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A Study to Investigate the Issues Facing Teachers in ECE Assessment

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Abstract: *This research was undertaken to investigate the problems teachers experience in ECE assessment. A qualitative research design with semi-structured interviewing was undertaken. The study's intent was to identify the assessment techniques used by ECE teachers to assess their students' learning during class. All primary level private schools in urban areas of Lahore were considered as the population of the study. Ten ECE teachers were selected by using a purposive sampling technique from the private school sector of Lahore. The data was analyzed through thematic analysis by using open and axial coding techniques. The major findings were that teachers used different assessments such as small class tasks, question answer techniques and observational techniques. The study revealed that the major issues teachers in ECE assessment were facing were students' individual differences, their level of understanding, their family background and lack of resources.*

Key Words: ECE, Assessment, Challenges, Students, Teachers, Education

Introduction

Assessment is defined as ways and means to comprehend the level of learning of students within an academic program, whether formally or informally. This study investigated issues which teachers faced in early childhood assessment. This research investigated teachers' issues in the assessment of pre-kindergarten children in a test setting. Assessment of young children is a challenge since it is very different from the assessment of older students (Whitaker, Jenkins & Duer, 2022). Young children display their learning by communicating

with the teacher and prefer to demonstrate what they know by doing rather than by taking written tests. Since young learners have limited reading and writing abilities, the use of developmentally appropriate activities is recommended. Kindergarten children cannot perform satisfactorily on multiple-choice tests or other formal written or oral assessments. Kindergarten children should be assessed in a local, familiar environment as they complete their routine tasks (Mendoza, Cheng, & Yan, 2022).

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Assessment plays a crucial role in early childhood education. The term 'assessment' is used interchangeably with measurement. In early childhood education, the underlying issue is the purpose of assessment. Researchers [Amoah, Dzakadzie, and Agbayisah \(2022\)](#) recommended observation of kindergarten learners' performances before making any decision on the selection of an appropriate assessment instrument and the methods of assessment.

Young children's learning process is developing. One option in educational assessment is the standardized tests for establishing learners' threshold of achievement, learning and growth following successful instruction of the essential elements of the curriculum. Teachers gain an insight into the successful outcomes of their learning materials and can decide whether they have achieved the objectives of their planned lessons ([McLaughlin et al., 2022](#)).

Classroom assessment practices of teachers connect curriculum, instructional mechanisms and students' learning outcomes. Teachers' assessment routine incorporates marking students' tests, question answer activities, projects, and group activities with the underlying goal of improving students' learning. Assessment practices develop learners' thinking patterns and enhance their confidence in attained skills and knowledge. Assessment practices during the early years foresee students' academic achievement in the later years from the evidence of scores they attained in early written or oral examinations ([Ahmad, shaheen, and Hussain, 2022](#)).

Kindergarten teachers face challenges in designing assessment strategies that encompass manifold functions of the objectives and learning outcomes as specified in the curriculum. Formative and summative assessments are regularly used to shape assessment integration ([Pyle & DeLuca, 2013](#)).

Two types of assessment are likely in early childhood learning. One is summative and another is formative assessment. The summative assessment determines how much students have learnt at the end of the term or the school year. Formative

assessments support teachers in instructional decision making. Formative assessment is important as it identifies to what extent the learning objectives have been achieved and highlight areas where teachers should provide remediation ([Mendoza, Cheng, & Yan, 2022](#)).

Pakistan's educational policy specifies the use of formative and summative assessment practices in ECE but the guidelines for incorporating both types of assessment are ignored. In formative assessment, the positive achievements of pupils are recognized and highlighted, so the teacher can proceed to the next lesson. The summative assessment whether criterion or norm referenced, is a comprehensive record of the overall achievement of pupils in a systematic way ([Zelenska, Kondra, & Galaidin, 2022](#)). Teachers also value projective techniques of personality assessment so they can involve learners in sharing ideas and work through self-assessment activities. Self-assessment practices lead to collaborative classrooms so that learners are prepared to take more responsibility for their own learning. Assessment data indicates the current level of knowledge of learners and guides teachers in planning their lessons ([Harlen and James, 1997](#)).

Early childhood teachers and researchers need to reflect and decide whether the assessment practices of our national curriculum can also be implemented in ECE. It is important to identify how to assess preschool children. Assessment results are used to communicate and report learners' achievements to their parents. Assessment is seen as evidence of learning by the school community and other stakeholders with an interest in the school ([McLaughlin et al., 2022](#)). Assessment practices support and motivate learners from socially disadvantaged homes to perform and excel. Assessment practices should develop learners holistically rather than encourage the usual *teach to the test* practices that encourage learners to build retention of facts for successful learning ([Amoah, Dzakadzie, & Agbayisah, 2022](#)).

The Importance of Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education includes concepts borrowed from disciplines such as childhood studies

and developmental psychology. Research studies on ECE investigate the developmental stages of growth and development. ECE centers are equipped with competent, well-trained teachers that incorporate Play Based Learning to teach discovery, exploration, and invention skills to young, curious minds (Bruijns et al., 2022). ECE centers are especially suitable for learners from socially disadvantaged homes as their parents might be away working most of the time, and their homes and streets, neighborhoods, and communities might not be supportive of young children's social and emotional well-being. Young children are greatly affected by the environment in which they are born and raised. Their eager, curious minds might absorb the conflicts they face so that their learning potential might be wasted unless channelized in the early years (Alvarado & Acosta, 2022). The benefits of early education for low-income families are that their children's cognitive growth and school readiness are highly motivated. It was revealed that one of the biggest reasons for parents sending their children to early childhood education centers was to keep them off the streets, away from the quarrels and disputes of their neighborhood to a learning center that will provide them with the knowledge to succeed in life in the competitive and stimulating company of teachers and peers (Pyle & DeLuca, 2013). Socially disadvantaged learners are in need of personality grooming, so they are a part of an amiable and agreeable group, learning through independent discovery and activity-based tasks. Children who do not have access to a supportive environment and peers may turn to crime and illegal activities in their youth, drop out of school, and take up other interests rather than studies (Ntumi, 2016). ECE recognizes the period of 0-6 years as crucial for children's growth and development. During the period of 0-3 years, most children are cared for by their mothers and caregivers but because of a certain time and financial constraints, mothers may not be able to care for their children. In such circumstances, ECE centers are a blessing for such children. Social uplift programs encourage the opening of more ECE centers in offices and educational institutes for the welfare of young learners (Sheridan et al., 2009).

Assessment in Early Childhood Education

It is customary for teachers to carry out an assessment routines and diagnose learners' weaknesses promptly. Assessment data is used for monitoring and evaluation decisions regarding learning goals and objectives. Diagnostic and formative assessment routines such as self-correction, peer correction, and teacher feedback inform teaching and learning practices. Formative assessment practices guide the assessment of learning in classrooms which lead to improved summative results (Pyle & DeLuca, 2013). ECE learners from Piaget's sensorimotor and preoperational developmental stage learn best when they are actively engaged in play-based learning activities. Since children's learning and development levels greatly affect the delivery of curriculum and the role of teachers, assessment practices need to be changed and modified as well. Good practices of assessment of authentic learning through a valid and reliable instrument are requisite for good results (Marra, 2004).

Purposes of Assessment in Early Childhood

Assessment practices reflect on teachers' lesson planning, inform how teachers provide learning experiences and identify areas of learning and development where children may need support or extension. Assessment practices are important for accountability decisions, making learning outcomes visible and integrating learning within curriculum and program planning (Alvarado & Acosta, 2022). Furthermore, assessment can also relate to evaluating the effectiveness of an early childhood program or school. Assessment is in the best interests of the child when it involves families and leads to decisions that support children's learning through social contributions and recognizes children's strengths, needs, interests and preferences (McLachlan, Flear, & Edwards, 2018).

Issues of Teachers in ECE assessment

ECE teachers have differing views on the feasibility of play based learning practices and assessment routines. While there is a deep link between play and learning, a teacher's observation is not a suitable

measure of assessment. Learners need to actively perform for assessment during PBL. Most educationists are of the view that although playing and learning are mutually related, assessment routines need to be revised in ECE ([McLaughlin et al., 2022](#)).

The issue highlighted here is if it is reasonable for educators to expect these children to use assessment results and derive benefits from assessment results to improve their own learning. Assessment practices are relevant in kindergarten school if they also enable children to feel accountable for their learning as motivated, self-regulating learners. Teachers knowledgeable about the curriculum and teaching also need well developed assessment capabilities with high motivation in spirit to forge learning partnerships with their children. Although primary and ECE teachers are confident in their lesson planning and assessment routine, they may not have acquired the skill to involve learners in self-assessment ([Absolum et al., 2009](#)). Researchers are aware of the benefits of projective techniques to inculcate the concept of social justice as part of young learners' cognitive development (Hughes, & Smith, 2007; [Mallory & New, 1994](#)).

There are some issues that teachers face during the ECE assessment

- Lack of time for lesson planning and implementation
- Discipline maintenance
- Lack of experienced teachers
- Students lack communicative skills
- Learners are individuals from different environments and levels of intelligence.
- Young Learners' energy is difficult to channelize constructively
- Lack of resources and electricity issue
- Learners are not able to read and comprehend text
- Lack of attention
- Classroom size issue

Statement of the Problem

The study is designed to investigate the issues faced

by teachers in schools during the early childhood assessment in the private institute at the primary level.

Objectives of the Study

1. To find out the assessment techniques that ECE teachers use to assess their students in the classroom during the academic.
2. To explore the challenges faced by teachers to assess the students at the early childhood level.
3. To find out the practices that ECE teachers used to overcome these challenges.

Research Questions

1. Which assessment tools are used by ECE teachers in the classroom during academic hours?
2. What are the challenges faced by teachers in assessing the students at the early childhood level?
3. What are the practices that ECE teachers use to overcome these challenges?

Research Design

The study was qualitative in nature. Qualitative research is investigative, naturalistic, and purposeful and studies the learners in their natural setting (Morgan 2008).

Study Population

The population of the study was the teachers who were taking classes for early childhood students and were selected from private schools in Lahore.

Sampling

Ten ECE teachers were selected by using the purposive Sampling technique from different private schools in Lahore.

Research Instruments

The researcher used the semi structured interview

to collect the data. Twenty open-ended interview questions were prepared for interview protocol to collect the in depth information regarding ECE assessment from the participants of the study.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed by using the thematic analysis technique after transcribing the data researcher used open and axial coding techniques to identify the patterns for themes. After coding researcher emerged initial themes, reviewed themes and then finalized these themes. The researcher made use of discourse, narrative and thematic analysis.

Key Findings

The study aimed to investigate the problems that teachers faced in ECE classrooms during the assessment and find solutions to resolve their concerns.

Q1. Which assessment Techniques are used by ECE teachers in the classroom during academic hours?

- A maximum of the respondents described that they mostly used formative assessment to assess the early childhood students. One of the Respondents shared that formative assessment is an ongoing assessment that helps teachers to find out students' strengths and weaknesses.
- Some of the respondents said that they used task-based assessment in which they assessed students' performance. Two of the respondents said that sometimes assessment practices are aligned with the demands of the subject and the teachers use assessment to meet their instructional objectives.
- Some respondents responded that they used the question answer technique to assess ECE students. One of the respondents said that this strategy is very beneficial for ECE students' conceptual clarity.
- A few respondents said that they used the white board to write down fill in the blanks and invited students to give their input and

fill these blanks. Students respond energetically.

2. What are the challenges faced by teachers in assessing the students at the early childhood level?

- Maximum respondents said that ECE students' individual differences are the biggest challenge that they face. Three of the respondents described that at the ECE level, students have many issues such as family background, parents' education level, and lack of understanding and comprehension.
- Few respondents replied that classroom management at the ECE level is also a big challenge because it is difficult for teachers to silence ECE children and make them understand.
- Most respondents also described how difficult it is to execute the class tasks of ECE students as it is such a huge challenge.
- Some teachers also identified that the lack of resources in the institutes is a big challenge that could affect the teaching learning process.

Q3. What are the practices that ECE teachers use to overcome these challenges?

- Most of the respondents replied that they used small classroom tasks to assess their students which are no cost.
- Few respondents said that they used observations to identify and manage ECE students' individual differences.
- Three respondents said that they used available waste material to make small assessment tasks such as identification of alphabets, fruits, animals, and some other relevant things to overcome the challenge of the availability of resources.

Conclusion

Researchers analyzed that their respondents mostly used formative assessment to assess early childhood students because it helps teachers to find out

students' strengths and weaknesses. Behavioral problems, individual differences and many other issues faced by teachers at the ECE level. Classroom management, lack of resources and executing a task for students at the ECE level is also a big challenge. The study also concluded that Teachers make efforts

to overcome the challenges. They can use small classroom tasks and low cost/no cost material to manage the classroom. They also used low cost/no cost material to overcome the challenge of lack of resources. Task based assessment is also found effective for assessing early childhood students.

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