expressed a desire for ECE teachers who are patient, caring, and demonstrate a passion for early childhood education. Concerns were raised about a lack of training in areas like child development and appropriate teaching methodologies. Some parents also mentioned witnessing teachers who seemed unmotivated or disengaged from their students.

Discussion

This study investigated factors influencing parental perceptions of Early Childhood Education (ECE) benefits and enrollment decisions in Lahore District, Pakistan. A mixed methods approach was employed, utilizing a descriptive survey questionnaire and focus group discussions. The findings illuminate several key areas for improvement within Lahore's ECE system.

The study identified significant limitations in Lahore's ECE school infrastructure. As shown in Table 1, a substantial portion of parents (34%) expressed concerns about the lack of teaching materials. Similarly, a significant percentage reported issues with poor infrastructure (19%) and inadequate school facilities (13%). Focus group discussions provided qualitative data that elaborated on these concerns. Parents described overcrowded classrooms, a lack of age-appropriate furniture and learning materials, and inadequate sanitation facilities. These limitations can create an uninviting and potentially unsafe learning environment, deterring parents from enrolling their children (Duncan & Magnuson, 2003).

Investing in ECE infrastructure has been shown to yield positive outcomes. For instance, a study by Barnett (1997) found that children who attended preschools with high-quality learning materials demonstrated greater improvements in cognitive skills compared to those in programs with fewer resources. Similarly, studies by Boyce & Estrada (2005) and Henderson & Mapp (2002) highlight the importance of safe and stimulating learning environments in promoting children's social and emotional development. By addressing these infrastructure limitations, Lahore District can create ECE programs that are more attractive and conducive to positive learning experiences for children.

Parental background, particularly education level, emerged as a factor influencing enrollment decisions (Table 2). Parents with higher levels of education (34%) were more likely to report prioritizing their children's participation in ECE programs. Focus group discussions provided further insight. Some parents with lower education backgrounds expressed a lack of awareness about the importance of ECE or questioned its value compared to traditional religious schooling. Conversely, parents with higher education levels often emphasized the potential of ECE to prepare their children for future academic success and highlighted the social and emotional development benefits they associated with ECE programs. These findings suggest that targeted outreach and awareness campaigns could be beneficial in reaching parents with lower education levels and promoting the advantages of ECE programs.

The positive impacts of ECE programs on children's cognitive and social-emotional development are well documented (Duncan & Magnuson, 2003; Barnett, 1997). However, research also suggests that social disparities in access to high-quality ECE programs can exacerbate existing inequalities (Bassok et al., 2010). Targeted outreach programs designed to educate parents about the benefits of ECE, particularly those aimed at reaching families with lower education levels, can help to bridge these gaps and ensure equitable access to these important educational opportunities (Melzer et al., 2008).

Teacher qualifications and motivation were identified as critical factors influencing parental perceptions (Table 3). A concerning percentage of parents (41%) expressed concerns about the lack of teacher training. Additionally, teacher motivation levels (33%) were a consideration for many parents in their enrollment decisions. Focus group discussions revealed that parents gauge teacher quality by observing interactions with their children. Parents expressed a desire for ECE teachers who are patient, caring, and demonstrate a passion for early childhood education. Concerns were raised about a lack of training in areas like child development and appropriate teaching methodologies. Some parents also mentioned witnessing teachers who seemed unmotivated or disengaged from their students. These findings highlight the need to prioritize professional development opportunities for ECE educators in Lahore District. Additionally, ensuring competitive compensation packages and fostering a positive

work environment could enhance teacher motivation and ultimately improve the quality of ECE programs.

High-quality teacher-child interactions are essential for promoting positive child development in ECE settings (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). Studies have shown that ECE teachers with strong qualifications and experience are more likely to create stimulating learning environments and utilize effective teaching practices (Howes, 2011). Investing in professional development programs for ECE teachers in Lahore District, along with efforts to improve teacher compensation and working conditions, can contribute to a more qualified and motivated ECE workforce. This, in turn, can lead to improved quality of care for children enrolled in these programs.

Conclusion

This study has identified several areas for improvement within Lahore District's Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs. By addressing these issues, the district has the potential to create a more attractive and effective ECE system that benefits a wider range of children and fosters their long-term development. Lahore District's ECE system can be significantly enhanced by addressing a combination of factors. Improving school infrastructure and learning environments, as highlighted by the lack of teaching materials and inadequate facilities, is crucial for creating a stimulating and safe space for young learners. Targeted outreach programs can address the influence of parental background on enrollment decisions, particularly by educating parents with lower education levels about the long-term benefits of ECE programs for their children's academic success and social-emotional well-being.

Furthermore, investing in teacher quality through professional development opportunities and competitive compensation packages can ensure a qualified and motivated ECE workforce, ultimately leading to improved quality of care for children. Addressing social disparities in access to ECE programs is essential to ensure equitable opportunities for all children in Lahore District. By implementing these improvements strategically, the district can create a more robust and sustainable ECE system that lays a strong foundation for children's lifelong learning and success. Further research exploring the long-term impacts of these interventions on children's cognitive and social-emotional development can provide valuable insights for future policy decisions and program enhancements. In conclusion, Lahore District has the opportunity to create a thriving ECE system by prioritizing infrastructure development, parental outreach, and teacher quality. This investment in early childhood education has the potential to yield significant benefits for children, families, and the community as a whole.

Recommendations

Lahore District has the potential to create a thriving ECE system that benefits a wider range of children and fosters their long-term development. To achieve this, a multi-pronged approach is recommended. Firstly, strategic resource allocation can improve classrooms, learning materials, and sanitation facilities, creating stimulating and safe environments. Secondly, targeted outreach programs can educate parents, particularly those with lower education levels, about the long-term advantages of ECE programs for their children's academic and social-emotional well-being. Framing outreach messages to emphasize these benefits can be a powerful strategy. Additionally, addressing social disparities in access to ECE programs is crucial for equity. Investing in teacher quality is also essential. Providing ongoing professional development opportunities, competitive compensation packages, and fostering a positive work

environment can attract and retain qualified and motivated ECE professionals. Finally, utilizing these study findings to inform policy decisions, conducting research on the long-term impacts of program improvements, and implementing continuous monitoring and evaluation can ensure the ongoing effectiveness and improvement of Lahore District's ECE system. By implementing these recommendations, the district can create a high-quality ECE system that yields significant benefits for children, families, and the community as a whole.

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