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Let's Prioritize ECCE Teachers

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Position Statement

"Prioritizing ECCE teachers is crucial for building the foundational blocks of early learning and securing a robust future for Pakistan. By investing in the ECCE workforce, we are not only guaranteeing high-quality education for every child but also ensuring that each child has the opportunity to learn, grow and thrive."



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Early Childhood Care and Education

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is a game changer in laying a strong foundation for children. According to global advocates, investment in ECCE multiplies opportunities for learning, health, and well-being; breaks cycles of poverty and inequality; and transforms lifelong outcomes for a generation, triggering a ripple effect on governments, businesses, communities, parents, and caregivers (Minifesto - Theirworld, 2024). Quality ECCE supports young children's emotional, social, and cognitive growth, fostering life skills such as self-control, resilience, compassion, empathy, adaptability, and basic financial literacy (Ghumman & Khalid, 2016). Teachers play a key role in early childhood care and education (ECCE) by creating positive early experiences and fostering exploration through various senses and types of intelligence. During these formative years, teachers serve as caregivers, mentors, and facilitators for holistic child development alongside parents/guardians.

The Problem

Pakistan has repeatedly endorsed ECCE in global commitments; including Jomtien (1990), the Dakar Framework of Action (2000) under "Education for All", SDG 4 (2015), and at the World Congress for Early Childhood Care & Education in Tashkent (2022). Nationally and provincially, laws, policies, frameworks, curriculum, and standards exist, but implementation and financing remains a challenge. Investment in early foundations has the highest return for any education system, with teachers playing a critical role. However, ECCE teachers face complex issues such as low status, lack of a formal cadre (except in Sindh), inadequate credentialing and licensing, and minimal professional development support (Rehman et al., 2022). With 40% of children in some form of early education across rural and urban schools, systematic support is mainly visible in a few public schools, while the private sector prioritizes this sub-sector.

The ASER Pakistan 2023 report highlights the urgent need for investment in early childhood education (ECE) teachers, by presenting significant disparities in qualifications and quality between the public and private sectors. The report reveals that 31% of teachers in government schools have a graduation degree compared to 38% in private schools; whilst 55% of public sector teachers have completed a Master of Education (M.Ed.) compared to 39% in private institutions. Despite higher qualifications, government teachers still struggle in ECE pedagogy and classroom management due to lack of specialization in child-centered approaches to address young children's developmental needs and foundational learning outcomes.

(ASER Pakistan, 2023)¹

Several critical gaps need to be urgently addressed to enhance the quality of ECCE teaching and the overall performance of teachers across Pakistan. The gaps are mentioned below:

- Absence of a national/provincial framework for ECCE teacher qualifications and competencies.
- Limited access to quality ECCE pre-service and in-service /on the job training & support.
- The government of Sindh has introduced teacher licensing; however it begins at the primary level, with no specific standards for ECCE or pre-primary teachers
- No dedicated quality accreditation body for ECCE teacher education and curriculum; existing evaluators lack specialization.
- Lack of holistic understanding by teachers on cross sectoral linkages with nutrition, health, social protection including birth registration and active parental engagement
- Insufficient evidence on assessment of ECCE teacher quality in school systems.
- Limited and consistently low financial investment in ECCE teachers.
- Multi-grade teaching and severe teacher shortages for early years.
- Unstable ECCE teacher placements, rotational staffing tradition for primary/ECE grades
- Early grade students lack essential support for readiness and smooth transition from ECE to Grade 1; dropouts begin early.

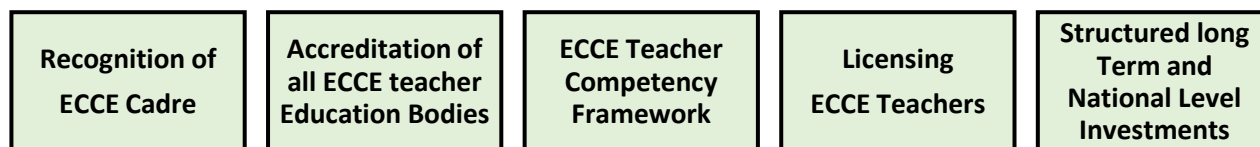
Why Prioritizing Teachers is Essential

With an estimated 25.3 million out-of-school children (OOSC) across Pakistan (UNICEF, 2023), making education accessible demands investment in efficient recruitment policies and sustained quality support. The target for SDG 4.2 commits to at least one year of pre-primary education, highlighting the importance of adequate ECCE teachers. Currently, Sindh is the only province that has created a special cadre for early childhood teachers/ECT (BPS 15) (Reform Support Unit, Sindh, 2021) and with has introduced the Teachers Licensing Policy 2023. The policy covers Primary, Elementary, and Secondary levels with separate eligibility but oversight ECCE by the Sindh Teacher Education Development Authority (STEDA, 2023). Although Sindh has a licensing policy, its ECCE framework and criteria remain unclear and requires urgent attention. In Punjab, ECCE initiatives are being strengthened through various projects. The Bunyad project, under the World Bank’s Punjab Human Capital Investment Project (PHCIP), has implemented a set of interventions across 12 districts, inducting 3,400 caregivers though through the non-salary budget (PHCIP, 2021). Nationally, pre-service and continuous professional development programs, a dedicated ECCE teacher cadre, tools for assessing teacher quality, and licensing policies aligned with the ECCE framework, curriculum, and SLOs are essential. There is a critical need to upgrade the ECCE workforce through progressive diploma, certification, and degree programs, providing flexibility to teachers—particularly women in challenging contexts. ECCE programs and initiatives across Pakistan build a strong case for standardizing teacher development, workforce preparation, and support through structured licensing policies. A comprehensive and standardized ECCE framework would maintain workforce standards, ensuring that both public and private sector teachers are accountable for the quality of ECCE programs locally and nationwide.

What Experts Think!

<p><i>"There is an absence of a supportive ecosystem for teachers' professional development, which should include comprehensive training, robust follow-up mechanisms, and mentoring and coaching support. Currently, the ECCE framework lacks policies that adequately promote the professional growth of educators."</i></p> <p>Ambreena Ahmed, Teachers Resource Center (TRC)</p>	<p><i>"The policy to establish designated classrooms for play-based learning activities with ECCE materials and free textbooks will help ensure a holistic learning experience for students."</i></p> <p>Erum Burki, UNICEF Pakistan</p>
<p><i>"ECCE teachers are undervalued globally and in Pakistan, often poorly paid and provided with few professional development opportunities. Moreover, they are expected to deliver high-quality ECCE services despite limited resources, inadequate space, and insufficient training."</i></p> <p>Dr Aisha Yousafzai, Harvard University & Visiting Faculty, Aga Khan University, Pakistan</p>	<p><i>"ECCE centers often lack sufficient learning supplies and have poor infrastructure, particularly in rural areas. Specific resource allocations are needed for infrastructure and adequate teaching materials, along with a standardized framework that emphasizes effective ECE teaching practices and parental engagement components."</i></p> <p>Humaira Jamil, VSO</p>
<p><i>"The ECCE cadre would serve as a platform for effective policy implementation and advocacy for early childhood education at both provincial and national levels. This would lead to increased funding and resources while fostering collaboration between policymakers and global funders."</i></p> <p>Atique ul Rehman, PMIU -PESRP</p>	<p><i>"Insufficient budget allocation for ECCE results in a shortage of quality teachers and inadequate materials and resources. Additionally, there is a lack of accountability within the system."</i></p> <p>Dr Sughra Choudhry Khan, Aga Khan Foundation</p>
<p><i>"We expect a high level of expertise in fields like medicine and engineering, but the same is not often the case when it comes to teachers, the nurturers of the human mind and emotions, particularly of the early years. Teaching young children is not a task to be taken for granted. Rather it is one of the most important human activities. It requires commitment, intelligence, passion, and prudence. This responsibility is one of the most crucial in society, as it shapes our collective future. We thus need both more teachers and of high quality."</i></p> <p>Dr Farid Panjwani, IED Aga Khan University</p>	

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