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Implementation of Early Childhood Care and Education Curriculum 2017: A Case Study of Pakistani Public Schools

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Abstract

The study was determined to find the teachers' practices in the implementation of the ECCE curriculum in public schools. The objective of the study was to find out the teachers' practices in the implementation of the ECCE curriculum in public schools. All the ECCE teachers in public schools formed the population of the study. The 20 teachers were observed through the purposive sampling technique. The data was collected by using the ECCE teachers' practices observation protocol in the implementation of the ECCE curriculum. The qualitative data was analyzed through thematic analysis. The data represents that the teachers' practices in ECCE are knowledge, learning environment, instructional strategies, assessment, individualized attention and teacher-parent relation. It is recommended that the ECCE centres may be built-in university campuses for the facilitation of the teaching practices of their prospective teacher. The government may take the initiative to build ECCE centres in collaboration with the private sector to enhance the quality.

Key Words: Early Childhood Care and Education, Teachers Practices, Curriculum Implementation

Introduction

Early childhood education is a highly diverse field that serves children from birth through age eight. During these years, children participate in many different kinds of care and education settings. Regardless of where they work or what their specific job titles are, however, early childhood teachers are professionals. This means that they make decisions based on a specialized body of knowledge, continue to learn throughout their careers, and are committed to providing the best care and education possible for every child.

Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MoFE & PT) spearheaded the process of Curriculum Revision a decade after its development under the slogan of Education Sector Reforms (ESR-2001-2004). MoFE & PT has led the initiative under the advice of the President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to synchronize National Curriculum with the rapidly changing international norms in education development and research. National Curriculum of Early Childhood Education (NCECE) caters to the need to streamline the guidelines to develop a road map for designing activities and scheme of studies for preschoolers (age 04-05 years*) under the notion of developmentally appropriate practices for this tender aged student. This curriculum is aimed to foster children's overall well-being and to ensure the best possible conditions for growth and development in a conducive, child-friendly and all-inclusive environment where they can experience choice and freedom of actions in a safe, guided and healthy environment (Curriculum for ECCE, 2017).

The development of any country depended on accessibility to knowledge, information and communication. The government attaches special significance to the provision of education to all children in all parts of the country. This is mainly because education is viewed as the major contributing factor in the economic development of the direct and indirect returns it yields. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) constitutes household,

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community and the state's efforts to provide integrated development for children from birth to the age of entry into primary school. ECCE teachers deal with children aged between 3 and 8 years. Children who are below three years are generally taken care of by their parents or guardians and caregivers or childminders at home. Therefore, the emphasis on ECCE has been on the provision of institutionalized education to children in the 3 - 8 years' age group, as this is the critical stage where so many social attributes and personalities are formed (Farrant, 2001).

Statement of the Problem

The most important person in the curriculum implementation process is the teachers. With their knowledge, experiences and competencies, teachers are central to any curriculum development effort. Better teachers support better learning because they are most knowledgeable about the practice of teaching and are responsible for introducing the curriculum in the classroom. (Carl, 2009). Hence, teacher involvement is important for successful and meaningful curriculum development. Teachers being the implementers, are part of the last stage of the curriculum development process.

The teaching practices are also affected by the individual characteristics of teachers' along with the environmental factors that influence their integration in the classroom. The study, therefore, investigated the teachers' practices and factors that affect teachers' practices in the implementation of the ECCE curriculum in public schools.

Research Objective

1) Find out teachers' practices in the implementation of the ECCE curriculum in public schools.

Research Question

1) How are teachers implementing the ECCE curriculum in the classroom?

Literature Review

The early years of life are catalytic for the physical growth and mental development of children. Experts emphasize the need for special care and attention to children and creating an enabling environment for them during this period, including the provision of health care, nutrition, education, and affection. Numerous terms are used to denote care and support for children in their early life. These include; Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), Early Childhood Development (ECD) and Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD). Most of these terms or concepts are comprehensively emphasizing and advocating a holistic approach to pre-school child development (NEP, 2017).

ECCE includes comprehensive measures to support families, such as maternal and child health, micronutrient supplementation, psychosocial support to families, programs to promote household food security, parental leave and childcare allowance. Early childhood is a sensitive period marked by rapid transformations in physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional development. Significant and critical brain development occurs before age 7, especially the first three years of life, when important neuronal connections take place (or not take place). What happens in the early years' sets trajectories in health, learning and behavior that can last throughout life (Martin et al. 2000; Malenka et al., 2009; Hensch, 2005; Mustard, 2002).

Curriculum implementation entails putting into practise the officially prescribed courses of study, syllabuses and subjects. The process involves helping the learner acquire knowledge or experience. It is important to note that curriculum implementation cannot take place without the learner. The learner is, therefore, the central figure in the curriculum implementation process. Implementation takes place as the learner acquires the planned or intended experiences, knowledge, skills, ideas and attitudes that are aimed at enabling the same learner to function effectively in society (Connor, 2005).

Stenhouse (2011) identifies the teacher as an agent in the curriculum implementation process. Fullan (2001) thus argue the importance of the teacher as a central change agent, as the teacher is the one who is primarily responsible for the successful implementation of a new curriculum. According to Morrison, Bachman, & Connor

(2005), the teachers' pedagogy, classroom management strategies, and interactions with students at the classroom level can determine how much is learned. A survey by GOK and UNICEF (2005) revealed that the lack of teachers training and poor teacher retention as key barriers to effective curriculum implementation.

Methodology

This study focuses on factors that affect teachers' practices in the implementation of the ECCE curriculum (2017) in public schools. This study was qualitative in nature. A phenomenological method was used to explore the teachers' practices in the implementation of the ECCE curriculum in public schools.

Twenty teachers were selected to observe teachers' practices in ECCE centres of public schools. At the first stage, the schools were selected, i.e.10 boys' public schools and 10 girls' public schools. Teachers were selected by the purposive sampling technique. For observation of teachers' practices, one teacher from each school was selected.

For ECCE teachers' practices, observation protocol was used. On the basis of related literature, an observation protocol was developed to observe the teachers' practices in ECCE centres. The ECCE teachers' practices observation protocol included six practices, i.e., knowledge of ECCE (subject matter), learning environment, provision of individual attention, teaching strategies for meaningful learning, teacher-parent relation and assessment that consisted of 33 statements.

The instrument (observation protocol) was validated through the views and opinions of educational field experts. The two experts were from the early childhood care and education field and two experts were from the assessment field. The researcher took formal permission from school heads to observe the teachers' practices in early childhood care and education Centres.

Thematic Analysis of Observations

The researcher instigated the observations. There were twenty teachers of early childhood care and education (ECCE) who were randomly selected for the observations.

Practice 1: Knowledge of ECCE (Subject Matter)

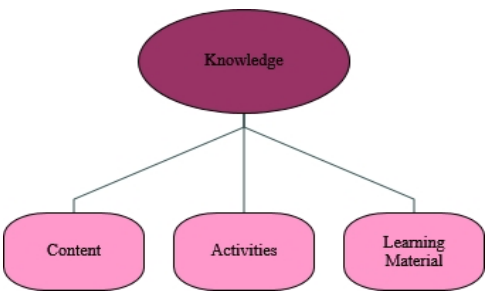

Figure 1: Concept Map for Knowledge (Source NVivo12)

Knowledge of subject matter, teaching skills are essential for education to reach its goals in the teaching profession. The researcher keenly started to observe the teachers' practices in the ECCE Centre, and it was observed that most of the teachers teaching children of ECCE have knowledge about making children learn through activities. It was observed by the researcher that few teachers (eight out of twelve) were providing hands-on activities for children that were integrated with the different concepts they were teaching. The teacher was teaching children the concepts like big and small by showing children the ball and giving it to them to play with. The teacher made groups of children and gave them two balls, big and small. In this way, the teacher gave them the concept by hand-on activity. Children were allowed to initiate a play of their own choice in groups with the ball. There were teachers who just draw the pictures on board and taught the children. Most of the teachers

teaching ECCE children have knowledge about making no-cost low-cost material, but there are very fewer teachers (six out of twenty) who were seen making material and utilizing it.

It was observed that the teachers were using low cost, no cost material, and the children understand the concepts, and there is better learning when children are learning through activities. Conversely, there were teachers that showed a lack of knowing that children learn better through different teaching styles and especially through activities. They were observed using the same old traditional method for teaching in which teachers are dominant in the classroom. They don't allow children to participate.

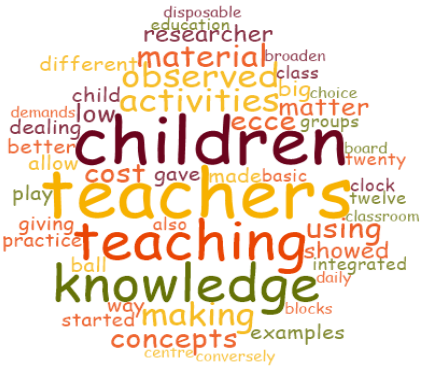

Figure 2*:* Word Cloud for Knowledge (Source NVivo12)

It was also observed by the researcher that most of the teachers teaching ECCE (twelve out of twenty) were having knowledge about the social, cognitive, numeracy and language concepts. They knew that children learn through examples from real life.

In a class, the researcher observed, for example, that there was a child not doing the activity and instead he was throwing blocks and making noise; as the teacher had knowledge of basic concepts of dealing with ECCE children, the teacher gave time to that child, heard him and solved the problem. As a result, the child started to perform the activity with all other children. This was all because the teacher was relating everything from the real world and giving examples from daily routine. In this way, teachers make teaching and learning easy for children by integrating the knowledge through the modern demands of teaching. The teacher also broadens the knowledge of children by using low cost, no cost material. Children learn how the teacher made different things from used material. And it was observed in a class that teacher made a clock with disposable glasses, the children were very motivated to learn. Hence, it showed that in some schools' teachers are practising what is expected of them but there are imperfections too that can be improved.

Practice 2: Learning Environment

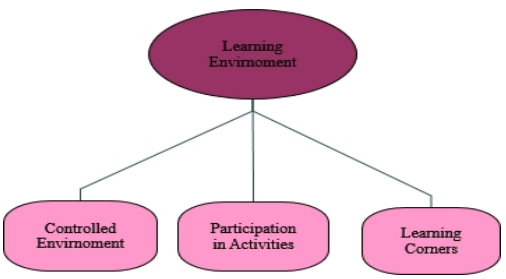

Figure 3: Concept Map for Learning Environment (Source NVivo12)

The learning environment is defined as the physical environment, its surroundings, and a specific setting. The physical environment will vary depending on the age and number of children in the classroom, as well as the

goals of programs and specific activities in the classroom. Having a cosy, warm, and home-like environment in the classroom provides infants with a healthy social/emotional environment.

Young children's positive relationships with their teachers have become increasingly important for a better learning environment. Considering the potential benefits of a positive learning environment, it is important to identify teachers' practices that may predict the quality of the classroom learning environment. This is particularly important for young children because early relationships with teachers in the classroom become a basis for their development.

Through the observation of teaching in the classroom, it was observed that in the majority of classes, teachers have made classroom rules and made children aware of the rules, i.e. teachers in almost all schools have made rules for maintaining the discipline and doing work in harmony with their peers. It was observed that there is a positive learning environment, and children have good relationships with teachers in most schools. For example, it was observed that teachers had taught children how they could raise hands to ask for help from teachers and even if they need to ask anything, they can raise their hands instead of leaving their chairs in the majority of schools' teachers of ECCE class allowed children to talk to them and ask for help. Few schools have teachers who don't allow children to talk and were very strict.

Figure 4: Word Cloud for Learning Environment (Source NVivo12)

It was observed that most of the teachers were familiar with the fact that children will learn better if children have a positive learning environment. Teachers were allowing children to move around the learning corners. Children were known how they could use the material placed in the learning corners. And teachers make groups of children so they can sit in different learning corners and perform activities according to their choices. But in spite of knowing the fact, there were few teachers who were not appreciating the children on their work, and they didn't even bother what children were doing. But the majority of the teachers were very friendly with the children. And they were cherishing the work of children and giving stars on hands as an incentive.

It was also observed by the researcher that most of the teachers (13 out of twenty) were giving importance to the children and heard them in the classroom, which encouraged them to talk and solve problems by themselves. These boosted children learning and also created a positive environment in classrooms. In the same way, some teachers were not bothered to create a positive learning environment, so this results in the need to made improvements in creating a better learning environment for children to have meaningful learning.

Practice 3: Provision of Individual Attention

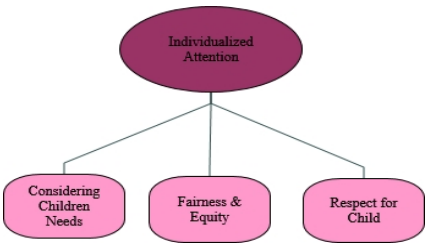

Figure 5: Concept Map for Individualized Attention (Source NVivo12)

The researcher keenly started to observe the teachers' practices in the ECCE Centre, and it was observed that crowded classrooms cause a decrease in the overall quality of the education carried out in classroom settings. For teachers, first of all, this eliminates the one-to-one interaction with children. Teachers had to deal with the overall performance of the children rather than finding a chance to interact with each child individually. Also, the more children teachers have in the classroom, the more they get tired physically, and this affects their classroom practices accordingly.

Moreover, the researcher observed that teachers in most of the classes don't provide individual attention to every child, but instead, they were taking care that if children need their help. It was observed that most of the teachers try to develop self-concept in children showing affection to them. Teachers were providing opportunities for all children to participate in activities

The teacher made groups of the children, and the children are performing different activities. Teacher and children were interacting with each other, and the teacher was helping children do the activity and encouraging them to complete their work".

Figure 6: Word Cloud for Individualized Attention (Source NVivo12)

Conversely, the large strength classrooms have more issues as it decreases teachers' efficiency and the teacher was just using a lecture method instead of activities. Large strength classrooms were noisy and had a discipline issue.

"In the over-crowded classrooms, children were very talkative and making noise, and it was very difficult for the teachers' to maintain discipline and teach them through group or play activities."

In observation, the researcher observed that in some classroom, the teacher was more focused on the individual needs of the children and the teacher need lesser time to deal with any disruption in the class. In a class researcher observed, for example, that there was a child not taking an interest in the class and sitting in her seat; the teacher sat with the child and talked to the child, heard her and solve her problem. The teacher made it easy for the child to work in groups by giving her individual attention. Effective grouping is a staple of any experienced teacher. Whether a teacher makes grouping by ability, interest, readiness, student choice, grouping can also improve the quality of individual attention a student receives. By offering the right partners at the right time, children can have access to a variety of resources; teachers help fill their constantly changing needs.

Practice 4: Teaching Strategies for Meaningful Learning

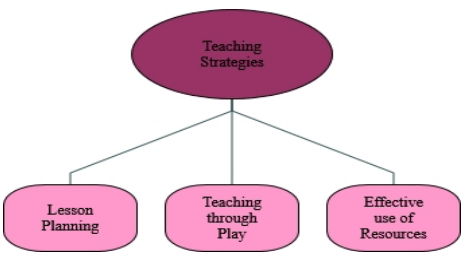

Figure 7: Concept Map for Teaching Strategies (Source NVivo12)

Teachers spend many hours planning lessons, marking work, assessing pupils, inputting data, organizing and running extra-curricular activities and taking on wider-school roles and responsibilities. Teaching strategies is one of the key factors affecting teachers' practices. The researcher observed that in some classes, teachers (seven out of twenty) were prepared for the lessons. They knew what they have to teach that day, and they were following the daily routine.

"*teachers knew the daily routine activities as given in the ECE 2017 curriculum. They were following it accordingly as the time was divided, and they were giving time for all activities. They had a proper greeting time, dua, activity and circle time".*

But in the majority of the classes (13 out of twenty) that were observed by the researcher, the teachers were not prepared for the lesson before.

It was also observed that the teachers who were prepared for the lesson had enough time to complete their daily routine activities following the ECCE curriculum. The teachers who were not prepared didn't perform any group activity in class and not taught anything through role play.

"*Teachers were not ready for the class, and they were just teaching different concept without preparation".*

The researcher observed that teacher had to prepare the material for group activities for children. The teacher was using the material to teach children. In one-half of the observed classes, the teacher was using low-cost material. And they prepared the material for group activities. But the other half teachers didn't prepare any material for children activities, and they felt the burden of making material for the class.

"teachers made low cost no cost material, but most of the teachers were feeling that it's a burden for them to prepare low-cost material".

Teaching through role-playing need the efforts of the teacher. In most schools, ' teachers were not using role play based method to teach. Teachers were not determined to teach, as they displayed that they don't want to use different ways to teach children. Some teachers were using the role play method, and children were learning and enjoying the lesson.

It was also observed by the researcher that in all the schools' teachers had training on ECCE about how to teach children through play and how they can creatively use the example of daily routine to make children learn different concepts. But alas, the researcher observed that only six teachers were actually seen practising those techniques. Moreover, the researcher observed that teacher is less determined towards teaching due to excessive work given to them, i.e. maintaining the registers, making worksheets for children, keeping the records of children work.

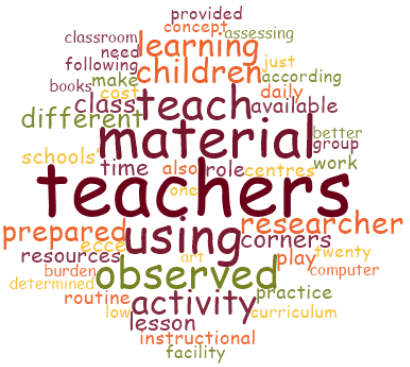

Figure 8: Word Cloud for Teaching Strategies (Source NVivo12)

Teachers use a wide variety of tools to foster learning. Every teacher needs supplies and resources in order to have a successful classroom. Writing utensils, paper, and inspirational wall signs are all useful objects in a classroom. Instructional materials are the tools used in educational lessons, which includes active learning and assessment. Basically, any resource a teacher uses to help him teach his students is instructional material. There

are many types of instructional materials. Popular resources include books, art supplies, puzzles, games, technological devices.

The researcher observed that majority of the teachers' (fourteen out of twenty) were using instructional resources provided to them but the problem mostly teachers' faced was that the material provided is less in quantity.

It was observed by the researcher that there was an inadequacy of resources for doing different kinds of activities and the materials that exist in the schools were just for repeating the same kind of activities rather than doing something innovative.

"teachers' were not using material from the environment and surrounding which are innovative, e.g. they can use different ideas of using leaves, grass, and sand to teach the concept of texture. Similarly, teachers could just use clay to make different things from it, but they were not using any product idea."

Moreover, it was also observed that learning corners are available in schools, but there is no adequate material through which teachers can effectively teach children. For different corners, there are suggested material in the curriculum, e.g. colors, crayons, paper, chalk, eggshells, measuring cups, magnifying glass, leaves, seeds etc. Teachers are not using material from the surroundings to incorporate it into better teaching practice. It was observed in one of the ECCE centres that "*there were learning corners shown on different corners of the room, but those corners were not equipped with the material."*

The researcher observed that very few teachers were using the material, i.e. (shapes, blocks, storybooks) available in the learning corners for better understanding of children. Some teachers also utilized their outdoor time and using the naturally available material for artwork, e.g. leaves and tree bark.

The researcher keenly observed the centres, and it was found that only two from the 20 observed ECCE centres had the facility of the computer. It is more depressing that the facility of the computer was not utilized by the teacher. Even that showed it was not used in class for teaching.

Therefore, the observation showed that the ECCE centres had learning corners and availability of learning material. The problem that exists is the insufficient material according to the size of the class and that the material provided need to be upgraded. According to the modern demands of the teaching and learning process, the facility of audio-visual aids should be made available.

Practice 5: Teacher Parent Relation

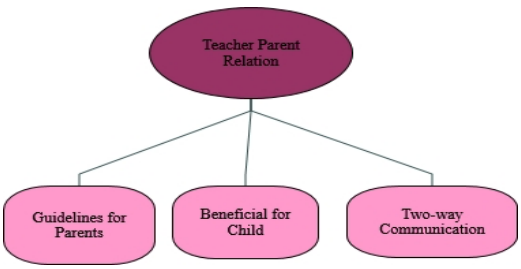

Figure 9: Concept Map for Teacher Parent Relation (Source NVivo12)

Teacher Parent Relation doesn't just happen. They are built over time through consistent communication, collaboration, creative problem solving, a common goal and, most importantly, trust. A strong parent, child and educator relationship helps boost student achievement and outcomes. It was observed that most of the teachers were known about the fact that parents' involvement is of great importance. But there was seen a neglected attitude of some teachers toward teacher-parent relationship. Most of the teachers in the classes were used to discussing the children with their parents when they came to pick their child from school. It was also observed that teachers are discussing the problems of the child with the parents, but parents were not concerned with the child progress. It was carefully observed that most parents of the children are not educated and unaware of the fact that after school time, he problems or behaviour issues children show in the classroom are to be taken care of by my parents. The teacher was telling parents that they should discourage the negative behaviour of the child.

Similarly, it was observed that the teachers were having a good conversation with the parents that came to pick up or drop their children. Teachers were listening to the concerns of the parents. Some parents were also very supportive and heard the problems and progress of their children. It was the teacher's routine work to provide feedback to the parents and giving the progress report of children. Teachers in most schools were guiding parents on how they can help in the progress of the child.

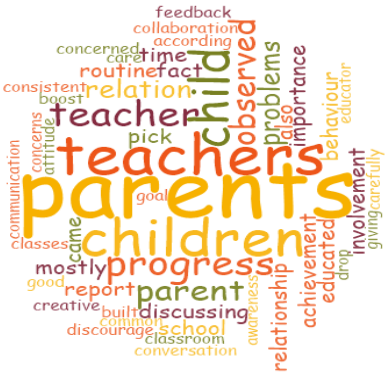

Figure 10: Word Cloud for Teacher Parent Relation (Source NVivo12)

In most schools,' teachers were providing the routine progress report of the children to parents. And according to the researcher observation, mostly teacher and parents showed a positive relation for the progress of children. And the main issue in this regard was that some parents were not educated, and there was a lack of awareness in them that their involvement is of necessary importance in their child achievement.

Practice 6: Assessment

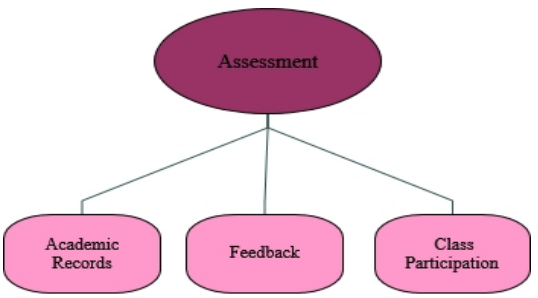

Figure 11: Concept Map for Assessment (Source NVivo12)

For an effective learning process, there is always a need for a well-designed and well-timed assessment of the students. Because it's the scale to measure the proficiency level along with the considerable level of the student, it reveals students' academic efforts and learning outcomes. It also helps the teachers evaluate students' innate abilities and intellectual potential. When this practice was observed in the classroom, the researcher found out that most of the teachers don't have a planned assessment for children. Teachers were not keeping the proper record of the children's work. It was observed during the class that few teachers were checking what children were doing and telling them that they are doing it wrong or right. This feedback was given by very few teachers. It was observed that most teachers were collecting the worksheets given to children for writing. But the artwork and creative work were not taken care of for the portfolios or records. Teachers in many schools didn't realize that for different activities, how they can assess children and which activities are developing different development stages in children. Teachers don't have any checklist through which they can mark the continuous growth and development of children.

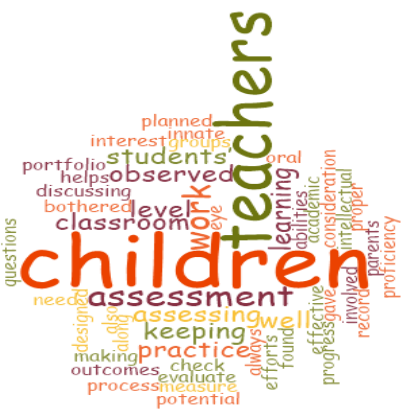

Figure 12: Word Cloud for Teacher Parent Relation (Source NVivo12)

The teachers were not bothered to check what children were doing for assessing them. Teachers gave the work to children to solve in groups, but they were not keeping an eye on children to see which children are more involved and who are not showing interest. The teachers were assessing children through oral questions. It was observed in the classroom that teachers were not making any portfolio records of children work, but they were discussing the progress of children with parents.

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to explore the teacher's practices in the implementation of the curriculum. The results illustrated that mostly the teachers are unaware of the national curriculum and their knowledge about the subject matter are not up to date. This opinion is also supported by the study of Siddiqui (2004) that competent teachers apply broad, deep, and integrated sets of knowledge and skills as they plan for, implement and revise instruction. Technology proficiency is but one dimension of teachers' competence. He also agrees that the majority of the teachers require continuous professional training to have a complete grip on the subject matter they need to deliver in class.

The challenges faced by early childhood teachers are similar to those that have historically been faced by teachers who attempted to implement child-centred methods into their classrooms (Cuban, 1993). Early childhood teachers working in the primary grades need support from the schools and families they serve in order to implement the developmentally appropriate curriculum their children deserve. Furthermore, in determining appropriate practices for their children, these teachers are acting as decision-makers in a setting that traditionally has not supported teachers in this role.

Shakir (2012), Siddiqui (2010) and Safia (2005) appeared to concur with the results that most of the teachers neglected to utilize successful instructing strategies. They are expertly prepared, however, they are not utilizing appropriate methods of teaching. Most of the early childhood teachers showed terrible practices in utilizing various techniques and methodologies for powerful learning. There is another profoundly qualified and experienced researcher who imparted her contemplations to regard the previously mentioned exhibition.

In response to the teaching methods employed in the teaching of early childhood education, it was revealed that teachers use methods that are convenient and do not require a lot of time and resources to prepare. Another most significant factor of learning environment is viable management of classroom upheld by Hopkins (2005), who contended that "Powerful instructional preparation and plans are fundamental for fruitful teaching: teacher should have the ability to keep up regard and order in the class.

Conclusion

The study concluded that there are many teachers practices, and the teachers are using different activities and also utilizing the learning material, but there are imperfections that can be improved. The majority of the teachers

were using instructional resources provided to them, but the problem mostly teachers faced was that the material provided is less in quantity. The learning corners are available in schools, but there is no adequate material through which teachers can effectively teach children. Most of the teachers were known of the fact that parents' involvement is of great importance. But there was seen a neglected attitude of some teachers toward teacher-parent relationship.

It was concluded that in most schools' teachers were not using role play based method to teach. Teachers were not determined to teach, as they displayed that they don't want to use different ways to teach children. Some teachers were using the role play method, and children were learning and enjoying the lesson.

Recommendations

1. Teachers may be provided with the continuous professional development that they may be able to cope with the emerging need of integrating knowledge with the modern demands.
2. The key learning areas of ECCE centres may be equipped with sufficient material according to the strength of class.
3. The teacher training institutes of early childhood care and education should induct the curricula that is activity based.
4. The ECCE centres may be built in university campuses for the facilitation of teaching practices of their prospective teacher.
5. The government may take initiative to build ECCE centres in collaboration with private sector to enhance the quality.
6. The policy makers may integrate children with disability at ECCE level and make sure that teachers are provided with appropriate training to teach.

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