Advocacy Booklet for District Education Managers

Creating a Better Future
The Role of Early Childhood Education

Teachers’ Resource Centre

in collaboration with

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1. Introducing Early Childhood Education

1.1. Foreword

When we talk about children’s education, most people regard primary schools as the beginning of ‘formal schooling’. Traditionally schooling at the primary level, especially in the public sector, has been taken more seriously by both schools and parents while the education of a younger child is widely regarded as the responsibility of the family.

Yet before a child turns six years old and enters primary school a period of rapid development and growth has already elapsed. The early childhood years of a child are a period of many changes and offer an opportunity for parents, teachers and caregivers to instill invaluable learning skills and habits. In fact, recent research has shown that a child begins learning at birth.

We have all seen how very young children learn new actions and words almost every day. It is almost as if they are learning by absorbing, much like a sponge. Now imagine a young child—in this period of rapid absorption—being part of an early childhood education programme that makes the most of her fast developing abilities. Indeed, there is plenty of evidence that suggests that a good quality early childhood programme has important long term benefits for a child (see chapter 3).

Even if we only consider the immediate advantages of education in the early childhood years, there are many. Scientific evidence suggests that an early childhood education programme has an important and positive effect on a child’s primary school readiness, in other words, it helps prepare them for what they will learn in class 1. It also helps lower the likelihood of a child dropping out of school and has a positive effect on his progress and performance. In turn, these early year advantages have a long term beneficial personal, social and economic impact on a child.

**Box 1.1: Understanding the Terms**

Early Childhood Development years cover the ages 0-8 years

- **ECE** (Early Childhood Education): aimed at the learning environment in a school setting for 3 years till the early primary i.e. class 3 or 4. The emphasis is on education inputs, and providing a child-centered, activity-based learning environment

- **ECCE** (Early Childhood Care and Education): aimed at creating a caring environment for young children in and outside school

- **ECD** (Early Childhood Development): aimed at creating an enabling environment for young children with an equal focus on health, nutrition and schooling

1.2. The Spotlight on ECE: International Trends and National Commitments

Research on education and human development processes highlights the criticality of the early years and its implication for life. Through the Education For All Declaration (Jomtien, 1990) the world has recognised the importance and need for ECE (Early Childhood Education) and has endorsed ‘expansion and improvement of comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children’ as a key means for creating a better world. The declaration
**Box 1.2: Understanding Education for All (EFA)**

The six EFA goals are:

1. Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

2. Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality.

3. Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes.

4. Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.

5. Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.

6. Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensure excellence of all so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

was subsequently reiterated at the World Education Forum (Dakar, 2000) and brought ECE into the main policy discourse of more than 180 countries. As a signatory to the Dakar Framework for Action for EFA (2000-2015), Pakistan has also made a commitment to support ECE programmes.

To honour its commitment to the Dakar Framework For Action, Pakistan developed a National Plan of Action (NPA) for EFA in 2001. The basis for targets set in the National Plan of Action (2001–2015) are the six EFA goals. One of the three main priorities of the NPA is ECE. Though some achievements have been made since the launch of NPA, such as the recognition of *Katchi* as a formal class and curriculum development for ECE, a lot more remains to be done to ensure the quality of ECE across Pakistan.

### 1.3. Content of the Advocacy Booklet

Efforts for improving and expanding ECE in Pakistan are being undertaken by both national and international organisations. Owing to the scale of public education it will be difficult to attain the national ECE targets unless every stakeholder plays a proactive role.

The onus of ECE expansion is largely on the Education Departments and key decision makers at district level with the local governance ordinance and consequent devolution of educational governance and management.

This booklet has been developed to create a deeper understanding of the many advantages of early childhood education amongst district level decision makers and implementers. This will facilitate the districts to develop and implement programmes aimed at expanding and improving the state of ECE.

We begin with an examination of the importance of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Chapter 2, explaining how it fits into the local system of education. The section also
describes brain development in early childhood and its impact on other aspects of children's growth and development.

The following section (Chapter 3) presents experiences and experiments in ECE and provides insights into policies, facilities, innovations and good practices that have been successful in different parts of the world. These experiences help identify the basics of a good-quality ECE programme that effectively caters to the needs of a wide range of children.

In the section ‘Status of ECE in Pakistan’ (Chapter 4), we examine the government's policy regarding ECE and the ground realities of Pakistan's public sector schools, in particular the Katchi class. This section highlights the problems that are preventing ECE from being adopted in the public sector on a large scale. It also charts out the salient features of Pakistan's National ECE Curriculum, which has recently been reviewed, by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and is notified for 2007-2008 academic year onwards. This section also looks at ECE projects that have been implemented through a concerted effort on the part of government, donors and NGOs.

The problems and issues facing the implementation of ECE and the role that district governments can play in promoting ECE is discussed in Chapter 5. It outlines the responsibilities of the Executive District Officers (EDOs) and educationists, who can play a central role in promoting ECE successfully at the district level.

1.4. Who Should Use this Booklet

This booklet can be used by anyone seeking information on Early Childhood Education (ECE) for developing programmes, improving practices or convincing stakeholders about the importance of ECE.

It is important to note that while this booklet was developed keeping in view the needs of district managers, it can also be used for raising awareness amongst teachers, parents, community members, officials from the education department as well as political representatives. The booklet provides snapshots of best practices in ECE from around the world which academic development teams can apply in the classroom. More information on the various models presented here can be obtained through the internet or by directly contacting these organisations.

The facts and figures which highlight the benefits of ECE as well as the issues in Pakistan provide a diagnostic analysis required for the effective development of a programme. This booklet is vital for any person involved in policy making and allocation of funds in the public sector. As a reference it will not only help address the major issues in implementing ECE but will also ensure that we build on the lessons learned through various initiatives and experiments.
2. Importance of Early Childhood Education: Towards a bright future

Different children grow in different ways. The most obvious way in which a child develops is physical. We have all seen how fast children grow. We have all seen children outgrowing their shoes and clothes, sometimes in a matter of months.

But there are other ways in which children grow. Children are also growing when they are learning to speak, when they develop a distinct personality, and also when they are learning to get along with others. Yet children grow and develop at their own rate. Some learn to walk at nine months while others can only stand with support at 13 months. Some can make full sentences at the age of two, while others still don’t feel confident enough to join together two words. All these children are ‘normal’ they just have different paces at which they develop. So whether they reach their milestones earlier or later, they all follow a sequence of development that is the same. For instance, a two-year-old child may play alone and could need an adult for guidance. The child would be able to make a simple 2-3 word sentence, with a vocabulary of about 270 words and will only be able to take the simplest of instruction.¹ By the time the child turns three, however, he starts to enjoy playing

with others and follows more complicated instructions. The child acquires an average vocabulary of 1500 to 2000 words during this year and will be refining his use of grammar.²

These are not rigid milestones and give only an approximate idea of when a child will start an activity. All aspects of development are interconnected. For instance, children’s social development is related to their physical development which in turn is related to their emotional development. A common observation is that at the age of three, when a child becomes more adventurous and feels emotionally more secure, it will be reflected in what she can do physically and also in how she behaves socially. So at around the same time the child – because she is feeling adventurous – will attempt to ride a tricycle and will also feel confident enough to try to ‘help’ you.

2.1. Brain Development in the Early Years

At birth the brain of a baby is only 1/4th the size of an adult’s brain. By the time a child is three years old, his brain is 9/10ths the size of a grown up. And by the age of six it is almost as large as it will ever be. However, some parts of the brain continue to grow even in adulthood. The rapid growth of the brain in the first few years of a child’s life is a good indicator of how important the early years are.

The brain is made of tiny building blocks known as cells. These cells are so tiny that they cannot be seen without the help of a


three has twice as many synapses as a 14-year old. As the web grows, so do a child’s abilities; such as memory, language skills, problem-solving and intellectual capacity. On the other hand the neurons and synapses which are not being used stop working and die. For example, vision develops slowly during the first six months of life. If the ‘web’ of synapses that is responsible for vision is not stimulated correctly during these months, eye sight may not develop properly. As a result, if the baby’s eyes never see any light in the first six months, no synaptic connections would form and the baby would not have any vision.

The ability and rate at which synaptic connections are formed is reduced manifold by the time the child reaches adulthood. Only those connections that have been strengthened during the early years survive. Figure 2.1 shows the development of synapses and neurons and highlights the criticality of the early years and the significance of an enabling and nurturing environment for the holistic development of children.

Learning is a life long process; however, the extent to which we can realise our potential and what we become as adults is largely determined by what we experience as a child. Scientific findings about brain development confirm what most of us know anyway; that warm and loving attachments between young children and adults, and positive stimulation right from birth make a difference in children’s development.

2.2 Holistic Development through Early Learning

Given the rapid development of the brain, the early years are crucial for children’s entire personality and attitude formation. While children are born with certain learning dispositions such as the ability to learn
language, and form relationships, environmental factors also play a role in nurturing children’s potential (BERA 2003, p. 20; Shonokoff & Phillips 2000 p. 24-28). Experiences, environment, biology, and genes are key forces that determine a child’s development.

As educators, implementers and policy makers, we are responsible for every child that enters school² at 3 years. A child of 3 or 4 years is still in her formative years and her school experience will shape her personality. Therefore it is important to have a fair knowledge of different domains of development and respond to the collective and individual needs of children. While many processes are integrated and simultaneous, the following are major areas in which development occurs⁴:

- **Physical Development:** This involves the way children use their muscles. The large muscles are used for activities such as walking, jumping and lifting large objects. The small muscles are used for fine motor activities such as threading beads, writing, drawing, cleaning rice, and working with small objects. Exposure to activities that help in muscle development helps children do small tasks on a daily basis. They start feeling capable of helping elders and gain confidence.

- **Social and Moral Development:** This refers to process through which children develop relationships with their culture, the people around them and the environment in general. The social setting and the value system form the core of a person’s identity - at a very young age children try to figure out what is right and wrong based on what they observe in their surroundings. A good ECE environment not only provides the opportunity for children to form relationships with peers and adults, but responds to their queries about their social set up and norms.

- **Emotional Development:** This refers to the development of a child’s capacity to experience, manage and express a full range of positive and negative emotions. It also enables children to analyze and reflect on what they have experienced. The kind of emotions they feel and express also has an impact on children’s self-esteem and self-image. An ECE environment that supports children expressing themselves will support their emotional development. Feeling important, listened to and cared for are essential for creating a positive self-concept. Similarly, children must take responsibility for their own work. It is the teachers’ responsibility to provide a caring and positive environment. On the other hand, the head teachers and educational supervisors should facilitate this process and the development of teachers’ technical competence. The classroom conditions can also have negative implications for children’s emotional development. For instance, 80 students sitting in one small room or under the scorching sun is hardly conducive to learning. Therefore, improving the ECE environment should be a priority in the decision making and budget allocation process.

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²School here refers to a formal education setting created for children of all ages including young learners.

⁴Definitions are taken from the following sources: Mahmud, M. 2002. Strong Foundations – A guide for ECE teachers, TRC; and http://health.enotes.com/childrens-health-encyclopedia/P
• **Language Development:** This refers to the process where children start to make sense of the words, symbols and the information around them. Children are born with the ability to learn language, but what they learn and how much they express themselves is directly related to the environment they are exposed to. The language development process greatly impacts the process of cognitive development. Early literacy i.e. learning to read and write alphabets and make small sentences, is just one component of language development. Emphasising this component especially through rote learning without the opportunity to process the information and relate it to their lives cripples not only language development but also cognitive capacity. Therefore it is extremely important to give children quality exposure to languages. Encouraging children to use their own language helps enhance both their linguistic and cognitive skills.

• **Cognitive Development:** It is the development of mental processes and capabilities. Cognitive development focuses on how children learn and process information. It is the development of the thinking and organising systems of the mind. It involves language, imagining, thinking, exploring, reasoning, problem-solving, developing and rejecting ideas and concepts, memory development, expressing through multiple media, experimenting, and applying what is learned. When they come to school, children are already equipped with basic thinking and processing skills. What the school needs to do is to provide opportunities and to refine these skills taking them to an advanced level of application.

Sound cognitive development also enhances critical thinking and creativity in human beings. When children have the freedom to explore, think, imagine, question, and experiment they are developing the ability to create novel ideas and solutions. The confidence and support given to them by schools and families helps children discover their creative potential. Through this, they become adept at creating more effective ways of doing things while resolving existing problems. Using critical thinking skills, children analyse problems and possibilities, and through creative thinking skills, they are able to create solutions. Children develop a sense of responsibility and a proactive approach when they focus on creating solutions by weighing the issues and circumstances.

2.3 **The Benefits of ECE**

One deterrent to education is that parents are not always convinced that it leads to economic growth, reduction of inequality and poverty reduction. Many countries that have invested heavily in primary and secondary education have not seen their investments resulting in economic growth and development. There may be other factors at work, such as a country’s social and political situation, but the quality of schooling – i.e. what children are learning in school is also an important factor.

Indeed one of the goals of EFA is;

“... improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence for all,
Box 2.2: The Significance of the Early Years for Holistic Development

- 80% of the brain is developed in the early years i.e. from birth to age 8
- Learning seems to peak between the ages of 3 and 10, but it continues throughout the lifetime.
- Between 10 and 18 months, a baby’s emotions develop.
- Emotions are closely connected with long-term memory.
- A child starts experiencing the world when she is 2 months old.

Quality Early Childhood Education and Care ensures:

- Sound Personal, Social and Intellectual Development
  - improved cognitive development (thinking, reasoning)
  - improved social development (relationship with others)
  - improved emotional development (self image, security)
  - improved language skills

- Maximum development opportunities for physical, social and psychological capacities:
  - Building confidence to communicate and create
  - Developing skills to learn and develop
  - Building relationships, connections and networks with families and communities

- Good Health
  - increased chances of survival
  - improved nutrition; improved hygiene and weight/height for age
  - improved micro-nutrient balance (where ECE programmes include health care facilities)

so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.”

As opposed to traditional methods of rote and passive learning which spoonfeed information, a good quality ECE programme should have a well-defined set of objectives. Here are some of the objectives that have been stated in Pakistan’s National ECE Curriculum and which provide an overview of what an effective ECE programme should set out to achieve:

- To provide for the holistic development of the child, which includes physical, social, emotional, cognitive and moral development.
- To create in the child a sense of citizenship in the community, the country and the world.
- To foster a sense of independence, self-reliance and a positive self-image.
- To nurture tolerance and respect for diversity.
- To equip the child with life long learning skills.
- To provide opportunities for active learning.
- To provide opportunities for self-initiated play, where children plan and review the work they have undertaken.
- To develop critical thinking skills

We now know how a young child’s brain develops and that ECE is an important goal to help us achieve EFA. But in practical terms, how useful is ECE? Many research studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of ECE and this section will make you aware of some of them.

- **Confidence and Creativity**

Research evidence indicates that a good quality ECE programme promotes confidence and creativity in children. The
High/Scope Perry study was conducted mainly to establish the long term benefits of an ECE programme. However the study also found that a good quality preschool education brings about some immediate benefits such as empowering children to take responsibility for their actions and also to help adults. This is a direct outcome of the child-initiated activities that are included in ECE programmes, that encourage children to initiate activities and take their own decisions. The EPPE project which studied a variety of programmes in different schools found that in successful preschools, staff supported children in being assertive during a conflict.

In these programmes, children were also encouraged to express themselves about the dispute. This did not happen in less successful preschools where if children misbehaved they were often 'distracted' or told to stop. The Releasing Confidence and Creativity (RCC) Project (see box on page 10) in Pakistan also reported anecdotal evidence from parents who felt their children had become more confident after attending the programme. As a result, the parents felt that their interaction with their children had improved.

- Care and Conscientiousness towards Society

ECE plays a role in all aspects of a child’s development and has a significant impact on his moral development and value system. As ECE programmes focus on building children’s relationships with other children, with parents, and with the community, values leave strong lasting impressions on children. One of the most significant findings of the High/Scope Perry study was that only 7% of the underprivileged children who had attended a preschool programme were likely to have had 5 or more arrests. On the other hand when a child had not attended a preschool programme, his likelihood of having 5 or more arrests shot up to 35%.

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5Source: http://www.highscope.org/Content.asp?ContentId-219
The EPPE project also found that in the short run, when staff in preschools showed warmth and were alert to the needs of their wards, it resulted in better social behaviour by the children.

- **Increased Enrolment and Reduced Dropouts**

Increased enrolment and reduced dropout rates are one of the most widely cited results of ECE programmes around the world. This was also seen in the pilot project of RCC in Pakistan where the enrolment rate increased considerably while dropout rate for Katchi and class 1, fell. The average dropout rate was 1.52% in Hyderabad schools, significantly lower than the 40-45% dropout rate recorded across the public sector.

Many studies report this desirable outcome of quality ECE programmes. In Pakistan the results of the RCC programme were extremely promising in this aspect. After only one year of attending an ECE programme more than 90 percent of the children in the RCC classroom who were eligible for promotion from Katchi class to class 1, were promoted. This was a big achievement in a region where dropout rates are extremely high. Another study titled Lasting Effects after Preschool (Lazar, Irving, and Richard B. Darlington (1978)) conducted by Cornell University in the United States found that children who had been through early childhood projects were less likely to stay back a class 4, even several years after being through an ECE programme, when compared to a control group that had not been to preschool.

Lasting Effects after Preschool was a long-term study of 11 early childhood projects that involved parents. It was found that children that had been through a programme that required parental involvement performed better in school and also resulted in significantly fewer children going to special education classes or staying back a class. This was in comparison to a 'control' group that had not been through such a programme. These advantages of a preschool education were evident in the children even several years after they had completed the programme.

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**The Releasing Confidence and Creativity (RCC) Project**

The Releasing Confidence and Creativity (RCC) Project was a venture in the field of Early Childhood Education managed by the Aga Khan Foundation in partnership with Aga Khan Education Service Pakistan, Sindh Education Foundation, HANDS, Teachers’ Resource Centre, Aga Khan University-Human Development Programme and Society for Community Support in Primary Education. The project was funded by USAID and was piloted in 155 public schools of Sindh and Balochistan.

The RCC was designed to support the Ministry of Education in Pakistan in its efforts to apply the ECE curriculum in the preschool Katchi class in public sector schools.

The training activities under RCC familiarise teachers with concepts of learning readiness for children, communities and schools. Teachers were guided on easing children's shift to a school environment, while at the same time supporting children's self-confidence and interest in education. The programme stressed child-centered learning for cognitive development and the emotional health of young children. Teachers were encouraged to work with children in ways that encourage discovery through play and increase self-esteem.
• Academic Achievements and Excellence

Children who had been through an ECE programme continued to do well in school much beyond the preschool years. For instance the High/Scope Perry Preschool Study found that 71% of the children who had been through the programme were likely to graduate from high school (i.e. complete twelve years of education) whereas only 54% of the non-preschool group achieved the same. Thus ECE helped nurture a stronger commitment to graduating from high school.

Similarly the School Performance as a Function of Early Stimulation (Guinagh, Barry, and Ira Gordon (1976)) found that ECE formed the foundation of early academic success. This was a long-term study of an early childhood parent-education project that trained low-income mothers to use learning materials at home.

The study was conducted by Florida University at Gainesville, Institute for Development of Human Resources in the United States. It found that an ECE programme produced significant advances in reading and math tests when the children entered school. These advantages were maintained till the child reached class 4.

ECE was also found to help children who had or were likely to develop a learning disability in the EPPE Project. These were children who because of their background or their limited abilities were considered ‘disadvantaged.’ The EPPE Project found that usually one in three children would develop learning difficulties after they start attending school. Yet, if they been through the preschool experience this proportion fell to one in five children who developed learning difficulties by the time they started primary school. So we can conclude that preschool is effective in reducing the need for special education, for disadvantaged and vulnerable children.

The EPPE Project also found that the more qualified the staff, in particular the manager at a good quality preschool was, the greater progress made by the children. Qualified and trained teachers were therefore linked to better outcomes in pre-reading skills and the social development of the children.

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The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education Project (EPPE)

In the United Kingdom, three universities: the University of London, the University of Oxford and the University of Nottingham conducted a research on Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE). The project (1996-2003) investigated the impact of preschool education on a sample of young children in England between the ages of 3 and 7 years. A subsequent research EPPE 3-11 was launched, following the same sample of around 2,500 children to age 11, the end of Key Stage 2. The research focused on the relationships between various child, family, home, preschool and primary school characteristics and measured children's cognitive attainment in Year 5 of primary school (age 10).²

• Economic Growth and Productivity

The advantages of ECE are long lasting and the economic benefits are considerable. The HighScope Perry research found that by age 40, the Perry Preschool participants’ median earnings were about one-third higher than who as young children did not benefit from early care and education. The Perry Preschool group was also more likely to have savings accounts and to own their homes.

The same study showed significant economic advantages to high-quality early care and education programmes from an investment perspective. For each dollar invested in the programme there was a $16 return. Of that return, about three quarters, almost $13, went to the general public, and the remaining $3 went to each participant over their lifetimes. The economic return on investment is one of the best ever found for public investment or responsible private investment.7

• Equipped to face the Challenges of Globalisation and Changing World

ECE lays the foundation for lifelong learning. Children who go through an ECE programme become lifelong learners. This is important in the face of the information explosion and the current pace of technological advancement. Both of these are growing and changing at a mind-boggling pace. What we know today will become redundant tomorrow as ever newer discoveries are made. Thus it is more important to be able to learn something new, than to know something which could change a few years down the road. Information that is spoonfed to children will fast become outdated as the ability to grasp new concepts becomes important. Active learning methods, which form the base of ECE, will become more important for the success of young children in future than a piece of information that may not be true by the time a child grows up.

7Source: http://www.highscope.org/Content.asp?ContentId=253

12 The Role of Early Childhood Education
3. Regional and International ECE Programmes and Experiences

From correspondence courses to one-on-one classes inside tents in remote areas, children around the world are receiving the benefits of ECE. This section gives an outline of the ECE experience in Australia, Mongolia, Malaysia, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines and Kenya.

3.1 ECE in Australia

A range of services exist for children and their families in Australia. This diversity reflects, to some extent, the different needs of families. Long day care centres, family day care schemes and outside school hours care services have been supported by governments primarily to meet the needs of working parents, although they are also used by non-working parents to provide respite to families. Preschools are orientated to providing sessional educational experiences for children before they enter school. Occasional care services provide limited casual care for the children of parents at home. The provision of such facilities is possible through a mixture of public, non-government not-for-profit, private for-profit, and private not-for-profit organisations. Most centre-based long day care is provided by the private sector (73%), although most other ECEC services are provided by State Governments, local government and the non-profit sector.

3.1.1 Case Study: The Queensland Education Department’s Preschool Correspondence Programme

In 1974, the Queensland Education Department began a Preschool Correspondence Programme. The programme is for families who live in remote parts of the state and whose children do not have the opportunity to attend a preschool. In 1975 in order to cater for the needs of these children to mix with their peers and to come into regular contact with adults other than those in their immediate environment, the Department introduced an extension of the Preschool Correspondence Programme. Under this programme, parents with preschool age children from neighbouring areas come together perhaps twice a week (or as seldom as once a month) to provide opportunities for their children to play with their peers.

3.1.2 Relevance for Pakistan

Australia’s Correspondence Preschool Programme is based on the assumption that the population of parents living in remote areas are literate and able to comprehend and implement the material they receive with their children. In Pakistan, which is grappling with a large population of illiterates such a correspondence course would be relevant only if it is targeted to teachers. Material for training developed as part of a correspondence course can be used by ECE teachers living and working in remote areas.

3.2 ECE in Mongolia

The main thrust of the Mongolian government’s policy on preschool is to increase access and improve the quality of the programmes in this vast but thinly populated
country. Public TV and radio channels run information and entertainment programmes aimed at parents and children providing information on various issues including child growth, mother-and-child health, nutrition, etc. In fact, out of 760 hours of programming that is transmitted by Mongolian TV more than 50% is devoted to preschool age children.

3.2.1 Case Study: Mobile Training Centres

Mobile kindergartens are run during the warm seasons of summer with the help of local population and local governments. The programme is designed in such a way that it is accessible to the herdsman families and adapts to their lifestyle. In most cases the costs for the mobile training center (a railroad car) is paid for by the local government or herdsman. Handbooks, textbooks and teaching materials are provided by the school or kindergarten.

3.2.2 Relevance for Pakistan

Mongolia’s mobile training centres give an example of bringing the teacher to the student, rather than the other way round and works well in remote areas and areas with a nomadic population. In Pakistan the vast and thinly populated Balochistan province as well as the tribal belt along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border would be ideal for implementing such a programme. The facilitator can be the political agent in the tribal area who can identify tribes with which such a programme can be implemented. The Balochistan province and the neighbouring areas of Sindh and Punjab are also home to various nomadic tribes who could benefit from such a programme.

Local radio stations are an extremely popular form of media in Pakistan. This is essentially because they broadcast in regional languages. FM radio channels are another media that have gained rapid popularity in a short span of time. These radio stations can be utilised for broadcasting educational programmes targeting parents of young children as their prime audience.

3.3 ECE in Malaysia

The preschool in Malaysia is an informal and flexible programme for young children aged 4-5 years. The programme runs for one to two years. While most centres with preschool programmes are private, the Ministry of Education also conducts preschool classes for underprivileged children in urban and rural areas. These programmes are available for free or at minimal charges.

To ensure high participation in public sector preschools, the government provides meals and other facilities such as per capita grant allocation, preschool activity packages, indoor and outdoor preschool equipment and material for preschool education. Improving the learning environment through use of
diverse teaching approaches, forging strong alliances with communities and incorporating indigenous forms of knowledge in schools is especially encouraged.

3.3.1 Case Study: Innovative use of Local Resources for Children’s Play

Recognising the importance of play, the Malaysian Ministry of Education has made play an integral part of the preschool curriculum. Learning through play recognises the need for an informal, activity-oriented approach to preschool education that addresses the learning needs, styles, and development of children aged four to six. Taking all these factors into consideration, one preschool center in the state of Sabah, Malaysia, combined the concept of play with the principles of the three R’s - recycle, reuse, and reproduce. Everyone was regarded as a resource and encouraged to contribute ideas. Together they brainstormed the resource collection, construction, and usage processes. The group thoroughly considered the purpose of each piece of equipment, its age-appropriateness, location, and safety features before coming to a final decision.

Use of this integrated play structure requires concentration and helps children acquire confidence. It involves physical skills such as climbing, sliding, balancing, and swinging; social skills such as turn taking and helping others; and communication skills. To ensure children’s safety, the builder rounded the edges and constructed it low on soft, sandy ground. It is located in the centre’s front yard, so the children can play on it upon arrival at the centre and before leaving.

It was heartening for the staff to experience the processes and create the products during the Make Local Project. Staff were recognised for their creativity, imagination, and more importantly, comradeship. Parents acknowledged their contributions, and the school provided monetary rewards such as extra allowances. The playground equipment facilitates a strategy that supports learning through play.

3.3.2 Relevance for Pakistan

The participation of the Malaysian government in implementing preschool education is a relevant model for the Pakistan government. For instance, simple meals provided by the government and a heavily subsidised preschool programme would serve as valuable incentive to families plagued by poverty and illiteracy who may find it difficult to see the value of a preschool education, to send young children to school.

Innovative learning practices of Malaysia are also of particular significance to Pakistan for two main reasons. First, there is a dearth of good learning games in general and availability of any learning material in rural areas especially. Second, there is a widespread tendency in government and private schools to put all resources under lock and key, and never allow the students or teachers to use them. Third, involving communities effectively has been an uphill task in various communities. Creating local resources with the children and parents can help in overcoming the scarcity of learning materials as well as the mistrust attached to using resources provided to schools. Also, this could act as a bridge between communities and schools as they would be able to contribute far more effectively than attending School Management Committee meetings. Likewise, collective awareness about mothers’ health, ECE, support for children, etc., could be raised once community members and parents become a regular resource and learning partner for school activities.

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3.4 ECE in South Korea

National, public and private kindergartens provide preschool programmes for children aged 3-5 years. The Ministry of Education implements policies to improve the standard of ECE.

3.4.1 Case Study: Establishment of ECE as a part of Public Education

The public kindergarten system is assisting children of low-income families with kindergarten tuition, allocating funds to improve facilities at kindergartens and providing support for teaching materials at private kindergartens. In 2002, the government sponsored 26,202 kindergarteners as well as 86,982 children in childcare. Some parents from low-income families also had their tuition subsidised if they chose to send their children to private ECE institutions.

3.4.2 Relevance for Pakistan

Government assistance, especially in the form of finances and subsidies such as that seen in South Korea would be a boon to preschool education in Pakistan where over a third of the population lives below the poverty line. Government sponsored incentives in the form of reasonably well-paid jobs for college graduates in Katchi classes and rigorous training programmes for ECE would improve the quality of education for the 3 to 5 year age group. It will also boost the status of Katchi ECE classes in the country, where—as things stand—the least qualified staff ends up minding this age group in a random manner.

3.5 ECE in Kenya

3.5.1 Case Study: Institutionalisation of ECE

The National Centre for Early Childhood Education (NACECE) in Kenya plays a significant role in the design, development, and dissemination of professional ideas, educational materials, and services for early childhood education and care. The NACECE trains staff for early childhood education, develops the curriculum and supports its implementation and also conducts research on early childhood education and care. The NACECE also coordinates and propagates the work of the District Centres for Early Childhood Education (DICECEs), which facilitate the training of preschool teachers.

Childhood Education. The effects of these activities are far reaching. There is an increased awareness of and concern for young children among the local leaders, the parents, and the community. Local authorities are providing sites for building DICECE's and improving physical facilities.

3.5.2 Relevance for Pakistan

An organisation modeled on Kenya’s NACECE would serve as a coordinating...
centre for Pakistan’s ECE programme. Many of the challenges that face Pakistan’s ECE programme are a result of the lack of co-
ordination. Research and documentation of findings is another area which is grossly neglected in many fields in the country. Sadly, outdated curricula and teaching methods are part and parcel of education in Pakistan. For an ECE programme to remain relevant it is important that it evolves and adapts to a changing environment. This can only be achieved through research and documentation. Research, development and training initiatives aimed at early childhood education would not only save time, money and effort but also enable the implementation of an effective and culturally relevant programme.

3.6 ECE in the Philippines

3.6.1 Case Study: Research-based Teacher Training

The Early Childhood Enrichment Programme in the Philippines is rooted in a research study that was conducted in the early 1980s to determine parents and institutional workers’ knowledge of and attitudes towards child care. A training curriculum for child care workers and teaching/learning materials for preschoolers was developed and tested on a regional scale before the project commenced. Government agencies and two non-government organisations collaborated in implementing the project. Every week the ECEP teachers receive an activity guide that consists of objectives for each session and the corresponding tasks of the day care worker. It also contains learning situations that aim to develop the child’s motor skills, language competencies, mental capacity, social behavior, and values. Moreover, exercises that allow each child to discover her bodily functions, to communicate, to accomplish simple tasks, to relate to other children, and to recognise positive values are also included in the programme.

Those who complete the training are given an ECEP kit that includes a childcare manual for parents; a manual for childcare workers; a collection of songs, poems, toys, and games for preschoolers; storybooks and a companion manual on storytelling; and a resource book of relevant information.

Assessments of the programme indicate that on the whole, preschool children who participated in the programme performed better in school than those who did not.

3.6.2 Relevance for Pakistan

One of the major problems facing the implementation of ECE in Pakistan is the lack of qualified staff to execute the National ECE Curriculum. A programme similar to the Philippines model adds further value to teacher training by providing close guidance to teachers beyond the training period. While teacher training sessions are irreplaceable tools for instruction, a programme such as this would not only counter the high cost of bringing together teachers periodically for refresher courses, it would also counter the considerable logistical hurdles that go into organising such a meeting.
4. Status of Early Childhood Education in Pakistan

As the various studies in the previous chapter show, the impact of ECE is wide ranging and significantly influences the development of the child. It also increases their opportunities for access to education, keeps them in school for longer and brings economic success and prosperity. With such extensive gains, it is important that the poor should benefit the most from ECE. Unfortunately many people are not aware of the facts about ECE and in many cultures, such as ours, the rights of the child are not given the required importance.

Research shows that education systems often widen the gap between the rich and the poor. For instance when compared to a child from a low-income family, a child from an affluent family who enters primary school is usually already exposed to the type of knowledge she will require in school.

The natural and situational advantages of the affluent child coupled with a traditional system of learning rarely helps decrease the gap between the rich and the poor.

In most developing countries, as in Pakistan it is usually the urban middle class that is able to afford an early childhood education. The poor, especially those living in rural areas, enrol their children in primary schools much later than other children and even then they are not able to access a high quality programme. In order to break the cycle of poverty, it is essential that children from low-income families are inducted in an ECE programme very early in their lives.

4.1 Moving from Katchi to ECE: Issues and Impact

Till the 1970s, the Katchi class was a part of the public education system in Pakistan. Officially, the Katchi class was almost discontinued in the 1980s but it continued to function informally, without a proper curriculum, separate classrooms, appropriately qualified teachers or suitable learning resources. So while Katchi classes have been around for a long time, the concept of an ECE class that uses active learning methods (i.e. where children learn by doing) rather than traditional rote learning methods, is new to the teachers of government schools.

The discontinuation of a formal Katchi class in 1980s is basically a result of the lack of consistency of the country’s educational policies which frequently change focus. The educational policy has been vacillating, at times concentrating on Universal Primary Education and at other times changing the focus to non-formal education or the madrassah system. While all these systems are important in achieving goals in education, it is important to realise that ECE can form a solid foundation, from which a child can take any course of education. By instilling a love for learning in the child a high-quality ECE programme enables children to do well whichever direction they take.

Fortunately in the current National Education Policy (1998-2010) the Katchi class has been recognised as part of formal system. Yet despite the recognition it continues to function as an informal setup in government schools in Pakistan. The Katchi class serves more as a facility to house the young children who come to school with their older brothers or sisters, than an environment where the prescribed National ECE curriculum and teaching methodology can be effectively followed. In the average Katchi class being run in a rural area, children under the age of 5 may learn basic concepts of
literacy and numeracy in the traditional rote style of learning. Currently the ECE curriculum is being taught only in a few project-based pilot programmes scattered around the country.

Beside the public school system, ECE classes are being run in schools in the private sector schools in the urban areas, on a commercial basis. Here pre-primary education is an essential prerequisite to admission in primary school. Most of these schools have pre-primary programmes under the names Nursery, Pre-nursery, Kindergarten, KG-I, and KG-II. Young children are also assembled in mosques, madressahs and Quran centres, that impart religious education run by the community or at home by parents.

4.2 Policy Provisions for ECE

Till very recently, ECE was not included in the education policy of many countries including Pakistan. Child rearing and development was traditionally seen as the responsibility of the family and governments tended to get involved only from the perspective of social or health services.

The fact that learning begins at birth was highlighted at the World Conference on Education For All in Jomtien (1990) and later at the World Education Forum in Dakar (April 2000). This gave a big boost to the cause of early childhood education which was pushed into the spotlight. As a signatory to EFA, Pakistan recognises the need for ECE and its importance in achieving various policy goals. As a result, ECE forms one of the three main priorities of the National Plan of Action and has become a vital part of the National Education Policy: 1998-2010, (NEP). The NEP includes provisions to reintroduce the Katchi as a formal class in primary schools. This move has increased the number of years in primary school to six, i.e. from Katchi to class 5.

However the NEP states that the pre-primary classes have not been started because of a lack of funds. The policy states that Pakistan is giving priority to primary education – rather than ECE and adult literacy, which are its other main priorities – to achieve the target of Universalisation of Primary Education

4.2.1 Education Sector Reforms and National Plan for Action

The Education Sector Reforms were launched by the Ministry of Education to bring improvement in all aspects of education. On the subject of ECE the reforms state that ‘Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is considered a significant input to compensate for early environmental deprivations at home, by providing a healthy stimulating growth and learning environment to the very young from conception to 5 years of age. The holistic and integrated concept of ECCE clearly represents this spirit.’

Currently the policy and implementation in Pakistan is focused on ECE in the 3-5 years age group. It is expected to provide the necessary readiness to the child for meeting the demands of the primary curricula, it is also expected to positively affect the enrolment and retention of girls in primary schools by providing a substitute care facility for younger siblings. Envisaged as a holistic input, fostering health, psychological and nutritional development, the policy emphasis is on making ECE play-based, with linkages between home and the school. Since 2002 ECE has been formally introduced in some government schools, supplementing the
private sector, with clear intervention methodologies as an innovative component of ESR and as the first plank of EFA goals agreed in Dakar.

ESR is the foundation of the National Plan of Action (NPA). Early Childhood Education is one of three priorities of NPA. If implemented the plan is expected to provide ECE to at least half of the population in the 3-5 years age group population by 2015. The NPA estimates physical provisions and financial allocations to meet the targets.

development of a child as being interrelated. A flexible document, the curriculum recognises the diversity in children and has been developed keeping in view both the urban and rural context and the needs of teachers in both setups.

With a central focus on active learning, the National ECE Curriculum aims to equip children with lifelong learning skills and also supports them in developing critical thinking skills. There is no textbook and the curriculum document provides succinct

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<th>Summary of Policy Estimations and Allocations for ECE (NPA 2001-2015)</th>
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<td><strong>NPA Targets &amp; Cost Estimations</strong></td>
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4.2.2 National Curriculum for ECE

The National Education Policy (1998-2010) has made provisions to formally introduce ECE as part of the curriculum in primary schools. The National ECE Curriculum is a prime example of private and public partnership. It was developed by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the NGO Teachers’ Resource Centre (TRC), Karachi in 2002.

Based on sound educational theory and practice, the curriculum considers the social, emotional, physical, cognitive and moral

outlines on learning outcomes in literacy, numeracy and life skills.

It also provides guidelines on various aspects of ECE such as classroom routines, classroom layout, teaching methodology and appropriate assessment methods for implementing the syllabus. Based on modern principles of learning, but grounded in the reality of Pakistan’s schools, the National ECE Curriculum is an inspiring part of the formal scheme of studies. It has been revised and enriched further in 2007.

In April 2003 the Ministry of Education began implementing the curriculum. The
government, donors and NGOs are also working to implement ECE in some public sector schools. Their activities include setting up the ECE class, training teachers and developing teaching learning resources. Moreover, the Department of Literacy and Non-Formal Education in Punjab has been supporting almost 500 ECE centres under the Education Sector Reforms.

4.3 Pilot Projects and Programmes: The Silver Lining

Several programmes have been operating in Pakistan in order to address the gap between policy and implementation. Given below is a brief synopsis of the programmes.

- **UNICEF:**

UNICEF-supported programmes in the area of ECCD (Early Childhood Care and Development) are being implemented on small scale in partnership with government counterparts. The ECCD pilot in 30 villages in the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) is being implemented through the frontline field workers of the Ministry of Social Welfare (MOSW). MOSW’s Social Welfare Workers are Master Trainers that train community members in awareness about early childhood care issues, centered on caregiving and health-related issues for the 0-3 age group. In the same pilot villages, UNICEF intends to expand ECE programmes to target pre-primary children (aged 3 - 5) by experimenting with community-based pre-primary schools. UNICEF is also supporting an Early Childhood Resource Centre based at the College of Home Economics in Lahore. The centre has been training field workers of the Ministry of Health (Lady Health Workers) and MOSW in community-oriented techniques so that they can impart training to local communities in the area of early childhood care and development. This center was established in late 1999 and since then has targeted about 3000 households in 15 villages in 1 union council of Lahore. As UNICEF is implementing these programmes as pilots for the mainstream public sector, they are small in scale and outreach, but are intended to serve as models for wider scale adoption by the public sector.

- **Teachers’ Resource Centre**

TRC is one of the premier institutions focusing on ECE implementation, teachers’ training and policy advocacy at the federal, provincial and district levels. In fact, TRC carries out its training for teachers in the public sector through the government District Education Officers. They have been proactive in their policy level dialogues and networking with the government. As a result, TRC has been identified by the Ministry of Education (MoE) as a technical support agency to assist in developing the national curriculum for a formalised Katchi class. The curriculum along with a teachers’ guide was prepared by TRC and duly notified by the MoE in 2002-03. As part of the National Curriculum Review Exercise (2006-2007), TRC has taken a lead role in the National ECE Curriculum review and enrichment. The overall framework and content of the curriculum has been approved by the MoE.

Another important contribution by TRC is the development of interactive learning materials that have been widely used both in public and private schools. Resource kits such as the Pehla Taleemi Basta, video CDs on the learning environment, literacy, poems, and others are used for developing initial language and literacy, numeracy and science activities while setting up an active learning
environment in schools. Material such as Strong Foundations and Towards a Better School used for teachers’ professional development in ECE have also been developed by TRC.

- **Children’s Resources International (CRI)**

Children’s Resources International (CRI), a US-based international NGO, implemented the Creating Democratic Schools programme in Pakistan with the support of USAID. The programme was implemented mainly in public and low-cost private schools in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), Rawalpindi and Karachi. The programme focused on a child-centred teaching methodology for *Katchi*, Class 1 and Class 2. Through this programme CRI worked in 354 classrooms reaching approximately 12,000 children in almost 120 schools. In addition CRI provides training for teachers and master trainers. CRI has also adapted and published Creating Child-Centred Classrooms, a book of ECE methodology for use in schools.

- **The Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi**

The Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi, an NGO based in Punjab, is promoting ECE in government schools. In partnership with the Government of Punjab, the Idara is implementing an ECE programme that focuses on whole school improvement, with a special emphasis on the 3 – 5 year age group.

- **Releasing Confidence and Creativity**

Through Releasing Confidence and Creativity: Building Sound Foundations for Early Learning in Pakistan (RCC), the Aga Khan Foundation with financial support from USAID, helped the Government of Pakistan to test and implement activities at the pre-primary and early primary level in clusters of public schools in Balochistan and Sindh. (See the chapter on Impact of ECE for more about the RCC).

Since 2006, the Royal Netherlands Embassy is providing financial assistance to the RCC Programme. Currently the programme is extended to approximately 330 schools in districts of Sindh, Balochistan and Northern Areas of Pakistan.

### 4.4 Challenges and Issues in ECE Implementation

Despite identifying ECE as a priority in the National Plan of Education and the subsequent development of the National ECE curriculum, there are serious gaps in ECE implementation. Large scale implementation in public schools is impeded by numerous issues including physical facilities, learning environment, classroom management, level of school participation, teachers’ profile and capacity, non-existent support systems, limited parental involvement, and the communities’ opinions on schooling and in particular the *Katchi* class.

A diagnostic analysis of ECE provision at the national level has not been undertaken as yet. Following is a synopsis of the implementation issues based on various small research and evaluation studies conducted by Aga Khan Foundation, Teachers’ Resource Centre and the Ministry of Education.

- **Lack of Facilities and Resources:**

  The majority of public sector schools are characterised by a lack of facilities on the one hand, and their ineffective utilisation on the other hand. The situation of *Katchi* classes depicts the
worst case scenario as they have yet to be regularised and included in the primary education cycle.

In terms of infrastructure, there is no provision of a separate classroom for Katchi. Even when enrolment is high with 100-150 children, the classes are conducted in corridors or grounds. During extreme weather conditions, children are crammed into small rooms with other classes or given a day off. Teachers and learning resources also suffers from neglect.

Since the Katchi class is not included by the Policy and Development Wing of the MoE there are no provisions for teaching positions or budgets for these classes. As a result, Katchi is often taught by teachers of class 1. Moreover, staff that has not been appropriately posted such as the Physical Training Instructor or a clerk would be looking after Katchi students.

Katchi classes also do not fare too well with respect to learning resource provision and other materials. Teachers are generally unaware of the existence of the National ECE Curriculum or the fact that there is no textbook prescribed at that level. Often the Class 1 textbook is introduced at the Katchi level also and the children continue to reread the same book for two years. In cases where material is provided, the fear of wear and tear or theft forces it to be locked away from use by teachers or students.

- **Lack of Awareness:** The ability to foresee the value of quality ECE for future generations and commitment is lacking. This lack of awareness has a ‘trickle down’ effect whereby an unconvinced body of decision makers is unable to persuade parents to enroll their children in an ECE programme. It is difficult to change the prevailing mindset that children between the ages of 3 and 5 are better off in the home without a formal system of education. Not surprisingly this attitude also ‘trickles down’ to teachers who would form the backbone of the success of a nationwide ECE programme.

It is imperative that the decision making body be convinced of the significant advantages of ECE if the programme is to be a success. On an optimistic note there is a positive relationship between parents and the school. This needs to be seen as an asset which can be utilised to its potential for the betterment of the schools and in particular the Katchi class.

- **Lack of Skills:** One of the bigger challenges facing ECE in Pakistan is the lack of skills. It is difficult to ensure that teachers are applying ECE methods in the classroom. It is also difficult to continually train them. Even when teachers are provided training in interactive teaching methods, they struggle in innovating and enriching their methodologies. As a result, the active learning methodologies are also rote-learned where teachers keep on repeating the same group exercises or activities. These problems coupled with
the lack of awareness and commitment to ECE by educational planners and parents results in a loss for the education of young children.

- **Low Priority**: The low priority given to ECE is also reflected in the schools. Even when the enrolments in Katchi is high with 80-100 children, the classes are conducted in open verandas or under a tree. Less experienced teachers are often assigned to teach the Katchi class, while the more experienced teachers teach higher classes. The costs and negative consequences of mishandling the transition from home to school are too many to be ignored by developing countries such as ours where primary school repetition and dropout rates are high⁹.

⁹World Development Indicators, 2003; Data for Pakistan are from Financing of Education in Pakistan, 1999-2000; Nigeria, from MICS, 1999
5. Way forward: Responding to ECE Challenges

The significance of ECE has clearly been established in the previous sections while the issues pertaining to the quality of ECE programmes in Pakistan have also been highlighted. The experiences gained through pilot programmes as well as the findings of regional and international initiatives indicate that multi-level strategies are required for meeting the ECE targets identified in the ESR and the National Plan of Action. The following section highlights some key steps in this regard. However, it is important to note that these actions are neither prescriptive nor the only ones that are required. As educational managers, it is important that needs are analysed and actions prioritised according to contextual realities.

5.1 Bridging the Policy Gaps

As identified in the previous section, various government and private programmes are focusing on ECE and catering to the age group 3-6 years. However, these efforts are not always coordinated and synchronised resulting in a waste of funds as well as energy. The sustainability of programmes becomes a main concern as the project cycle reaches its end. Often multiple interventions without in-depth planning and coordination become counter productive leading to confusion between different stakeholders especially at school level. This is true for programmes in the public sector as well as those run by or in coordination with private or donor agencies. For example, the National ECE curriculum is developed and should be implemented across all Katchi classes in government schools. However, teachers in most public schools have never heard of the curriculum nor use it in their Katchi classrooms. A similar situation is seen where resources and teacher development initiatives are concerned. Staff Development initiatives of Education Departments, Teachers’ Resource Centre, PITE, AKU-IED and other institutes have developed various training programmes and teaching material that can be integrated in pre-service training (which is a pre-requisite for primary teacher). However, the preparatory trainings offered by most public teacher training institutes does not focus on ECE concepts nor equips teachers with skills required for creating a child friendly learning environment in schools.

Therefore it is very important to bring coherence in the following key areas:

- **Curriculum and textbooks for ECE and Primary Classes**: At present, there is a major gap between the curriculum guidelines and the “prescribed textbooks” that focus on rote learning. While the new curricula and schemes of study have addressed this issue, it also has to be reflected in the textbooks developed for primary classes.

- **Teachers’ Training & Professional Development**: Teacher development activities should take account of the ECE requirements and policies. It is imperative to introduce the ECE component in the pre-service PTC training or any other training imparted for primary teachers.

- **Institutionalisation of ECE**: The formula for allocating teachers needs to be reviewed. Despite the national notification for their regularisation, Katchi classes are not included in the main classes. As a result, teachers are not allocated for Katchi class nor are enrolments included in the general registration for school. This also reduces the financial incentives offered to public schools, such as the

Way Forward: Responding to ECE Challenges  25
SMC funds. Katchi classes need to be regularised and seen as a “formal” part of primary/elementary schools.

- **Age and Grade Issues:** The age issue needs to be resolved along with the focus on enrolment drives. Katchi is seen as a catchall class where children from 2-7 years are thrown together. Also all the “failures” that are unable to read and write the first lesson of class 1 textbooks are retained in Katchi till the time they master rote learning. To compound the situation, enrolment drives focus on the 5-7 years age group who are directly enrolled in class 1 thus creating a chaotic situation for teachers who have to deal with children ready for Pakki through their Katchi exposure and those who have just stepped into the school.

### 5.2 Role of District Governments in Promoting ECE

In the wake of devolution in education, promoting and improving ECE at the district level is comparatively easy, especially in the context of school and community (Asian Development Bank/Department for International Development/World Bank, 2004). While the districts have greater autonomy to plan and prioritise reforms, it is often seen that resource constraints or lack of clarity cripples the district government’s capacities to take initiatives. Some key action points to improve ECE implementation are identified here. We have clubbed the actions according to the levels and nature of responsibilities. It is essential that district managers and administrators familiarise themselves with all key aspects, which will create a deeper sense of the scope for ECE improvement.

#### 5.2.1 Points of Action for Executive District Officers, Education and Supervisors

- Differentiate between the academic and the administrative issues faced in carrying out your job responsibilities. You will notice that there are many things which you can do to improve ECE in your jurisdiction without additional resources. Also, when you demonstrate positive changes in schools and learning outcomes, it is very likely that your budgets/fiscal demands will be approved with little or no resistance.

- Orient yourself and your teachers with the National Early Childhood Curriculum. It will help you to understand that many things which take central position in primary schools are irrelevant and destructive for children’s development and learning.

- Support the teachers in changing the focus of engagement with children from drills and rote learning to play based and interactive learning. This can be a slow process, but it is a crucial one for improving the quality of learning outcomes as well as children’s development. Quality training and development initiatives would prove helpful in this regard.

- Liaise with other district departments to undertake a series of advocacy exercises for parents, children, community members, and Nazims on ECE. Some of
the topics for these advocacy sessions could be, the importance of a caring environment for children, the role of parents, how learning takes place, health and hygiene, the importance of mothers’ health, positive care giving and child rearing practices, etc. Share what changes will occur in classroom teaching strategies and the school environment if they have to become learner-friendly. Solicit their advice and seek their support through a collaborative process. You will create a sense of comfort amongst teachers for implementing active teaching and learning strategies. On the other hand, parents will be engaged in more constructive ways and share the responsibility instead of blaming teachers.

- Revise the focus of monitoring and develop tools according to learning quality indicators. The focus of visits to schools is invariably to check the attendance records or copy work done by students. This clearly does not have any relevance to ECE nor to the kind of environment required for the holistic development of children. The ECE curriculum guide for teachers has sample checklists that can be used for this. Other tools can be developed to help children learn actively.

- Ensure the provision of teaching and learning material that would support active learning. Teachers can be facilitated in developing low-cost and no-cost material while SMC funds could also be utilised for buying play material and learning supplies.

- Encourage the use of materials in classroom. A negative trend commonly seen in public schools is the tendency to lock learning material. When asked, teachers express the fear of auditing or of material being destroyed by children. Changing the very rules of business may be required so that learning material is exempted from fiscal auditing. The prevalent practice of keeping learning material away from children or allowing its use under strict vigilance does not have a positive impact on their personality or learning process. EDO, ADEOs and supervisors should ensure that teachers are allowed to freely and effectively use learning material.

- Provide time for teachers and students, and create a culture where they engage in developing low-cost or no-cost material that is also relevant to their immediate context and life. Similarly, they should also be encouraged to create and use simple and no-cost toys.

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<tr>
<th>Summary of Action Points for EDOs &amp; Supervisors, Education &amp; Literacy</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Spend time with staff to understand the ECE National Curriculum and the need to successfully implement it.</td>
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<td>- Influence and convince community members, education department officials and teachers on the importance of quality early learning and education</td>
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<td>- Move towards monitoring the quality of learning and the learning environment</td>
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<td>- Support teachers to create quality ECE experiences for children through discussions, proper allocation of resources and training opportunities</td>
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<td>- Encourage the use of learning material and aids in the classroom</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Encourage teachers to engage in discussions on early learning as well as to develop material and use active learning strategies</td>
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5.2.2 Points of Action for District Coordinating Officers & Advisory Council Members

- Ensure that Early Childhood Development initiatives are separately budgeted by the Education, Health and Social Welfare Departments. Allocation should be made for development costs, it should not be restricted to recurring costs/salaries.

- Engage with provincial government to benefit from federal and ESR schemes offered for ECE implementation. A considerable amount of fund lapses because district governments do not proactively seek provincial and federal grants available to them.

- Identify areas where coordination between various departments’ activities can take place. For instance, social welfare, health, agriculture and the education departments can formulate district-wide awareness programmes for improving the quality of life, with a special focus on ECE.

- Encourage integrated programme planning and implementation at district level. This will help in allocation of adequate budgets and their effective utilisation. Also, create networks between home, school, and the community for the 0-8 years age group and also cater to the health and nutrition needs of mothers and children.

- Plan for the utilisation and streamlining of development inputs made through various funded projects. For instance, there are thousands of teachers and mentors trained under initiatives, such as ESRA Programme, PRSP, etc. However, it is not clear how the momentum and thrust of educational improvement will be sustained and the role of critical mass created at district level. Facilitate respective teams in education and health departments in appropriating roles according to the training received. Insist on allocating quality human resource for ECCE. Early years need quality exposure and facilities for children to realise their innate potential. Nurture and nature work together!

- Seek support from various national and international NGOs to organise events creating awareness about the benefits of ECD along with your own initiatives. Ensure the presence of local decision makers and affluent people in the district in such events. This will result in greater understanding of ECD amongst the key stakeholders of the community and consequently, a better footing for the district to launch programmes.

- Change the focus of monitoring and regulatory activities concerned with the well-being of children. This could be done across departments especially in education and health. To run the district, it is very important to be aware of the progress on quantitative targets. However,
to ensure that districts are progressing in the right direction, you should also look at the kinds of quantitative targets that are set. Supplying furniture in schools or raising enrolments is needed but is NOT enough! As key decision makers, you should also look at how many Katchi classes have been regularised, how many information camps for mothers' health and quality childcare are conducted. These are just some examples. A comprehensive list of quantitative indicators could be developed on activities critical to service provision especially for children.

- Focus on qualitative aspects also – just like you monitor the progress on quantitative targets of enrolments and admissions, knowing the level of happiness of children and how coming to school is benefiting them is important. So the next time you receive updates on the Education Department, don't forget to ask about the learning environment of schools.

5.2.3 Points of Action for Nazims at District and Tehseel Levels

- Rally for regularisation of Katchi classes and their proper inclusion in resource allocation (both in terms of financial and human resources.) Dialogues with provincial government and education department may prove more effective than pushing it with the district education department.

- Participate in the learning seminars organised by various organisations on the importance of Early Childhood Development. To share your learning, organise dialogues with community members (both male and female) and encourage your constituency to look into their practices regarding children.

Are they giving adequate care and attention to their children and their upbringing? Discuss and debate what needs to change and improve at family and community level.

- Exercise your political influence in not just providing tangibles to your constituency schools but also improving their utility as well as the overall school environment. Due to limited awareness, many times Nazims have forced new furniture onto their constituency's schools or got them refurbished, for example. Perhaps it is a tangible way to deliver the promises you made to people. However, as far as the promise of improving education is concerned, this is certainly not going to yield positive results. A more effective strategy would be to interact with parents, teachers, head teachers and education department officials to understand the key issues and needs for improving education in your constituency. Take concrete measures to resolve the problems faced by the majority of schools and teachers.

- Focus on improving the physical conditions of your constituency that concern the health of children, and their

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<td>• Support and advocate for Katchi regularisation</td>
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<td>• Focus on qualitative improvements</td>
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<td>• Use political support in the constituency to raise awareness about early learning &amp; the role communities can play</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Ensure overall cleanliness and sanitary conditions in the area – so children live in a healthy environment</td>
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You must have noticed heaps of garbage and overflowing gutters immediately outside school premises. These are in stark contrast to the health and hygiene lessons children are taught in school. More than new furniture, healthy and secure conditions will help children grow physically and cognitively. As Nazims, a healthy and enabling environment for children is the most important service you can provide your constituency.

5.3 ECE Investments: Pathway to Progress

As discussed in preceding sections, quality care and support in the early years play a decisive role in children’s development. The short-term and long-term benefits of investing in Early Childhood Education and Care have been established through research. Pakistan faces very daunting challenges in education particularly related to girls’ education, with high dropouts, low participation and students’ achievement rates. Owing to global conflicts and dynamics, it is also important that future generations have the creativity, confidence and maturity to deal with uncertainties and chaotic situations at the personal, professional and social levels. Quality care and education in the early years helps nurture children’s natural potential so that they develop into well-rounded human beings and effective members of society. Some of the important benefits of investing in ECE programmes include:

- By investing in ECE, a lot of resources wasted on dropouts, repetition, and remedial actions can be saved.
- ECE interventions promote gender equality by counteracting gender biases in nutrition, healthcare and stimulation. Gender-sensitive ECE facilitates positive changes in social attitudes towards females. It lays the foundation for gender equality and also contributes to raising awareness amongst parents and family members. Older girls who are the traditional childminders of younger siblings, are freed by ECE programmes to continue their schooling. ECE also has the potential to change the perception and role of men in child rearing.
- Young children who participate in ECE programmes do better in school than those who have not had this opportunity. Children who receive pre-primary education or ECE are more likely to be interested in future studies. Their quality of learning is enhanced, and the retention rate is increased. Mental capabilities of ECE graduates are better developed.
- Early success helps in developing greater motivation, better performance, and a higher regard from teachers and classmates.
- Children develop a sense of self-worth, confidence, the capacity to take responsibility, and the skills and ability to learn.

It is imperative for all decision makers and implementers to realise the significance of quality Early Childhood Education and take concrete steps to expand and improve it at district, provincial and national levels. It is arguably the most effective pathway for the progress and prosperity of our future generations as well as the country.
Bibliography


in collaboration with

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