Early Childhood Education Schools In Pakistan

Early childhood education: A critique and comparison of ECE models worldwide and a proposed model for government schools in Pakistan

We have come to a time where the importance of education and the revitalization of its pedagogy has never been more imminent. It has been long since the dark ages, but unfortunately there hasn't been any significant change in our educational systems until recently. With addition to the rise of capitalism and more awareness on our cognitive and neurological behavior, the world has started to be clearer on the importance of early childhood development (ECD). It has a ripple effect on a particular person's wellbeing and their surroundings. Formerly, childhood development was mainly restricted to issues such as nutrition and health but now as science progresses, we have started to witness its importance in numerous aspects, such as cognition and academic achievement, behavioral and emotional competencies, educational progression and attainment, child maltreatment, health, delinquency and crime, social welfare and labor market success. (1) Making it an efficient tool to increase social, self-regulatory and physical health capacities. (2)(3)

In the following paper, we would be delving into the fact that although there is a copious amount of research on the significance of early childhood education and its large scale importance on the overall human welfare, why it is still not being adequately implemented and even if it is, why it isn't deriving the desired results. What can be done to overcome it and what kind of model will work in Pakistan?

We will be looking into different ECE models that have been implemented in various countries with different demographics. Further on, we would be shedding light on popular worldwide models that are being implemented till today. We would be critically analyzing and criticizing on why these models are failing and not reaching their true potential. Further on, we would highlight universal problems that stunt the processes of ECE and elaborate on which model is the most applicable when it comes to Pakistan.

The global world is a complex phenomenon and each country has its own sets of rules, laws, vision, restrictions and encouragements. So when it comes to education, especially in a global aspect, it is wise to say that one can't paint everything with the same brush. There is no such thing as a universal educational model that would work globally. To say that there is a full proof method of ECE which generates the optimum results worldwide is utterly false, and this is the foremost problem when it comes ECD (Early Child Development). Most countries rather than generating their own methods, implement programs which may have been fruitful in different countries and that in itself, indicates failure from the start. As each country works differently, due to the resources, economy, PPP (Purchasing Power Parity), geographical location and so on. What might work in the Americas, unfortunately will not work in South East Asia due to different constraints and opportunities. Hence, different countries have to approach this problem divergently. Developed countries which are, comparatively more conscious about this notion have devised their own methods accordingly.

In New Zealand, ECC (Early Childhood Centers) uses “Te Whariki” in their ECE pedagogy. Established in 1960s, this curriculum was written by the new Zealand ministry of education as a framework for teachers to ensure that the children are provided with the experience which aids in promoting their optimal development(4).It is a framework which offers more holistic approach to adolescents, focusing more on non-cognitive skills, It is important to stress here that this, by no means implies that cognitive skills are any less important but rather that it is comparatively more important to focus on non-cognitive skills, such as, perseverance of a task, attention, memory, curiosity, verbal and nonverbal communication and ability to solve a problem diligently. Te Wharikian model argues that the chances of these skills being embedded in a pupil are higher, if started from an early age.

The main aspect of Te Whariki is to trigger a sense of curiosity through cultural and traditional norms within a child, so that they are able efficiently to express one self. This exercise ensures that the child is well aware of their culture, surroundings and norms, in turn creating a strong New Zealander identity. Due to its framework, this method has started to gain attention in South Australia as well as Japan. Although, the results are somewhat positive, Te whariki has faced its fair share of criticism as well. For instance, firstly, there is no systematic procedure to gain insight on the results of its success. The implementation of the method varies according to the facilitator. It is up to the teacher to devise a curriculum in order to meet these results as the result is the end goal rather than the process, hence it can be assumed that their services and abilities can vary widely, giving way to irregularities in the framework itself. The second problem which I believe can occur with this pedagogy is a surge of nationalism. Although nationalism is an important part in shaping ones identity, it however has a connotation to it as well. As Te Whariki focuses on embedding New Zealand’s identity from an early age, it might also trigger a form of superiority complex which may in effect have a negative global connotation.

The second example of an ECE model is based in Kenya. Whereas previously, in New Zealand, it was the governments’ job to ensure the implementation of ECE, in Kenya it is somewhat opposite. In Kenya, the government is involved minimally. It is the parents’ responsibility to plan, develop and manage different early childhood programs. They come as a collective unit and devise a curriculum which is best suited for their children, depending on the locality of their area, consequently, the problem arises due to limited funding and lack of consistency. This education model highly depends on parent’s education, income and upbringing, hence it can be gathered that the success of this program widely depends on the parents’ level of education and their willingness to participate in familial ties and this program. In order for it to be more successful and impactful, Kenyan government has to be actively involved in the development as well as the implementation process of this program to ensure a smooth consistency(5)

The third approach is the two generation approach where parents are forced to enhance their living standards in order to provide better future for their children. This approach is often seen in developing countries where the national income strata is lower. The main focus is combined initiatives undertaken by both parents and children for better lifestyle. It is usually targeted towards low income households. The process included lifestyle coaches, learning new skill sets, starting/going back to school and seeking diverse opportunities. As the parent is keen, this is reflected in the child as well, creating a see saw affect. The pros are that it alleviates the entire family’s hierarchy and acts as a union whereas the con is that it solely depends on the parents’ determination and access to means. (6)

Apart from individual ECE models, there are different universal educational frameworks which

are recognized worldwide. Some of the instances are, for e.g., the Waldorf education model, also known as Steiner education, it is based on the educational philosophy of Rudolph Steiner. Its primary focus is to tap into and build upon individuals intellectual, artistic and practical skills in a holistic manner. The prime objective is to develop creative individuals through cultivating pupils' imagination. The practice relies upon immersing in an environment which propagates learning through un-self-consciousness imitation of practical activities. It is somewhat of an experiential education allowing children to learn through examples and opportunities from imaginative play (7). It is implemented by setting up routine in a classroom which enhances their creative, practical and artistic skills, for instance drawing, singing, free play time, cooking and so on. This gives them an opportunity to be creative and express themselves as individuals from an early age. Use of electronic media is mainly discouraged as Waldrof believes that these mediums hinder children's cognitive development. There is a substantial focus on celebrating traditions and culture, giving them a sense of their identity, which aids in shaping up their personality (8).

The second widely used model is the Reggio Emilia approach. It was found after World War 2, by an Italian pedagogist, Loris in the villages around reggio emilia, Italy – hence coining the name. Basing on the sense that children should be free to devise their own curriculum. At its core, there is an assumption that children communicate through 100s of languages, which in turn, if recognized efficiently can help in forming their personalities (9). Children under this model are free to do whatever they want to do, with proper supervision of course. The aim is to teach these children a symbolic language that they can incorporate in their everyday life, such as painting, sculpting, and drama and so on. Parent's involvement is highly crucial in this model as it ensures that their children's expression isn't limited till their hours at the school but is rather an entire day's immersive experience.

The prime difference between both models is that the former is more controlled than the latter – Waldrof models tools are placed from the start. The procedure is defined from an early stage, thereby contouring the development according to the facilitator. Hence one can say that it is somewhat limited and controlled when compared to the Reggio model. Whereas the criticism for Reggio model is that there has to be some sort of boundaries in which learning should be limited, as exposure to free will at such an early stage can lead to turning a blind eye to boundaries, regulations and authorities.

The third and the most popular ECE model is under the banner of Montessori, found by Maria Montessori. It is a systematic approach to cultivate children's cognitive behavior. Whereas the previous ones had a more of free approach in their pedagogy, the Montessori model is more scientific. Different tasks and duties are assigned to these individuals so that certain skills are polished from a very young age. For instance, behavior, sensory refinement, order, team work, acquisition of language (10). Different scientific tools and exercises are designed to ensure success, preparing them to learn and shaping them accordingly. Being the most popular model, it is often referred as a prerequisite for schools and further down, university. The criticism, in my opinion for this model is that, every individual is unique and this model assumes that all children in certain age bracket are similar, with similar tendencies to grasp things but in essence, what might work for on pupil may not for another. Hence, It negates individuality and has limited room for experimenting and going beyond the traditional model of education.

Apart from the individual criticism for each model, ECE faces many similar problems which are universal for instance but not limited to,

- A lag between policy making and implementation of ECE across countries. Although the policies are being made to enhance the quality of ECE, sadly, the government doesn't advocate it rigorously hence effects the overall implantation.
- The parent involvement is limited. ECE is highly depended on the willingness of the/a parent. As the society is transitioning towards capitalism, less time is available for familial matters.
- Emphasis on 'Play" is being reduced worldwide. Less time is subjected towards free playing for adolescents. Academics is given more priority from an early age.
- There are other major factors, such as funding, different regulatory offices, time and safety which hinder ECE from reaching its true potential.

Pakistan's ECE model

Pakistan is a diverse country and although the importance of education is being stressed upon, the literacy rates are still plummeting. There are many variables for it. Some of the common ones which have also been highlighted in the previous models are the limited government involvement and the willingness/ awareness of parents when it comes to ECE and its long term benefits.

Apart from that, if we are to profile Pakistan meticulously, some of the issues that are hindering ECE are, fore mostly, the lack of government participation and the lack of coordination between different institutes who propagate the same agenda. This can be solved with an awareness campaign on the importance and the implementation of ECE. This drive can further be targeted to different stakeholders such as parents, decision makers and institutions, leading to more participation and funds for the ECE models. The second issue is the importance of the ECE itself. As because of our culture, it is subjected that adolescents require little to no attention from external forces, when compared to children from the age of 6 and above. The main argument is that it is the parents' responsibility to educate/ develop their children in an early stage, hence if a trained staff is hired for ECE, the screening process isn't up to the mark. They are hired to just fill in the positions on paper rather than to fill in the gap. Hence the non-availability of trained staff and professionals hinder the very base of ECE. Thirdly, limited funds are available for ECE as more focus is directed towards other issues such as health and safety. This in turn effects the overall framework of the model as minimum funds denotes inadequate infrastructure, from limited training to nonexistent training and learning materials. The fourth problem is the poverty itself. It is a vicious cycle, especially in a developing world. Lack of family funds mean that more focus is given to earning money hence children are forced to participate in child labor and as the family has to come to terms with it, they find it useless to invest in ECE. Poverty is also directly linked with the cognitive and neurological understanding of a child. As the family is poor, the child will get insufficient nutrients which will severely affect their overall health.

So if a model has to be proposed, it has to keep in an account of all of these variables.

A model for a government school in Pakistan has to be a crossover between reggio amelia and a two generation model with addition of a separate framework suited for Pakistan. Children should be given a free will to express and delve into what they think best suits them. They should be given different tools to experiment and ignite their curiosity. They should be taught through experiential education, igniting them to yearn for learning different things. The framework of 100 languages should be implemented, which will make them more confident and

expressive. Aiding to their neurological and cognitive understanding. Simultaneously, parents should also be educated on how to approach their children from a young age. Awareness as well as training workshops should be held for parents to educate them on the benefits of ECE as well as to empower them for any change. Proper training manuals on ECE must be disseminated so that it reaches the masses and excludes exclusivity. Teachers should be trained/ screened adequately. Different incentives from both private as well as public sector should be offered to them, for to increase their participation and motivation. Monitoring and evaluation should be rigorous to ensure homogeneity across the sector. Nutritionists should be taken on board, to both educate the parents on the importance of early nutrition as well to implement it in the educational framework. Government should add a subsidy to encourage parents to enroll their children rather than to take them out for work. There should a separate government department which solely works on ECE to increase seamless coordination between all dedicated organizations. A dedicated play area should be designed and incorporated in all of these schools/centers to promote play time.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, there is a clear picture that a country needs to devise its ECE based on its profile. Government participation and parent involvement is crucial for its success. We need to educate different stakeholders to increase its awareness. There should be a dedicated department which ensures ECE as its priority within the government, which in turn will look after training of the teachers and practitioners, create homogeneity within the curricula, and monitor the programs, and provide funds in order to sustain it.

References

1) URL: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9145.html

- Website Title RAND Corporation
- Publication Day 01
- Publication Month January
- Publication Year 2005
- Access Day 26
- Access Month October
- Access Year 2019
- Article Title : Proven Benefits of Early Childhood Interventions

2) National Education Policy

- Publication year 2017
- Author Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training Government of Pakistan.
- URL http://www.moent.gov.pk/userfiles1/file/National%20Educaiton%20Policy%202017.pdf

3) Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood

- Publication Year 2010
- Publication Month 01

- Article Title The Early Childhood Educator in a Critical Learning Community: Towards Sustainable Change

4) Journal Title International Journal of Early Years Education

- Publication Year 1993
- Publication Month 12
- Article Title Choosing a Model. Reflecting on the Development Process of Te Whariki: National Early Childhood Curriculum Guidelines in New Zealand

5) Journal Title Early Years

- Publication Year 2009
- Publication Month 10
- Article Title Early childhood education programs in Kenya: challenges and solutions

6) URLhttps://www.urban.org/policy-centers/metropolitan-housing-and-communities-policy-center/projects/host-initiative-action/designing-housing-platform-services/two-generation-approach

- Website Title Urban Institute
- Publication Day 06
- Publication Month December
- Publication Yea r2018
- Access Day 26
- Access Month October
- Access Year2019
- Article Title Two-Generation Approach

7)URL https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263257494_Meeting_the_child_in_Steiner_kindergartens_an_exploration_of_beliefs_values_and_practices

- Access Day 26
- Access Month October
- Access Year 2019
- Article Title Meeting the child in Steiner kindergartens: an exploration

8) URL http://self.gutenberg.org/articles/Waldorf_Education

- Website Title Waldorf education | Project Gutenberg Self-Publishing - eBooks | Read eBooks online
- Access Day 26
- Access Month October
- Access Year 2019
- Article Title Waldorf education

9) Book Title the hundred languages of children: the Reggio Emilia approach-advanced reflections

- Book Publisher Ablex Publishing Corporation

- Publication Year 1998

10) URLhttp://www.montessoriteacherscollective.com/abcclio/childhood.html

- Website Title moteaco.com - Library - ABC-CLIO Series
- Access Day 26
- Access Month October
- Access Year 2019