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Teachers Conception about Early Childhood Learners Adoption of 21st Century Skills in Central Punjab

Syeda Asma Sarwar *

Fakhar Ul Zaman †

Taslim Ullah ‡

Corresponding Author: Syeda Asma Sarwar (MS Scholar, Department of Education, University of Sialkot, Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan. Email: asma.umair209@gmail.com)

Abstract: Teachers' views on early childhood learners' 21st-century skills adoption are examined in this study. Education for the 21st century promotes student engagement and prepares them for a global, linked society. The study population was primary school teachers. The researcher randomly sampled two hundred fifty elementary school instructors—a questionnaire collected data for the study. Frequency, percentage, mean score, and standard deviation were used to achieve the study's goal. Most respondents said the classroom helped pupils communicate, according to the report. In contrast, most students said they support classroom punishment for learning. The institute improves early learners' communication and classroom motivation. Students follow the class routine and support classroom discipline because they feel safe and comfortable. The results suggest using the unified national curriculum at the preschool level to help young children develop 21st-century skills.

Key Words: Teachers Awareness, 21st Century Skills, Early Childhood Learners

Introduction

The first few years of a child's existence are the most formative. Early education is essential to molding a child's personality and future success. High-quality early childhood education has been linked to improved academic and social outcomes. Providing opportunities for learning through play, exploration, and social engagement can significantly aid a child's cognitive, social, and emotional growth (Hadwin, and Oshige, 2011). The skills and knowledge acquired in early childhood lay the groundwork for later learning and development throughout one's entire life. Caregivers should foster a

fascinating and safe atmosphere that builds on a child's innate interest in learning. Instilling a lifelong love of learning is the best way to help a youngster develop to his or her full academic and life potential.

A child's physical makeup serves as a catalyst for the maturation of life skills and the expansion of perspective on the big picture. Education in the 21st century should educate students about a multicultural and interconnected world by fostering active engagement in learning. The widespread adoption of technology in our culture has sparked the idea that it would eventually lead to the emergence of a society based on the

* MS Scholar, Department of Education, University of Sialkot, Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan.

† Visiting Lecturer, Department of Education, University of Narowal, Narowal, Punjab, Pakistan.

‡ Assistant Professor, Department of Education, University of Sialkot, Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan.

dissemination and application of knowledge. While the "explosion" of information and information systems is a central metaphor in discussions of the "information society," the "knowledge society" more often than not refers to economic systems in which ideas or knowledge act as commodities (Anderson, 2008). Reich explored how technology influenced our culture. He pointed out that regular industrial workers and assembly line workers will likely become obsolete as technology advances to perform their tedious responsibilities. Services will be provided by trained professionals who will meet with you in person. Problems will be found and resolved, and information will be mediated, thanks to the work of symbolic analysts (Reich, 1992).

Levy and Mioduser (2010) say computers can easily replace rule-based tasks. However, computers still need to replace humans in complex pattern analysis jobs. Truck drivers and doctors face these increasingly complex duties every day. Computer-based information can help humans at little cost. Thus, "21st-century skills" are increasingly needed. Today's youth must be educated for a job that does not exist. Thus, it is crucial to understand that society is changing its jobs and it must be considered based on research (McLeod, Richardson, and Sauers, 2015; Voogt et al., 2013). Most jobs are similar. In today's information-based society, Anderson (2008) recommends these skills:

- The creation of new knowledge,
- Adaptability,
- The ability to locate, organize, and retrieve information,
- The administration of information,
- The ability to think critically
- Work done in a group

In 2002, the European Commission said that all EU residents should be allowed to acquire "key skills." These "key skills" are those that Anderson (2008) has identified as being particularly important. The Education Ministers of the OECD Member Countries refer to these skills as "lifelong learning capabilities" (Law, Pelgrum, and Plomp, 2008). The term "skills for the 21st century" or "competencies for

the 21st century" will be used throughout this article as an umbrella concept for the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that citizens need to contribute to the knowledge society.

Student growth in analytical and critical thinking, as well as problem-solving skills, was prioritized. At the same time, educators around the country were getting together to determine what would constitute adequate 21st-century education. The goal of education in the twenty-first century is to ensure that all students, beginning with preschoolers and continuing through high school seniors, graduate with the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in their chosen careers. There are various concerns regarding updating education to meet the needs of the 21st century. Teachers have complained that they lack the tools to overcome the challenges set by policymakers (Gewertz, 2012). Instead of addressing the issue of how to involve educators in the process and ensure its implementation, they focus exclusively on defining the standards. Because teachers believe they need to be well-equipped to overcome the challenges set by the state.

Early childhood education's primary focus is enhancing a child's cognitive development so they can reach their full potential as individuals. Addressing such issues is of the utmost importance since, as Fullan, Hopkins and Spillane (2010) noted, increasing schools' collective capacity is a shift imperative for transforming the entire system. Because more teacher training and resources are needed, there has been a lack of research on the potential and 21st-century skills of early learners in early childhood education. As a result, more study into teachers' implementation experiences is urgently needed to understand better how to foster early learners' development of 21st-century abilities. It will probably gather valuable data that can be utilized to figure out how and what procedures should be put in place to help young children best prepare for the challenges of the modern world.

The first few years of a child's life are filled with rapid learning and development that begin at birth and continue astoundingly. The

people entrusted with the care and education of young children bear a heavy responsibility for their well-being, development, and education because of the critical foundation it creates for future success. It is essential to recognize that the professionals who look after and educate young children from birth to age eight are a workforce that shares the knowledge and abilities required to perform their duties effectively.

Includes digital literacy, traditional literacy, topic understanding, media literacy, and learning/innovation abilities, which are crucial for students to grasp in an increasingly digital and connected environment. The 21st Century Skills Project is an education standards and reform movement with its roots in the United States. Its goal is to raise the bar for what students in public schools in the United States are expected to acquire to be successful in their academic and professional endeavors. "21st-century skills" refers to a wide range of competencies related to careers, core topics, 21st-century themes, information literacy, technological proficiency, life skills, communication, creativity, and problem-solving. The primary focus of the study is on teachers' conception about acquiring 21st century skills among early childhood learners.

Review of Related Literature

Early learner education was not given a high priority in the public sector of Pakistan or in the schools run by the government of that country. The original purpose of the katchi class was to teach students to be on time for school and to familiarize them with the process of going to school. However, students who took the katchi class were not counted toward their attendance in the traditional sense. Instead, they were instructed in only the most fundamental aspects of the class one curriculum. 1970 was the year that katchi class was supposed to commence in earnest as an early learner education for pupils who were between the ages of three and four years old; however, as a result of negligence on the part of the government, this practice was discontinued in 1980. However, despite this, lessons remained

significant and instructive in their genuine senses, and Pakistan's educational program did not reject them.

In 2001, the government of Pakistan made public its intention to carry out the promises that Pakistan had made to the Millennium Development Goals, Education for All, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child by announcing a program to reform the education sector. The primary goals of this strategy were to expand the number of katchi classes that were available, as well as to implement a more structured curriculum for katchi classes. The Teachers' Resource Centre in Pakistan developed learning outcomes for the national early learner education curriculum in the early part of 2002. These learning outcomes were revised in 2007; however, due to the lack of teachers, classrooms, and funds (in the public sector), the curriculum document alone was unable to reach the children. Pakistan was not able to meet the Education for All target for early learner education by the year 2015 despite the development of legislation (such as the Right to Education Act, which was just recently passed and is enshrined in article 25A of the constitution), education policies, plans, documents, and targets. Early learner education (also known as ECE) needs to be implemented in Pakistan's public sector schools, but first the country needs to break free of its traditional paradigms and move beyond them.

According to Malik (2010), the Ministry of Education of Pakistan has stated that the early learner education that is provided in the government schools of Pakistan is not effectively established and is not seen as an important sector to be put into practice. Early learner education is recognized by the Ministry of Education of Pakistan in 2009 as something that is still not properly accepted by the public sector in the country. In the schools that are governed by the Pakistani government, the perception and acceptance of early learner education is not considered, and instead, katchi classes are deemed to be early learner education classes. Katchi is a Japanese word that can indicate either "not mature" or "not

admitted or enrolled." In addition, it is clear from the research that the public schools in Pakistan do not have sufficient resources to fulfil the prerequisites for starting a class that is not officially recognized by the government. These prerequisites include a separate classroom, teachers who have received training, and the creation of a curriculum that is tailored specifically for katchi classes.

The most significant difficulties Some of the larger problems that the country has been facing, which have an enormous impact on its education system, include political instability, the continuation of the colonial education system, a class-difference education system, a lack of funds, religious extremism, and terrorism. In addition, the country is facing a shortage of funds. Because there is a lack of political commitment, the area of early learner education is not a priority issue in the planning that the government does. None of Pakistan's state universities offer degrees, graduate courses, teacher training programs, or world-class research in education for early learner education teachers. Neither do private universities in Pakistan. Existing facilities, including human and material resources in public and private schools, are not sufficient or competent enough to run effective early learner education programs. These schools include public and private elementary, middle, and high schools. The most essential thing is that an early learner education framework has not yet been developed. This framework will direct the development, implementation, and assessment of early learner education services all across the country. In order to begin the delivery of appropriate early learner education programs and to transition the existing traditional katchi classes into enhanced early years courses in all of Pakistan's public schools, a budget is required (Nganga, [2009](#)).

Reduced play in early childhood schooling threatens academic, cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development (Golinkoff & Hirsh-Pasek, [2016](#)). Urban children have fewer safe play facilities (Yogman et al., [2018](#)). These youngsters have more terrible childhood experiences and toxic

stress (Yogman et al., [2018](#)). Reduced playtime can undermine lifelong development, health, and well-being for poor and stressed children (Harvard University Center on the Developing Child, 2021). Children from varied backgrounds develop linguistic and social skills; for others, this may be the first time they practice these abilities with non-familial people and other children (Poulou, [2009](#); Taylor et al., [2017](#)).

Challenging behaviors are common as young children navigate their feelings and emotions and develop self-awareness. However, on the other hand, children who experience toxic stress are more likely to externalize disruptive behaviors. So, they face difficulty connecting with teachers and peers. Children in urban poverty are twice as likely to have developmental, behavioral, and social deficits as those in higher-income homes (Watson, [2014](#)). Adversity, stress, and poor social-emotional control in early childhood educators have been connected by research. The varied social-emotional abilities that children depend on for responsive care and that they develop via play are precisely the capacities that toxic stress can harm (Hanon, et al., 2021).

According to Christakis, et al. ([2016](#)), quality early childhood programs are perilous and look different from play spaces two decades ago. Teachers increasingly need young children to earn their play time through academic work. As public schools add academic content to close the success gap, underprivileged children are especially vulnerable to such techniques. Playing helps children with disabilities, second (or third) language learners, and trauma survivors interact, learn from, and educate others. Play benefits children, but it also helps early childhood instructors be purposeful, thoughtful, and introspective (Yogman et al., [2018](#)).

Children take the time to understand the sentiments of others and take them into consideration. Children view the world through the lens of their own perspective and overlook the rest of the things that are happening in their

surroundings. They have an egocentric view of the world, which means they see things from their own point of view without acknowledging that others may see things differently. Children who attend pre-school are given the opportunity to develop their thinking skills and become more empathetic toward the perspectives of others. They are also given the opportunity to learn many ways to view and interpret the same event from a variety of perspectives.

Lynch (2004) shows, in the past, children, and especially girls, were frequently seen as major responsibilities and were given a sense of encouragement that was insignificant. Previous research have demonstrated that in the past, child labor was valued in the manufacturing regions and agricultural areas of the economy. On the other hand, the conditions under which children worked were typically better than the poverty in which the vast majority of families lived. However, as time went on, re-formers began to gain an understanding of the stages involved in the maturation process of children (Ramey, 2003). They started to understand that childhood is distinct from maturity, and that children are not simply smaller versions of adults. In other words, they came to the conclusion that children are not just miniature adults. According to the findings of the studies, we may draw the conclusion that providing children with an education beginning when they are still in the pre-school years is essential if we want them to succeed in life.

Students that think creatively learn to come up with new concepts and figure out how to implement them. Students are taught to come up with and implement new concepts through the process of creative thinking. It involves being open to a variety of viewpoints and possibilities, as well as making new connections between ideas and concepts. The educational program emphasizes both creative expression and analytical rigor as separate but complementary aspects of mental processing (Acara, 2013). Some theorists, such as Moneta, and Csikszentmihalyi (1996), place a high standard on creativity by arguing that an artefact is only creative when it is

acknowledged by specialists in a field as being unique and valuable. They believe that this is the only condition under which an artefact can be considered creative. This is consistent with the widespread misunderstanding that creative capacity is a unique gift rather than an innate human talent that can be improved through practice. A larger perspective is provided by Awan, and Gauntlett (2011) who defines daily creativity as "a process which brings together at least one engaged human mind, and the material or digital world, in the action of generating something that is original in that context." A term known as "Big-C" creativity has been used to the inventiveness of very creative people. Creativity, as well as the "small c" variety of creativity known as daily creativity. This model has been modified to incorporate something called "mini-c" creativity, which refers to the creative thought processes that are inherent in the learning process (Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009). Includes being open to new viewpoints and possibilities as well as finding new connections between ideas and concepts.

The journey of a pre-school child, which may take the form of any educational program in which young ones participate prior to going to school (a day care center), is helpful in creating language, academic, emotional, and health awareness in a child so that the child can form a healthy behavior at the pre-school level. In recent years, substantial demonstrations of the importance of a child's first year of life and the repercussions of that year at a young age have emerged. Studies in the past ten years have shown that 85 percent of a child's mental development is almost finished in the first five years of life start, which has led neurobiology and other brain sciences to conclude that the first five years of a child's life are extremely important for brain development (Woodhead, 2009).

Awalya (2012) developed an understanding of the ways in which ECE can contribute to the personal and social development of children. This research was carried out at the University of Negeri Semarang in Semarang, Indonesia, in the year 2012. The major objective of early childhood

education is to foster excellence in Indonesian children; this excellence is achieved when children grow and develop in accordance with the level of development that has the greatest willingness to begin primary education and to live life as an adult. The accompanying objective is to get the youngsters ready for the academic learning that will take place at the school. It has been found, in accordance with Erikson's theory of personal and social development, that it is incontestable that the ECE is an essential and predetermined source for the progression of social life.

Early childhood centers are increasingly responsible for the growth, expansion, and education of children beginning at birth and continuing through the first five years of life. These centers include exhibits, day-care a family daycare midpoints, nurseries, and playgroups. This rapid growth of early childhood facilities has caused governments to examine their policies, teacher training programs, and funding for early childhood services in order to stimulate better educational practices and environments. These centers ought to be well equipped, and more and more funds ought to be allocated to them so that they can spread concept.

Research Methodology

In this study, the researcher employed a method known as quantitative research design. A research method that was descriptive in nature and survey-based was used for this investigation. According to Gay (2008), descriptive research requires providing comprehensive accounts of educational occurrences. The primary objective is to ascertain and to respond to the questions that deal with what, where, when, and how. The description is used to calculate frequencies, averages, and various other statistical measures. Data was gathered using research devices from many individuals at a specific time. Afterwards, the data was tabulated, evaluated, and interpreted in the context of the study's goals.

A population is a group of people with specific traits that are used to draw the required

information. This information will be based on all the conceivable cases (persons, things, and events) that make up a known whole (Gay, 2008). The study population consisted of all educators working in the district of Sialkot who were teaching to students at early childhood level.

Sampling is known as selecting a group of participants for a research study so that the individuals picked would accurately represent the larger group from which they were selected (Gay, 2008). A significant amount of interest will be displayed in this study to pick a sample of a reasonable size to represent the entire population and the data that will be obtained from the schools that have ECE classes. Therefore, the individuals who participated in the study comprised two hundred and fifty (250) educators who were teaching to the early childhood classes at primary school level.

The study's aims were considered when developing the research instrument (questionnaire), which was then used to collect the necessary information from the individual respondents. It is because it was determined that these were the most appropriate and proper ways to answer the study questions that were given. The following is a rundown of the specifics of each research instrument:

According to Gay (2008), a "questionnaire" is an instrument used to receive answers to questions by utilizing a form that respondents fill out according to their assessment of the situation. A predetermined series of questions can be used to obtain a representative sample from the population to obtain the needed information. Only one type of closed-ended type questionnaire was developed for this study. It was validated through experts' opinions, and it was administered to respondents to collect data, which was then analyzed, tabulated, and interpreted in light of the study's objectives. This study aimed to explore teachers' perceptions about early learners' potential in the district of Sialkot, with a particular reference to 21st-century skills.

The questionnaire was developed using a Likert scale with five points, ranging from 1 to 5, with SA standing for Strongly Agree; A

standing for Agree; UD standing for Undecided, DA standing for Disagree; and SDA standing for Strongly Disagree. The researcher began developing the questionnaire by reading the relevant literature and conversing with senior primary school teachers. Initially, the questionnaire contained more than ninety items; however, following the pilot testing process, the questionnaire was finalized with only 41 items.

The questionnaire was the research tool for the study, so it was piloted on a small representative sample of the study's population before being administered to the entire sample. Following a thorough review of the relevant literature, a questionnaire with 68 items was developed as the research instrument. The data for the pilot testing came from the researcher's visits to the additional 30 respondents who were not included in the sample. Each section of the questionnaire's statements has been transcribed to be simple, clear, and applicable.

Primary educators with more than twenty years of experience in the field, researchers, and administrators contributed to the survey questions' revision and improvement. There has been an overall gradual trend toward clearer language. Each survey question is taken as its own thought. To better understand the early learners potential for 21st century skills, how well-versed they are in 21st century skills, developed the items using a five-point Likert scale. The survey questions can benefit from the input of both the researchers and the professionals.

The reliability of a test, survey observation, or other measuring equipment is defined as its consistency under controlled conditions. Reliability is defined by its capacity to be repeated and its consistency across time. That is right; maintaining coherence necessitates that the questionnaire is simple. More importantly, they are not confusing the first responders. When a study undertaken by one

group can be replicated by another group and provide the same results each time, we say that the study is reliable.

For validity purposes, the researchers used SPSS to analyses the survey responses. The researcher looked at both difficult and easy things for final selection since they were on the same difficulty scale. After analyzing data from 30 secondary school teachers, we find that the questionnaire is credible and reliable (Cronbach Alpha = 0.831).

Data collection is a difficult task and requires consistency and commitment. The researcher obtained permission from the relevant authorities, and a research instrument in the form of a questionnaire was developed and then distributed to respondents in person, with the request that they fill it out at the location that was prescribed for them so that data could be collected. The research instrument (a questionnaire) was made available to be filled out and returned in person; hence, the response rate was close to a hundred percent. The researcher attempted to obtain relevant and reliable data, and they made it possible to collect data.

The obtained data from required respondents through a research instrument was tabulated, analyzed, and interpreted using proper statistical techniques of frequency, percentages, mean score, and standard deviation. Value assigned to each response was based on 5 points Liker Scale given as under:

- Strongly agree (SA) : 5
- Agree (A) : 4
- Undecided (UD) : 3
- Disagree (DA) : 2
- Strongly Disagree (SDA) : 1

Data Analysis

This part presented the data analysis and its interpretation in the below lines;

Table 1

S. No	Statements	SA	A	U	DA	SDA	M	SD
Life Skills								
1	Students listen teacher and understand.	45	98	23	50	34	4.31	0.895

S. No	Statements	SA	A	U	DA	SDA	M	SD
2	Students give value to others' ideas.	40	132	40	45	27	4.51	0.781
3	School facilitates students' physical skills.	35	130	20	42	23	4.44	0.931
4	Students encouraged through cooperative learning.	46	123	3	30	48	4.43	1.013
5	Students cooperate with peers.	105	121	5	10	9	4.81	2.421
6	Students feel energetic when they perform activities.	95	116	10	7	22	4.71	2.860
Creativity								
7	Students can introduce themselves.	59	125	10	50	6	4.67	1.689
8	Students can differentiate between colors.	67	64	12	61	46	4.23	0.834
9	Students identify living and non-living things.	126	45	7	24	48	4.67	1.027
10	Students know about their religion.	110	96	2	13	29	4.73	1.875
11	Students can identify shapes in environment.	65	132	10	23	20	4.28	1.271
Communication								
12	Students do not shout on each other.	75	94	4	45	32	4.01	0.961
13	Students speak politely while they communicate.	108	111	3	20	8	4.78	1.796
14	Students ask for help when needed.	68	120	8	49	5	4.22	1.461
15	Students do not express their likes and dislikes.	61	25	9	50	105	3.16	0.764
16	Students want to be praised by their teacher.	120	40	10	35	45	4.12	0.952

Findings & Conclusions

Data analysis yielded the study's results;

According to the statistical analysis, most respondents ($45 + 98 = 143$) agreed that students listen to and understand their teachers. Students who engage in such practices strengthen their listening abilities. Most respondents ($40 + 132 = 172$) agreed with the statement that students have developed life skills, i.e., they value the opinions of others. Therefore, the students take into account the viewpoints of their peers. Most respondents ($35 + 130 = 166$) agree that kids can acquire life skills through the school's resources, namely that the school helps students develop their physical skills. Therefore, children need access to physical education programs in preschool and kindergarten. Most respondents ($46 + 123 = 169$) agree that students gain confidence when they take advantage of opportunities for collaborative learning, according to the study's

findings on students' life skills. Cooperative learning possibilities within the school grounds are provided to kids at the early childhood level, contributing significantly to the development of extroverted behavior.

Most educators ($105 + 121 = 226$) believe students cooperate. As a result, children in preschool settings learn to work together. Respondents ($95 + 116 = 211$) agree that kids have the chance to develop essential life skills, such as feeling energized while participating in classroom activities. Therefore, children participate in early childhood activities with vigor and enthusiasm.

Most respondents ($59 + 125 = 184$) think that students' creativity is evident in their methods of self-introduction. In this way, preschoolers engage in frequent and open self-introductions. Most respondents ($67 + 64 = 131$) agree that students have creative talents and can differentiate between different colors. Even young children quickly grasp the concept

of color differentiation. Most respondents (126 + 45 = 171) agree that pupils are creative; specifically, they can tell the difference between living and nonliving things. Therefore, even preschoolers can tell the difference between living and non-living items. Most respondents (110 + 96 = 206) agree that students are creative. As a result, by the time they enter kindergarten, children have already had exposure to religious instruction. The majority of responders (65 + 132 = 197) agree that students are creative and are good at recognizing shapes in their environment. Thus, even preschoolers can rapidly and accurately identify various shapes in a given area.

Most respondents (75 + 94 = 169) think students' communication abilities are improving. Young children who show consideration for the thoughts and feelings of others in social interactions are well on their way to developing healthy relationships. Most respondents (108 + 111 = 219) agree with the study's central finding that students' communication abilities are generally positive. Students are equipped with the social skills necessary to interact civilly with others. Most respondents (68 + 120 = 188) agree with the study's central finding regarding students' openness in communicating their needs and receiving assistance. When children in the early grades feel powerless, they contact their instructors directly. Most respondents (105 + 50 = 155) disagreed with the study's conclusion that pupils communicate their preferences and dislikes well. Young children like sharing their opinions with their educators and peers. Most study participants (120 + 40 = 160) agreed that pupils want teachers' praise for good behavior. As a result, early elementary school students require positive reinforcement from teachers.

The study's findings led to its conclusions;

In Pakistan's public schools, memorizing facts precedes developing analytical thinking skills. Researchers found that classes, in which lecturers shifted activity protocols twice or three times helped students become more present in their second language learning. A

child's social, emotional, cultural, physical, and spiritual development has taken a backseat to the teaching of phonics and cognition as part of a single national curriculum overhaul. In addition, the results suggest that moral stories facilitate socialization in young infants. Compared to early education, the impact of formal schooling on a child's social and cognitive growth is relatively minor. Students' participation in group activities positively affects their linguistic abilities, and teachers often use these activities to assess the student's progress in this area.

Children with a richer range of experiences in their early years tend to be more engaged in school. Learning by doing gives pupils the self-assurance they need to engage in verbal arguments and discussions and teaches them the skills they need in the real world. Students are familiar with the problem-solving approach and agree it works because teachers regularly assign it in class. Students have a sense of responsibility and frequently complete their tasks on time while participating in class activities. A child does not learn in a vacuum; in addition to his or her peers, the child's environment plays a role in shaping his or her identity.

Recommendations

Recommendations were drawn from the conclusion;

1. As a possible recommendation, the research may suggest that the single national curriculum be fully implemented at the preschool level to help young children acquire necessary 21st-century abilities.
2. The study may recommend that teachers may train in the use of brain based learning for improving multiple intelligences among early childhood learners.
3. The better use of brain based learning techniques and principles may enhance the critical thinking and problem solving skills among students as well as in teachers.

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