FACULTY OF EDUCATION
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THE INFLUENCE OF PARENTAL PERCEPTION ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CHOICES IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

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Keywords:	Decision making, educational choices, early childhood care, early childhood placement, parental perception, early childhood education and quality indicators.

Aim: The purpose of this study was to analyse how parents' decision making process of early childhood education choices in Pakistan is influenced by parental perceptions.

Theory: The theoretical framework used for this study is Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory.

Method: A qualitative design survey together with one to one interview of 8 parents of children aged 3-5 years enrolled in private and public ECE programs was used to answer four research questions on parents' decision making for ECE selection.

Results: The study revealed that Pakistani parents relied on personal priorities such as socio-economic as well as educational backgrounds, traditional views and expectations which influenced their decision-making process. Even though parents considered information from multiple sources they haphazardly ordered quality indicators without regard for the influence of any quality compromising indicator on their child's development.

Foreword

Firstly, I thank Allah Almighty for giving me the strength and opportunity and peace of mind to appear in this Master's program.

Secondly, I would like to thank my supervisor Daniel Bergh senior lecturer in Pedagogical Work at the University of Gothenburg, for his support and diligent guidance in the development of this research. His motivation and encouragement he showed were very important for me to complete this thesis.

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List of Abbreviations

AEPAM   Academy of Educational Planning and Management

CT   Certificate in Teaching

ECCE   Early Childhood Care and Education

ECE   Early Childhood Care

ECCERS-R   Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale-Revised

EFA   Education for All

EST   Ecological System Theory

MDG   Millennium Development Goal

NGOs   Non-Government Organizations

PPTC   Process-Person-Context-Time

PTC   Primary Teaching Certification

UNICEF   United Nations Children's Fund

UNESCO   United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UPE   Universal Primary Education

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This study is carried out in Pakistan which is among those developing countries, where progress in the field of education is quite slow. Ever since its independence from the subcontinent in August 1947, the government of Pakistan is constantly emphasizing its determination to achieve 100% enrollment of school age children at the Primary and Secondary levels. Since the government of Pakistan is committed to the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children strengthening the quality of education has become a concern at all levels including early childhood care and education. In order to transform the vision into action and to meet the national education aims, Pakistan launched a national plan of action for children and a social action program (Mumtaz Ahmad, 2011). The national plan of action (Government of Pakistan, 2017) identified early childhood and education (ECE) as one of the priority areas to be considered. It has been chosen the responsibility for improving the access and retention of young children in early education, and for providing them with opportunities for future success.

In Pakistan mostly early years of learning, i.e. three of five years, are spent at home without planned educational activities and children's abilities are not nurtured in a proper way. However, the constant entry of women into the employment market and the current economic downturn in Pakistan has necessitated the demand for couples to work to fulfill the responsibilities of family. Thus the child needs care and ECE programs are essential for filling this void. Choosing an ECCE program is a critical task (Ceglowski, 2004).

In Pakistan, the selection of a school has always been a difficult as well as a highly important decision for most of the parents. Most of the parents have different backgrounds and educational positions and while staying in their space it is difficult for them to decide which school to be preferred due to the availability of many options and many marketing claims. Pakistani parents are however diversified in terms of their socio-economic as well as educational backgrounds, which influence their decision-making for choosing a pre-school. Some parents may try to make a decision to select a school for their young children based on their own backgrounds as different schools offer different and very attractive choice of opportunities, and available facilities (Mushtaq Ahmad & Ahmad, 2018). For others, the process of decision-making may be restricted by what they simply can afford, given their scarce financial resources. For children of low social economic status especially; high quality care is essential as it has a great impact on children's cognitive, social and emotional development. Studies show that parents' involvement is highly related to children's cognitive development and academic performance (Kreider, 2002). Traditional views and expectations may also play a significant role in such parental choice- and decision-making regarding sending their small children, aged 3 to 5 years to institutionalized settings.

However, the factors that influence the parental decision making process in selecting ECE programs are unknown. Parents should wisely choose an ECE program to enroll their young ones as a deficient program is reported to have a detrimental impact on language, social development and later school performance that is difficult to remedy (Okobah, 2018). Therefore, parents wish to send their young children of age 3-5 to a school that can provide them with better return on their effort. Thus, knowing parents opinions and perceptions regarding ECE placement decision-making is very important as a means to inform policy makers and service providers.

A complete picture of Pakistani ECE system is been illustrated in Figure 1, showing its diversity of arrangements in terms of settings (private home or institution), employed or non-employed personnel as well as its extent (half day, part-time or full day).

Children from age 0-6 years

Home Setting   Center Setting

Own Home

Home of another   Playgroup   Preschool
                         (Half Day)   (Part Day)

Extended   maid
Family
Member   Informal   Family child   Child Care
              Caregiver   care home   (full Day)
              (Neighbors)
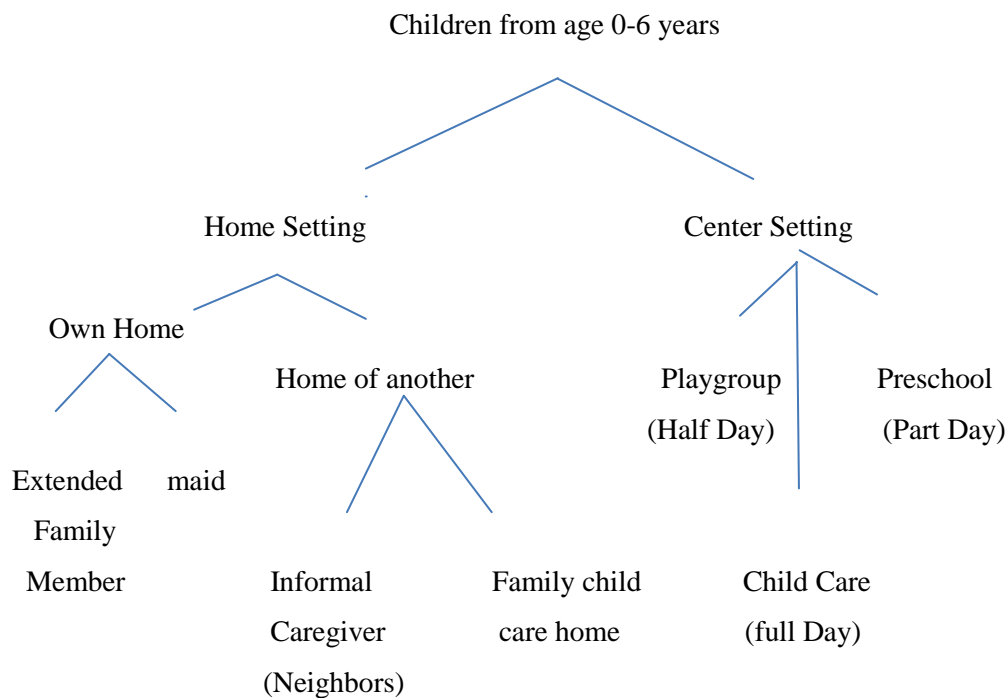
Figure1. Framework of Early Childhood Setting in Pakistan.

Background

For political, social and economic development of any country education lays the foundation. A feasible education system enables the country to attain its state goals. It also plays an important role in the progress of any country around the world. Pakistan as developing country has faced critical problems of education

since its inception and therefore the system of education has failed to deliver according to the aspirations of the nation. Government statistics show that there are 51.53 million children of aged 5-9 years in Pakistan. Among this group on 28.84 million children are attending educational institution (public or private). While 5.06 million primary age children (ages 5-9) are out of school. Research has identified various causes for the state's inability to attain the target of universal enrolment. For example low public investment in education (Munshi & Bhatti, 2009), lack of access, facilities and teachers (ASER, 2017; UNDP-Pakistan, 2016), economic and social standards (Qureshi & Qayyum, 2017), political instability, poor management, supervision and corruption as reasons for unsuccessful policy execution (Majoka & Khan, 2017) are various elements acknowledged by the researchers as the main reason for low enrolment rates in Pakistan.

In the next section, Pakistani ECE policy and action plans will be introduced because Pakistani parents' choice- and decision-making of pre-school enrollment is likely to be informed by the options available. Many researchers identify the important responsibility that strong positive bond between homes and schools, play in the improvement and reforms in education. Thus parental involvement in the education of children begins at home with the parents providing a safe and healthy environment, appropriate learning experiences, support and a positive attitude about school.

 The following sub-section is structured in the following way, first, some short information on the historical development of the national education system in Pakistani will be provided. The historical background is necessary to understand how the three systems of education operate in contemporary Pakistani. The three systems are therefore explained. Then, the main intentions by the Pakistani state will be presented with the help of policy documents, outlining the general aspirations for the state to provide ECE to its all citizens. The rationale for these aspirations, based on international policy documents will be also briefly touched upon, such as policy documents by international organizations such as UNESCO. Some challenges to implementation of national policy on ECE in Pakistan will be dealt with, e.g., the pre-school teacher training. The Background chapter concludes by a presentation of a problem statement, arguing for the significance of the present investigation.

Early Childhood Care and Education

ECCE is a branch of education theory which relates to the teaching of young children. First few years (till age eight years) of a child life are particularly important for the development of all domains such as psycho-social, emotional and physical skills. ECCE benefits children's cognitive development and better social and emotional adaptation. Children do not grow in size, they develop, evolve, mastering ever more complex understandings of the people, objects and challenges in their environment (Mumtaz Ahmad, 2011). "In order for a child to grow and learn in a healthy and normal way, it must meet not only the basic needs of

interaction and encouragement affection safety and learning, but also to come across the basic needs for interaction and encouragement, affection, security and learning through exploration and discovery" (Ertmer & Newby, 2013).

In the view of the World Health Organization (1999), parenting education, skills development and support from parents and families, adequate nutrition and improved health conditions and health education are essential for improving children's life chances. Today, there is a growing awareness that the first years of a child's life are crucial to his/her development and there is substantial proof to the importance of quality education from a young age. Coley et al.(2014) found that factors associated with family needs and resources (parental employment, income, education, and family structure), cultural norms and preferences (race, ethnicity, and immigration status; geographic location; child characteristics; and parental priorities regarding ECE characteristics) and contextual opportunities and constraints (availability of care in the community) were all associated with selection into ECE settings. Many patterns were similar for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, although race/ethnicity, employment, and availability were most strongly linked to ECE type during infancy, whereas parental priorities for features associated with higher-quality care programs predicted ECE most strongly for preschoolers.

ECE as part of Pakistan's Educational System

Early childhood and care education (ECCE) became a hot topic in Pakistan when it was focused by the world as an important Millennium Development Goal (MDG). Until 2000, ECE was sporadic in Pakistan and was primarily provided by the private sector or non-government organizations (NGOs). Pakistan being a signatory to the Education for All (EFA) declaration was committed to ensure ECE by the year 2015. However, the expected benchmarks for 100% admission and Universal Primary Education(UPE) goals have been consistently hampered (Syed, Asif, & Yousaf, 2011).

ECE was officially organized in Pakistan in the 1970s, as *katchi* classes[1] or Pre-Primary level offered from age 3-5 at the public schools and it is totally free of cost. These classes are present in public schools and are very common in the rural and urban areas. In Pakistan many schools are being opened in the name of Montessori, Kindergarten, etc, (no matter the name each serves the same Pakistani children schools try to prepare young children for their transition into primary school) without understanding their true spirit. It has added to the problems. There are however some preschools, from which one could learn lessons to develop more effective programs. These programs brought out an awakening in the field of ECE. But there is lack of co-ordination and co-operation among these programs, institutions, organizations, public and private

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[1] *"Katchi Class" means"not mature or not enrolled" term used for pre-primary. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), termed katchi or pre-primary, play group, Montessori or kindergarten etc. is defined as both formal and informal as well as public or private education services for children aged 3-5 years.*

providers. Streamlining of ECE is essential for the sake of economy, proper utilization of man power and benefitting the target group of the children in the possible way (Ismail et al. 2019).

Minimal measures have been undertaken for the development of ECE curricula. Neither separate classrooms nor teachers have been provided and there is a bare minimum of other essential facilities. Provinces, districts, communities and schools lack the capacity to plan, implement and monitor ECE programs (Mumtaz Ahmad, 2011). On the other hand private schools have more established system of ECE. Learning level of students who are enrolled in the private schools is higher than the students enrolled in the public sector schools. Overall there is a lack of physical facilities for pre primary children in both sector schools (Nazir & Khurshid, 2014). The minimum age limit for preprimary level (three years) at private schools is three years. Every school has its own syllabus for each class of preprimary level. Each private school has its own fee structure.

The main education systems of Pakistan

The education systems in place in Pakistan are mainly framed within a didactic approach to teaching and learning, which addresses certain areas of education but does not teach the child as a whole (M. A. Khan, 2018). There are mainly three different education systems in place in Pakistan; (1) the national education system for the middle and lower- middle class; (3) the elite private Cambridge system for the upper class; and (4) the Deeni Madaris or religious schools system for the poor families. Below some information about each of the three systems is provided.

National education system

In this system the public and non-elite private schools fall. The medium of instruction in these schools is Urdu and they follow national curriculum of Pakistan.

Public schools

These schools provide free education as they are run by the government. The scope of ECE is very limited and not much matured and fully recognized (Ministry of Education, 2018). According to Malik, Asghar, & Economies (2021), ECE in Pakistani public schools, is not yet a fully mature, developed or completely understood sector of education. In schools run by the government of Pakistan, among teachers the concept and understanding of early childhood care and education is very limited as it has been largely confined to an unofficial class (katchi class) to prepare for school year one (Andrabi, Das, & Khwaja, 2010; Saif, Inam, Abiodullah, & Education, 2020). In public schools there is a shortage of separate allocated ECE rooms, trained teachers, care-giver, ECE kits, learning corners, teacher-made toys, portfolios and furnished playgrounds (Malik et al., 2021). In the public schools, the quality of teaching and learning is not promising due to non-operational textbooks, substandard teacher training programs, overcrowded classrooms, lack of

resources, corruption in the employment and transfer of teachers, the misuse of the limited school budgets and the lack of an effective monitoring system and physical punishment. The government schools have a nominal fee or no fees; but quality education is not available in these schools. The teacher-student ratio up to class 5 is 1:35-40, which is not favorable for teaching quality. According to Nazir & Khurshid (2014), one of the leading cause of lack of awareness about the importance of early childhood education in public schools is the management, and that teachers and even parents do not know about the usefulness of ECE for children.

A country like Pakistan where one-third of people live below the poverty line, this is quite obvious majority do not have access to an expensive ECE program. Both the lack of ECE programs in public schools and the low quality of these programs explain why parents prefer private settings even if free public schools are available. A study was conducted by Ahmed and Sheikh (2014) conducted in rural areas of Punjab, Pakistan, to understand why parents choose to send their children to private schools when free public schools are available. Their finding suggested that Pakistani parents' opinions of school quality and employment opportunities emerge as key factors of private school choice. The finding also added by showing that the socioeconomic status of the family has a significant influence on parents' probability of choosing a private school for their child (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2011).

Non-elite private schools

These schools provide compulsory ECE education to children aged three to six (Coleman, 2010) and are run by individuals, groups, registered societies and political parties. These are better equipped with furniture and other resources but do not address children holistic needs which include physical, social, ethical, cultural, intellectual, emotional, cognitive and moral development and some other key academic skills (Khan, 2018). According to Ismail (2000), ECCE programs in Pakistan are private sector-driven where activity based teaching approach is in action. Nevertheless, in private schools teachers have a clear concept of preschool education to provide an opportunity to express, socialization, knowing own self and develop the ability of problem solving. Though most of the private schools are stated with higher aims and objectives, but in most of the cases teaching the children goes on in traditional manner, i.e. from book to black board. All private schools charge fees making it in-accessible for many children of low income families. In the non-elite private school the teacher child ratio is one teacher over thirty to thirty-five students (1:30-35) that is far too much burden on the teachers.

Cambridge school system: Elite private schools

Elite private schools operates pre-primary schooling in a more systematized way, using the names of various organized programs, such as kindergarten, nursery, infant's education, preschool education and ECCE

(Khan, A. 2018). In elite private schools the teacher child ratio (1:10-12) is very known to be liked by all parents as the teacher can give attention to all students. The International Crisis Group (2014) states that elite private schools teach in English, follow a different curriculum and have a fee structure that is unaffordable to most families.

A survey study conducted in Punjab, the largest province of Pakistan, reported on children's performance at government and private schools (Andrabi et al., 2010). The reported results suggest that children in private schools perform better than children in public schools. This may be due to the reason that in the private sector physical facilities for early childhood education are far better than facilities provided in the public sector schools (Nazir & Khurshid 2014).

In Pakistan; the private sector has emerged as an important provider of education services (Andrabi et al., 2010) because they provide better facilities, better learning outcomes, and high quality English medium education in addition to better care for child welfare. At the primary level, one third of total enrollment is in private schools (Andrabi et al., 2010). According to Nazir and Khurshid (2014), the reason why parents choose private schools to educate their children can be summed up in this single sentence: the government has not increased investment in building new schools, especially in the urban areas, overcrowding existing schools and reducing the quality of education provided in these schools.

Deeni Madaris System

Deeni Madaris provide free religious education, accommodation and food to school students. These schools do not offer early years of education in the way that ECE classes are organized. However, some of these Madaris also have kindergarten classes that offer Islamic and Quranic instruction (Coleman, 2010). Deeni Madaris schools are Pakistan's second largest education providers in terms of numbers and primarily address poor rural families and proletariat (Anjum, 2017).

Quality of Teachers in Pakistan

Teaching in Pakistan is a relatively unattractive career choice, particularly at the pre-primary and primary levels due to low social status of teachers and low salaries (Warwick & Reimers, 1995). Private schools, particularly in urban centers, are the preferred choice of motivated teachers especially women. According to the World Bank report about 72% school teachers were female and 28% were male in 2019, compiled from officially recognized sources.

Pakistani women play an important role in educational provision, particularly as classroom teachers. Three key reasons for the number of women teachers at the pre-primary and primary levels are: 1) their limited

opportunity for receiving higher education training; 2) relatively safe women dominated work environments; and 3) perceptions of this work being acceptable for women (Pardhan, 2009). According to Pakistan's Ministry of Education, 87% of teachers in the state sector are officially considered to be 'qualified' (HDSA, 2000), but, many practicing teachers considered being 'qualified' according to the Ministry of Education, have limited understanding of both subject content and pedagogy (Pardhan, 2009). Due to the existing professional development opportunities including the primary teaching certification (PTC) and the certificate in teaching course (CT) within the public system being of poor quality (Warwick & Reimers, 1995). While public sector teachers are required to hold a PTC or a CT course, this is not a pre-requisite for private sector teachers, especially those at the preprimary and primary levels. As a result, it is evident: Pakistani teachers are rarely consulted in issues of policy and educational reforms. Furthermore they remain under-represented in educational leadership and management and in positions of educational planning and policy-making. Globally research has shown that there is an increase in the demand of pre-primary education. In public sector there are limited resources and the issue of ghost-teachers benefitting from the government payroll is a telltale sign that the country has a long road ahead to making education available to all children out-of-school.

Policy Framework of ECE in Pakistan

The National Educational Policy of 1998-2010, was the first official document that visualized institutionalizing and integrating "*Katchi* Class" (aged 3-5 years) means "not mature or not enrolled" term used for pre-primary. Early Childhood Education, termed *katchi* or pre-primary, play group, Montessori or kindergarten etc. is defined as both formal and informal as well as public or private education services for children aged 3-5 years. It remained functional since the beginning of the government school system in Pakistan.

ECE was included as one of the three priority areas selected by Pakistan for its 15 years National Plan of Action to achieve EFA goals. The following table presents the brief history of policy provisions regarding ECE 2017):-

Table1. Brief History of Policy Development for ECE in Pakistan

Time line	Historical Progression
1947	Viewing nursery as an integral part of the mainstream education at the Education Conference 1947

1950-1980	*Katchi* classes as a mean to merely familiarize children with school setting; no education policy during the four decades made any reference to ECE.
1992	Education policy proposed to mainstream *Katchi* classes.
1998	National Education policy recognized the need for ECE.
2001-2005	EFA National Action Plan (2001-2015) proposed a complete plan. Main stream early childhood education into a formal education system by raising awareness, advocacy group, allocation of funds, promotion of private sector etc.
2002	National ECE Curriculum was developed. This document provides policy and curricular guidelines pertaining to ECE in Pakistan.
2001-2004	In the Education Sector Reform-Action Plan, ECE was taken up as an Innovation Program implemented across Pakistan with federal funds.
2009	National Education Policy proposes that ECE should become part of mainstream education integrated in all primary schools. The policy also suggested an action plan.

However ECE policy initiatives have ignored the factors that influence parents' decision-making for ECE choices. Is seems essential to discover parents' thinking as they make ECE choices and identify the factors that heretofore have encouraged enrollment into scarce programs.

ECE Action Plan

The 2018 National Education Policy recognizes the importance of ECE, providing at least one year of pre-primary education in all public schools, providing teachers with appropriate professional training and additional budget allocations. The government is creating friendly working environment for the children and efforts are made to reduce drop-out rate in the earlier grades. National Education Policy, 2009 proposed following policy actions regarding Early Childhood Education:

Table 2: Policy Actions regarding Early Childhood Education.

Policy Action- 1	Improvements in quality of ECE shall be based on a concept of holistic development of the child that provides a stimulating, interactive environment, including play, rather than a focus on regimes that require rote learning and rigid achievement standards.
Policy Action- 2	ECE age group shall be recognized as comprising 4 to 5 years. At least one year pre-primary education shall be provided by the State and universal access to ECE shall be ensured within the next ten years.
Policy Action- 3	Provision of ECE shall be attached to primary schools, which shall be provided with additional budget, teachers and assistants for this purpose.
Policy Action- 4	For ECE teachers, a two-year specialized training in dealing with young children shall be a necessary requirement.
Policy Action- 5	This training shall be on the basis of ECE revised National Curriculum. The curriculum and support material for ECE shall take account of the cultural diversity of particular areas.

Research has validated that early childhood is the most significant developmental period in life as it links to various benefits such as language, literacy and mathematics skills development, better attitudes towards school and better relationships with peers.

A study was conducted under AEPAM; to explore the current status of implementation of National Education Policy (2009) regarding ECE in Pakistan indicated several options/ reasons for which parents send their small children to schools. Among the most common reasons following were reported:

a) parents send their small children to schools for playing purpose.

b) parents send their small children for strong educational foundation.

c) small children are sent to schools for their holistic development.

d) some parents sent their small children, because of non-availability of any person at home to look after the children, therefore some children are entered in school at an early age of three years (N. Khan et al., 2017).

International policy documents

At the current time, the government of Pakistan is committed to The Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2013), the first goal of which is to expand and improve comprehensive ECCE for all children, especially those who are regarded as the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. Empirical findings from a variety of disciplines have demonstrated that it is during early care (3 to 5 years) that a child develops all the key elements of emotional intelligence, namely confidence, curiosity, purposefulness, self-control, connectedness, capacity to communicate and cooperate (Shami, Ahmad, & Khyizer, 2014). According to UNESCO and UNICEF (2012), because of the speedy neural connections, mind improvement and increase in this age is taken into consideration a vital window of opportunity for optimizing children's development all the way through the combined impact of education, care, health nutrition, protection and stimulation. In short ECCE make quick transformation in cognitive, emotional, social and bodily improvement of the children (Shami, Ahmed & Khyizer, 2014). Therefore the early years of a child's life are the prime time for parents, teachers and administrators to provide positive experiences that will affect the rest of child's life.

The research problem and its relevance

Since parents are known to be the key stakeholders in ECCE placement decisions, it is necessary to understand their decision-making processes in designing programs to promote more equitable access for children to high quality ECCE services (Forry, Simkin, Wheeler, & Bock, 2013). The enrollment rate in ECE programs is rising due to the awareness among the parents about the importance of early childhood education and its long-term positive effects. Unfortunately, the early childhood education programs in Pakistan, look after the children's academic needs and over looks their health and psychological development (M. A. Khan, 2018) creating a gap in the quality of education. Pakistan being a participant to Education for All (EFA) goals was thought to increase and improve "widespread early childhood care and education by 2015 which could not be achieved yet. As Federal government minimum standards established in 2017 regarding rooms" dimensions, caregiver-child ratio, and use of government approved curriculum, and basic qualifications for teachers are absent in many ECCE programs (M. A. Khan, 2018, p.314).

Even though several authors have claimed that research is needed to investigate how age appropriate methods, materials, activities and other factors such as class size and teacher qualifications are weighted and prioritized by parents in the decision-making process for ECCE choices, there is yet a lack of knowledge (Coley, Votruba-Drzal, Collins, & Miller, 2014). Little information exists on the factors that influence parents' ECCE decision-making processes. The apparent lack of knowledge concerning the factors that influence parents' decision-making processes for ECE choices is the problem that shapes this study. Since parents are the key stakeholders in ECE placement decisions, greater understanding of their decision-making processes is necessary in designing programs to promote equitable access for children to high quality ECCE services (Forry et al. 2014; Vesley, 2013).

The purpose of this study (research aim)

This study is important because it focuses on parental choice and decision-making processes regarding the enrollment of their children in ECE. Especially, when the role is related to choosing a placement things are getting more challenging and heavier responsibility creates on the shoulders of the parents. As a researcher investigating parents' experiences and identifying the challenges they confronted during the phase of decision-making is a necessity because once the challenge of placement was detected precisely, it is easier to address with those demanding situations by finding ways of managing those challenges. In addition, this study may bridge the gap in the literature regarding parental decision-making processes of early childhood care and educational choices. Research on parent selection of childcare has revealed the choices that parents make and factors that influence parents, but less is known about the parents' decision-making process. This study will investigate challenges associated with the nature of family priorities and considerations in making ECE placement decisions. Furthermore, this study aims to shed light on parents' views of coping with the challenges related to the social changes by generating information that is essential to early childhood educational policy makers in Pakistan.

Key research questions

The preceding four research questions will guide the study:

RQ1: How do parents source information to guide their decision making regarding early childhood education placement for their child?

RQ2: How do parents use quality indicators in deciding on an early childhood education placement for their child?

RQ3: How do parents weight different options in making a placement decision with regards to their child?

RQ4: How do parents describe the task of making a decision about an early childhood education placement for their child?

The conceptual framework

This study is conducted by the theoretical framework of ecological systems theory developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979). In this study, focus was to explore the perception of parents as they construct knowledge to make decisions with regards to early childhood care and education choices and how their understanding of personal characteristics, experiences, structural factors and the physical environment influences these choices. The study therefore adopted the ecological systems epistemology. The theory states that individuals do not live in isolation, but are influenced by complex interconnected systems. Bronfenbrenner (1979, p. 3), conceives the ecological development as a set of nested structure, each inside the next.

Research Method

The current study used convenience sampling technique to select 8 participants of different socio-economic background from urban area of Lahore, Pakistan to be the study participants whose children are between 3 and 4 years in age. Qualitative approach was adopted for answering the research questions for this study. Qualitative methods are engaged to address people's experiences, understand various perspectives of individuals regarding a concept or phenomenon and the impact of experiences on people's needs and actions (Patton, 2015).

In this study, to obtain the depth of parent's decision-making processes regarding early childhood educational choices semi-structured interviews were engaged for data collection to allow the participants to express their views using words and expressions. In other words, participants were allowed to tell their stories, thus giving the researcher a better insight into parental actions and final decisions regarding early childhood education choices. The interview session collected data using the standardize questions as well as asking probing questions as follow up on new key factors that emerged at the time of the interview. The data collection session was audio recorded since the exact statements of the interviewee were the target of the qualitative researcher (Patton, 2015). The data collection session was conducted in Urdu language and later translated into English. Nevertheless, the participants were asked to feel free and reveal any information he or she considered necessary for the researcher to know which may have been

omitted. Researcher also informed the participants that they will be given an opportunity to review the transcript to confirm its accuracy.

Limitations

All research methodology highlights that to having limitations on any real-world research due to inadequate variable measurements, lack of participants, small sample sizes and other factors are commonly associated with data collection and analysis (I.W. Creswell, 2019).

A shortcoming of the study is its small sample size that potentially may make the results less representative for the whole population. Another limitation was not getting a chance to collect data from the public school parents due to the pandemic of Covid-19.The strict lockdown made it hard to conduct interviews physically in schools with many participants. This left the researcher with no choice other than to apply convenient sampling. The pandemic created difficulties in reaching people from a variety of socio-economic background. These limitations do not allow for generalizations, but it gives the clues that lead to findings that may give rise to further investigation.

Another reason for not representing other background sample in the study was because of the non-co-operative attitude of the principals of one of the schools I visited very early of my study. Time is also considered as a shortcoming here. The study also suffered from self-report exaggerated answers of the participants being less talkative and not revealing the details required (Polkinghome, 2005). The study is also limited by lack of sufficient local literature and this forced the researcher to use literature from outside Pakistan.

Research ethics

In conducting the qualitative study, some ethical issues may emerge about the treatment of the human objects. Consequently, a consent form was sent to the participants ahead of the interview for them to read and understand what the interview session would be about. The consent form contained details of the study such as voluntary participation and the liberty to discontinue from the study at any point. Also, all identifications associated with the participants were confidentially handled and referred to in the report with pseudonyms. Researcher invited questions from the participants on any aspect of the study they needed to clarify as well as informed them that signing the consent form is an indication of their agreement to participate in the study.

Structure of the study

In the first chapter I will present the introduction and the background of the study. The second chapter contains the theoretical framework and will focus on literature review on previous approaches in the discipline to this problem. The third chapter presents the methodology used for conducting this study. Also the research tools are described in the chapters that were used to collect data and analyze the data. The research questions of the study are given there too. There will also be a part on validity, ethics and trustworthiness.

The fourth chapter contains data analysis of the interviews and questionnaires. The findings of the research are presented in this chapter. The fifth chapter contains the discussion and interpretation of the research findings. The sixth chapter will present the conclusions of the study. At the end of the study, the bibliographical references and the appendices with the interview guide and questionnaire used are listed.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

This chapter explains the theoretical framework upon which the study is based. According to Hayes et al (2017) there is an increasing emphasis on the part of parents in children's ECE and the importance parent engagement in preschool may have on children's development. This study is guided by the theoretical framework of the Bronfenberner's Ecological System Theory (EST,) developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979), it has been updated a number of times since its original (1979) exposition (Rosa, Tudge, & Review, 2013); using the latter version including the Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model developed by (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998; 2006); which illustrates the study's scope and direction. The theory recognizes that individuals do not live in isolation but are influenced by the immediate and broader environment in time and space.

Research focus

In this study, focus is on how parents' individually construct meaning of quality in early childhood education programs and how their understanding of personal characteristics, experiences and the environment influences their early childhood educational choices. According to Yngvesson (2019, p.1732); "parent's engagement in preschool is considered important for reasons such as promoting child well-being and development, as well as socialization and learning". Applying the theoretical framework of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) EST to their study Yngvesson, Garvis and Care (2019, p.1734) noted; "the more encouraging and nurturing these relationships and places are, the better the child will be able to develop healthily". This involves looking at how parents' choose a pre-school, as well as source information ahead of their decision, how they judge the quality of a pre-school and how this information is weighed in making enrollment choices for their children.

Following is a brief introduction of the Bio-ecological Model describing that changes in one system or environment will cause a ripple effect in the other systems as the systems are all interdependent.

Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Model of Human Development:

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), no human lives in an isolated vacuum. It is impossible to understand a human's development if we do not consider its social context. Bronfenbrenner; presented an ecological model of child development, which allows consideration of a human's world on a number of levels, each which are considered imperative in understanding the wholeness of a child's development (Yngvesson, 2019). This model, to incorporate biological components and temporal concerns, is now

referred to as the 'Bio-ecological Model of Human Development' rather than the traditional 'ecological model'.

The concept of development, as defined by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998), refers to "stability and change in the bio-psychological characteristics of human beings over the life-course and across generations. The Bio-ecological Model operates through a multilayered approach, at the center of which is the developing person, as an active agent in his or her own world (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). This study will apply the original model of EST, adding the PPTC model for dynamics. Where the ecological development 'is conceived as a set of nested structure, each inside the next, like Russian dolls' (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 3) and that 'the innermost level is the immediate setting containing the developing person. And the PPCT model advocating that in order to study a developing person's understanding and experience of a phenomenon, we must include a larger scope of the person's life.

The 'micro-system'

According to Bronfenbrenner, (1994, p.1645) the Bio-ecological Model describes the micro-system as: A pattern of activities, social roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical, social, and symbolic features that invite, permit or inhibit engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interaction with, and activity in, the immediate environment.

Parents' micro-systems include children, spouses, siblings, grandparents, co-workers and friends that they interact with throughout the day. Therefore, parents' choice of early childhood education might be affected by their family, socio-economic status, peer group and work place; the more encouraging and nurturing these relationships and places are, the better the person will have a healthy cognitive development (Bronfenbrenner,1979; and Morris, 2006). Positive parental involvement is identified as a significant factor influencing both academic and social development and outcomes for young children. According to Yngvesson (2019), critical factors affecting children's educational outcomes include families' socio-economic and cultural status, parental involvement in their child's education and the type of expectations that family have.

The 'meso-system'

Applying Bronfenbrenner (1979, p. 25), EST to the early years, the meso-system is described as the level taking account of interconnections and relations between two or more settings, such as school, peer group

and family, and acknowledging their impact on the individual. According to Hayes (2017) in early education, this would include the relationship between family members and early year's practitioners. In a context of this study the meso-system is particularly important in determining parents' satisfaction with quality in early childhood education; whereby parents' view and thoughts may be influenced by interaction with different settings such as home, school environment and work place making visible the linkages between the micro-system and meso-system. According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2016), the bio ecological system model ascertains that a person's lives develop through a web of mutual relationship, providing a comprehensive conceptual lens through which the relationship between parent engagement, home and preschool and its great significance on the child's healthy cognitive development and self-concept can be explored. Preschool and parental engagement in preschool is highlighted as important in (T. Yngvesson, Garvis, & Care, 2019) research for reasons such as promoting a healthy development of the child, as well as socialization and learning through play.

The 'exo-system'

The exo-system comprises the links and processes taking place between two or more settings, at least one of which does not contain the developing person, but in which events occur that indirectly influence processes within the immediate setting in which the developing person lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 24).

The support networks developed and the decisions made both form the integral parts of the exo-system, including other people and places that the parent themselves may not often interact with. Thus an exo-system refers to settings that do not involve the parents as an active agent, but in which events take place that 'effect or are affected by what happens in the setting containing the developing person' (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 27). This includes areas such as a parent's workplace, the curriculum for ECE, ECE policies, parent-teacher meetings, school-community links, etc. For example parents' perceptions may be influenced by their experience, support from administration, as well as the neighborhood where the home is located.

The 'macro-system'

The 'macro-system' consists of the wider pattern of ideology, ethnicity, traditions, religion common to a particular social class or culture to which a person belongs, such as patterns of racism, cultural norms, etc. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This system consists of the very overarching pattern of the other systems; the micro, meso and exo-system specific characteristics of any given culture, subculture or other social contexts.

Perhaps, the most important complexity to bear in mind when considering the macro-system however is that it can dominate the child's experiences and influences as this stems from the distinct factors such as family customs, culture and lifestyle (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The macro-system level is likely to influence how parents perceive religious education at the pre-school level.

The 'chrono-system'

The most recent addition to the model is the 'chrono-system'. This refers to the patterning of ecological procedures and transitions over the life-course of the person (Bronfenbrenner 1995; Bronfenbrenner and Morris 1998; 2006).

 In effect, this recognizes that experiences and reactions to experience often change over time. For example, women are more likely to be encouraged to have a career now than they were fifty years ago, and so this would shape the ambitions of individual women (Santrock, 2011), showing that "the life course of individuals is embedded in and shaped by the historical times and events they experience over their life-time" (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998, p.1020). The levels of nested systems can also be graphically represented and explained as following:-

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                        MACROSYSTEM                            │
│  ┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐ │
│  │                      EXOSYSTEM                            │ │
│  │  ┌────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐  │ │
│  │  │                   MESOSYSTEM                         │  │ │
│  │  │  ┌──────────┐    ┌──────────┐    ┌──────────────┐   │  │ │
│  │  │  │  MICRO   │    │  MICRO   │    │   MICRO       │   │  │ │
│  │  │  │  SYSTEM  │────│  SYSTEM  │────│   SYSTEM      │   │  │ │
│  │  │  │ e.g.     │    │ e.g.     │    │ e.g.workplace │   │  │ │
│  │  │  │ family   │    │ school   │    │               │   │  │ │
│  │  │  └──────────┘    └──────────┘    └──────────────┘   │  │ │
│  │  │    i.e. Interconnections between microsystem         │  │ │
│  │  └────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘  │ │
│  │               e.g. Local community                        │ │
│  └─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘ │
│               e.g. Broader socio-cultural context            │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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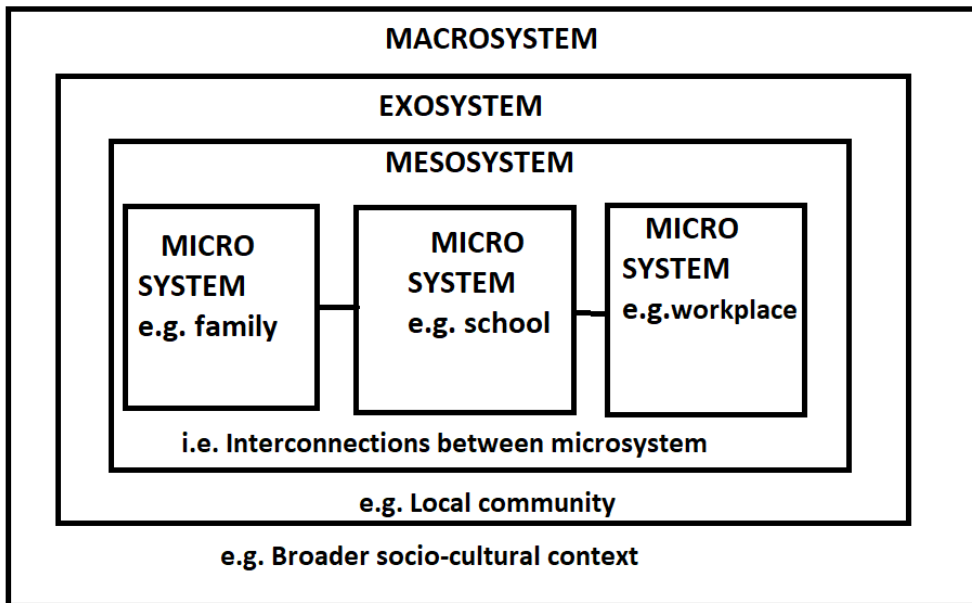
Figure 2. *Diagrammatic representation of Bronfenbrenner's theory of the ecology of human development.*

Process, Person, Context, Time (PPCT) Model.

According to Tudge et al. (2009), the Bio-ecological Model was in a continual state of development, up until Bronfenbrenner's death in 2005. The most complete version was published by Bronfenbrenner and Morris posthumously in 2006; it synthesized the levels of human, micro-system, meso-system, exo-system, macro-system and chrono-systems as well as the fluid interactions between them, into four key elements to be used both in understanding human development, and in structuring research on it: Process, Person, Context, Time model (PPCT). According to Bronfenbrenner, (1995, p. 620), human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving bio psychological human organism and the persons, objects and symbols in its immediate environment. Therefore when seeking to gain understanding about a developing person, he/she must be studied in a multiple environment context.

In this study by applying the Process – Person – Context – Time model (PPTC) enables to place a greater emphasis on the parents as an active agent (the biological person) and from that lens explore the interconnect (friends/ family, school and teachers) in order to, better understand what parents decision making process means.

The PPCT model builds upon four concepts. Below follows a figure making visible the main interactions between the model's concepts. See figure 3.
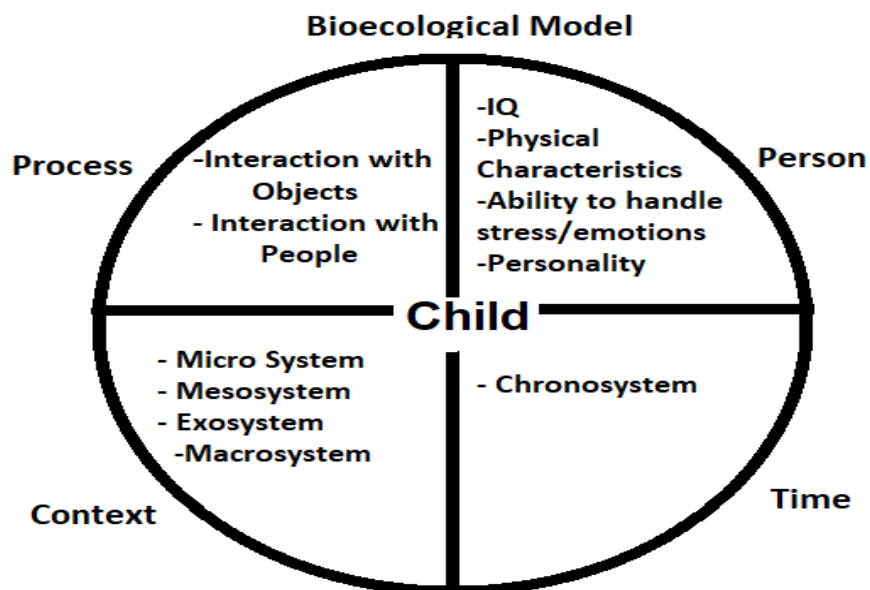

Figure: 3; Process, Person, Context and Time make up the Bioecological Model.

Source: Bioecological Model: Theory & Approach, (2016, p. 1)

Proximal processes

Bronfenbrenner described the transition from ecological to bioecological models and emphasized the role that human play in their development by means of a mechanism termed proximal processes. Proximal processes are the center of bio ecological theory and are viewed as the driving forces of human development (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). In Plomin and McClern's *Nature, nurture, and psychology*, Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1993) offer two propositions which describe proximal processes and the manner in which they operate:

Proposition 1: "Human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving bio psychological human organism and the persons, objects and symbols in its immediate environment" (Bronfenbrenner, 1995, p. 620). These interactions must occur regularly over time in order to be effective.

Proposition 2: "The form, power and direction of 'proximal processes' affecting human development may vary as a joint function of the bio psychological characteristics of the developing person, of the environment, both immediate and remote in which the processes are taking place, and the nature of the developmental outcomes under consideration".

Developmentally effective 'proximal processes', are not unidirectional. Proximal processes involve not only relationships among people but also relations between people and the objects and symbols with which they come into contact. In the case of interpersonal interaction, this means that initiatives should not come from just one side, but there should be 'reciprocity of exchange' (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998; 2006).

Person

Regarding 'person' factors, the individual is not viewed as a passive recipient of experiences within settings and 'processes'. In the Bio ecological Model, the person is seen as someone who helps construct settings through the actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstances. In this way, the biological component enters the model. The bio-psychological characteristics of the individual influence both sides of the equation; they are at once the product of prior developmental processes, and the partial producers of the person's future developmental course (Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998; 2006). Thus, the characteristics of the 'person' actually appear twice in the Bio-ecological Model - first as one of the components influencing the form, power, content and direction of 'proximal processes', and then again as 'developmental outcomes'. These 'person' characteristics are also included in the definition of the micro-system, in the characteristics of parents, relatives, close friends, teachers, or any others who participate in the life of the developing person on a regular basis over time (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998; 2006).

Context

With reference to 'context', the Bio-ecological Model rests on the assumption that biological factors and evolutionary processes do more than simply set limits on human development. They also impose rules regarding the environmental conditions necessary for a person to achieve their full potential (Bronfenbrenner and Ceci, 1993; 1994). This provides the necessity to investigate which environmental conditions are supportive to human. Later versions of the Bio-ecological Model place much stronger emphasis on other aspects, in particular 'process' (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006), it is perhaps the identification of the importance of 'context' for which it is best known, through its concepts of the micro-, meso-, exo- and macro-systems (Downes, 2014).

Time

Regarding the 'time' element of the model, Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) indicate that the form, content and direction of 'proximal processes' are strongly influenced by the "social continuities and changes occurring over time through the life course and the historical period during which the person has lived" (p. 798). This dimension has a prominent place at a number of levels. According to Tudge et al., (2009), 'times' can be summarized as follows: Micro-time refers to continuity versus discontinuity of relationships within the micro-system. Meso-time is the periodicity of these episodes across broader time intervals, such as days and weeks. Macro-time focuses on the changing expectations and events in the larger society, both within and across generations, as they affect and are affected by processes and outcomes of human development, over the life course (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 1998; 2006; (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, Karnik, & review, 2009)). The effects of certain experiences can also accumulate over time, and changes in results may be very small at first and not statistically significant, but yet predict large changes over the next few years to come (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006).

Looking at each of the elements of 'process', 'person', 'context' and 'time' as a system means recognizing that no part in the system moves in isolation and that actions in any one part of the system affect all the other parts. This yields an impressively fluid, dynamic model built on "bidirectional, synergistic interrelationships" (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006, p. 799) that allows us to begin to unravel the complexity that is human development.

In this chapter we have seen that the theoretical framework of the Bronfenbrenner Ecological System's Theory (EST) and the more updated dynamic bio ecological model highlights the importance of understanding a person's development within environment systems. Furthermore it explains that both the person and the environment affect one another directionally. In the following chapter we will look at previous investigations and research into the same phenomena. A literature review follows, highlighting discourses as well as surfacing the gap, in the existing literature.

Application of theory to the study

This adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's model helps to see the complexity of the parents-as-person, challenges faced by them and the skills that are required of them to fulfill their decision making process of an ECE placement. The particular way that distinguishes Bronfenbrenner model from other theories of learning is parental involvement. Parental involvement and parental collaboration are important aspects of this theory of learning and are necessary elements depending on the achievement of new skills in children. Parental involvement in the act of choosing an early childhood education program for their children is vital.

In this model, a five-system approach is used to describe human development (Brofenbrenner, 1997). According to Brofenbrenner (1977), the family is one element of both the micro-system and the meso-system – two of the five systems within the ecological model. Two issues that inhibit children's readiness for kindergarten are parenting and the connectedness of the home-school relationship. Both of these factors are essential components in the human ecology model of development. The ecological environment, according to this theory, consists of a set of nested structures, each inside the next. The third level, exo-system refers to one or more settings that affect the person but do not contain the person (e.g., workplace or school, teachers and the local community). The fourth level, the macro-system, refers to values, laws, and customs of the culture that influence all the lower orders (e.g., personal values, beliefs and interactions). The final level, the chrono-system, is the largest of all and encompasses the changes and similarities over the course of time (e.g., change in work and employment structures and curriculum implementation).

Within the ecological theoretical structure, there is interconnectedness both within and between the settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). By integrating the research on parents of young preschool children in to the Bronfenbrenner model, the inner-most circle, the micro-system, represents the parents-as-person with all the subjective characteristics such as perceptions, norms, values, understanding and expectations level of education, communication skills, ways to interact with others knowledge of the child or children that have developed from their experiences including the present challenges of finding a suitable place for enrollment of their young kid. The next circle represents the meso-system where the parents interact with the school teachers or other school staff, linking their past experiences with the new situation. As prior experiences vary from one person to the next person, the skills acquired for each person may be at a different rate, level, or altogether different skills. It refers to the relations between school and home as parents have been visiting different institution enquiring about the physical characteristics to find best fit for their child's ECE. As families vary by culture, parental education level, household size, income, etc. so may their early childhood education program selection factors? While one family selects one early

childhood education program, another family may select a different program for its unique alignment to the family; selection factors are "highly personal". The next circle, exo-system, represents the effect of activities in classroom and influences of the environment, often formulated through the teacher's behavior. The fourth circle, macro-system, refers to societal beliefs that are not easy to change, for instance traditional views on the roles of parents and cares. The final circle, chrono-system, represents the changes takes place in the workplace as an institution, and changing curriculum, goals and intentions.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

Countries like Pakistan where one-third of people live below the poverty line, it is quite obvious, and that majority does not have access to an expensive Early Childhood Education program (AEPAM, 2018). All the same, the current economic downturn in Pakistan has necessitated the demand for couples to work to fulfill the responsibilities of family (Qureshi & Qayyum, 2017). Parents with children of 3 to 4 years old are confronted with challenging decisions associated with enrolling their children in ECE programs including selecting the type of programs to use (Coley et al., 2014). There is an increased financial pressure on parents due to the economic recession experienced in Pakistan for last many years. This has put families under pressure to become dual working households to fulfill their financial obligations to the family. Thus the child needs care and ECE programs are essential for filling this void. Choosing an ECE program is a critical task (Ahn, Shin, & Review, 2013).

ECE programs not only provide important support for child development but also provide support to the working parents. Quality early childhood education is considered a positive start for a child's development, which is not only beneficial to the child but for the society in general (Good Start Early Learning, 2015); as cited by (Okobah, 2018). Therefore the purpose of this study is to understand parent's perception of ECE and how these perceptions influence their decision-making processes for early childhood education choices, including personal characteristics, experiences, structural factors and the physical environment.

Literature Search Strategy

To review primarily the literature and research I have considered and selected the scholarly materials published between the years 2000 and 2018. Search engines were accessed, including the University of Gothenburg Library, Google Scholar. The keywords included parents' perception, decision making, decision process, educational choices, educational selection, educational preferences, early childhood care and placement, ECCE choices and quality indicators of early childhood education.

Selection Process

The review included scholarly literatures covering:

- Academic journal articles,

- Academic books and their chapters,

- Formal academic reports,

- ProQuest Master and doctoral dissertations

Articles that have been considered for full-text review were included due to the following criteria like (1) the clear objective of the research, (2) the findings of the research, (3) validation of the data, (4) use of research methodology, (5) presentation of the result.

An important note to mention here is that due to the gap in literature in Pakistani ECE context this review consists of articles from international researchers.

Parental Perception of ECE Quality

The process through which individuals receive and process information from their surroundings is known as perception. Therefore, through perception information about the environment and the stimuli that influence actions are processed. Emlen, Koren, and Schultze (1999) suggest that flexibility is the major factor in parental selection and definition of quality child care. Canada and Bland (2014) identified seven major critical characteristics of a high-quality ECCE program or school, these in order of priority included:

(a) the quality of teachers,

 (b) continuity of teachers,

(c) a multicultural environment,

(d) physical characteristics of the ECCE facility,

(e) enriched curricula,

(f) support for parental engagement and involvement and

(g) safety and security within the ECCE facility. Ceglowski (2004) found that parents associated a "quality ECCE program" with culturally and community sensitivity, parent-friendly and parent-supportive learning environments. Program administrators tend to focus on quantitatively measured quality factors such as: child-teacher ratio; teacher retention rates; accreditation of the facility; teacher pre-service education; learning activities; and environmental factors like safety, space and cleanliness (Ceglowski, 2004). Definition of quality may be narrow or broader, depending on the groups identified. Children, parents, families, employers, providers and society all have different requirements and principles and will describe quality differently.

Parents' classifications of quality ECCE programs vary; parents tend to overvalue the standards of ECCE programs, associated with the appraisals of ECCE professionals (Forry et al., 2013). However, the difference in evaluation of ECCE programs by parents and professionals has been attributed to parents; expectations of the way parents believe care and education should be provided to their children (Little & Eager, 2010). Parents' perception of high-quality ECCE programs reveals together cultural and socio-economic variances (Ansari, 2017). Nevertheless, what happens inside the ECCE classroom is essential in

determining a high quality program. For that reason, the quality of an early childhood program is reliant on three key aspects: interpersonal experiences, physical surroundings and reliability of program support (Yoshikawa et al., 2013). These three factors are important for ensuring quality.

A study conducted by Forry et al.(2013) featured ideal high-quality care identified by parents align with professional standards. Also parents' priorities while searching childcare centers focused less on structured learning opportunities and more on practical features of care. In addition, there are limited means of determining the quality of care a child is receiving in a program. It is equally difficult to ascertain whether a child is engaging sufficiently and participating in the developmentally appropriate activities (Workman & Ullrich, 2017). Eventually, the issue of definition of quality for ECCE programs has been resolved with a consensus that the definition of quality should incorporate locally associated expectations for children's language, cognitive, social, emotional and physical development (Raikes et al., 2019). According to Juma (2004) essential elements included for quality in early childhood settings are knowledge about teaching, knowledge about learning and knowledge about knowledge.

The Task of Selecting an ECE Program

Tronto (2013) stated that ECCE is a practice that demands a close inspection of the needs and skills of everyone involved in the context. For most families, ECCE is a necessity, and as a result parents are confronted with the challenge of choosing ECCE programs that meet their needs; this a great responsibility (Ransom, 2012). Parents are forced within their communities to select from services with different qualities. The factors that determine ECCE choice are family needs and resources, cultural norms and parental preferences as to the availability, affordability and accessibility of ECCE alternatives (Coley et al., 2014). Five significant factors that determine parents' preferences for early childhood care and education are safety, trusting and loving staff, parents' involvement, strong curriculum and small pupils to teacher ratio (Forry et al., 2013).

Parents' and children's characteristics that influence parental preference of ECCE have been reported as parents' education, family income, the age of the child and family structure (Laughlin, 2010). Similarly, the aspects of programs that most influence the parental decision- making of early childhood education are the staff activities and the teaching methods. Some other elements of programs that affect decision are the reputation of the center, indoor and outdoor play equipment, the size of the playground and the physical structure (Bauer, 2014);(Forry et al., 2013). In addition, parental choices of ECCE program may be partially determined by the options available and the previous experience of having had another child

in a program. These factors tend to influence parental priorities (Citizen Advice, 2015); cited by (Okobah, 2018).

Thanks to parents' expectations of incentives, limitations and obstacles, ECCE program choices are made (Coley et al., 2014). Parents are pressured into accommodating employment demands and flexible ECCE arrangements in their routines and for finding the best alternatives to meet the diverse needs of all the children in the family (Rothenberg, Goldhagen, Harbin, & Forry, 2013).

ECCE is considered a simple matter of choice, but the ability to pay is a principle factor in accessing the appropriate program (Speirs, Vesely, Roy, & Review, 2015). In one study, parents ranked the following criteria in order of priority when making ECCE choice: qualified and experienced staff, friendly, caring environment and quality of physical structures, health and safety as priorities and cost. Trust positions high with many parents (Forry et al., 2013); (Rothenberg et al., 2013).

In studies done at the Oregon Child Care Research Partnership confirms that parents do a fairly good job differentiating between good and bad child care. Factors that parents consider important such as whether a child feels safe in care and receives a lot of attention and the care giver being open to new learning is consistent with experts evaluate care, that many parents use poor quality care because they feel helpless or believe they lack other resources (Emlen, Koren, & Schultze, 2000), (Fantuzzo, Perry, & Childs, 2006). Even though researchers in the discipline have generated information related to factors and processes associated with ECE selection, a knowledge gap exists about parents' perception of the task of locating care for a child.

Sources of Information for ECE Program Choice

Another challenge confronting parents in their decision-making process for an ECCE program is the accessibility of quality information concerning ECCE facilities (Citizen Advice, 2015), cited by (Okobah, 2018). Studies have shown that social networks are the key source of ECCE program information (Vesely, 2013). Parents' preferences for ECCE facilities in their neighborhood are dictated by their perceived quality, friends and neighbors' suggestions, parents' previous experiences, and parents' educational values and primary concern (Bauchmüller, Gørtz, & Rasmussen, 2014).

Data regarding ECCE facilities in a lot of locations can be accessed online over the phone and the internet (Bauer, 2014). Parents in one study reported that the most common method of searching for a child care provider is through the word-of-mouth while information about child care subsidies and other financial assistance are often obtained through personal network (Altenhofen, Berends, & White, 2016). In other

words, social networks by their normative effects expressed on members contribute in creating the set of alternatives seen as reasonable by parents.

According to Bauer (2014), there are two ways of planning a decision process: heavily planned decision process and the lightly planned decision process. A heavily planned decision process entails collection of information over a period as well as embarking on center tours, talking with others, web based searchers and checking for locations in the phone book. On the other hand a decision process is said to be lightly planned when a choice is swiftly made based on minimal information search. Also selection of an ECCE program is determined by the closest, most convenient and the most famous center among the people (Bauer, 2014). Moreover, parents enrolling their first child in an ECCE program tend to collect a large amount of information and undertake a tour of several centers to ensure that they make a most informed decision (Bauer, 2014).

Nevertheless, sourcing for information for ECCE selection can be made with certainty by obtaining first-hand information through the adoption of certain procedures. As cited by Okobah (2018); these procedures include

(i) procure a potential shortlist of ECCE programs;

(ii) arrange for a visit and book an initial appointment with the program director to acquaint yourself with the environment and the staff;

(iii) ask questions about the curriculum and discuss the needs of your child and find out how they intend to meet the needs;

(iv) ascertain the environmental safety that will guarantee your child's happiness;

(v) ask questions concerning staff qualifications and experiences between employees and children;

(vi) inquire about communication between the center and parents;

(vii) demand for the daily routine of the program;

(viii) ask a question on how staff provides positive interactions to the children;

(ix) note the availability and the quality of resources in the center; and

(x) if satisfied with what you have seen make a second appointment to visit with your child (Good Start Early Learning, 2015).

Factors in Decision-Making

Making a decision is an indication that choices can be made from alternatives. Dewey (1991) as cited by Okobah, (2018); suggested five sequential stages of decision-making, including identification of the problem, analysis of the problem, generation of possible solutions, evaluation of each option, and final

decision-making. According to Simon, 196 recommended three phases of decision making: the intelligent phase (a period to gather information); the design phase (a time to make tentative decision); and a choice phase (a course of action is selected). Decision-making is understood as a procedure that involves creating a choice out of various alternatives with the aim of achieving a set objective (Androniceanu, Ristea, & Sciences, 2014). Decision making is all about the reduction of uncertainty and doubt linked with alternatives, allowing a meaningful choice of alternatives to be made (Anonymous, 1999) as cited by Okobah. Leslie (2014) described the decision-making procedure to be investigated in different phases i.e.

- to identify problems;

- create alternatives; evaluate choices;

- choose an alternative; execution of decision and

- assess the effectiveness of the decision.

The decision process requires breaking down of a choice dilemma into a group of smaller problems and resolving each issue separately. Both the decision-making and decision makers' behavior can be considered key components of the decision-making phenomenon. The decision making process involves human thought and responses regarding the outside world to reflect former actions as well as the possible future happenings along with the psychological consequences for the decision-maker of those events (Leslie, 2014). However, if the problem is not properly identified or if alternatives are poorly evaluated and implemented; decision-making can fail. In this study I will focus how this reasonable process might be applied to parents' choice-making in early childhood education decisions is the focus of this study.

Quality of ECCE

The quality of ECCE in recent times is given more attention by parents than was previously done because the quality of care influences child care outcomes in various dimensions (López Bóo, Araujo, & Tome, 2016). Strong programs quality is associated with the high education level of toddler/infant/ preschoolers teachers and caregivers (Elicker & Fortner-Wood, 1997). There is no universally accepted definition of quality (Sims & Parry, 2006). Post modernism view quality in early childhood services as a 'constructed concept, subjective in nature and based on values, beliefs and interest, rather than an objective and universal reality' (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999). This perspective indicates that the meaning and perception of quality can change depending on the individual and circumstances.

Many scholars Burchinal (2010): Ishimine & Tayler (2014): Marshall, Robeson, Tracy, Frye, & Roberts, (2013) agree on structural and process categories of quality. The structural quality refers to measurable features that involve the characteristics of the program/school, such as physical environments (including building, surrounding, materials and equipment), teacher/child ratios, class size, qualifications and motivation of staff and teachers, use of standard curriculum (Mashburn et al., 2008). Studies have shown that structural quality measures have indirectly influenced children's development outcomes (Howes et al., 2008); Ishimine, et al., 2014; Mashburn et al., 2008). A small class size and relevant curriculum may directly influence the quality of interactions children experience in classrooms, which in turn affects children's development (Mashburn et al., 2010). (Bauchmüller et al., 2014), presented five structural ECCE quality components including

 (1) the staff child ratio;

 (2) the number of staff;

 (3) the number of trained teachers;

(4) the number of ethnic minority staff and

(5) the retention of staff.

As described by Copple and Bredekamp(2009), staff with specialization in ECCE and greater levels of education achievement and training has the skills to understand and handle the specific needs of the child correctly as well as emphasize learning and school readiness. Consequently diversity among the staff is an indication that all children will be better prepared for diversity in the larger society (Villegas & Irvine, 2010). Researchers have identified essential elements of a high- quality ECCE programs including

(a) the quality of teachers and the retention of teachers in the program every succeeding year;

(b) quality curricula;

(c) parental engagement and

(d) involvement with the program.

The safety and security of children within the ECCE facility and efforts to create a multicultural setting are all aspects of high-quality (Bauchmüller et al., 2014); Canada & Bland, 2014). Retention of staff is a reflection of the number of employees that remained employed in the program year in and year out. Studies show that low rates of job turnover in an ECCE staff are a strong indication of program quality (Cassidy, Lower, Kintner-Duffy, Hegde, & Shim, 2011).

On the other hand process quality emphasizes the actual experiences that children daily encounter and interact with in educational settings, such as teacher-child interactions, peer interaction, teacher-parents interaction and teaching or the types of activities in which children are engaged (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005). In general these measures reflect teacher sensitivity and responsiveness, instruction, classroom management and activities available to children (Burchinal, Magnuson, Powell, & Hong, 2015). Studies have indicated that process quality has more significant influence on children's social and academic development (Howes et al., 2008). In a study which was measuring classroom quality in USA, Mashburn et al.(2008) found that process quality (teacher/child instructional and emotional interactions experienced in classroom) have consistently and strong influence in children's academic, language and social skills. Similarly the positive social interactions between teacher and children, teacher and parents and peer interaction have a stronger influence on children's development of social, language and academic competition. Process quality has to do with the relationship between children and teachers as well as the content of instructions within the classrooms together with instructional materials (Bauchmüller et al., 2014). The components of effective teaching such as positive social and emotional atmosphere of the classroom and relationships between teacher and child are all aspects of the process quality.

An aspect of the quality indicators of ECCE facilities is family sensitivity; some parents consider cultural responsiveness as a dimension of quality (Allen & Steed, 2016). Mothers are said to be emotionally attached when selecting ECCE program therefore, they often settle for the options that are capable of serving the needs of the child as well as providing the intimate complex and interdependent nature of a caring relationship (Yuen & Review, 2015). Studies show that when choosing a facility, parents focus on safety, interacting with their child's teacher and supporting learning in the ECCE program. Also program proximity to home has been identified as one of the top three reasons for selecting a program (Canada & Bland, 2014), Joshi, 2014; Matei, 2014).

As cited by Okobah (2018); Child Care Solutions (2016) suggested the following six directives to consider when hunting for a program:
(1) seek for staff that is passionate about caring for children;
(2) search for programs with small group size with professional caregiver;
(3) watch out for the warm and nurturing environment;
(4) rate the center on general cleanliness, supervision and proper hygiene;
(5) search for opportunities for parent involvement;
(6) request for evidence of registration, license and accreditation. Moreover, the Assessment for Quality Improvement (AQI), a new measure of global quality, has been found to provide a promising and efficient

measure of universal quality in infant and toddler ECCE context (Perlman et al., 2017). Another tool used to measure quality is the Performance Administrative Scale (PAS), it was developed to assess the overall quality of leadership management practices in center-based early care and education.

The questions posed in this study are intended to determine whether and to what extent parents are aware of any of the quality indicators suggested by research or by popular guides and how that awareness contributes to parents' choice of an ECCE program for their children. Again there is a possibility; this study can determine if these indicators are adequately evaluated to take into account other factors such as facility location and program costs in early childhood care and education decisions.

Summary

The literature has revealed that decisions are made based on the alternatives that seem most favorable to the values and preferences of the decision maker and decision about ECE selection is not an exception. Studies in the discipline have shown that ECE choices are determined by social status, developmental age of the child and socio demographic factors. Also inquiries indicate that parents associate quality with observable behaviors and pay less attention to structural factors as an aspect of quality. However consensus exists that ECE selection is tasking and consists of the outcome of some interactions among parental preferences, opportunities and limitations. In the light of the above assertion, this study explored the interactions among parental preferences, opportunities and constraints that influence the ECE decision making.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research methodological approach and design. The purpose of the study was to identify, collect and analyze information about parents' perceptions of early childhood education decision-making processes. Researcher used qualitative design to draw on the insights of parents, who have made ECE placement decisions recently for their children aged 3 to 5 years. In this chapter research design, data collection tool and samples and research questions are described. At the end of the chapter, data analysis, limitations of this research are highlighted. In addition, trustworthiness and ethics issues are discussed.

Research Design

This study represents, parent's decision-making processes regarding early childhood educational choices. The qualitative approach design was adopted for answering the research questions for this study. Qualitative methods are engaged to address people's experiences, understand various perspectives of individuals regarding a concept or phenomenon and the impact of experiences on people's needs and actions (Grossoehme, 2014). This design is used to attain the answers to how and why questions about parents decision process for ECE choices.

Qualitative methods permit in-depth investigation through collection of detailed data regarding situations and specifics of the issue of inquiry (Patton, 2015). To obtain the depth of insight required for various facets of early childhood education decision-making, semi-structured interviews and a short survey was conducted for data collection to allow the participants to express their views using their own words and expressions. The strength of the semi-structured interviews is that the researcher can prompt and probe deeper into the given situation but according to (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008), Kvale (1996) it also relies heavily on the researcher's skills as an interviewer how to add different techniques like additional, supportive, follow up questions to gain in depth answers from the participants. Patton (2015, p. 374), recommends to "explore, probe and ask questions that will clarify and brighten that particular subject and to build a dialogue within a particular subject area, to word questions freely, and to create a conversational style but with the focus on a particular subject that has been predetermined." In other words, participants were allowed to tell their stories, thus giving the researcher a better insight into parental actions and final decisions regarding early childhood education choices.

One of the most important techniques of data collection is questionnaire (Cresswell,1998) because of its capability to collect large amount of information in a short period. To understand how the participants'

process quality in ECE decision making a questionnaire was designed to collect information on how parents rank the quality indicators. From there the researcher was able to probe more by asking supporting questions to better understand their perceptions.

Population and setting

The setting of this study was in Lahore, Pakistan. Lahore is the capital of Pakistan's Punjab province and second largest city in the country after Karachi. Lahore, like most of the cities in Pakistan has both public and private educational institutions from primary school to university. Most educational institutions vary by gender, from elementary school to college. All educational institutions are the responsibility of the state government.

Researcher visited public and private schools to draw samples for the study. The school principals were met and requested to allow the researcher to interview parents for the study. The permission letter from the Gothenburg University (see appendix D) was also shown to them. A few of the principal allowed the researcher to meet a small group of parents who had recently admitted their kids in the ECE program. The researcher was also able to copy the parent's contact numbers and talked about the aim and purpose of the study. Unfortunately, a strict lock down was soon followed in the country due to the corona virus pandemic, thus the sample was drawn from the members from the mentioned programs public and private who were conveniently available to participate in the study.

 Application of convenience sampling facilitated the duration of time given for the research. Due to the corona virus pandemic special arrangement had to be made for the research as the schools were closed following the standard operating procedures (SOPs). Contacting parents of children enrolled in a pre-school was hard. Thus the parents who were contacted before the rapid spread of the virus were interviewed and data related to the research was obtained.

Participant selection

The majority of parents participating in the interview sessions were (seven) female and one male. Parents ranged in age from 18 to 45 years. All parents were married and majority of them had a college degree except the one male who had a high school certificate. The male participant of the study belonged to upper socio-economic background whereas the seven females belonged to an average socio-economic background. Parents each had between one and three children. Pre-Schools attended by the participants kids were as elite private pre-school= 2, non-elite private school= 5 and public school=1. Participants were recruited from a parent whose child was between 3 and 4 year in age and had spent a minimum of 6 months in the ECE program at the time of data collection. The reason for this criterion is determined by the recently made decision by parents in selecting a program because the purpose of this

research was directed at accessing parents' ECE decision processes. By choosing such specific time bracket researcher hoped to get the participants personal experiences in richly elaborated ways (Patton, 2015). Because the parents had recently gone through the process of making decision for a placement thus it would be easily recalled and shared with the researcher.

Sample size

It has been argued that sample size should be determined by the intention and the objectives of the study together with how the results will be utilized and the resources available for the study (Patton, 2015). Therefore, the sample size was set to 8 participants for the semi structured interview to allow a detailed and in-depth insight into the contexts of the study (Patton, 2015). All the participants lived in Lahore city of Pakistan. Thus, to dig deep into the factors that affect parents' choice of early childhood care and education setting researcher conducted two one to one interviews at her place and the rest six interviews were conducted by telephone due to the corona virus pandemic staying within time and resources available. The calls were recorded through the voice recording application inbuilt in the researcher's mobile phone and laptop. As the interviews were conducted by telephone, the interviewer maintained the conversation in a polite and respectful manner. This helped in making the participants relaxed and confident which could be felt through their voice thus marking that the use of the telephone in qualitative interviewing does not negatively impact the ability of researchers to create rapport with interviewees (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008) (Farooq, 2015).

Parents that met the mentioned criteria were contacted through an e-mail (see Appendix A) containing the following information: an introduction of the researcher, the purpose of the study; data collection procedures; measures to protect the identity of participants; confidentiality of information provided; data usage and liberty to withdraw from the study at any point was part of the information requesting them to indicate interest to participate in the study (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008). Furthermore, a day before a call was put across to the recruited participants to organize for a mutually convenient date, time, for the interview. In other words, an intensive one session of 45 minutes duration of interview with each of the 8 participants was conducted.

Instrumentation

According to Yin (2014), the researcher is the principal instrument for data collection in a qualitative study. For data collection of this study 9 open ended interview questions were developed, based on the three research questions. It was hoped that the use of open-ended questions provides opportunities for the participants to express diverse views of their world. In the course of the interview where necessary

to fully understand parents' perspectives about their needs for child care services follow up questions were supplemented.

The 8 interview questions and their relationship to the three research questions are as follows:

RQ1: How do parents source information to guide their decision making process regarding early childhood education placement for their child?

1. How did you work out on choosing a school?
2. How did you gather the information?
3. How did you go about in making up your mind?

RQ2: How do parents use quality indicators in deciding on an early childhood education placement for their child?

To answer this question a questionnaire was considered most appropriate to collect information in a short period of time. (See questionnaire in Appendix B.) The questionnaire for this study was designed by the researcher based on the literature review. Some items in the questionnaire were adopted from Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale-Revised (ECCERS-R) by Harms, Clifford, and Cryer (1998), and with the researcher's supervisor's recommendation it was modified to fit the study. ECCERS-R is a quality assessment instrument used widely by trained observers. Therefore, in order to collect parents' perception of quality in ECE decision making process the modification was thought to be appropriate. The questionnaire has three parts:

(A) physical environment including (surroundings, learning materials, equipment and space etc.)
(B) teachers quality like qualification, experience, training, teacher child ratio and class size.
(C) Parents participation, satisfaction etc. (see Appendix B).

A three point key was developed ranging between '1= not important'; '2= less important'; and '3 = important' in order to determine and record the parents perceptions. Since the main language of communication in Lahore is Urdu translation of the questionnaire was necessary. The questionnaire was translated in Urdu from English and the answers were marked according to the developed three point key. The questionnaire was discussed with researcher's supervisor for validity purpose. Inventing the questionnaire was had been a difficult task if the researcher's supervisor had not guided with his valuable feedback and recommendation. The following research question helped to complete the interview.

RQ3: How do parents weight different options in making a placement decision with regards to their child?

4. Were some quality indicators more important to you than others?

5. How did the things you considered as priorities actually guide you in making a final decision for your child's placement?

RQ4: How do these parents describe the task of making a decision about an early childhood education placement for their child?

6. How was this task of choosing a preschool for you?

7. What were your hopes and worries while choosing a preschool?

8. Is there anything that I have omitted that you would like me to know concerning your decision making process for your child?

Data collection

Data was collected from two categories of early childhood education programs namely: a government (public) ECE program, and a private ECE program. The data source for this study was one session of 45 minutes interview conducted in the local language that is Urdu with participant. This was a time consuming task as the data collected was to be transcribed, translated and coded. Data collection for the three research questions was conducted by using 8 open-ended questions (Appendix C) was carefully designed after having a fruitful discussion with the researcher's supervisor. The interview guide included general questioned which allowed the participants to express themselves freely. As, open-ended questions tend to provide paths for the researcher to learn the terminologies and judgments of the participants together with the details of their personal views and encounters (Patton, 2015).

The questionnaire part was also designed in easily understandable language so that the participants were put at ease to answer the parts related to the task of decision making for a placement thus ensuring confidentiality and privacy. The questionnaire was emailed to the 8 participants same day the interview was to be conducted. This change was done due to the pandemic of corona virus. Before the open-ended questions were asked the questionnaire was filled. Each questionnaire instruction and item was read and explained to the participants clearly. The participants where then requested to fill the questionnaire and after completing it take an image and send it to the researcher to further dig deep into the responses by asking additional questions and clear any query if faced. The participants were also requested to email back the filled questionnaire for record and analysis.

As the interviewer was not administrating the interview and the questionnaire face to face the participants facial expressions could not be recorded. In the interview session interviewer collected data using the

standardize questions as well as asking probing questions as follow up on new key factors that emerged at the time of the interview. The data collection session was audio recorded since the exact statements of the interviewee are the target of the qualitative researcher (Patton, 2015). Nevertheless, the participants were asked to feel free and reveal any information he or she consider necessary for the researcher to know which may have been omitted. The interviewer also informed participants that they will be given an opportunity to review the transcript to confirm its accuracy.

Issue of Trustworthiness

According to Patton (2015), different strategies to qualitative inquiry reveal that issues of quality and credibility interconnect with the interviewer and the objectives of studies. The problem of trustworthiness in qualitative studies can be addressed through establishing credibility (Creswell, 2013).

Credibility in qualitative research is directed at ascertaining that the findings of a study are an accurate representation of the participants' point of view in the research. To ensure the credibility of this research work member checking was adopted. The use of member checking was accomplished by inviting the participants to comment on the accuracy of the interview transcripts and whether the final themes and concepts generated were the accurate reflection of their perspectives of the phenomena being examined. The engagement of member checking allows the researcher to learn more concerning the accuracy, completeness, fairness and the perceived internal validity of his data (Patton, 20015). Since the main language of communication in Lahore is Urdu, translation of the questions was necessary. As translating between language is not easy and time consuming but with the help of a friend it was brought into process. The questions were translated from English to Urdu and vice versa.

In order to ensure the transferability as a criterion for trustworthiness is associated with the degree to which the result of a study can be employed in other contexts or setting (Creswell, 2013). Data for this study was collected from two categories of early childhood education programs namely government and private. Doing the research in such a way may indicate to readers that the results obtained after analysis of data from multiple settings and findings common themes across the sites could be applied to different contexts (Creswell, 2013). As an interviewer efforts were made not to influence any of the participants. The pilot study also helped the researcher to improve the wordings and the sequence of the questions.

Analyses of data

Upon the completion of the interview session the analysis plan for the data for this study involved the following: preparing the data by transcribing the interviews and requesting the participants to check to confirm, modify and verify the interview transcripts. Data analysis in qualitative research has different stages: preparing and arranging the data; coding and reduction of the data into themes and presenting the data in figures, tables or as a discussion (Creswell, 2013). The plan includes connecting and grouping the data to specific research question (Miles & Huberman, 1994); reading freely and closely the transcribed interview texts to be familiarized with the content and make notes (Thomas, 2006). Researcher searched for word repetition, and looked for words used by the respondents with a particular meaning and significance in their setting. Also, searched for the range of uses of keywords in the phrases and the sentences in which they occur, and constantly compare and contrast preceding and subsequent statements. Researcher has searched for patterns and significance among and across the marked words, circled and underlined texts and used color highlighting to indicate different meanings and codes and organized all the transcripts coded in the same way into folders and re-read them to ascertain their themes or pattern.

All data collected was connected to specific research questions. Answering the research questions guided this study to accomplish through review of the themes that emerged from analysis of data. Moreover, to minimize the influence of researcher's judgment, intuition and bias external audit trial will be engaged.

Research Ethics

Applying appropriate ethical principles to protect subjects is important in any research study. In conducting the qualitative study, it is necessary to consider the ethical issues of the research study before actually collecting any data (Johnson & Christensen, 2019; Miller, Birch, Mauthner, & Jessop, 2012; Silverman, 2019). Consequently, a consent form was sent to the participants ahead of the interview for them to read and understand what the interview session was about (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008; Miller et al., 2012). The consent form (see Appendix A) contained details of the study such as voluntary participation and the right to discontinue from the study at any point. Informed consent incorporates issues of clarity of purpose, trust, honesty and integrity (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). During our first talk on the telephone it was again assured to the participants that they have the right to withdraw from the interview at any point. Also, all identifications associated with the participants were confidentially handled and referred to in the report with pseudonyms. Researcher invited questions from the participants on any aspect of the study they needed to clarify as well as informed them that signing the consent form is an indication of their agreement to participate in the study.

According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018) the field of social sciences have developed a lot, and this has brought an increasing awareness in the ethical issues. Research ethics have become an important topic for every researcher regarding the ethical dimension on the design and implementation of research.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

The purpose of the study was to understand parents' perception of early childhood education and how these perceptions influenced their decision-making processes for early childhood education choices. Four research questions guided researcher's exploration of how parents described their sources for information, perceived their ECE placement decisions; described their engagement of quality indicators of ECE programs and indicated how they synthesized these factors to generate a placement decision for their children. In this chapter researcher will present the participants' demographics and analysis and result.

Demographics of the Participants

This study had eight participants comprising of one father and seven mothers. The only male among the participant was a businessman. Two of the mothers were working as in-charges of different preschool sections. The remaining four mothers were housewife. The participants were between 18 and 45 years old. Four participants were graduated from college and three University degree holders and the male participant was a high school graduate. All the participants were married. One represented the public school ECE program and the rest represented elite and semi elite private schools ECE program. The identity of all the participants was kept confidential through use of pseudonyms.

Table 4: Summary of the Demographics of the Participants

Participants	Gender	Age	Education	Marital status	Schools
Shams	Male	30	High School Graduate	Married	Private elite
Saima	Female	43	Masters	Married	Private Semi-elite
Zamina	Female	44	Masters	Married	Private Semi-elite
Samreen	Female	18	Bachelors	Married	Private elite
Ishfaq	Female	40	Bachelors	Married	Private Semi-elite
Hina	Female	33	Masters	Married	Private Semi-elite
Arshia	Female	44	Bachelors	Married	Private Semi-elite
Asiya	Female	30	Bachelors	Married	Public

Gathering information

Findings from interview questions 1, 2 and 3 helped to answer the first research question. The following table shows that the participants revealed many sources through which they attained information that helped them in the building of their ECE placement for their child.

Table 5: Sources used by parents to collect information

Participants	Consulted neighbors	Consulted friends/ relatives	Social media	Visit schools
Shams			✓	✓
Saima		✓	✓	✓
Zamina		✓		✓
Samreen		✓	✓	✓
Ishfaq		✓		✓
Hina	✓			✓
Arshia	✓	✓		✓
Asiya	✓			✓

Prior enquires for sourcing information

Asiya, Saima and Arshia indicated that they sourced information from their neighbor and friends. Saima's interest was to source information of an Islamic Montessori school thus she counted on her cousin's advice for the final decision and she also used the internet to find Islamic schools. It is worthy to note that five of the participants used the terms **"friends and relatives"** to indicate their prior enquires for sourcing information and making decision regarding ECE choices. Samreen, Zamina and Shams sourced information from social media which was interesting and concrete. Samreen stated,

>……….. **I searched schools on the internet… there were some schools whose leaflets and pamphlets I found at my doorstep…..l also looked up in newspaper for information about schools and short listed them……**

This shows dependence on social media network as a source of information for making decision for early childhood education selection. Hina had no need to source information apart from her earlier experience, which she expressed:

>**….I found the school I was working as the best fit…..**

In other words her earlier knowledge about the programs was enough information for making a decision for her child. In the data the participants have also expressed the usefulness of consulting their sources for the information obtained with the following expressions; Asiya said,

>**………..My first child was going in the same school, it helped me to make the placement decision……..**

All the participants agreed that the information gathered was useful to them in making an ECE placement decision for their child.

Visiting schools

From the table above it is also obvious whatever may have been the sources to gather information they all visited the school personally to obtain insight of the program. Shams, Saima and Samreen short listed some school from the internet and visited them, Samreen:

> **………the schools that were of my interest I started short listing them and then I visited those schools….**

Saima:

> **………My first concern was religious beliefs thus I only visited Islamic schools…..**

Ishfaq, Zamina and Arshia visited the schools that were in their nearest approach. Asiya and Hina based on their previous experience did not need to visit new school. These were some prior enquires, that the parents obtained which specifically guided the participants in selection of a quality ECCE placement.

Events encountered while sourcing information

Moreover, parents also attached importance to the events they encountered, which included issues like personal tasks, and individual attractions, and expression that indicated a personal challenge. Here Arshia and Asiya's personal impressions are worth sharing as they faced some unpleasant situations while surveying preselected preschools. Asiya said in one of her visits to a public school she found:

> **………….the classes had no doors and windows….the teacher showed lack of interest in the kids…. they were not engaged in any activity….the teacher present in the class was not bothered and the kids were busy in their stuff…we decided there and then this is not the school we would like our kid to study in……..**

Her observation helped her to select wisely to decide to find a better school. On the other hand, Arshia who thought it was a must to meet the principal and teachers during her visits to schools shared one of her experience:

> ……….**we visited a school XYZ….in a small office the admins met us…. they took all details from us….I requested them to meet the principal but they refused saying it is only possible after the admission is done. Next I asked them to let us meet the teachers on which they said that is also not possible because it is not in their rules….No one can meet the teacher directly……..**

As this left a negative impression on her; she decided not to enroll her son in such an environment where interaction with school staff is not possible. Thus, this information was a detailed enough description of a specific school in which the informants did not wish to enroll their kids.

Samreen's narrative revealed her personal attraction based on her observation of other's experience, she said:

> **………. on my visit to the school while waiting for my car I heard a conversation between the principal and the care taker…..her polite tone impressed me a lot**……

Zamina recounted the issue of proximity to the school, she said:

> …….. **the traffic along the canal often gets stuck and it takes hours to get through thus I recommended the nearest school…….**

In other words, the importance attached to the memorable incidents of prior enquiries, the criteria employed for lifelong learning opportunities, as well as the reasons for engaging occurred during the decision process, have contributed to make a decision of enrollment of their child.

Priorities involved in searching an ECE placement using quality indicators

Physical Characteristics

Findings from the questionnaire and follow up interview questions were included in answering the second research question. Data analysis revealed that participants involved certain priorities in their search for ECE programs for their children.

The present study indicates that classroom characteristics have an important impact on parents' decision making process and satisfaction with the quality of ECE program. All the participants marked 'important' the physical characteristics of a playroom and used phrases like "colorful"," spacious and airy"," user friendly furniture", "decorated with toys" and "audio visual aids" in their decision making priorities list.

Shams preferred the environment of a preschool to be home like:

> **….so that kids won't feel that they are out from their home……….**

Ishfaq said:

…room should have audio visual aids as it helps avoiding the habit of rote learning…….

The other physical characteristics that the participants were very concerned about was the quality of availability of water, hygienic toilets and safety and security marking these as important and calling these necessities to be kept in mind while choosing a preschool for their kids. In the same stance, Ishfaq was the only one to mark it less important saying:

………I think the school toilets can never be clean as compared to the toilets of a house. While making a decision I may only compromise on this quality if the school meets all other points that were in my mind……..

Moving on towards the security and safety; all the participants had also marked it as an important quality. Shams said:

……….**My child's security is most important to me….due to the current situation of the country……**

Saima said:

………I would like my kid's classroom to have user friendly equipment….

Asiya replied:

……… When we went to visit the school, the guard was on his duty that gave a sense of security to us……

This indicates that while deciding about the kid's placement, every participant is concerned about their children security and safety. Relating to Bronfenbrenner, (1995, p. 620), human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving bio psychological human organism and the persons, objects and symbols in its immediate environment. Therefore when applying the Process – Person – Context – Time model (PPTC) enables to place a greater emphasis on the parents as an active agent (the biological person) and from that lens explore the interconnect (friends/ family, school and teachers) in order to, better understand what parents decision making process means.
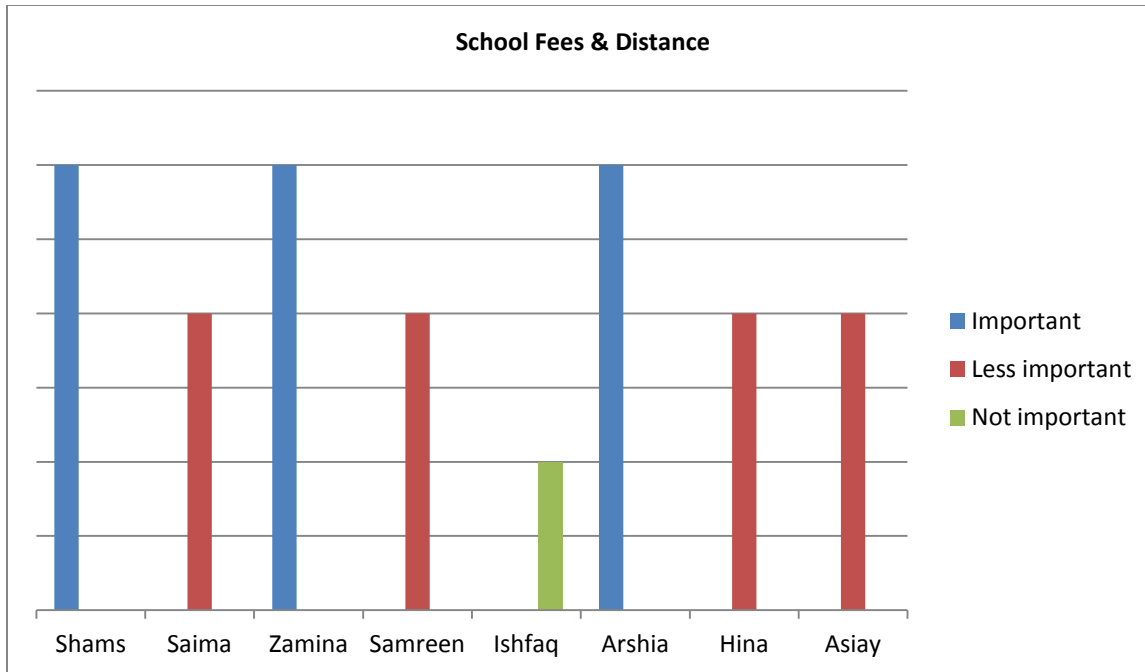
Figure 3. *School fees and distance*

Furthermore, from the graph above we can see half of the participants declared distance as less important in their priority list. Samreen said**:**

> **……..I will compromise on the distance of the school if it offers good teachers, education, hygiene, security and environment…..**

Four of the participants emphasized proximity as a component of the priorities that guided their search for an ECE program for their child. Arshia, declared the distance important because:

> **…….. I preferred the nearest school to manage my morning routine properly…train my son to do proper breakfast…for me it is very important that he stays active……**

Zamina said:

> ……… **I preferred the nearest school because the traffic along the canal in our area often gets stuck and it takes hours to start so I thought the more easily we can move was much better…….**

Even though different reasons were advanced for having closeness to the school as a priority, these reasons were considered of utmost importance to the participants while making a placement decision.

From the findings we can see that participants had financial implications as one of the considerations they applied in their search for an ECE program.

Asiya stressed,

> **…in PEF schools there are no fees…thus these public school parents do not understand the of its importance and significance of education…..**

Saima said:

> **……..The fee mattered a lot in making the decision…..if the school I visited had fee more than my budget…. then I had to search for another option……**

Participants' responses concerning their priorities while searching for ECE for their children revealed that parents were conscious of the cost in making a placement decision about early childhood education for their child. They avoided sending their children where the cost could not be accommodated by their income. In other words the ability to pay was a key factor in the search for and decision about ECE programs by parents; hence they see proximity, along with cost, and the physical space of the center, as a priority in their search for ECE programs. Here we can easily relate to Bronfenbrenner, 1997 exo-system of the Ecological Model which refers to settings that do not involve the parents as an active agent, but in which events take place that 'effect or are affected by what happens in the setting containing the developing person.

Teachers Quality

Teacher child bond for fitting preschool care to individual needs

The above-mentioned qualities lead to strong relationship namely **"Bonding"** between teacher and the child. All the eight participants; sourced it as an important quality, to consider while making a decision for a placement in ECE programs. Parents perceive teachers involvement and motivation as a long term impact on students' overall development.

Arshia elaborated about the teacher child bond saying:

> **…when a kid goes to school for the first time he is worried, he cries and does not want to leave the family.…a teacher's smiling face, welcoming attitude, helps in relaxing the crying child**………**involving the child….making him participate…be productive and achieve the learning goals…….**

Samreen said:

> **…. teacher is the very first person a child interacts with in school…a bond develops between them…. The teacher understands the mood….relax him…….he shares his problems……the learning goals are achieved easily……**

Ishfaq said:

……….A good teacher bond can develop good moral ethics, etiquettes and good behavior in kids.…due to this relation kids start sharing things with the teacher, they enjoy talking with her……..

Hina said:

……. in junior classes the most important aspect is the kid's settlement with the class and its environment…studies have a secondary value because as time passes the kids start following the teachers instruction…..

Thus, the findings indicate teacher child bond as an important quality, the more parents' satisfaction with the quality of teachers the more it helps in decision making process of placement for an ECE program for their kids.

Shams said the bond is important because:

………if the child feels any problem….feeling bad about a thing or being disturbed….in the school….he should share it with the teacher easily…..

Findings from this study moreover indicate the idea of lifelong learning opportunity in how parents make a choice in its perspective as a ground. From the data it was also found that participants associated teacher child bond for fitting preschool care to individual needs. To be able to account for how participants form rational choices of preschoolers the following table shows all the expressions collected from parent's perception on child development issues.

Table 6: Parents' views of individual development, care & learning

Participants name	Child Development/ Individualizing Care & Learning
Saima	My kids practice Islam and become good practical Muslim
Asiya	Cognitive abilities
Arshia	Concepts; Physical development
Samreen	Self-regulation of emotions
Hina	Psyche
Ishfaq	Meta cognitive skills
Shams	Problem solving

From the table we can see that how parents' views differ in their child's individual development, care and learning. Saima being a Montessori administers said:

…….I want my kids to practice Islam and become good practical Muslim…..

Asiya, Hina and Ishfaq talked about cognitive abilities and psyche: Asiya said:

……a teacher should understand the kid's mental ability and teach them accordingly….she should care for the whole class…….the strugglers should not be left for themselves…….

Hina said:

…….I believe all kids are not alike…a teacher does not only handles the kids but she also knows about their psyche….thus it is important to know the individual needs of a kid…..

Arshia discussed a variety of child development issues like concept development, physical development, social training saying:

…every child has different ability…through activities learning new concepts can be made easy…understanding the child's mood a teacher can relax him mentally and achieve the learning goals…..along kid's studies they are given social training….how to cope with different people…. With studies and learning activities physical development is also very important……

Samreen and Shams expressed the need for individualizing care and teaching with self-regulation of emotions and problem solving saying; Samreen:

……….A kid should be able to share his problems easily with the teacher…problems are not only related to the studies….it can be "shyness"…not asking the teacher if he wants to go to the toilet and wet his pants waiting for the school to end….

From all these interesting and concrete expressions, it is easy to imagine parents' concerns about appropriate preschool care to individual needs. When there are few children in the classroom the teacher has more time to work with each child. Thus, we can say that teachers' quality of fulfilling the individual needs and learning of one's child play an important role while making a placement decision. This is supported by the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) which states that individual's satisfaction levels are socially constructed in time and space.

 Experienced teachers vs. certified teachers

From the data an interesting comparison was found between teacher's experience and teacher's certification of preschool. From the table below we see how the opinions of the participants differ with respect to the qualification and working experience of the teachers.

Table 7: Experience vs. Certification

Quality	Teachers Experience	Teachers Certificate
Important	5	3
Less Important	3	5

Five participants declared teacher's preschool certification less important. Shams said: **"…having a certificate is less important because behavior of the teacher matters more to me."**

Hina said:

> ……..**It does not matter to me….because a certified person does not grantees a good teacher……. But an experienced teacher uses different strategies to help kids to improve….how to overcome a problem….and understands kids' psyche…….**

Arshia said:

> **…a certified teacher has knowledge but how to apply them practically will be learnt with experience………..having knowledge of classroom learning techniques is good….but how to apply these in class….how to manage kids………teacher only gets to know when she is practically involved in the situation……..**

Three participants marked teachers' certification as "important"; Asiya said:

> **……..Having a certificate is important because the teacher gets a job easily…….**

Samreen said**:**

> **……..If a teacher is not certified she will not know how to deal with kids….tackle the situation…which technique to adopt during teaching…**

Asiya said:

> **……..An experience teacher keeps the kids busy…… never leave the kids on themselves……….always try to stay involved with them…….**

Ishfaq said:

> ……… **it is important for a teacher to be certified….as a proof of her qualification… having an experienced teacher is important……..as she knows how to control emotions, manage time and deliver her work….a preschool class should not be given to a person who has recently graduated and has no experience.**

Here we can say that participants' satisfaction with the teacher's experience is a key quality for influencing a placement decision for their kids. Participants like Shams, Zamina and Saima marked

teachers experience less important because this issue seems not to bother them as they think that their kids will be given development appropriate activities and that teachers have the necessary qualification. Thus we can say that certification of preschool had some influence on the parent's satisfaction with quality of ECE programs.

Teachers' rate of retention

From the finding of the study it can also be seen how parents are concerned about the rate of retention of teachers during an academic year. From the data it is very obvious that all the 8 participants call this an important quality to look into while making decision for a preschool. Hina associated with the teaching profession having inside view of a preschool said,

> **……….Teacher turns over should not be practiced at the junior level……..not at all. In junior classes…..kids have to be engaged with the teacher, the class mates and the school then only they start learning. He needs love and attachment……..attention. Sometime you may get a better teacher than the previous but still the kid does not accept her readily….**

Asiay said,

……..**When a turnover takes place it upsets not only the kids but also the parents……**

Saima a Montessori administers said,

> **……..Young kids get disturbed…as they create attachment with the teacher. A new teacher has to put effort in developing the relationship and bring the kids towards doing a task. Sometimes it also happens that the new teacher is not able to understand the kids as the previous teacher did…….**

Parents connected with the education profession have an insight and concern for their children's well-being and wishing to minimize distress is paramount in the data.

Arshia said,

> …….**In early learning years if teacher's turnover is observed frequently then it will be very difficult for the kids to progress as required…..because every teacher has a different way of giving instructions……**

For Samreen the turnover of teacher is like breaking of the bond, she thinks,

> **……..If the teacher leaves during the academic year it cannot be said for sure that the child will develop the same bond with the new teacher too….time is taken to develop a new relation….**

From the data it was found that only Zamina called the turnover of teacher as less important saying,

……A teacher's turnover may happen due to some personal problems or her work quality….

Teacher's turnover during an academic session is not supported by any parent and none think of it as a good idea to train small children to be flexible meeting new teachers. Parents believe that effective teachers not only make their kids feel good about school and learning, but also their work actually result in increased students' achievement. On the other hand, teacher turnover negatively impact student achievement. Thus teachers turnover is seen as one of the major quality participants have as priority for decision making.

Moving teachers within grades

A contradiction and contrast was seen in the answers of parents in **"Teachers moving within grades"** section.
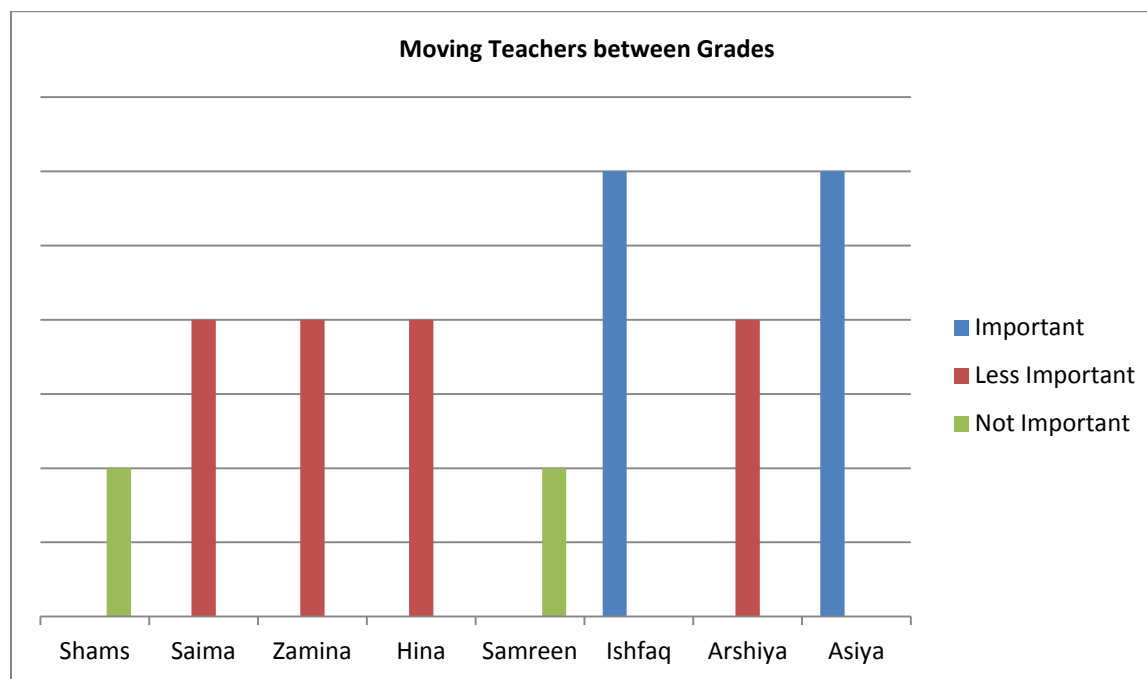
Figure 4. *Mowing Teachers within grades*

Reading the graph above we can see that Shams and Samreen have marked moving teachers between grades as "not important", Saima, Zamina and Arshia have marked it as" less important" whereas Ishfaq and Asiya have marked it "important".

From the data it was seen while answering the question Shams actually sketched his experience picturing the Pakistani schools education system saying:

……..This is not a common practice in Pakistan…I have not experienced anything like this…I think they need not move to any upper level…

Even though the other participants had even not experienced moving of teachers within grades still none of them highlighted it.

Hina expressed her view by saying:

> **……I do not encourage it….the more experience of working with different teachers he(son) has…….the more his confidence and knowledge will increase. Having the same teacher for the next year too would not help in developing the skill of understanding the society he has to move in future……**

Arshia said:

> …..**The most important thing will be that the kids will be so used to the same teacher that for them accepting a change in the future will be difficult………..This is a type of socializing that kids learn how to cope with different people……**

On the contrary Asiya and Ishfaq were the only two participants in favor of teachers following grades. Asiya replied,

> **…….She knows about the kids…..understands their mental development….how kids follow instructions and act accordingly…..what strategies she has used effectively…..thus it will be easy for the teacher; she will not face any difficulty if moved…**

Ishfaq said:

> **…… Moving teachers due to their good performance is important. The kids will also have the same comfort level if the teacher is moved with them….**

Thus for these parents moving teachers within grades is a kind of accountability and mutually learning each other (teacher and children) for raising children achievements. As the participants of this study believe the purpose of school should be to meet the needs of children that can only be possible with a passionate teacher; who shapes the academic, oratory, characteristics and personality, spiritual and virtuous capabilities of the children. Thus, while making an ECE placement decision they want the best possible educational experience for the kids.

Another interesting pattern seen in the findings while discussing moving of teachers was how participants expressed their appreciation for the fact that preschool teachers learn on the job. Samreen shared her views saying:

> **….A teacher dealing the play group class over and over again gains knowledge over time and improves her teaching techniques and masters her skills. She will also be aware of how to improve her students' progress…..**

Arshia said:

> **………an experienced teacher is performing, practicing and handling the situation……at the same time she is also learning…..**

Thus, according to these parents, learning skills in the job shows initiative and commitment to work that could result in increased opportunities for growing professionally.

Standard classroom with small size

The importance of teacher child ratio among participants of this study is obvious from the data. All the participants have marked it" Important" except one. Shams stated:

> ….. **In a classroom, the lesser the number of students the more attention each child can get……**

Samreen stated:

> ……**If the class size is small the teacher can give more attention, she can understand the kid's problem and will be able to deliver her talk in a better way…….**

Participants believed in a smaller class size, teachers can get to know each child as an individual, working with them to enhance their strengths and improve their weakness. Kids on the other hand also get to know each other better and are also encouraged to take part in discussions and driven to express their opinions.

The following table shows the preferred teacher child ratio by the participants. Words and phrases like:
 "How many teachers will be in a class?", "What will be the number of children in each class?"
were asked by all participants on their visits to preschools while making a decision for their kids.

Table 8: Parent's preference for class ratio

Participants Name	Preferred teacher child ratio
Shams	10:1
Saima	12:1
Zamina	20:1
Samreen	15:1
Ishfaq	20:1
Arshia	15:1
Asiya	15:1
Hina	10:1

From the above table we see the preferred class size on parents' priority list. Most of the participants prefer a ratio of 15:1 or less. Discussing the importance of a small class size Samreen said:

> **……….. If there are too many students in a class a teacher will not be able to keep an eye on everyone……..**

Arshia stated:

> **……….I think 1 teacher with 15 students is an ideal class size as I have seen teachers doing well in situations like these. A good teacher sets some rules like sit in your own chair, go to the bottle corner for drinking water, and take permission to go to the washroom. These small activities keep the class discipline...…a teacher can handle the class with care, kindness and responsibility…..**

Hina experience things happening in the class and said:

> **………I think this should depend on the syllabus. Like the school I am working has a lot of written work…so I think there should be 1 teacher for 15 students. I think with this ratio a teacher can pay attention to all kids…….no one will be ignored…..and the class will also have no strugglers………**

While answering the question on ideal teacher student ratio Asiya's insight was interesting and noteworthy being a teacher in a PEF school. She said,

> ……. **In my opinion there should not be more than 15 kids with one teacher. But here in PEF schools the teacher child ratio exceeds to 40:1 and the teacher has to deal with all the kids alone. When the students are more there is a lot of noise and disturbance in the class……so I think at least there should be two teachers who can handle the kids in a better way. In this way the teachers as well as the kids would not feel upset……**

Thus we can say that the participants emphasized on standard classroom with small size. Two parents went beyond 15 marking the ratio till 20.
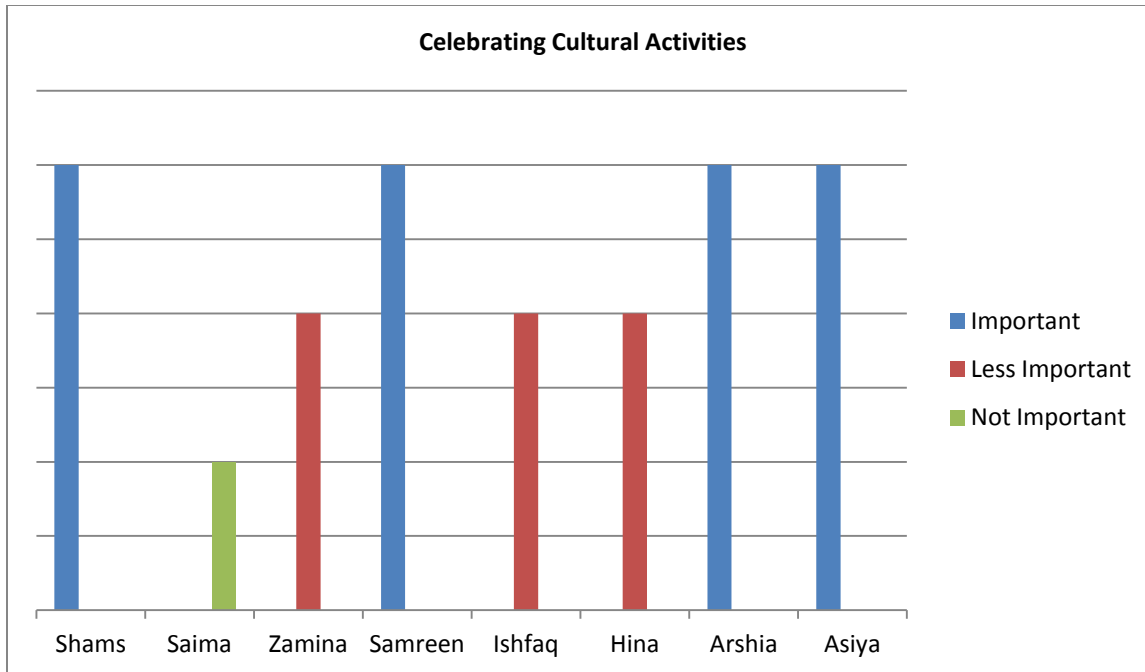
Celebrating cultural activities

Figure 5. Celebrating cultural activities

It was interesting to explore across the data, how do participants talk about the cultural activities; as for their own sake or as an opportunity for learning? Or as opportunity for learning citizenship? Shams said:

> **……..I think from young age, a child should know about the special events celebrated culturally and religiously, and their importance…..**

Asiay also marked cultural activities as important saying:

> **……I think kids should know what our culture is. Celebrating and participating in activities… kids feel excited and motivated…they enjoy and also get the information. It is something beyond the studies…but in PEF schools cultural activities are not celebrated… school should practice having debate competitions on the special events………or a small performance related to the cultural and religious event…..**

Arshia described her thought saying:

> **……Kids learn common moral values….like punctuality, respect, discipline, and not being harsh with each other…..learning about these values in school can help a kid to become a good citizen….**

Hina said:

> **……Kids express joy celebrating flower day, color day but…..I have marked them as less important because in the names of these activities schools spend the whole day planning and preparing for them. Then asking parents to submit funds for these activities and also burdening the parents to dress the kids accordingly. I believe these activities should be celebrated but not too often……..**

Ishfaq also marked cultural activities as less important expressing:

> **……I have marked them as less important because I see too many events celebrated in the schools. Like flower day, cultural day, school day etc. and then at the expense done to celebrate these……. Thus, I think a few important events should only be celebrated……**

Saima the only participant to mark cultural activities as not important supported her point saying:

> **……In preschool other activities such as art, reading, and sports are more important than cultural activities. In international schools kids interact with multicultural peers but this has no impact on them as I think kids have their own culture…..**

From the data we see that the participants talked about these activities as less for the sake of learning opportunities, and more as a source of collecting funds.

Parental Participation

Parents Teachers Meeting

From the data once again it was found that all eight participants marked parents' teacher meeting as important. Shams giving details on the quality said**,**

> **…..It is not only an important day for the parents but it is also important for the teachers too. These meetings are very important to know what is happening with their child or what the child is doing in the school….**

Saima expressing her point said:

> **……The benefit of PTM (parents teachers meeting) is that you get a clear picture of your kids activities………there may be issues ignored and if those are highlighted by the teachers and given reinforcement at home can give good results…..**

Samreen shared her views that were different from the others as she was not only concerned with knowing the academic progress but also she thought these meeting to be affective in discussing the kid's behavior. Supporting the importance of PTM she said:

> **………During the whole academic year there are fewer chances for the parents to interact with the teachers. Some schools do not even allow the parents to meet the**

teacher other than the open house. Thus attending……..these meetings through the teachers you come to know about the kid's studies, and most importantly you come to know about their behavior. Most of the time only the academic progress or grades are sent home but through these meeting other important things can also be discussed…

Moving ahead to Arshia's answer, her passage was informative because it connected to utterances about "home routines interlocking with preschools, progress and activity:

……. It is very important for me to know that my son is spending five to six hours in the school so what is he doing there? How………is his relation with rest of the class fellows…does he communicate with the teachers......at the café how he manage things? What ways he use to talk with the maids? And most important the feedback of the teacher related to his learning progress. Does he show curiosity and ask questions? Does he follow the given instructions? All these things are important for me to know. These meetings also have opportunity for the teachers to share, discuss and inform the parents how the kid is lagging behind and with the parents help the kid can perform better. As the time a kid spend at home with the mother can be used to help in making the kid's learning better. A teacher can take the help of the parents to reinforce or practice the task with the kid to achieve success…..

Asiya also favored saying:

……..PTMs are equally important for the teachers as well because the teachers can inform the parents about their kids progress. They can discuss with the parents if a child needs support from the parents to improve their progress………

Ishfaq came up with a different approach discussing the dual personality of the kids that differ at home and school. She expressed herself in the following way,

……..I think a kid is a combination of two different personalities……. One which he has with the mother at home where he is stubborn, arguing, lazy but on the other hand he is attentive in the class, shows cooperation while doing different tasks………..his performance like……..his attitude towards the class fellows……..things he lack in ………..and other things he is good at. Then there are many things happening inside the class room that a parent does not know like the behavior of the kid, his pace of working……

It seems clear here that this participant has given a clear idea of what a kid should be like and should not. We will be also seeing whether how this rhymes with others ideas, which the teacher should adapt to individual needs.

Making the school accountable for their child's progression

Hina being an assertive participant of this study highlighted different things in her interview. She discussed teacher child bonding alongside performance, her expectations from parent conferences for the sake of solving individual problems. Then her concern also showed that kids going to school in distress and the parent's efforts to alleviate this too. She stressed that:

> **……..As I have told you before……….a parent should know………..how attached is the kid with the teacher……..how well is he performing in the class….. Parent teachers meetings are also important in a way when a teacher has any issue with the kid………..these should be disclosed in the meetings and a solution should be found for those issues. These issues can be like……why does the kid cry while coming to school….why do the teacher fail to involve him in the class? Another kind of issue can be that parents do not see any progress……like he is unable to hold a pencil…….. Or maybe there is no improvement in his speech…. Thus, a parent might ask the teacher that their kid is spending half of the day in the school and yet he is not showing any progress……**

Here we see how this parent makes the school accountable for their child's progression. In the findings we have found a nice contrast of different expectations that some assertive parents have as opposed to those less assertive. Zamina and Asiya also shared their views marking parent teacher meeting important. It was also interesting to know parents' point of view of "looking for my child's opportunities for progression and learning" as an important argument in choosing the school in the study.

Parental Involvement

Moving ahead in the interview we see how decision-making choice for a placement is affected through parental involvement. From the present study we find that two participants marked parents' involvement as less important and the rest belief the quality to be important. As level of parent involvement in schools allows parents and staff to work together in respectful and mutually supportive ways. Participants believe that home-school collaboration leads to improved student achievement, and more positive attitudes toward school and learning turns helpful in their decision making process.

Interlocking pedagogies of home and school

From the data an often recurring topic of interlocking pedagogies of home and school is seen as an important argument for choosing the school. Asiya expressed her view saying:

> **………..When I teach my son at home I make an apple and ask him to color it…..he is learning and playing at the same time….there should be no pressure and force on kids while learning. In school they will happily and with confidence tell the teacher**

> **that the picture you have drawn they know about it as they have been practicing it at home too. Parents and teachers need to play their parts sincerely to help kids grasp knowledge easily and progress according to the required level.**

Arshia stated that training starts from home before they leave their child at school. She interconnected her home practices with the school practices in a way saying:

> **………I preferred the nearest school…..to properly manage my morning routine…as it used to irritate me that his training from home is not been done properly. It is very important that a child should be active when he leaves home for school……I want him to be confident and brave."**

She also connected home routines interlocking with preschool's progress and activities by saying:

> **…….The feedback of the teacher related to his learning progress….his curiosity of asking and ability to follow given instructions are all important for me to know. Because the time a kid spends at home with the mother can be used to help the teacher by making the kid's learning better…..**

In Ishfaq's interview we see that she calls parental engagement as an opportunity to help ……..kids. She said:

> …… **Sometimes from school kids might get a topic that is a bit difficult to understand…..here efforts a parent put in to help the kid understand it and fill up the missing gap of knowledge that is important…..if the kids find it interesting they happily share this knowledge in the class to get appreciation…..**

The findings in this study confirm that parents are adequately involved in their children's education. Their descriptions showed that they interlock pedagogical qualities of school and home which was not verbalized but could be seen as an implicit priority.

Religious Beliefs

In addition, to parental involvement in the study it was seen that all the eight participants stressed the importance of religious belief as a key priority in their search for an ECE program. Arshia applied these words:

> **……..For me being religious make kids become disciplined; it keeps them positive and makes their beliefs strong. When a kid is praying he is attached towards Allah…. At least he knows how to ask from Allah and convey his thoughts and feelings…..**

Ishfaq emphasized religious beliefs as a necessary quality saying:

> **……Knowing about the religion from the school is important. I like it when the kids come home and shares that today he was taught about a special concept of Islam. These elaborations have good effect and last long on kid's memory……**

These words value the cognitive contribution that preschool provides. Hina being an insider working as a preschool in-charge said:

> **……In schools kids are given awareness about friendship day, chocolate day etc. whereas the need to talk about religion is not up to the mark. I think Islamic talks; stories of the prophets, verses from the Quran and moral lessons related to ethics should be given to kids….as they learn more from the school…..**

Asiya equally stressed that:

> ………**From the very beginning the kids should know who their creator is? So, from the very early age they should recognize themselves as Muslims. Developing moral values in the kids since childhood will make them a good human.**

These thoughts featured in the course of the discussion of parents priorities indicate that parental values and beliefs engaged in constructing ECE placement decision.

Weighing options in making a decision

Findings from interview questions 7 through to 8 were used to answer RQ4. Two things contributed to the combination of alternatives that parents employed in the construction of their placement decision for their child: priorities parents considered necessary and quality indicators parents considered important. The responses obtained from the participants showed that they did consider some quality indicators more important than others.

Quality vs. Priorities

Various levels of relationships that exist in and early childhood education program were considered as an essential component for parents while making a placement decision for their child. Shams ordered the quality indicators:

> **…….The most important thing was to see the teacher's behavior with the child. Next whether the school is providing the services what they are charging you for and the cleanliness should be considered as a priority. The school fee and the distance matters next…..**

Hina stated:

> **……….She saw the syllabus first, then the management and then the teachers…..**

Samreen responded that:

> **…..Majority points of my decision making process was..…..the activities, study plan, cleanliness of the school, the staff's interaction with the parents and the security and safety provided……**

Asiya said:

> **…….While deciding for a placement I saw the school building, playground, the school environment, security outside the school. In the classroom the teacher child ratio, teachers behavior with the kids and the physical characteristic like comfortable furniture and availability of water near to classes…..**

In other words, each parent ordered the quality indicators according to personal preference.

Saima, Arshia and Ishfaq considered relationships in a program setting as an essential element that cannot be compromised. However, Zamina attached importance to the preschool environment for her turnover of teachers was least important. Furthermore, moving of teachers between grades was the quality indicator that parents felt least important also while making an ECE program placement decision. For parents like Hina, Asiya and Ishfaq school distance was least important as the kids were supposed to travel with them daily being school teachers.

Traditional vs. non-traditional approach to learning

In this study another factor that showed up as important was the quality 'behavior', 'passion', 'support', 'encouragement' of the teacher that influenced participants' satisfaction in the decision-making process. This implies that the more the parents perceived teachers' behaviors such as warm, patient and helpful to children, away from the traditional rude, impolite components the more they were satisfied with ECE program. Participants of this study desired non-traditional teachers; and also preferred having a preschool where instead of traditional approach towards learning, progression from play to learning was practiced. Hina a preschool teacher explained saying:

> **…..…first kids learn while playing, then he learns through activities, models and then projects…even with different experiments he learn. I think we do not want our kids to rote learn but we want to clear the concepts. It is easier for a kid to understand things if the concept is clear…I think kids should be allowed to do whatever they want to do as in Pakistani schools kids get a very little chance of doing so. Like in international schools kids are given a free hand to explore and learn……….**

Asiya said:

> **……..I think a kid gets tried soon with a same day routine…if there are activities conducted during the class he feels relaxed……….there should be a time……a period……when he can do some activities practically….like face painting, coloring…….**

We can see from the finding how parents talk about traditional vs. non-traditional approach to learning as an important factor in choosing a school. Likewise, participants confirmed that their priorities guided them in making a placement selection for their child. They all expressed satisfaction with their choices because the presence of their priorities made them have confidence in the programs. Consequently, using priorities to construct placement decisions for ECE served as a guide to making a satisfactory choice.

Placement decisions on personal experiences

Participants perceived their task of ECE placement for their child differently depending on their personal experiences. The descriptions seemed to be influenced by their individual experiences making it difficult, interesting or calling it a new experience in the course of the task of making a decision for their child's placement in a preschool.

Out of eight participants three agreed that the task of selecting a preschool for their child was difficult. Saima replied:

> **…..It was a difficult task ….I came from Saudi Arabia and faced problems to choose a preschool here….**

Ishfaq said:

> ….**it was panic; hectic and a big responsibility…** I **was doubtful about my choice… that may be I have taken a wrong decision…..**

Shams being the only male member among the participants recalled it as '**a new experience**''. Parents characterizing the process as difficult, suggest that these parents took the task seriously and were overwhelmed by the factors that might enter into a sound decision.

Hina and Asiya being professionals stated their experience as,

> **…..not difficult, we work here, also the elder siblings are here…..**

The fact that these two participants considered making an ECE placement decision as easy tasks suggests that they relied on priorities of convenience and familiarity. Though all the participants had different

perspectives still they were all open in expressing their individual experiences regarding the early childhood education placement for their child.

Parent's Hopes and Worries

Moreover, their hopes and worries emerged as important factors guiding their choice of school. Three of the participants hoped to have a school where the kids could have good environment, supportive staff with a lot of extra activities to play, learn and progress accordingly to their grade level. Shams said,

> **…….I hope there should be a lot of activities in the school, play time and extra curriculum activities……**

Zamina answered:

> **………I hoped that school will teach my daughter to speak English…..**

Ishfaq hoped:

> ……..**My son should have good instructors……**

Samreen's hopes were:

> **….my child gets the best education and knowledge……**

Arshia hoped:

> **…….My son should not have burden of work…he should enjoy and learn at the same time. A kid should feel happy to learn in the early years……**

The participants who were working in the field of education had a bit different approach. Hina described her hopes by saying:

> **……my kid should gain confidence, learn good manners, gain knowledge and progress accordingly…..**

Asiya hoped:

> **..….to find a school with different classes for preschool and kindergarten with a small class size….**

Saima replied:

> **…….My hopes were to find a good Islamic school…….teaching practical skills too…..**

Participant's worries were also interesting regarding the process and considering their choices of school. Their concerns revolved mostly around having proper hygiene in the school, having fewer burdens of studies and not adopting bad habits. Shams worried on the following:

> **….Hygiene issues……my son being treated badly……having burden of homework…**

Zamina said:

> **…..What if she does not follow the teacher's instructions….**

Samreen replied very interestingly covering a lot by saying:

> …….**My worry was that I may choose a school that is not good…I wanted to personally visit the school to confirm the given information….on the web pages. Secondly while visiting the schools I also wanted to check all the points related to the quality….best studies… cooperative staff and school cleanliness…..**

Ishfaq replied:

> **……My worries were having enrolled my son in a school where he may carry loads of books on his back and less to learn….**

This reveals that participants' views on learning emerge as an important factor guiding their choice of school. We see that the participants of the study do not like traditional ways of classroom studies too. Saima replied,:

> ….**Attending an Islamic school I do not want my kids to become rigid Muslims…**

Hina's worries being a member of the same school her kids were enrolled in were:

> **…..If left unattended……she may disturb me in a meeting. I do not only worry for her studies but it is also her behavior, attitude, values that are developing side by side in the school's environment…..**

Asiya said:

> …….**My worries were that my kid should always be a good boy…..and possess good habits…..and must not adopt bad habits….**

Arshia answered this question a bit differently concerning the routine:

> **……..I did not have worries about his studies…..I thought how will he do lunch…..will he share his lunch with his classmates….has he been able to clean himself properly after using the washroom….I think all mothers have these worries…..**

These participants' views captured ideas of lifelong learning which were less visible in the other informants. Participants of this study have attached different reasons describing the task of decision process, which has contributed as a ground for making a choice.

In constructing early childhood care and education placement decision for their child, parents combined the quality indicators of, physical characteristics of the location, and teachers' relationships, idle class ratio, financial requirements and parental values. As indicated in the results for research question 4, parents' decision-making relied more heavily on their personal priorities than on indicators of program

quality. The combination of program alternatives was unbalanced, with greater weight given to parental priorities and less attention afforded to quality benchmarks.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand parents' perception of early childhood education and how these perceptions influenced their decision-making processes for ECE. In this section, the results of the current study will be discussed in relation to previous research findings and in relation to the theoretical framework. Data was obtained from eight parents, who had recently made a placement decision, by interviewing them. The data were qualitatively coded and analyzed. Thus, the interpretation of data is based on the ecological systems theory by Bronfenbrenner (1979). The result of the data analysis revealed that parental perception on the task of decision making for an ECE placement for a little kid varied depending on their personal experiences, allowing this activity to be classified as very easy, confusing or valuable. Parents used quality indicators as well in deciding on an ECE placement.

Research Q 1: How do parents source information to guide their decision making process regarding ECE placement for their child?

The data analysis for RQ1 revealed that participants sought and obtained information from variety of practical factors when selecting an ECE placement. Sources of information included social networks, family members, friends and neighbors, and personal search, as well as previous experience of having had a child in an ECE program. Vesely (2013) stated that social networks are the key sources of ECE program information. Also, Bauchmüller et al.(2014) and Okobah (2018) reported that parents' preference for an ECCE program is determined by parents' assessment of program quality, the recommendations by friends and neighbors and the previous experience of the parents with a program under consideration and competing programs. In line to macro-system of Bronfenbrenner (1979); Bronfenbrenner and Morris, (2006), EST model parents' choice of early childhood education might be affected by their family, socio-economic status, peer group and workplace.

The information participants obtained from the mentioned sources were not specific to any aspect of ECE programs, parents acknowledged them rather more general which guided them in making placement decision for their children. Therefore, all the participants visited the short-listed school personally to obtain insight of the program. They attached importance to the events they encountered, which included issues like personal tasks, and individual attractions, and expression indicating personal challenge. Thus, this information was detailed enough about a specific school in which the informants wished to enroll their kids. Bauer (2014), stated parents enrolling their child in an ECCE program tend to collect a large

amount of information and undertake tour of several centers to ensure that they make a most informed decision. Also Okobah (2018) listed points from Good Start Early Learning (2015), reported that sourcing information for ECCE selection can be made with certainty by obtaining first-hand information through the adoption of certain procedures like short-listing ECCE programs, booking an appointment before a visit, discussing the needs of the child, asking questions etc. From the data analysis it was also found that participants had to visit multiple schools before making the last decision as said by Leslie (2014) the decision-making process involves human thoughts and reactions to the outside world, reflecting past actions and potential future happenings along with the psychological impact on the decision-maker. In line to meso-system of Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2016), the bio ecological system model ascertains that a person's lives develop through a web of mutual relationship, providing a comprehensive conceptual lens through which the relationship between parent engagement, home and preschool and its great significance on the child's healthy cognitive development and self-concept can be explored.

Research Q 2: How do parents use quality indicators deciding on an ECE placement for their child?

From the analysis of the first part of the questionnaire the present study indicates that the perception of physical environment makes the strongest unique contribution to parents' decision-making process and satisfaction with the quality of ECE program. All the participants were very concerned with the quality of availability of water, hygienic toilets and safety and security marking these qualities as important and calling these necessities to be kept in mind while choosing a program for their kids. As discussed in the literature, studies have shown that structural quality measures (i.e. physical environment and program location and length) have an indirect impact on children's development outcomes (Howes et al., 2008; Ishimine, et al., 2010; Mashburn & Pianta, 2010).This suggests that the more the parents perceive their children's learning environment as good, the more they are satisfied with the program while making a placement decision. This is in line to the exo-system of Bronfenbrenner (1979) EST model; even though there is no direct engagement, the individual can still be impacted negatively or positively and in a powerful way (Dooley, 2018).

In this study another factor that showed up as important was the quality 'behavior', 'passion', 'support', 'encouragement' of the teacher that influenced participants' in the decision-making process. The more the parents' perceived teachers' behaviors such as warm, patient, and helpful to children, the more they were satisfied with ECE program. The above-mentioned qualities lead to strong relationship namely **"Bonding"** between teacher and the child. All the eight participants; sourced it as an important quality, to consider while making a decision for a placement in ECE programs.

Secondly, findings from this study also indicate that parents' perceived teachers' engagement and motivation to have a long-term effect on students' overall development. And similarly, we can capture the idea of lifelong learning opportunity in how parents make a choice in its perspective as a ground. From the data it was also found that participants associated teacher child bond for fitting preschool care to individual needs. From all the interesting and concrete expressions, it was easy to imagine parents' concerns about appropriate early childhood care to individual needs. Therefore, the quality of teachers in meeting individual needs and learning children play an important role while making a placement decision. This is supported by the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) which states that individual's satisfaction levels are socially constructed in time and space.

On the other hand, there was an interesting comparison found between teacher's experience and teacher's certification of preschool. Five participants declared teacher's preschool certification less important. Three participants marked teachers' certification as "important". Thus, we can say that certification of preschool had some influence on the parent's satisfaction with quality of ECE programs. Furthermore, five participants marked teachers' experience for preschool "important" and three marked it "less important". As described by Bredekamp and Copple (2009), staff with specialization in ECE and greater levels of education achievement and training has the skills to understand and handle the specific needs of the child correctly as well as emphasize learning and school readiness. Here we can say that participants' satisfaction with the teacher's experience is a key quality for influencing a placement decision for their kids.

From the finding of the study we also see that how parents are concerned about the rate of retention of teachers during an academic year. All the 8 participants called this an important quality to consider while making decision for an ECE program as none thought of it as a good idea to train small children to be flexible meeting new teachers. Parents believe that effective teachers not only make their kids feel good about school and learning, but also their work result in increased students' achievement. On the other hand, teacher turnover negatively impacts student achievement. Thus, teachers turnover is seen as one of the major quality participants have as priority for decision making.

From the data analysis we found that moving teachers within grades was not a common practice in schools of Pakistan. The following table helps to understand parent's perception on the matter.

Table 9: Moving teachers between grade levels

Participants name	Against teachers following grades	For teachers following grades
Shams	✓	
Saima	✓	
Zamina	✓	
Samreen	✓	
Ishfaq		✓
Arshia	✓	
Hina	✓	
Asiya		✓

From the table it is obvious that only two participants were in favor of moving teachers within grades, while the rest six participants were against it. Thus, for these parents moving teachers within grades is not an important quality to look into while making a placement decision.

Another interesting pattern seen in the findings while discussing moving of teachers was how participants expressed their appreciation for the fact that preschool teachers learn on the job. Thus, according to these parents learning skills in the job shows a kind of accountability and mutually learning each other (teacher and children) for raising children achievements.

The analysis of the data reflect that a favorable class size and teacher child ratio make the participants' choice easy along other qualities. Therefore, we can say that the participants emphasized on standard classroom with small size. As they highly value the idea of having their children in a favorable class size and teacher-child ratio standards for learning interaction. This implies that the more the parents perceived class sizes and teacher-child ratio as favorable, the more it helped in making a placement decision. Researchers have also provided strong evidence that a small class size and favorable teacher-child ratio directly influences the quality of interactions children experience in classrooms, which in turn, affects children's academic achievement (Mashburn & Pianta, 2010). Generally, findings of the present study are in line with Bronfenbrenner's theory (1979) that people's satisfaction with anything is shaped by their experiences, cultures, and situations in time and space. This reflects process, structural, and physical characteristics as priorities that guided parents' search for ECE programs for their child. In the present study we see that parents talked more and were also more concerned with teachers' part as compared to physical characteristics of the school while making a placement decision for an ECE program.

From the analysis of the teacher's part, it was found that while making a placement decision parents are keen about the teacher's behavior as the frequent topic of mothering preschoolers was found among the participants of the study. Secondly the rate of retention of the program was also considered important while making a decision as they believed in the topic of bonding. Thirdly it was found that the more the parents perceived class size and teacher-child ratio as favorable the more it helped in making the placement decision. In line to Bronfenbrenner (1979), EST model a person's development is affected with everything in their surrounding environment.

Moving ahead to the last part of the questionnaire that was related to parent's participation it was found that they thought parent teacher meetings (PTM) are important. Because a parent and a teacher get the opportunity to discuss and solve problems they both have been facing related to the kid. In the findings we have found a nice contrast of different expectations that some assertive parents have as opposed to those less assertive. It was also interesting to know parents' point of view of "looking for my child's opportunities for progression and learning" as an important argument in choosing the school in the study. Most of the participants made the school accountable for their child's progression. The information participants provided was informative because it connected to utterances about "home routines interlocking with preschools, progress and activity".

The findings of this study confirm that parents are adequately involved in their children's education and call this engagement as an opportunity to help kids. As parental involvement helps extend teaching outside the classroom, creates a more positive experience for children and helps children perform better when they are in school. In addition, from the data the recurring topic of interlocking pedagogies of home and school is seen as an important argument for choosing the school. Parents interconnected home practices and routines with school's progress and activities. Thus, a positive home and school relationship is important for the child's learning habits and effective academic performance. Studies show that parents' positive involvement in the early childhood stage helps in their children's cognitive development as well as school readiness and achievement (Kreider, 2002). This is because children's learning and development is situated in the cultural and social context of the communities and families, rather than simply the child (Mc-Farland-Piazza & Saunders, 2012). This interrelation among home and school, family and social life would also be an example of the meso-system Bronfernbrenner (1979), theory as it emphasizes the need of collaborations between the school and parents.

Participants' responses concerning their priorities while searching for ECE for their children revealed that parents were conscious of the cost in constructing a placement decision about early childhood education for their child. They avoided sending their children where the cost could not be accommodated by their income. In other words, the ability to pay was a key deciding factor in the search for ECE programs by parents; hence they see proximity, along with cost, and the physical space of the center, as a priority in their search for ECE programs. Even though different reasons were advanced for having closeness to the school as a priority, these reasons were considered of utmost importance to the participants while making a placement decision. These findings confirmed Day Care Trust's (2010) report that parents identified cost as a priority when making ECE selection. Also program proximity to home has been identified as one of the top three reasons for selecting a program (Canada & Bland, 2014; Joshi 2014; Matei, 2014).

This study revealed that all the eight participants belonging from different demographic characteristics (gender and education level) emphasized the importance of religious belief as a key priority in their search for an ECCE program. Perhaps, the most important complexity to bear in mind when considering the macro-system however, is that within each of the other systems that comprise the macro-system lies a multitude of developmentally-instigative belief systems, resources, parental habits, beliefs and ideologies, patterns of social and cultural interchange, as well as hazards, life styles, opportunity structures and life course options (Bronfenbrenne, 1979). The macro-system level is likely to influence how parents perceive religious education at the early level of schooling. Discussing the importance of cultural activities while choosing a school, participant had different opinions. This was not a core quality that parents considered while making a placement decision.

The findings of the study revealed the various options of ECE program that participants engaged were quality indicators to evaluate the alternatives to make placement choices for their child. This finding suggests that parents are aware of quality factors of ECE, as has been reported by various authors (López Bóo et al., 2016; Yoshikawa et al., 2013). Most of the participants considered teacher behavior as an essential indicator of quality and as a personal priority. Consequently, parents' choice of quality indicators agreed with reports by Matei (2014) and Natsiopoulou and Vitoulis (2015) that parents rank safety, child-teacher interactions, and support to learning as highly important when selecting a program. Parents in different situations may have different views on quality that can affect satisfaction levels. This is supported by the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) which states that the level of individual well being is socially constructed in time and space.

Research Q 3: How do parents weight different options in making a placement decision with regards to their child?

The findings of this study revealed that parents combined their priorities with the quality indicators they considered central in making a placement decision for their child. The quality indicators employed in generating alternatives for ECE placement were ordered on individual importance like what the participants thought important for them. Even though parents ordered the quality indicators that were engaged in their early childhood care and education placement decision making, the ordering was not uniform for all the participants. However, some participants provided the order of importance of both their priorities and the quality indicators. In line with the ecological system theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) this interaction among parental interests, available opportunities, and apparent limitations reflects that meaning making and understanding are constructed by individuals in a process that requires interdependence between existing knowledge and beliefs and new knowledge and experiences. According to Richardson (1992), decisions are reached while considering the optimal value of choice, so that the construction of early childhood education placement decision included consideration of the idea of optimal value, since both parental priorities and the available quality indicators were synthesized to attain the needed value. Moreover, as indicated by Spitzler et al., (2016), decision-making is a process of identifying and selecting alternatives that correspond with the values and interests of the decision maker, so that making a decision is an indication that a choice can be made from alternatives. In other words, the proposed literature and the results of this study also confirm that participants decided on placement based on their own interests and chose the alternatives that they felt best met all their expectations.

Research Q 4: How do parents describe the task of making a decision about an ECE placement for their child?

The participants of this study have described the task of making early childhood care and education placement decision differently. Their descriptions about the task of choosing a preschool were very interesting turning out to be 'an emotional roller-coaster' demanding a close examination of the needs and skills of everyone involved in the context (Tronto, 2013). Their descriptions included reflections on their reasons for searching for ECE through weighing pros and cons confirming literature regarding challenges of choosing an ECE program that meet their needs; that are a great responsibility (Ransom, 2012).

From the data collected a liking among participants was found for progression from play to learning. From the findings it is also reflected how parents talk about traditional vs. non-traditional approach to learning as an important factor in choosing a school. The participants presented different opinions about

their ECE placement decision based on their diverse experiences in their ECE program decision making. However, the order of the indicators seemed disconnected from each other and without regard for the effect of any quality compromising indicators on their child's development. In studies done at the Oregon Child Care Research Partnership confirms that parents do a fairly good job of differentiating between good and bad child care. The factors parents saw as important such as whether a child feels safe in care and gets a lot of attention and whether a care giver is open to new learning correspond to ways experts evaluate care, many parents use poor quality care not because they don't recognize it as bad but because they feel helpless or believe they lack other resources (Emlen et al., 1999)

Moreover, their hopes and worries emerged as important factors guiding their choice of school. The participants hoped to have a school where the kids could have good environment, supportive staff with a lot of extra activities to play, learn and progress accordingly to their grade level Canada and Bland (2014). Results related to RQ4 confirmed the literature regarding the importance to parents of elements of programs like the physical structures, play equipment, indoor and outdoor activities (Forry et al., 2014; Rothenberg et al., 2013). Participant's worries were also interesting regarding the process of weighing and considering their choices of school (Little & Eager, 2010). Their concerns revolved primarily around maintaining proper hygiene at school, less stress from studies and not developing bad habits. This reveals that participants' views on learning emerge as an important factor guiding their choice of school. The participants of the study have attached different reasons in the course of constructing an ECE placement decision, adding an insight into the factors that influence decision making process of ECE placement.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand parents' perceptions of early childhood education and how these perceptions influenced their decision-making process for early childhood education choices. Researcher used a qualitative study design in drawing on the insights of parents who have made childcare decisions for their children.

Participants gathered information from many sources, but considered their own intuition or opinion as the most important source because they had to feel confident about a placement to select it for their child in conjunction with the belief that they knew their child best and knew his/her needs. Participant decision-making was influenced by the placement's location, logistics, cost, and first impression received by participants. The analysis of data reflected two prominent themes: parents' priorities that guided their decision making for early childhood education selection for their child and how parents ordered quality indicators in constructing early childhood education placement for their child. Parents considered proximity of the school to home or work, class size and teacher-child ratio, teachers' behavior, safety,

security, comfort, parental values and cost, as priorities in their search for ECE programs for their child. Moreover participants were also interested in activity based learning in a non-traditional ways. Participants of this study interlocked home with school learning. They held the teachers accountable for character building and cognitive development along with educational achievements.

Furthermore, the study has been able to uncover the decision-making process for a choice that sets the tone of the educational journey in a child's entire life as well bridge the knowledge gap in the literature on parental decision making process of early childhood care and educational choices. The findings of this study provided an understanding of the decision-making process of parents in making ECE choices and have the potential to generate policy reform to improve ECE programs. This study generated information for policy makers by which to encourage placement decisions into quality programs, so that an increasing number of children might experience the benefits of quality programs.

Parents being the key stakeholders in making decisions concerning ECE placement for their child they need to be better informed of the need to give attention to quality indicators above other considerations. In other words as a result of this study society may reduce the achievement and opportunity gaps and become aware of family needs and contexts as factors that influence early education placement decisions. The key findings in this study are that parents gave preference to their own convenience and familiarity with the proprietor of a child care center over child center quality. To change this, some policies can be implemented; firstly government can create a campaign that informs parents of the importance of quality early childhood education. In addition reforms might be made to improve the quality of existing low quality public centers, so that parents' priorities of cost, familiarity and convenience are supported.

Suggestions for Further Research

There are three suggestions for further research. The first suggestion is to address the limitation of the subject population to include more participants with children in public schools. By including parents who selected public schools, the researcher would be able to compare the findings of this research in order to identify any similarities or differences between public and private placements for ECE. The second suggestion is to include quantitative data collection. A survey tool could be created using the indicators of the three themes of parental desires, sources of information, and factors in the decision-making process. The third suggestion for future studies would be to include participants whose opinions were not heard in this research. Future researchers could include a broader parent group: fathers, etc. Learning more from a

broader parent group would help researchers and principals understand more about what is important to parents and how they make their decisions.

Further, additional study might explore the mechanism by which parents synthesize the generated alternatives in constructing ECE placement decision, using a methodology that could enable real-time observation of this process. It would also be interesting to investigate why some quality indicators were considered more important than others in constructing early childhood education placement. In addition, more studies of parents' decision-making by program type would be helpful. Selection of a program by its method of funding was not explored in this study but may constitute a significant variable in parents' ECE decision-making. Finally, as the study-country emerges out of economic recession, this study could be repeated to ascertain more clearly the influence of economic considerations on parents' perspectives and considerations for ECE decision-making.

CHAPTER 7: RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended for early childhood education experienced teachers may be deputed who possessed desired abilities to implement the curriculum in its spirit.

The result of study revealed that public schools have lack of physical facilities for preprimary students like trained teaching staff, well equipped classroom, IT facilities, AV aids and educational toys. It is therefore, recommended that government provide these facilities in the public schools. Doing so parents belonging to all social economic background could attain the opportunity of enrolling their kids in non-costly institutions. If the government improves the quality of the public school a lot of parents would find it helpful for them as much more challenges are still to be overcome related to child development in country like Pakistan.

It is recommended that in the public sector schools trained teachers may be hired specifically with the background of Montessori diploma (Nazir & Khurshid, 2014).

Parents should acknowledge that education is the basic right for all children and ECE is the base for future development and success in life.

Parents should wisely choose a place for their young ones as it provides the foundation on which a child's whole development is based. The points from Good Start Early Learning (2015) or any other program can be referred for sourcing information for ECE selection. This can be made with certainty by obtaining first-hand information through the adoption of certain procedures like short listing ECE programs, booking an appointment before a visit, discussing the needs of the child, asking questions etc.

There is a difference between the factors influencing parental selection of early childhood education programs. As parents perception of quality of pre-primary education was expected to have an influence on their level of satisfaction with the quality of pre-primary education. It was expected that parents as consumers evaluate preprimary education (be satisfied or dissatisfied) only after they perceive it. The quality of pre-primary education was measured by physical environment, classroom characteristics and teacher qualifications and children's experience, teacher behavior and parents' involvement which are related. The outcomes of parents' satisfaction with the quality of pre-primary education are increased enrollment and retention of children, parents" loyalty and trust; and strong parent-teacher partnership.

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Appendix A

Invitation to Participants

Dear parent,

I am a student at Gothenburg University, Sweden doing International Master in Educational Research. I am conducting a study on the factors that influence decision making for early childhood education placement. The purpose of the study is to understand parent's perception to generate information that policymakers can employ to draw up program policy that could be relevant, and accessible to many children.

I would like to invite you to participate in the study. Participation in the research is voluntary and participants are at liberty to discontinue participation at any point in the study. Participation entails one event of 30-45 minutes interview that will be audio recorded. You will be given an opportunity to review the interview transcript. Your responses to the interview questions will be confidentially handled and will be utilized for the purpose of the study.

If you accept to participate in the study, please respond via e-mail or inform the class teacher in 7 days. You can come forward in advance if you need more information before the interview. Your kind consideration will be appreciated.

Warm regards.

Appendix B

Questionnaire

The Influence of Parental Perceptions on Early Childhood Educational Choices in Pakistan

Part I:

Directions: - The following questions determine your perceptions of the quality of pre-school education you used in deciding a placement. Please indicate your opinion of the level of school quality by circling the appropriate number that best represents your perceptions.

KEY: Important (I) = 3, Less Important (LI) = 2, Not Important (NI) =1

S/N	Items measuring quality indicators	I	LI	NI	Rating
	Physical characteristics				
1.	Preschool environment (indoor/ outdoor)	3	2	1	
2.	Size of class, windows etc.	3	2	1	
3.	Sufficiency of play equipment	3	2	1	
4.	Quality of appropriate activities	3	2	1	
5.	Available classroom learning materials like textbooks, pictures and charts	3	2	1	
6.	Toilets hygienic	3	2	1	
7.	Availability of water	3	2	1	
8.	Distance to the school	3	2	1	
9.	Safety and security	3	2	1	
	Quality of Teachers				
10.	Teachers behavior/ encouragement/ support for working with kids	3	2	1	
11.	Teachers passion for working with kids	3	2	1	
12.	Experience of working as a preschool teacher	3	2	1	
13.	Teachers commitment for working with children	3	2	1	
14.	Teachers having preschool certificate	3	2	1	
15.	Teacher/child bond for developing good educational care	3	2	1	
16.	Moving teachers between grades/levels (from one class to another)	3	2	1	

17.	Turnover of teachers	3	2	1
18.	Student teacher ideal ratio	3	2	1
19.	Celebration of different cultural activities/settings to show respect	3	2	1
	Parental Participation			
20.	Parental engagement (parents teacher meeting)	3	2	1
21.	Parental involvement in academic activities (storytelling, field trips, etc.)	3	2	1
22.	Religious beliefs and values	3	2	1
23.	Cost of child care (fees)	3	2	1

Would you put these things in order please, what do you think matters the most important thing to your boy/girl while searching a preschool and the least important to them?

Research Questions

The following four research questions guided the study:

RQ1: How do parents source information to guide their decision making process regarding early childhood education placement for their child?

1. How did you work out on choosing a school?
2. How did you gather the information?
3. How did you go about in making up your mind?

RQ2: How do parents use quality indicators in deciding on an early childhood education placement for their child?

See Questionnaire in Appendix B

RQ3: How do parents weight different options in constructing a placement decision with regards to their child?

4. Were some quality indicators more important to you than others?
5. How did the things you considered as priorities actually guide you in making a final decision for your child's placement?

RQ4: How do parents describe the task of making a decision about an early childhood education placement for their child?

6. How was this task of choosing a preschool for you?
7. What were your hopes and worries while choosing a preschool?
8. Is there anything that I have omitted that you would like me to know concerning your decision making process for your child?

Appendix D

Permission letter

To Principal,

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: Permission to conduct Research in your Institution.

The bearer of this letter Mrs. Aliya Majid is a Postgraduate student of this University .She is registered for International Masters in Educational Research program in the department of Education and Special Education.

As part of her studies she intends to do a research on "The Influence of Parents Perceptions on Early Childhood Educational Choices in Pakistan".

I request you to kindly permit her to collect the required data for the concerned inmates of your institution. The information gathered will be strictly kept confidential and will be used for the research study purpose only. Thanking you.

Yours truly

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