



Exploring the Status of Training Initiatives for Improving Early Childhood Education in Public Sector Schools of Punjab

Mirza Zafar Ullah Farmayash¹, Muhammad Saeed²

¹PhD Scholar, Minhaj University, Lahore, Email: zafarbaigmul@gmail.com

²Professor, School of Education, Minhaj University, Lahore,
Email: muhammadsaeed.edu@mul.edu.pk

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Early Childhood Education,
Training Initiatives, Public
Schools, Punjab

Corresponding Author:

Mirza Zafar Ullah Farmayash
zafarbaigmul@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Punjab has proliferated speedily, however doubts persist regarding the reach, frequency and quality of in-service trainings that render policy into classroom practice. This qualitative, descriptive research deals with the practicing of QAED Oriented ECE trainings in nine districts of Central-Punjab, Pakistan as perceived by the conveniently selected QAED Principals based on semi structured interviews. Applying reflexive thematic analysis and cross-case matrices, we coded transcriptions against a practice-to-impact framework connecting policy standards, professional development design, implementation drivers and local operating conditions. Results converge on strong trainer readiness and high guideline fidelity within training rooms, yet against this backdrop, three tensions in implementation endure: (i) unequal AEO exposure & dosage thins supervision/post-training 'booster' (ii) inadequate pace of training for all roles prompts demand for regular annual/biannual calendars and refreshers; and (iii) nomination/attendance frictions along with budget lines which fund delivery but not classroom materials requisite to activity-based pedagogy. Principals perceive on-site training supervision as straightforward and post-training school follow-up, recognized as the weakest yet most high-leverage step for maintaining practice, is haphazard. We advocate for universal AEO training (3–5 day plus refreshers), published multi-role calendars, stricter nomination protocols, micro-budgets for activity corners/print packs and a standardized follow up visit (4–6 weeks) based on a short rubric and written feedback supported by a light-handed district dashboard. These pragmatic alterations will match what is on offer and available to everyday practice, promoting the potential that ECE training leads to more uniform, age-appropriate classroom instruction across Punjab.

INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is central to foundational learning and school readiness, with wide agreement that high-quality, play-based environments and trained educators shape later achievement and social outcomes. In Punjab, the provincial architecture for ECE has evolved over the past decade through policy commitments, curriculum reform, and large-scale implementation drives. The Punjab Education Sector Plan 2019/20–2023/24 (PESP) positioned ECE as a pillar for improving equity and quality, pairing classroom expansion with teacher development and governance reforms (Government of Punjab, 2020). In parallel, Pakistan’s Single National Curriculum codified pre-primary learning standards and competencies raising the floor for minimum quality and creating a new training agenda for public-sector teachers and supervisors (ITACEC & National Curriculum Council, 2021). At the federal level, the 2024 Foundational Learning Policy underscores early literacy/numeracy, signalling sustained attention to the early years and the need for strengthened professional development systems (MoFEPT, 2024).

Within this evolving policy environment, the Quaid-e-Azam Academy for Educational Development (QAED) is the primary institutional home for in-service teacher education and management trainings in Punjab’s school system, including ECE. Administrative data and program notes indicate that QAED and allied institutions supported rapid classroom scale-up in the late 2010s e.g., over 18,000 ECE rooms were established across 36 districts in 2017–19 while simultaneously rolling out training modules, guides, and supervisory routines by Punjab Education Curriculum, Training & Assessment Authority (PECTAA). Yet scale-up inevitably surfaces questions of coverage, cadence, quality, and implementation fidelity: How frequently are teachers, caregivers, and school leaders receiving role-appropriate ECE trainings? Are supervisory cadres especially Assistant Education Officers (AEOs) systematically included? Do materials and budgets match the activity-based pedagogy envisioned in policy? These are precisely the issues surfaced in our qualitative dataset: semi-structured interviews with QAED Principals from nine central-Punjab districts (Lahore, Kasur, Faisalabad, Chiniot, Gujranwala, Hafizabad, Sahiwal, Pakpattan, Sargodha). Their district-level vantage point provides a grounded lens on nomination processes, trainer preparation, attendance constraints, resource adequacy, and supervision.

The salience of these questions is reinforced by national evidence. UNICEF’s 2023 review of ECE models in Pakistan documents uneven access and variable quality, and emphasizes the importance of continuous professional development, mentoring, and community engagement to translate standards into classroom practice (UNICEF, 2023). The World Bank’s human capital analyses likewise highlight gaps in multisector readiness and financing that can blunt early-learning reforms unless teacher capacity and school-level support improve in tandem (World Bank, 2023). Household-based assessments such as the citizen-led ASER studies continue to show persistent foundational learning challenges into the early grades, underscoring the need to strengthen the ECE–Grade-1 transition and pedagogical practices from the outset (ASER Pakistan, 2018; ASER Pakistan, 2023).

Policy instruments also shape the content and expectations of training. The SNC’s ECE framework specifies competencies and pedagogy for class 1, implying that QAED’s modules, classroom observation tools, and teacher/caregiver guides must align to developmentally appropriate, activity-based methods (ITACEC & National Curriculum Council, 2021). More recently Safdar, Waqar & Muhammad (2024) described that The Federal Foundational Learning Policy (2024) calls for regular reviews and accountability for outcomes, reinforcing the value

of monitoring and follow-up after workshops an issue repeatedly raised by our interviewees, who advocate structured post-training school visits and rubrics to check fidelity of implementation (MoFEPT, 2024). At the same time, provincial statistics remind us that system scale is large and heterogeneous, and district operating conditions (staffing, rural outreach, seasonal constraints) complicate training logistics and attendance (Bureau of Statistics Punjab, 2023).

Empirically, Punjab's experience mirrors global lessons: large rollouts of pre-primary classrooms and standards create momentum but must be coupled with recurrent, role-specific CPD, adequate material budgets, and responsive supervision to sustain practice change (UNICEF, 2023; World Bank, 2023). Our interviews indicate that Master Trainers generally adhere to QAED guidelines, but training frequency is perceived as insufficient, AEO coverage is uneven, and attendance among caregivers/School Council members is fragile without targeted incentives. Principals also describe variability in nomination/selection practices and in budget lines for activity-based materials issues that, if addressed, could lift fidelity and classroom quality. These grounded perspectives complement recent mixed-methods research in Punjab showing implementation bottlenecks amid progress, and calling for institutionalized support cycles beyond one-off workshops (Haque et al., 2023).

Against this backdrop, the present study asks: What is the status of training Initiatives for improving ECE in Punjab's public schools, and how might QAED and district actors strengthen them? By synthesizing district-level perspectives from QAED Principals with current policy and research, we aim to (i) describe coverage, cadence, and perceived quality of trainings for different stakeholder groups; (ii) identify operational constraints around selection, attendance, resources, and supervision; and (iii) propose actionable improvements consistent with provincial/federal priorities for foundational learning. The contribution is pragmatic: surfacing concrete levers annual training calendars, universal AEO inclusion, strengthened nomination protocols, incentives for caregiver/school council participation, budget ties to activity-based kits, and structured follow-up that align policy aspirations with day-to-day realities in public-sector schools across Punjab (Government of the Punjab, 2020; MoFEPT, 2024; UNICEF, 2023).

Objectives

1. To assess the status and fidelity of QAED ECE trainings delivered to key roles (AEOs, head teachers, ECE teachers, caregivers, School Council members), focusing on frequency, duration, and adherence to guidelines
2. To examine the supporting conditions for effective training and classroom uptake budget adequacy (TA/DA, materials, printing/refreshments), availability/quality of guides /manuals module revision and alignment to standards
3. To identify implementation bottlenecks and practical improvements (e.g., attendance, staff release time, scheduling, follow-up visits) and synthesize Principals' recommendations for strengthening CPD cycles and classroom fidelity

Research Questions

1. What is the current status and quality of QAED-led ECE training Initiatives across districts (coverage of roles, frequency/duration, and guideline fidelity) as perceived by QAED Principals?
2. Are resources and instruments training budgets, Teacher Guides/Caregiver Manuals, and revised modules aligned with ECE standards sufficient to support activity-based pedagogy?
3. What operational challenges (attendance, logistics, staffing, timing) arise during trainings, and what actionable steps do Principals propose to improve implementation and classroom uptake?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present is a qualitative, descriptive study using semi-structured interviews to examine the status, coverage, cadence, guideline fidelity, and implementation challenges of QAED-led trainings for Early Childhood Education (ECE) in public sector schools in central Punjab. The design is suited to capturing nuanced perspectives of district-level leadership who oversee training delivery and post-training monitoring. Interviews were conducted once per district with QAED Principals, following a common interview schedule (a single indicator operationalized as ten prompts). Ethical safeguards included informed consent, voluntary participation, and de-identification of respondents in reporting. The results chapter is organized question-by-question to retain traceability from prompt to theme and interpretation.

Population and Sampling

The population for this study comprised all QAED Principals who supervise ECE training implementation across all districts of central Punjab. These officials coordinate Master Trainers, nominate participants (AEOs, head teachers, ECE teachers, caregivers, School Council members), arrange venues and logistics, and oversee monitoring and follow-up. Focusing on this population ensures that findings reflect both policy intent and operational realities across diverse district contexts.

We used convenience sampling to recruit nine QAED Principals from Lahore, Kasur, Faisalabad, Chiniot, Gujranwala, Hafizabad, Sahiwal, Pakpattan, and Sargodha. Inclusion was based on access and availability within the fieldwork window while ensuring coverage of urban and peri-urban settings and variation in training scale. One interview was completed per district QAED principal. For reporting, participants are anonymized using codes for principals of districts (Principal Lahore=P-LHR; Principal Kasur=P-KSR; Principal Faisalabad=P-FSD; Principal Chiniot=P-CHN; Principal Gujranwala=P-GRW; Principal Hafizabad=P-HFD; Principal Sahiwal=P-SWL; Principal Pakpattan=P-PPK; Principal Sargodha=P-SGR). Thematic saturation, defined as no new themes emerging within the ten prompts, was reached within the nine interviews.

Instrument Development and Data Collection

The semi-structured interview instrument drew on QAED's ECE training guidelines and the study objectives. A single indicator "Training Initiatives for ECE" was operationalized through ten semi-structured prompts covering: (1) Master Trainer specialization and guideline fidelity; (2) AEO specialized ECE trainings (coverage, duration, quality and suggestions); (3) nomination /selection criteria; (4) sufficiency of coverage and cadence across roles; (5) Problems faced in conducting trainings for ECE; (6) Budget sufficiency for conducting trainings for ECE; (7) Sufficiency of teachers' guides and caregivers' manuals; (8) Module revision and alignment with prescribed quality standards; (9) Ease or difficulty in supervision/monitoring; and (10) Suggestions for improvements. Interviews were conducted in the respondent's preferred language, audio-recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim. Brief field notes captured contextual details. Transcripts were de-identified and stored securely; only coded IDs are used in reporting.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The researchers conducted reflexive thematic analysis. First, transcripts were read repeatedly and open-coded line-by-line within each interview question. Codes were then clustered into categories and elevated to themes and sub-themes for each question. Next, a cross-case matrix (district-by-theme) was compiled to examine convergence and divergence across districts. Trustworthiness was enhanced through an audit trail (memos, codebook decisions), peer debrief on code-theme fit, and the use of short verbatim excerpts tied to coded IDs. In the

Results chapter, each interview question is presented with a table: Participant → Theme → Sub-theme (evidence tag), followed by a brief interpretation that explains the pattern, outliers, and practical implications.

Question 1: Master Trainers' specialization and Guideline Fidelity

Table 1

Themes and Sub-themes Related to Question 1

Participants	Themes	Sub-themes
P-LHR	High Trainer Preparedness Strong Guideline Fidelity	Follow QAED training guidelines
P-KSR		Maintain discipline
P-FSD		Online observation
P-CHN		Rooms management
P-GRW		Multiple specialized trainings
P-HFD		Guidance in lesson planning
P-SWL		Better outputs
P-PPK		Follow schedule/timetable for sessions
P-SGR		

Across districts, Principals consistently report well-prepared Master Trainers and strong adherence to QAED guidelines, with routine observation and orderly session management. Trainer capacity and fidelity are not the binding constraints for classroom change.

P-LHR said that master trainers fully follow the trainings guidelines in the training rooms.

P-KSR replied that when ECE master trainers perform then they follow all the training guidelines and related other officers also visit and observe them.

P-FSD stated that master trainers follow the training guidelines like discipline of the class, delivery of lessons and manage the training rooms.

P-SWL and P-CHN both similarly responded that master trainers fully follow all the training guideline and their performance is directly observed by QAED Punjab through online cameras.

P-GRW answered that they follow the training guideline during managing the training classrooms and guide the trainees to develop an effective lesson plan.

P-HFD said that they follow training guidelines and are giving better outputs.

P-PPK said that they completely follow the training guideline during whole the training process.

P-SGR answered that they follow all the training guidelines as per the given schedule such as time table.

Question 2: AEO Specialized ECE Trainings (Coverage, Duration, Quality and Suggestions)

Table 2

Themes and Sub-themes Related to Question 2

Participants	Themes	Sub-themes
P-LHR	AEO Coverage More Refreshers Training Courses Longer Duration for Quality Improvement	Specific programs recommended
P-KSR		Increase duration/frequency
P-FSD		Ongoing cycles and
P-CHN		classroom-focused content
P-GRW		Maintain quality checks
P-HFD		Continuous training process
P-SWL		

P-PPK P-SGR		
----------------	--	--

Coverage and dosage for AEOs are uneven. Several districts completed one round; others remain partial or pending. Respondents value the trainings but request universal inclusion and longer, repeated cycles to build supervision skill.

Both of P-LHR and P-SGR similarly answered that some AEOs have got it but most have not and more training programmes should be arranged for all AEOs.

P-KSR, P-GRW and P-PPK similarly replied that AEOs have received one training and I am fully satisfied but more trainings should be arranged for them and duration of trainings also should be increased.

P-FSD responded that they have received only one training, more trainings should be given to them related to manage ECE classrooms and methods to deliver lessons to small kids.

P-CHN said that AEOs have not received any specialized training in district Chiniot such types of trainings should be provided to the AEOs.

P-HFD answered that they have received ECE related training in different badges and duration and quality of trainings was appropriate but more trainings should be provided.

P-SWL responded that all AEOs did not received and duration should be long (two- or three-weeks) and trainings process should be continuous.

Question 03: Nomination/Selection Criteria

Table 3

Themes and Sub-themes Related to Question 3

Participants	Themes	Sub-themes
P-LHR	Nomination of ECE related Staff Verification and Filtering Process Availability-driven Substitutions	Related and qualified nominees
P-KSR		Verify IDs
P-FSD		Documents checked
P-CHN		Relevant staff attends
P-GRW		Irresponsible Staff
P-HFD		ECE-related teachers/caregivers/SC
P-SWL		nominated
P-PPK		
P-SGR		

Nominations generally follow QAED criteria with ID/service-card verification. However, availability-driven substitutions occur in some cases, reducing role-fit tightening eligibility checks would help.

P-LHR said that I am satisfied because they fully follow the criteria, they nominate related and qualified caregivers and school council members.

P-KSR, P-FSD and P-CHN replied similarly that head teachers nominate the related persons, we verify them from their documents before and during the training classrooms at daily bases if irrelevant then we send him back and demand for the relevant person.

P-GRW and P-SWL responded similarly that relevant staff comes and our focal person/staff verifies the trainees from their ID or service cards.

P-HFD replied that head teachers sent that staff which is available at that time and sometime they send less qualified staff so I am not satisfied.

P-PPK and P-SGR said that head teachers nominate only that persons which are purely related to the ECE. I am satisfied.

Question 04: Sufficiency of Coverage and cadence Across Roles

Table 4

Themes and Sub-themes Related to Question 4

Participants	Themes	Sub-themes
P-LHR	Continuous Trainings	More and more continuous trainings
P-KSR	Trainings ss per Community	Continuous cycles of trainings as per changing demands
P-FSD	Demands	At least one training per year recommended
P-CHN	Trainings per Annual	Calls for pre-planned annual schedule
P-GRW		Training timelines assist supervision
P-HFD		
P-SWL		
P-PPK		
P-SGR		

Most roles have received at least some training, yet cadence is viewed as insufficient. Principals call for an annual or biannual calendar and continuous refreshers to match evolving needs.

P-LHR, P-KSR and P-GRW answered that all relevant ECE staff has received trainings and these trainings are not sufficient so training process should be continuous.

P-FSD and P-CHN said that ECE relevant staff has received it one or two times so these trainings are insufficient and more trainings should be provided.

P-HFD responded that all relevant ECE staff has received ECE trainings but these trainings are not sufficient so that at least one training in one year should be given.

P-SWL responded that all relevant ECE staff have received trainings very less in number so these trainings should be more and continuous.

P-PPK and P-SGR similar answered that ECE relevant staff has received such trainings but these trainings should be annually pre-planned and continuous.

Question 05: Problems Faced in Conducting Trainings for ECE

Table 5

Themes and Sub-themes Related to Question 5

Participants	Themes	Sub-themes
P-LHR	Attendance Issues in Start	Caregivers/school council members attendance
P-KSR	Funding Frictions	Late arrivals in the beginning
P-FSD	Female Attendance Constraints	Funds for activity-based sessions
P-CHN		Distance issues for female staff
P-GRW		Heads resist due to less availability of staff
P-HFD		
P-SWL		
P-PPK		
P-SGR		

Common frictions include caregiver/School Council attendance, staff release constraints, travel/time, and initial latecomers though many districts report smooth delivery due to clear QAED procedures.

P-LHR said that he is facing problems related to funds and attendance of caregivers and school council members.

P-KSR and P-FSD replied similarly that in the beginning, the teachers come late especially female staff attendance is short because of long distances.

P-CHN, P-GRW, P-SWL and P-PPK answered in a similar way that we have not faced any type of problem because good and clear pre-planned procedure of guidelines provided by the QAED Punjab and we follow the given guidelines.

P-HFD responded that because of less availability of ECE related teachers, the head teachers resist to send them for training.

P-SGR answered that in the beginning, the teachers comes late but after it this problem has been solved.

Question 6. Budget sufficiency for Conducting Trainings for ECE

Table 6

Themes and Sub-themes Related to Question 6

Participants	Themes	Sub-themes
P-LHR	Budget sufficient for (TA/DA, Stationery and Lunch)	Covers tea/lunch and cash to trainees
P-KSR		Covers refreshment, travelling and daily allowances
P-FSD	Budget Sufficient for Routine Costs	Covers routine delivery needs
P-CHN		
P-GRW		
P-HFD		
P-SWL		
P-PPK		
P-SGR		

Budgets are widely seen as sufficient for delivery (refreshments, TA/DA, printing), with isolated concerns about activity-based materials; micro-budgets for classroom kits are recommended.

P-LHR answered that no, this budget is not sufficient because all the ECE training process based on activity-based methods so more equipment is required.

P-KSR and P-CHN responded that Budget is much sufficient for stationary, refreshment, travelling and daily allowance provided to the trainees.

P-FSD replied that budget is now sufficient but it should be without any tax.

P-GRW said that budget is sufficient for their refreshment and travelling allowance.

P-HFD and P-SWL stated that budget is sufficient because from this budget we provide them food and as well as cash money easily.

P-PPK said that budget is much sufficient because we provide the tea, lunch and cash money with the help of given proper guidelines.

P-SGR answered that budget provided by the QAED is sufficient to meet routine training delivery requirements.

Question 7: Sufficiency of Teachers' Guides and Caregivers' Manuals**Table 7***Themes and Sub-themes Related to Question 7*

Participants	Themes	Sub-themes
P-LHR	Sufficient and Affect Job Performance Supportive and Create Interest Aligned and Prints via Budget	Sufficient, prints as per numbers
P-KSR		Improves performance and interest-creating
P-FSD		Provide help in improving management and teaching skills
P-CHN		Helpful to all roles for improving quality
P-GRW		
P-HFD		
P-SWL		
P-PPK		
P-SGR		

Guides and manuals are considered sufficient and engaging, provided as soft copies with prints per trainee; respondents perceive improvements in job performance and classroom management.

P-LHR answered that QAED Punjab send us the whole material in a soft form we take prints as per the numbers and whole material is very effective for improving performance.

P-KSR, P-CHN, P-HFD and P-SWL replied that guides and manuals are very creative. QAED Punjab provide in soft a copy and then we take prints as per numbers from the provided budget and then distribute to in them. Material is very effective for job performance.

P-FSD responded that material is sufficient, interesting and creating. Staff are following guidelines and their management and teaching skills have been improved.

P-GRW said that material is sufficient, very supportive, creating and providing a lot of interest in ECE teachers and caregivers.

P-PPK answered that guides and manuals are sufficient and very helpful to manage the ECE classrooms.

P-SGR stated that guides and manuals are very helpful for head teachers, teachers, caregivers and school council members for improving the quality of ECE.

Question 8. Module Revision and Alignment with Prescribed Quality Standards**Table 8***Themes and Sub-themes Related to Question 8*

Participants	Themes	Sub-themes
P-LHR	Modules Revised Aligned to Standards	Time to time revisions by experts as per standards
P-KSR		Aligned with prescribed Quality Standards
P-FSD		Aligned as per desired standards
P-CHN		
P-GRW		
P-HFD		
P-SWL		
P-PPK		
P-SGR		

Training modules are periodically revised and broadly aligned with prescribed quality standards across districts.

P-LHR and P-FSD both similarly said that training modules are revised and prepared by highly expert. These are broadly aligned with prescribed Quality Standards.

P-KSR, P-CHN and P-PPK replied that training modules are revised after two years and they are broadly aligned with the prescribed quality standards.

P-GRW and P-SWL answered that modules are revised as per prescribed standards and also aligned with the prescribed Quality Standards.

P-HFD P-SGR responded that modules are revised time to time and aligned with the Quality Standards.

Question 9: Ease or Difficulty in Supervision/Monitoring

Table 9

Themes and Sub-themes Related to Question 9

Participants	Themes	Sub-themes
P-LHR	Supervision Easy Due to Facilities/Guidelines Easy because it is routine matter Schedules provided by QAED	Availability of facilities (Multimedia, budget and trained MTs) Has become routine Conduct as per guidelines Timelines shared 5–6 days before by QAED
P-KSR		
P-FSD		
P-CHN		
P-GRW		
P-HFD		
P-SWL		
P-PPK		
P-SGR		

Supervision is generally described as easy or routine tasks to pre-schedules and clear guidelines; the larger challenge lies beyond the training room in ensuring consistent post-training follow-up at schools.

P-LHR replied that we find it very easy because all necessary facilities are available and we have well trained master trainers and cooperating officers.

P-KSR and P-PPK similarly said that all aspects to supervise the trainings are easy and routine matter.

P-FSD answered that all the training process is easy for me because it has become routine work and nothing is harder.

P-CHN stated that Supervision is easy for me because it is a routine work.

P-GRW and P-SWL answered that it is easy for me because pre-schedule and guidelines have been provided by the QAED Punjab and we conduct these trainings in the light of these provided guidelines.

P-HFD and P-SGR answered that QAED Punjab provide us timelines before five or six days so I easily manage the training process.

Question 10: Suggestions for Improvements

Table 10*Themes and Sub-themes Related to Question 10*

Participants	Themes	Sub-themes
P-LHR	Increase Budget	Allocate more budget for (support staff, incentives, special allowances)
P-KSR	Nomination process	Foreign visits
P-FSD	Improve Modules	Nominate willing/qualified staff
P-CHN	Continuity of Trainings and	More attractive/activity-based modules
P-GRW	Monitoring Process	Continuous trainings to improve monitoring process
P-HFD	Recruitment of Specific ECE Teachers	Recruit of ECE Teachers
P-SWL		
P-PPK		
P-SGR		

Suggested improvements converge on: universal AEO training with longer dosage; pre-planned annual calendars; stricter nomination; more budget (especially for caregivers and school council members); structured post-training school visits; and, in some districts, recruiting a dedicated ECE teacher cadre.

P-LHR said that budget should be increased and willing and qualified staff should be nominated. Modules and Manuals should be more attractive and activity based.

P-KSR replied that ECE trainings should be continuous and schedule should be annually pre-planned. The monitoring process should also be improved.

P-FSD answered that budget for supportive staff in the forms of incentives special allowance should be increased and foreign visits should be arranged.

P-CHN answered that more trainings should be required, at least one training in one year and more funds should be allocated. More visits of the ECE schools for the officers.

P-GRW responded that specific teachers for ECE should be recruited and trainings should be provided to them time to time.

P-HFD and P-SGR replied that more budget should be provided specially for the caregivers and school council members so that they can receive trainings with more interests.

P-SWL answered that budget should be increased and willing qualified staff should be nominated. Modules and manuals should be more attractive and activity based.

P-PPK stated that ECE trainings should be continuous, schedule should be annually pre-planned. Monitoring of implementation processes should be improved.

Findings

1. Master Trainers are well-prepared and consistently follow QAED guidelines, sessions are orderly and routinely observed trainer capacity/fidelity are not the binding constraints.
2. AEO training coverage and dosage are uneven, with some districts reporting none and others only one short round, Principals call for universal inclusion and repeated cycles.
3. Training cadence across all roles is insufficient for sustained change respondents repeatedly request continuous, annual/biannual calendars and refreshers.
4. Nomination/selection is usually criteria-based with ID verification, but availability-driven substitutions sometimes reduce role-fit; tighter eligibility checks are needed.

5. Operational frictions are concentrated in attendance/logistics (especially for caregivers and school council members), staff release, and travel/time though delivery is often smooth under clear QAED procedures.
6. Budgets are generally sufficient for routine delivery costs (refreshments, TA/DA, printing), but thin for activity-based classroom materials; micro-budgets for kits and print packs are recommended.
7. Guides and manuals are sufficient, engaging, and widely used (soft copies with per-trainee prints); Principals report improvements in job performance/classroom management.
8. Modules are periodically revised and aligned with prescribed standards, reinforcing consistency with activity-based pedagogy.
9. Supervision during trainings is easy/routine due to pre-schedules and clear guidelines; however, post-training school follow-up remains the weakest link for translating training into classroom fidelity.
10. Cross-district synthesis: The training room architecture is sound (competent trainers, aligned materials), but downstream implementation driver who gets trained, how often, with what supports, and how follow-up is organized are uneven. The sharpest constraint is incomplete/short AEO training, which weakens the supervision–feedback loop after workshops.

Discussion of Results

Synthesis for interpretation across districts, principals converge on strong trainer preparedness and useful modules/guides, but flag insufficient training cadence, incomplete AEO coverage, and fragile attendance (especially caregivers/school council members). Resource sufficiency is acceptable for delivery logistics, while classroom-level activity materials require steadier funding (Azubuike, 2025). Supervision is feasible, yet post-training school follow-up is the missing link for classroom fidelity (Reinke et al., 2013). These patterns directly inform the study’s Findings and Recommendations (e.g., annual training calendars, universal AEO inclusion, nomination protocols, incentives, and structured follow-up rubrics).

The cross-district picture that emerges is one of a sound training architecture whose design and delivery inside the training room are largely working as intended, but whose implementation drivers beyond the room remain uneven. Principals consistently described Master Trainers as well prepared and highly faithful to QAED guidelines, and they regarded the modules and support materials as aligned and engaging (Chaudhry & Tajwar, 2020). This convergence matters: it suggests the curriculum inputs are not the principal constraint. Instead, the friction points appear downstream who gets trained, how often, with what supports, and how follow-up is organized which ultimately determines whether practices become routine in ECE classrooms (Wood & Hedges, 2016).

The sharpest constraint is AEO coverage and dosage. While many districts reported at least one round, others noted partial coverage or none; even where delivered, principals stressed that dosage is too short. Because AEOs are the proximate supervisors of classroom practice, an under-trained AEO cadre weakens the feedback loop between training and implementation (Akhtar, 2025). This explains why strong in-room delivery does not always translate into sustained classroom change: without AEOs confident in observation, feedback, and coaching, teachers receive little structured reinforcement after training. The emphasis from respondents on universal inclusion and longer, repeated cycles is therefore not simply a preference; it identifies the lever most likely to shift classroom practice at scale (McLeskey et al., 2022).

A second, system-level theme is cadence. Across roles (head teachers, ECE teachers, caregivers, School Council members), respondents valued past training but described current

provision as insufficient and irregular (Brown & Englehardt, 2016). Their call for annual or biannual calendars reflects an understanding that early-years pedagogy is skills-based and wanes without refreshers. Cadence also interacts with selection quality. While most districts reported criteria-based nominations with document checks, a few described availability-driven substitutions that reduce role fit (Nelson, Jimenez & Bruno, 2025). A simple eligibility checklist and substitution protocol would protect training seats for the intended practitioners and increase downstream impact.

Operational realities also shape uptake. Attendance frictions especially for caregivers and School Council members and, in some locales, for female staff facing long travel were repeatedly mentioned. Many Principals nonetheless said delivery budgets are adequate for routine costs (TA/DA, refreshments, printing), highlighting that the binding resource gap lies in activity-based classroom materials rather than in running the sessions (Malik, Asghar & Khalid, 2021). That suggests a small but strategic rebalancing: predictable micro-budgets for activity corners and print packs would make it easier for trained teachers and caregivers to enact what they learned. Several districts also proposed pre-planned clustering of venues and time-tables that better match community constraints.

On supervision, respondents agreed that monitoring during training is easy thanks to pre-schedules and clear procedures. The weakness is post-training follow-up in schools, which is inconsistent or episodic. Aligning these two realities points to a practical fix: pair the upgraded AEO training with a lightweight, standard follow-up visit protocol a short rubric, one early classroom visits per trained participant, and brief written feedback. This keeps workload realistic while providing the confidence, clarity, and accountability that make new practices stick. In some districts, the suggestion to recruit a dedicated ECE teacher cadre would further protect continuity by stabilizing who receives and applies ECE-specific training (Rafiq-uz-Zaman, 2024).

These findings should be read with appropriate caution: the analysis relies on nine district-level interviews using convenience sampling, and accounts are self-reported by Principals. Even so, thematic saturation and cross-case convergence lend credibility to the pattern. The practical implication is clear: the province already possesses credible content and competent trainers; implementation refinements universal AEO coverage with adequate dosage, published training calendars, tighter nomination, micro-budgets for classroom materials, and structured school follow-up are the highest-value next moves to translate training investments into consistent, developmentally appropriate practice in ECE classrooms.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to describe implementation of QAED-facilitated trainings for ECE in 9 districts in central Punjab, Pakistan. Common themes All interviews painted a similar picture: quality of in-room training was robust with Master Trainers well prepared, sessions following QAED guidelines and modules and guidance were also strongly aligned to mandated standards. Primary barriers occur outside the training room, within the constellation of implementation drivers that influence whether practices get adopted in classrooms. Chief among these is AEO exposure and dose. When the AEOs the ones closest to those who are directly supervising what happens in classrooms do not have ECE-specific training, the feedback loop (observation → coaching → reinforcement) becomes weaker and practices for which they were trained slowly diminishing. A second crosscutting theme is cadence: respondents appreciate the trainings but describe provision as lacking and infrequent, and demand predictable annual/biannual calendars/training refreshers. Third is selection and attendance. Many nominations are criteria-bound but availability-constrained substitutions also exist; caregivers

and School Council will face distance, time, and competing-on-attendance frictions. Lastly, although training budgets usually cover delivery costs, schools do not always have reliable resources and print packs to implement activity-based pedagogy following the training. Training supervision is a “no-brainer” and post-training school follow-up is the weakest but most important element.

Cumulatively, these results imply the system has authentic materials and capable teachers. The diminishing returns from here on in are going to be made mainly on the margin factors - everyone in, for long enough, every cycle, stingy nominations (size and frequency), small but dependable funds to fund classroom resources and a light load visit as standard. The cross-case convergence and saturation, within the constraints of a qualitative design (convenience sampling; self-report), provide assurances that making these adjustments would convert current investments in ECE classrooms into more coherent, developmentally appropriate practices and ultimately better outcomes for young learners.

Based on above findings and conclusions, following recommendations are made.

1. 100% of AEOs to be trained in ECE supervision (3-5 days role-specific courses + periodic refresher).
2. Upload annual/biannual training calendars for AEOs, head teachers, ECE teachers, caregivers and School Council members.
3. Strengthen nomination protocols (simplified eligibility grid; meanwhile-in plays) to gauge suitability role.
4. Set micro-budgets on activity corners (also starter kits and refill) and print packs for guides.
5. Normalize post-training school follow-up: one visit in 4–6 weeks with a 2-page rubric, brief written feedback.
6. Cluster sites and/or program and schedule flexibility (weekend/evening options where possible) to increase caregiver/SC participation.
7. Develop a light data dashboard (by district) that can track who was trained, when, follow-up status and simple classroom indicators.
8. Further develop periodic modules; incorporate practical examples (e.g., checklists, mini-cases, short demo videos) to facilitate transfer.
9. Offer focused incentives (travel/childcare funding if needed) to caregivers/SCs to overcome attendance obstacles.
10. Investigate a categorical ECE teacher cadre in district that would help maintain a stable staffing situation and ongoing specialization.

References

- Akhtar, M. (2025). Collaborative managerial roles of AEOs and its impact on the school performance at elementary level in the Punjab. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Educational Studies*, 5(1), 40-50.
- ASER Pakistan. (2018). *Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2018*. <https://aserpakistan.org>
- ASER Pakistan. (2023). *ASER 2023 dissemination materials*. <https://aserpakistan.org>
- Azubuike, O. R. (2025). Utilization Of Learning Resources for Teaching in Primary Schools in Udi LGA of Enugu State. *Irish Journal of Educational Practice*, 8(01).
- Brown, C. P., & Englehardt, J. (2016). Conceptions of and early childhood educators' experiences in early childhood professional development programs: A qualitative metasynthesis. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 37(3), 216-244.

- Bureau of Statistics Punjab. (2023). Punjab education statistics (2018–2023 series).
https://bos.punjab.gov.pk/education_statistics
- Chaudhry, R., & Tajwar, A. W. (2020). The Punjab schools reform roadmap: A medium-term evaluation. In *Implementing Deeper Learning and 21st Century Education Reforms: Building an Education Renaissance After a Global Pandemic* (pp. 109-128). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Government of the Punjab. (2020). *Punjab Education Sector Plan (PESP) 2019/20–2023/24*. Global Partnership for Education.
- Haque, R., Malik, M., & Hameed, A. (2023). Ten years of ECE in Punjab (Pakistan): Challenges and opportunities. *Early Education and Development*, 35(1), 1-22.
- ITACEC & National Curriculum Council. (2021). *Single National Curriculum 2020 Early Childhood Care & Education (Pre-I)*.
https://itacec.org/document/2021/8/ECCE_in_Single_National_Curriculum.pdf
- Malik, S., Asghar, M. Z., & Khalid, L. (2021). Perspectives of headteachers, teachers, parents and caregivers about early childhood education program in Punjab: A qualitative study. *Sir Syed Journal of Education & Social Research (SJESR)*, 4(2), 309-316.
- McLeskey, J., Maheady, L., Billingsley, B. S., Brownell, M. T., & Lewis, T. J. (Eds.). (2022). *High leverage practices for inclusive classrooms*. Philadelphia, PA: Routledge.
- Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Training (MoFEPT). (2024). *Federal Foundational Learning Policy 2024*. MoFEPT.
<https://mofept.gov.pk/SiteImage/Policy/Fed%20FL%20Policy%202024.pdf>
- Nelson, J. L., Jimenez, M., & Bruno, P. (2025). Hiring under constraint: How school administrators perceive and respond to centralized screening by the district. *American Educational Research Association (AERA) Open*, 11(1), 1–20.
- Punjab Education Curriculum, Training & Assessment Authority (PECTAA). (n.d.). *Early Childhood Education: QAED's introduction of ECE classrooms*.
<https://pectaa.edu.pk/earlychildhood.php>
- Rafiq-uz-Zaman, M. (2024). Evaluation of challenges faced by the early childhood care and education due to the shortage of teachers in Punjab, Pakistan. *Journal of Childhood Literacy and Societal Issues*, 3(2), 58-74.
- Reinke, W. M., Herman, K. C., Stormont, M., Newcomer, L., & David, K. (2013). Illustrating the multiple facets and levels of fidelity of implementation to a teacher classroom management intervention. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 40(6), 494-506.
- Safdar, S., Waqar, Y., & Muhammad, Y. (2024). Beyond reading and numeracy: Examining holistic educational implications of Pakistan's foundational learning policy. *Journal of Social Research Development*, 5(3).
- UNICEF Pakistan. (2023). Review of Early Childhood Education (ECE) models in Pakistan. Samuel Hall.

Wood, E., & Hedges, H. (2016). Curriculum in early childhood education: Critical questions about content, coherence, and control. *The curriculum journal*, 27(3), 387-405.

World Bank. (2023). *Pakistan Human Capital Review*.
<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/>