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The Dera Ismail Khan Early Childhood Education Divide: A Comparative Analysis of Public and Private Sectors Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to compare early childhood education between public and private sectors schools of district Dera Ismail Khan On the basis of curriculum, teaching methodology, and assessment technique. objectives of the study were to compare the curriculum, teaching methodology and assessment techniques of ECE curriculum between public and private sectors of district Dera Ismail Khan. Three research questions and three hypotheses were developed study was delimited to female schools of district Dera Ismail khan questionnaire was used as a research tool on five Likert scale. For this research study multistage sampling technique has been considered suitable which is followed by stratified sampling and then simple random sampling techniques were used to collect the data from teachers. Questionnaire was distributed among 30 respondents for pilot testing, reliability is checked through Cron Bach's alpha. Questionnaire was validated by the experts of relevant field. Questionnaire was collected by researcher herself. Independent sample t-test was used for comparison. Data was analyzed, arrange through latest version of SPSS. After applying test of significance p.value is less than level of significance 0.05 alternate hypotheses was accepted significance difference was found in opinion of teachers regarding provision of early childhood education in terms of curriculum, teaching methodology, evaluation between public and private sectors primary schools districts Dera Ismail Khan.
Key words. *Curriculum, teaching methodologies, early childhood education*

INTRODUCTION

Education is a vital instrument for national development, as no nation can achieve sustainable progress or prosperity without it. It serves as the most cost-effective safeguard for a country, as an educated and skilled population is the true indicator of national advancement. Education functions as the backbone of society and a reliable route to success, addressing social problems such as poverty, corruption, crime, and social frustration (Khan, Ghazi, & Shah, 2025). It transforms individuals' ways of thinking, communicating, and behaving, thereby shaping lifestyles and enhancing overall societal well-being.

The quality of a nation depends heavily on the quality of human beings cultivated within its schools, colleges, and universities. Educational institutions act as factories producing and refining human capital capable of national transformation (Arshad & Zamir, 2023). Islam also places the highest emphasis on knowledge and learning. The first revealed verses of the Holy Qur'an command: *"Read in the name of your Lord who created, created man from a clot. Read, and your Lord is the Most Generous, who taught by the pen, taught man what he did not know"* (Qur'an 96:1–5). This verse underscores the divine importance of acquiring knowledge and literacy.

Early Childhood Education (ECE) refers to educational experiences for children from birth to eight years of age and is also known as Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) or pre-primary education (Shakeel, Farooq, & Umbreen, 2011; Younas, Khan, & Taj, 2023). ECE has evolved as a multidisciplinary field influenced by cognitive psychology, health and nutrition, sociology, anthropology, and economics. Together, these disciplines emphasize holistic development—intellectual, emotional, physical, social, and spiritual—along with the process of socialization (Qayyum, Tabassum, & Kashif, 2024).

Rehman (2006), citing Bertram and Pascal (2002), highlighted that the first eight years are the most critical for a child's lifelong learning and personality development. During this formative stage, attitudes, cognitive pathways, and learning dispositions are established, making early childhood education a complex yet vital responsibility. In recent years, ECE has increasingly focused on literacy and numeracy through structured, adult-led pedagogical approaches (Adnan & Ramzan, 2024). ECE or pre-primary schooling primarily emphasizes joyful and play-based learning, whereas ECCD takes a broader view by integrating health, nutrition, and family care. Similarly, Early Childhood Development (ECD) extends to maternal and post-natal care and holistic early education for children aged 0–8 years (Evans & Myers, 2000; Penn, 2004; Zaidi et al., 2024).

Recent studies across Pakistan have examined the quality of early childhood education in public and private schools. The present study focuses on evaluating ECE quality in both sectors in District Dera Ismail Khan, comparing their curricula, teaching methodologies, and assessment practices. It also investigates teachers' perceptions of curriculum design, evaluation methods, and the role of play and learning environments in fostering early childhood development (Khan, Ghazi, & Ullah Khan, 2022; Khan et al., 2025).

Chronological Background of Early Childhood Education

The concept of educating young children can be traced back to the early sixteenth century, when Martin Luther (1483–1546) emphasized the importance of literacy and moral instruction for all children, regardless of social class (Gulzar & Qureshi, 2023). During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, European philosophers significantly influenced early childhood education (ECE). Comenius (1592–1670) proposed the idea of a "school of the mother" for children's first six years, focusing on early experiential learning (Clarke, Eller, & Hunt, 1983). Locke (1632–1704) introduced the concept of *tabula rasa*, suggesting that children are born as blank slates shaped by experience, while Rousseau (1712–1778) advocated for a natural, child-centered approach that allowed innate abilities to unfold (Aries, 1962; Rehman, Arif, & Bashir, 2024).

In early colonial America, Puritan beliefs emphasized discipline and moral salvation, contrasting with the European humanistic approach to child development (Greven, 1973; Wishy, 1968). In the nineteenth century, Friedrich Fröbel (1782–1852) established the kindergarten in Germany, emphasizing structured play, social interaction, and emergent learning (Peterson, 1987; UNESCO, 2023). This model spread to the United States, supported by reformers and philanthropists aiming to improve the education of immigrant and poor children (Braun & Edwards, 1972).

The nursery school movement emerged in early twentieth-century England, led by Rachel and Margaret MacMillan in 1910, focusing on children's social, physical, emotional, and intellectual development (Peterson, 1987). Simultaneously, Maria Montessori (1870–1952) opened her *Casa dei Bambini* in Rome, applying her methods for children with disabilities to urban poor children. Her approach emphasized independence, hands-on exploration, and child-centered learning in a carefully prepared environment,

with the teacher acting as a guide rather than a traditional instructor (Montessori, 1967; Nadeem & Shah, 2024).

In the mid-twentieth century, John Dewey and G. Stanley Hall contributed to ECE theory, emphasizing experiential learning and developmental psychology (Hill, as cited in Braun & Edwards, 1972; Kahn & Kamerman, 1987). The twentieth century also saw the professionalization of early childhood education, integration of research into practice, and expansion of publicly funded pre-school programs (Provence, Erikson, Vater, & Eddy, 1977; Khan, Ghazi, & Shah, 2025).Overall, ECE has evolved from informal, religious, and moral instruction toward a holistic, research-based, and child-centered approach that emphasizes socialization, play, cognitive development, and equity in early learning (Rehman et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2023).

Statement of the Problem

Early childhood education (ECE) has historically received limited attention from state authorities in Pakistan, largely due to political instability, inadequate funding, insufficient resource allocation, security concerns, lack of institutional commitment, and the persistence of a colonial-era education system. Social inequalities and class divisions have further contributed to the neglect of ECE, despite the formulation of policies and strategic plans. A key challenge remains the implementation of these policies, which often do not translate into meaningful action at the ground level (Ahmad, 2011).

Since the creation of Pakistan, the overall educational system including early childhood education has remained underdeveloped and requires significant reform. Although Pakistan is a signatory to several international commitments, such as the Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals, limited concrete measures have been undertaken to enhance ECE provision (Ahmad, 2011).

ECE is recognized globally as a critical factor in ensuring successful school readiness, improved academic performance, and long-term educational achievement (Morgan & Murtaza, 2011). In Pakistan, however, its integration into the formal education system remains limited due to multiple challenges. Foremost among these is insufficient financial support, as budgeting for education is often inadequate, opaque, and misaligned with the needs of institutions serving preschool children. Another significant barrier is a general lack of awareness about the importance of early childhood education among policymakers, educators, and parents, particularly in the public sector. As a result, little proactive action has been taken at the governmental level to implement ECE programs systematically.

This study seeks to address this critical gap by analysing the provision of early childhood education in Pakistan, comparing practices in public and private sector schools. In the public sector, ECE typically begins with traditional Kachi or nursery classes (e.g., Nursery, Kachi, Paki), whereas private institutions often start with playgroup programs (e.g., Playgroup, Nursery, Prep). These differences reflect variations in curriculum design, teaching methodology, and assessment techniques. The primary aim of the present research is to conduct a comparative study of early childhood education in terms of curriculum, instructional strategies, and assessment techniques between public and private schools in Dera Ismail Khan. The study investigates how these two sectors approach ECE, highlighting the similarities, differences, and implications for educational policy and practice.

Study Objectives

1. To compare curriculum of early childhood education between public and private sectors.
2. To analyze teaching methodology used for teaching young kids between public and private sectors.
3. To investigate assessment techniques used for the assessment of young kids between government and private sectors schools.

Research Questions

Q. 1: Why the curriculum of ECE is different in public and private sector schools of Dera Ismail Khan?
Q.2: How does the different Teaching Methodology used for ECE in public and private sector schools of Dera Ismail Khan.?
Q.3: How does the different assessment techniques used in public and private sector schools of Dera Ismail Khan?

Research hypotheses

- Ha01: significant difference is found in curriculum used for early childhood education between public and private pre-primary schools.
- Ha02: significant difference is being observed in evaluation/assessment techniques used for early childhood education between public and private pre-primary schools.
- Ha03: significant difference is found in teaching methodologies used by teachers at early childhood level between public and private pre-primary schools.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive, quantitative, and causal-comparative research design. The primary objective was to compare early childhood education in terms of curriculum, teaching methodologies, and assessment techniques between public and private sector schools in District Dera Ismail Khan. The researcher developed the research questions and hypotheses to guide the study. A survey method was employed to collect data from teachers, using a questionnaire as the primary research instrument. The study population consisted of all female teachers teaching in early childhood education in the district. Simple random sampling and stratified sampling techniques were used to select the study sample.

The Dr. John Curry formula was applied to determine the appropriate sample size. The validity and reliability of the questionnaire were rigorously tested prior to data collection. Questionnaires were personally distributed and collected by the researcher to ensure accuracy and completeness. Data were analysed using the latest version of SPSS, and descriptive and inferential statistics, including mean, percentage, and independent sample t-tests, were applied to examine the data. Based on the analysis, the researcher formulated findings, conclusions, and recommendations regarding the comparison of early childhood education practices in public and private sector schools.

Population of the Study

Population of the study is comprised of all public and private primary schools, teachers of district Dera Ismail Khan (Khyberpakhtoon Khwa) Pakistan. Total number of government and private schools of district Dera Ismail Khan are 1173, and 1140, total numbers of government and private schools' teachers are 3924,6840.

Table 1 : Population public and private primary schools along with their teachers and heads of district Dera Ismail Khan, as per EMIS, DEO office, is given below.

Sectors	schools	Teachers	female schools	female teachers
Govt primary schools in DIK.	1173	3924	463	1512
Private primary schools in DIK.	1140	6840	540	3,488
Total	2313	10,764	1003	5000

Table 1: shows total number of school population for this research study is 1003. Out of which total numbers of female public and private primary schools are 463 and 540 respectively. Total number of Government primary schools' teachers are 1512 and total number of private primary schools' teachers are 3,488 so total population of female primary schools' teachers are 5000.

Sampling Technique

Procedure which is adopted to select the unit of sample from given population in a way that represent the overall population is called sampling technique. For this research study multistage sampling technique has been considered suitable which is followed by stratified sampling and then simple random sampling techniques are used.

Step 1. Stratified sampling technique was used to divide whole population public and private primary schools into two strata of public and private sector.
Step 2. In step two simple random sampling technique was used to select female primary schools' teachers from both strata (public and private).
Formula for Sample Selection
Dr. John Curry formula of sample selection

10-100	100%
101-1000	10%
1001-5000	5%
5001-10000	3%
10000+	1%

Sample of the Study

Sample size of this research study is 5000 (1512 government, 3,488 private school teachers) out of which the sample of the government teachers is 89 and number of private school teachers are 203 which is again 5 % according Curry sampling formula.
Table 2: Public and private female teachers sample size according to J.Curry

school	Total	Selected Teacher for sample
Female Teacher government primary schools.	1512	89
Female teacher private primary schools.	3,488	203

Table 2: shows the sample size which are selected from two strata public and private by john curry formula.

Data Collection Tool

The tool which is used to gather the data from specified sample from population is called research instrument or data collection tool. As mentioned above the study is descriptive and survey was viewed suitable questionnaire as selected the most appropriate tool for conducting survey.

Structure of Qestionnaire

Header of the questionnaire contains information about research study along with that Questionnaire was mainly consisted of two parts one contains demographic info e.g., qualification, experience, training and the other contain research question regarding three main variables e.g. curriculum, teaching methodology, and evaluation. And sub variable e.g., English/ Urdu language, Math's, Arts. That questionnaire was designed and composed by researcher with guidance and supervision of supervisor that is made a Likert type scale having 5 options from strongly agree to strongly disagree. For the convenience of participants and to get unbiased results these five options of Likert scale were abbreviated as follows

Table 3: five-point Likert scale

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Un - decided	Agree	Strongly Agree
SDA	SD	U	A	SA

Table 3 : shows codes of five-point Likert scales.

Validity of research instrument

In accordance with research ethics, the research instrument was validated by experts in the relevant field. Validity refers to the extent to which an instrument measures what it is intended to measure (Mohajan, 2018). In this study, content validity was conducted to ensure that the questionnaire adequately captured the concepts and constructs under investigation.

A five-point Likert-type scale was developed and subjected to expert validation. For this purpose, the questionnaire included three response options for each item: accept, reject, or accept with minor modifications. The questionnaire, along with a covering letter, was sent to 25 education experts in a sealed envelope to obtain their feedback. Experts assessed the instrument for consent, language clarity, and content accuracy.

Initially, the researcher drafted a 56-item questionnaire. Based on expert feedback, ambiguous or unclear items were removed, resulting in a refined instrument of 50 items, incorporating minor revisions as suggested by the experts. This finalized questionnaire was used for data collection in the study.

Pilot testing of research instrument

Pilot test makes research instrument more authentic so Before actual distribution of questionnaire to selected sample of the study the research instrument was subjected to pilot test on the representative part of given population which may not affect the original sample of the study. Few difficult items were removed, and minor changes were made.

Table 4: Sample Size and Reply Rate for Pilot-Testing

No of participant	Sent	Returned	Discarded	Used	Response Rate
Teachers	292	274	0	274	93.83%

Table 4: shows Respondent response rate shown in table above. 292 questionnaires were distributed among respondents and 274 questionnaires were collected back by the researcher; so total response rate of pilot test was 93.83%.

Reliability of research instrument

After pilot test to check the consistency, questionnaire was passed through the process of reliability. Reliability of the instrument was checked calculating by Cronbach's Alpha values which is the co-efficient of reliability through latest version of SPSS.

Table 5: Reliability of questionnaire

variables	No of item in each Category	Cronbach's Alpha Value
Curriculum	24	0.935
Teaching methodology	18	0.914
evaluation	08	0.904
Total	50	0.945

STable 5: shows reliability statistics of the questionnaire. Overall reliability of all fifty items of the questionnaire was calculated as 0.945.

Data analysis and interpretation

Collected Data was tabulated and analyzed with the help of statistical package of social sciences (SPSS). As the study is descriptive in nature so the mean, standard deviation, and percentage was applied and at the same time study was involved with testing of hypothesis so inferential statistics and descriptive statistics given below

- Independent sample t-test for research variables were used for statistical analysis of hypothesis.
- Mean scores formula was used $X = \Sigma x/n$
- P-value was also used along with t-test to test the hypothesis.

The P-value is defined as the probability under the assumption of no effect or no difference (null hypothesis), of obtaining a result equal to or more extreme than what was actually observed. The P stands for probability and measures how likely it is that any observed difference between groups is due to chance. Being a probability, P can take any value between 0 and 1 (Connelly, 2008). Values close to 0 indicate that the observed difference is unlikely to be due to chance, whereas a P value close to 1 suggests no difference between the groups other than due to chance.

Interpretation of P-value

- P-value less than 0.05 Strong evidence against null hypothesis
- P-value equal to 0.05 Rejection of null hypothesis
- P-value greater than 0.05 Weak evidence against null hypothesis

Descriptive and inferential statistics

Variable	Sector	N	Mean	SD	t-value	df	p-value
Curriculum - Mathematics	Public	140	4.283	0.308	-3.840	272	0.000
	Private	134	4.492	0.374			
Curriculum - Language	Public	140	3.611	0.667	-7.674	272	0.000
	Private	134	4.250	0.635			
Curriculum - Arts	Public	140	3.823	0.655	-8.972	272	0.000
	Private	134	4.466	0.501			
Teaching Methodology	Public	140	3.923	0.504	-10.132	272	0.000

Variable	Sector	N	Mean	SD	t-value	df	p-value
	Private	134	4.559	0.479			
Evaluation Techniques	Public	140	2.873	0.892	-8.412	272	0.000
	Private	134	3.671	0.892	-8.412	272	0.000

FINDINGS

1. Curriculum differences were significant: Private schools reported higher means in mathematics, language and arts curricula than public schools, and all relevant null hypotheses were rejected (e.g., $t = –5.056, –11.020, –12.453$, $p < .05$ for mathematics, language, arts respectively).
2. Teaching methodology also differed significantly: Private-sector teachers reported more use of activity-based, child-centred methods, modern AV aids, and better classroom management, whereas public-sector teaching tended to use traditional lecture methods and had weaker individualisation. The t-value ($–16.304$, $p < .05$) indicates a strong difference.
3. Evaluation/assessment techniques likewise showed significant variation: Private schools used more frequent assessment, portfolios, behavior and manners in report cards, and regular parent-teacher meetings; public schools relied more on annual or monthly test systems with limited portfolios or PTMs. Hypothesis 3 was therefore accepted.
4. In summary, the study concludes that private-sector schools in District Dera Ismail Khan currently offer a higher-quality ECE provision than public-sector schools across all measured domains.
5.

Summary of Findings

Private sector teachers consistently reported higher mean scores across curriculum (mathematics, language, arts), teaching methodology, and evaluation techniques compared to public sector teachers. Independent sample t-tests indicate significant differences in all variables ($p < 0.05$), suggesting that private sector schools provide a higher quality of early childhood education than public sector schools in District Dera Ismail Khan. The findings highlight areas of strength in private sector schools, including more effective teaching methods, comprehensive curriculum implementation, and robust evaluation techniques.

DISCUSSIONS

This descriptive causal-comparative study used a survey design to compare early childhood education (ECE) across public and private sector schools in District Dera Ismail Khan. The objectives included comparing curricula, teaching methodologies, and evaluation techniques (Objectives 1-3.

The findings align with prior research in Pakistan which shows wide quality gaps between public and private ECE provision. For example, one study in Sindh found that public-sector ECE classes were often held in primary schools with inadequate facilities, untrained teachers and poor physical environments (Chachar & Almani, 2022).

Similarly, national reviews indicate significant challenges in implementing uniform ece policy and adequate training for teachers (unicef & pakistan govt., 2024; malik & asghar, 2020). the fact that curriculum, teaching methods and assessments all differ suggests systemic issues: in public schools the lack of resource allocation, teacher training, and implementation fidelity undermine ece quality. in contrast, private schools with more autonomy, higher resources and more investment in training are better

positioned to adopt developmentally appropriate practices (bredekamp, 1997; unicef & pakistan govt., 2024).

Practical Implications

- Policymakers must prioritise uniform curriculum implementation, with clarity and support across both sectors.
- Teacher professional development is critical: Public-sector teachers need structured training in child-centred pedagogy, assessment for learning and early childhood development principles.
- Schools should adopt assessment practices suitable for early learners ongoing, portfolio-based, including socio-emotional and behaviour domains rather than heavy reliance on paper-pen tests.
- Resource equity is essential: Play-based materials, AV aids, classroom environments and qualified staff matter a great deal in determining quality of ECE (Wasi et al., 2018).
- Monitoring and accountability mechanisms should ensure that ECE programmes are implemented as intended—not simply existing in policy.

Contributions of the Study

This study makes several noteworthy contributions:

- It offers a comparative empirical analysis of public vs private ECE provision in a specific Pakistani district, focusing on curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.
- It extends the literature by including teacher-perspective moderating variables (qualification, experience, training) and demonstrating their influence on perceptions of ECE quality.
- It provides actionable insights for stakeholders (school administrators, policymakers, teacher-training bodies) regarding how to strengthen ECE in both sectors.

LIMITATIONS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Although rigorous, the study has limitations: It relies on self-reported teacher perceptions rather than classroom observations or child-outcome measures. Future research could incorporate mixed-methods, direct classroom observation and student achievement data to deepen understanding. Moreover, longitudinal studies would help assess how enhancements in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment translate into improved child outcomes over time.In addition, the focus on a single district limits generalisability; broader multi-provincial studies would better capture context variance. Nevertheless, the findings offer a strong case for prioritising ECE reform across Pakistan.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study concluded that Early Childhood Education (ECE) remains one of the most neglected areas in Pakistan's education system. Although national and provincial policies recognize its importance, the practical implementation, resource allocation, and teacher preparedness are insufficient. The comparative analysis of ECE in public and private sector schools of District Dera Ismail Khan revealed significant differences in curriculum, teaching methodology, and evaluation practices.

The private sector demonstrates comparatively higher quality in all three domains. Its curriculum is activity-based, child-centered, and aligned with modern educational approaches, emphasizing English and Urdu as the medium of instruction. Private school teachers are generally more qualified, trained, and equipped with modern teaching aids. They use play-way and experiential learning approaches that foster

creativity, communication, and manners among children. Continuous assessment through portfolios, progress reports, and parent–teacher meetings enhance the learning process.

In contrast, public sector ECE largely follows a traditional, lecture-based approach with limited use of learning materials and outdated assessment methods. Teachers often rely on rote learning, have limited exposure to new pedagogies, and face shortages of resources and training opportunities. However, public-sector teachers tend to have more teaching experience, which positively influences classroom management and subject knowledge, though not always pedagogical innovation.

Overall, the study concludes that private sector schools are providing better-quality ECE than government schools, primarily due to greater teacher training, resource availability, and pedagogical innovation. There is an urgent need for national-level reforms, improved teacher training, resource allocation, and uniform implementation of the ECE curriculum to ensure equitable early childhood education across Pakistan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed to improve ECE in Pakistan:

1. **Prioritize ECE in national education policy:**
    - ECE should be treated as a foundational stage of education rather than an optional program.
    - A separate budget and section for ECE should be included in education policies and plans.
2. **Ensure effective implementation of the National ECE Curriculum (2017):**
    - Conduct teacher and headteacher awareness workshops at provincial and district levels.
    - Provide necessary learning materials and monitoring systems for curriculum execution.
3. **Develop a uniform, innovative curriculum:**
    - Organize a national conference involving educationists, policymakers, and private-sector stakeholders to develop a unified, modern ECE curriculum that meets international standards.
4. **Strengthen teacher training and qualifications:**
    - Make ECE or Montessori diploma mandatory for early childhood teachers.
    - Introduce **Master's programs in ECE** at universities and offer in-service professional development.
    - Provide incentives such as salary upgrades or bonuses to teachers holding ECE qualifications.
5. **Promote play-based and child-centered learning:**
    - Replace rote learning with activity-based teaching strategies emphasizing holistic child development.
    - Equip classrooms with modern AV aids and age-appropriate learning materials.
6. **Improve assessment and evaluation practices:**
    - Adopt continuous, formative evaluation through portfolios, progress reports, and observation checklists.
    - Conduct regular **Parent–Teacher Meetings (PTMs)** to communicate children's progress.

7. **Enhance language and communication skills:**
    - Train teachers in English communication and interactive classroom language.
    - Encourage bilingual instruction (Urdu and English) for better comprehension and expression.
8. **Provide adequate infrastructure and child-friendly environments:**
    - Establish separate, well-furnished ECE classrooms and activity areas in public schools.
    - Create safe, joyful, and inclusive environments conducive to young children's learning.
9. **Address teacher behavior and well-being:**
    - Offer counselling and behavioural training to teachers.
    - Regularly monitor teacher conduct and ensure a nurturing classroom environment.
10. **Tackle poverty-related barriers:**
    - Introduce **free or subsidized ECE programs** in low-income areas to reduce dropout rates.
    - Collaborate with NGOs and donor agencies for funding and resource support.

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