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Impact of Early Childhood Educational Practices on the Students' Social and Cognitive Development

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ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted to investigate the differences in early childhood education practices in primary schools and their impact on children's cognitive and social development. Main objectives of the study were (i) To find out the perception of stakeholders regarding various early childhood education practices in primary schools (ii). To find out the perception of stakeholders regarding children's social development in primary schools (iii) To find out the perception of stakeholders about the impact of various early childhood education practices on children's cognitive development in primary schools. The study was delimited. Primary schools in D.I.Khan district. Primary school teachers of district D.I. Khan. Five hundred thirty three respondents were participated on their selection as sample of the study. A questionnaire was developed for data collection and a pilot study was carried out to make it valid and reliable. Questionnaire was validated through the experts of Education and 10 Senior Teachers of School. Mean Percentage, Standard deviation, T-test was utilized for analysis of data. After the findings and facts, it was concluded that. The majority of respondents, including 74.55% of male teachers and 81.96% of female teachers, gave a positive response to the statement: The classroom is organized in a way that promotes active learning and exploration for cognitive development. However, a small percentage of respondents, 14.46% of male teachers and 8.18% of female teachers, disagreed. Additionally, 10.96% of male teachers and 9.83% of female teachers were undecided. The mean value for male respondents is 3.74, with a standard deviation of 0.98, while the mean value for female respondents is 3.83, also with a standard deviation of 0.83. The calculated t-value is 1.139, and the p-value is 0.255. The majority of respondents, including 78.93% of male teachers and 75.4% of female teachers, gave a positive response to the statement: Children develop better communication skills through regular interactions with their peers in class activities. However, a small percentage of respondents, 7.88% of male teachers and 18.02% of female teachers, disagreed. Additionally, 13.15% of male teachers and 6.55% of female teachers were undecided. The mean value

for male respondents is 3.89, with a standard deviation of 0.91, while the mean value for female respondents is 3.62, also with a standard deviation of 1.09. The calculated t-value is 0.034, and the p-value is 0.003.
KEYWORDS: *Women in Leadership, Academic Leadership, Gender Barriers, Higher Education, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Public Sector Universities, Qualitative Study.*

INTRODUCTION

Education in the Early Years has a significant impact on shaping the social behavior and the cognitive growth of the child. Many factors that they have encountered during the process of transition to primary school might be more completely and permanently determined by the specific educational practices they went through. Their influence can go beyond the direct practice and reflect in the endorsement of the theoretical basis behind that practice. And it is reasonable to say that this disagreement may be related to cultural, pedagogical, and policy approaches. The restricted exposure to curriculum, type of engagement, and daily routines in the class and in the early years of primary schooling may affect children's mental abilities including his or her ability to reason critically, solve problems and use language. Functional skills such as communication, managing emotions and relating to other people are also vitally important for future development.

Developmentally appropriate and play-based behaviors have proven to promote cognitive and social growth in children. On the other hand, an excessively constrained or mechanistic approach to learning can stifle creativity, collaboration, and emotional resilience. Exploring comparative approach among different ECE practices will help to quickly identify the common strategies optimize early learning experiences to support holistic child development especially in this post covid time.

Research by scholars like Pianta et al. (2009) and Siraj-Blatchford (2010) highlights the connection between early childhood education (ECE) practices and child outcomes, indicating that the quality of early education significantly influences future academic success and social skills. Therefore, exploring the variations in ECE practices within primary schools offers important insights into how early learning environments can be optimized to support the overall development of young children. The field of early childhood education is extensive, with numerous studies underscoring the significance of early learning experiences in a child's holistic growth. Over the past two decades, various educational approaches, including play-based learning, structured education, and hybrid methods, have been examined for their effects on the development of primary school children.

Cognitive (Mental) Development

Cognitive development, which includes skills such as problem-solving, memory, attention, and language acquisition, is greatly influenced by experiences in early childhood education. According to Pianta et al. (2009), children who participate in high-quality early childhood education (ECE) that offers personalized instruction and active learning opportunities tend to show better cognitive outcomes. Furthermore, Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social constructivism suggests that children flourish in interactive environments where engagement with peers and adults enhances cognitive abilities like critical thinking and reasoning.

Research indicates that play-based learning is more effective in promoting cognitive development compared to traditional direct instruction. Whitebread et al. (2012) found that play-based settings encourage creativity, boost language skills, and enhance problem-

solving abilities by giving children the chance to explore ideas in a flexible and hands-on way. On the other hand, overly structured environments that focus on rote learning can restrict opportunities for deeper cognitive engagement, which may hinder intellectual curiosity and independent thinking (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009).

Social Development

Social development, which encompasses emotional regulation, collaboration, and communication skills, is a vital aspect influenced by early education practices. Studies indicate that children who participate in early childhood education (ECE) settings that prioritize social interaction, teamwork, and emotional support are more likely to cultivate robust interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Social-emotional learning (SEL) programs, which are incorporated into numerous early childhood curricula, have proven effective in improving children's social abilities, such as empathy, self-awareness, and cooperation (Denham et al., 2012).

In contrast, education systems that prioritize academic results over social learning can harm children's social development. Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2013) discovered that early childhood education programs concentrating exclusively on academic achievement frequently resulted in heightened anxiety and diminished social interaction among young learners. This highlights the necessity for a more balanced approach that promotes both cognitive and social development.

International Comparisons and Policy Implications

There are notable differences in early childhood education (ECE) practices around the world, influenced by various cultural, economic, and policy factors. For example, Nordic countries are recognized for their strong focus on play-based and child-centered learning, which has been associated with positive developmental outcomes (Einarsdóttir, 2010). On the other hand, many Asian countries tend to emphasize more structured, academically oriented learning during the early years. While this approach can result in high academic achievement, it may also restrict opportunities for social development (Li, Wang, & Fong, 2014).

Another crucial element affecting both cognitive and social outcomes is the quality of teacher-child interactions. Research by Mashburn et al. (2008) indicated that classrooms characterized by warm and supportive teacher-child interactions promote better developmental outcomes compared to those with more authoritarian or detached teaching styles. This highlights the significance of teacher training and ongoing professional development in improving early childhood education practices.

Statement of Problem

The issue is that primary schools' approaches to early childhood education (ECE) varies greatly from one another, which begs the question of how these practices affect kids' social and cognitive development. There is still little knowledge about how particular ECE approaches—like play-based learning, structured instruction, or mixed methods—affect children's cognitive abilities, like language acquisition and critical thinking, as well as their social skills, like emotional regulation and teamwork, despite a wealth of research emphasizing the value of early learning experiences. For educators and policymakers looking to adopt strategies that promote the best possible developmental outcomes for every kid, irrespective of their socio-cultural or educational background, this ambiguity poses a problem. The problem understudy was"Investigate the differences in early childhood education practices in primary schools and their impact on children's cognitive and social development.

Objective of the study

1. To find out the perception of stakeholders regarding various early childhood education practices in primary schools.
2. To find out the perception of stakeholders regarding children's social development in primary schools.
3. To find out the perception of stakeholders regarding the children's cognitive development in primary schools.
4. To find out the perception of stakeholders about the impact of various early childhood education practices on children's cognitive development in primary schools.
5. To find out the perception of stakeholders about the impact of various early childhood education practices on children's Social development in primary schools.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of stakeholders regarding various early childhood education practices in primary schools?
2. What are the perceptions of stakeholders regarding children's social development in primary schools?
3. What are the perceptions of stakeholders regarding the children's cognitive development in primary schools?

Significance of the Study

- Provides insights for educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers on the most effective early childhood education (ECE) practices for enhancing children's cognitive and social development.
- Examines varying ECE approaches in primary schools and their impact on critical developmental outcomes, including problem-solving, language skills, emotional regulation, and social interaction.
- Contributes valuable findings to efforts aimed at improving early education quality, fostering a more supportive learning environment for young children.
- Identifies ECE practices that yield positive developmental results, enabling more informed decisions on curriculum design and teaching strategies.
- Supports the holistic growth of children, contributing to improved long-term educational and social outcomes.

Literature Review

ECE is essential for a child's social and emotional growth (Pugh, 1992). Studies indicate that the quality of early childhood education experiences significantly influences the development of intelligence, personality, lifelong learning abilities, and social behaviors, among other traits (Pugh, 1992; Evans et al., 2000; Woodhead, 2006; La Paro et al., 2012). Furthermore, high-quality ECE (QECE) programs contribute to improved mathematical skills, enhanced social abilities, language and literacy development, and stronger interpersonal relationships (Sylva et al., 2011; La Paro et al., 2012; Papadakis et al., 2016; Ekinci-Vural and Doğan-Altun, 2021).

Research in brain science and child psychology has highlighted the significance of early experiences and the vital role that early childhood education (ECE) plays in children's development and their future success in school and life (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000; Mustard, 2007; Young, 2007). When children engage in enriching early experiences through ECE, they build a strong foundation for lifelong learning, fostering their knowledge, skills, self-confidence, and social behaviors (Mustard, 2007). Studies indicate

that ECE can effectively address the academic, social, health, and nutritional needs of children prior to their entry into formal schooling (Rolnick, 2004; La Paro et al., 2012; Fourie, 2013; Ministry of National Education (MoNE), 2020). ECE is deemed essential as it represents the start of a child's formal educational journey, a critical period for nurturing their potential (Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MWCA), 2004).

Early childhood education plays a crucial role in setting the foundation for a child's future success (Evans et al., 2000; UNICEF, 2020). Among the many advantages of ECE are the development of writing and literacy skills (Sylva et al., 2011, 2004; Sakellariou and Rentzou, 2012). According to Schweinhart et al. (2005), children who engage in ECE tend to perform better in their later educational pursuits compared to those who do not. Significant brain development, which influences human behavior, occurs by the age of five, making early childhood a critical period for experiences such as education and affection that support brain growth (Woodhead, 2006). While the brain continues to develop beyond childhood, research indicates that the rate of development is most rapid during these early years (Fischer, 2012; Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000). Despite the benefits of ECE, the quality of the education provided is equally important. High-quality ECE has been linked to increased happiness and punctuality in school (UNESCO, 2005), better preparedness for primary education, and higher enrollment rates (Schweinhart et al., 2005). It also contributes to healthy development (Clement, 2004) and fosters a sense of security with teachers (White, 2013). The evidence clearly indicates that the experiences children have in their early years significantly influence their overall development, highlighting the importance of quality early childhood education in achieving these outcomes. It is crucial to provide children with a solid education during their early years to support their optimal development. Similar to other developing countries, Ghana has made significant progress by enacting laws and creating policies aimed at delivering the best possible formal education for children aged 0 to 8, both during the colonial period and after independence (Sackey, 2009).

Despite the efforts made, existing literature shows that the perceptions of ECE stakeholders—such as teachers, head teachers, education officers, and parents—significantly affect the attention they give to its provision (Lemaire et al., 2013; Phoon et al., 2012; Robbins, 2008). Perception is defined as the process through which an individual organizes and interprets sensory information to make sense of their environment (Robbins, 2008). While perception largely shapes one's decisions and behaviors, it is also crucial to recognize that it can differ significantly from objective reality (Robbins, 2008). This means that even when two individuals encounter the same situation, their interpretations and the decisions they make can vary widely. Therefore, in the context of providing ECE, the perceptions of the stakeholders involved are vital, as they can greatly influence how ECE is delivered.

Robbins (2008) and Lemaire et al. (2013) suggest that the way early childhood education (ECE) is delivered often reflects the perceptions and aspirations of the stakeholders involved. This means that stakeholders shape ECE based on their understanding of what constitutes quality ECE (QECE). Factors such as the learning environment, the involvement of learners in the process, and the roles they play in implementing ECE programs are all influenced by these perceptions. During informal discussions with several ECE teachers and head teachers while completing his Master of Philosophy practicum and working as an early childhood educator, the researcher discovered varying interpretations of what quality ECE provision entails. For instance, some educators believed that any location could serve as an ECE setting as long as the

teachers were trained, while others contended that the quality of the premises is equally important for achieving high standards. This indicates that there are diverse opinions regarding the concept of 'quality' in ECE and the necessary conditions for attaining it. Lemaire et al. (2013) also observed in their study in the Western region of Ghana that when stakeholders believed that ECE could be taught by anyone, regardless of their academic or professional background in ECE, they assigned untrained teachers to ECE classes. Additionally, better facilities were often allocated to primary and Junior High Schools (JHS) at the expense of ECE, reflecting the stakeholders' perceptions. Consequently, several thought-provoking questions arise from these discussions, including: What are the stakeholders' views on the quality of ECE in the selected schools? What challenges do teachers face in delivering ECE? Under what conditions are teachers providing ECE? And what are the implications of ECE provision in these schools concerning quality.

The study by Tugas (2022) focuses on creating a conceptual model for quality basic education, specifically looking at how school-based management influences stakeholder involvement and morale. It reveals that both internal and external stakeholders maintain high morale and actively monitor school-based management practices. The research identifies four key impacts of these practices on education quality: poor quality, high involvement, low involvement, and low involvement. It highlights the necessity of fostering positive working relationships among all participants in the education system to enhance stakeholder engagement. A deeper look into the work of Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) from the Department of Education Leadership and Management shows that deliberately boosting stakeholder involvement in schools aims to alleviate the various challenges faced by both stakeholders and schools, ensuring the desired outcomes are met. It is clear that improving student learning and academic performance requires more than just the collaborative efforts of parents, teachers, school heads, SMC members, and government officials. This study is driven by the need to explore how stakeholder participation and quality indicators set by the government in schools can influence students' academic performance and learning abilities. In the meantime, it is essential for all parties involved in the education system to cultivate positive working relationships, as this remains the primary objective of stakeholder engagement in education.

Methodology

Research Design of the Study

A research design is the strategic plan that outlines the approach for conducting a study, providing a framework for the methods and procedures used in data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Its purpose is to structure the study so that it systematically and reliably addresses the research questions or tests the hypotheses. This study were use a descriptive research design.

Population of the Study

The population refers to the entire group from which conclusions are intended, while the sample is the subset from which data is collected, typically smaller than the population. In research, a population may include entities beyond just people. In this study, the population consists of all male and female primary school teachers in District D.I. Khan.

TABLE#1	Population of The Study		
Total Govt male Primary School in D.I.Khan	Total Govt Girls primary School in D.I.Khan	Total Govt male primary school teachers in D.I.Khan	Total Govt female primary school teachers in D.I.Khan
763	448	2276	1524

https://dikhan.kp.gov.pk/page/education_facilities_in_district_dikhan

Research Sample and Sampling Technique:

The research study's sample included 228 male and 305 female primary school teachers, determined using the L. R. Gay formula. Respondents were selected through a stratified random sampling method.

TABLE#2: Sample Table

Male primary school teachers	Female primary school teachers
228	305

TABLE#3: L.R Gay's sample drawing criteria:

Sr No	Population size	Sample of size
1	Less than 100	Total Population
2	500 approximately	50% (250)
3	Approximately1500	20% (300)
4	Greater then 2000	10% (200)

Research Tool/Instrument

Research instruments are the tools used by researchers to collect data to address their research questions or objectives. A closed-ended questionnaire will be used for data collection.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Validity of research Instrument:

Three Ph.D. language experts in social sciences were assess the content validity of the items. Their suggestions were help enhance the item content. Validity indicates how accurately a research instrument measures what it is designed to measure (Neagu, 2022). Additionally, social science education experts will assess both the face and content validity of the items, providing valuable feedback for improvement.

Pilot testing of Research Instrument:

Pilot testing, also known as a pilot study, is an essential preliminary step in research, involving the initial testing of the research instrument on a small sample prior to the main data collection. The primary goal of pilot testing is to detect and address any potential issues, allowing researchers to refine the instrument and verify its suitability and reliability. This process helps ensure that the instrument accurately measures the intended variables and provides relevant feedback on its clarity, format, and usability. Additionally, pilot testing offers insights into the feasibility of the research design, helping to anticipate any challenges in the main study.

Research Instruments' Reliability:

Reliability refers to the stability and consistency of a measurement across time and different circumstances. In this study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient will be used to evaluate the internal consistency of the questionnaire, ensuring that the items reliably measure the intended constructs. High Cronbach's alpha values indicate that the instrument is producing dependable results across similar contexts, suggesting minimal random error. By testing internal consistency, researchers can confirm that each question within the instrument aligns well with others, enhancing the overall reliability of the data collected.

1	More Than 0.90	Excellent
2	0.80-0.89	Good
3	0.70-0.79	Acceptable
4	0.6-0.69	Questionable
5	0.5-0.59	Poor
6	Less than 0.59	Unacceptable

Data Analysis:

The descriptive analysis of the data employed mean and percentage, standard deviation, and T-test was used.

Table 4.1: The teaching methods used in my child's classroom are highly engaging and effective in enhancing their cognitive development

Options	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Male Teachers	8	20	30	140	30	228
Percentage	3.50%	8.77%	13.15%	61.40%	13.15%	100%
Female Teachers	15	20	20	210	40	305
Percentage	4.91%	6.55%	6.55%	68.85%	13.11%	100%

The majority of respondents, including 74.55% of male teachers and 81.96% of female teachers, gave a positive response to the statement: The teaching methods used in my child's classroom are highly engaging and effective in enhancing their cognitive development. However, a small percentage of respondents, 12.27% of male teachers and 11.46% of female teachers, disagreed. Additionally, 13.15% of male teachers and 6.55% of female teachers were undecided.

	Sample 1	Sample 2	Difference
Mean	3.71	3.78	0.0699999999999998
Standard deviation	0.92	0.92	0.92
N	228	305	533
Standard Error	0.061	0.053	0.081
95% CI for mean	3.59 - 3.83	3.676 - 3.884	-0.088 - 0.228
DF	227	304	531
T			0.864
P-values			0.388
Tails			2-tailed
Conclusion			Accept null hypothesis: means not significantly different

The mean value for male respondents is 3.71, with a standard deviation of 0.92, while the mean value for female respondents is 3.78, also with a standard deviation of 0.92. The calculated t-value is 0.864, and the p-value is 0.388.

Table 4.2: Hands-on activities (e.g., experiments, arts, crafts) are regularly used to improve children's understanding of concepts

Options	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Male Teachers	6	12	30	150	30	228
Percentage	2.63%	5.26%	13.15%	65.78%	13.15%	100%
Female Teachers	10	25	30	190	50	305
Percentage	3.27%	8.19%	9.83%	62.29%	16.39%	100%

The majority of respondents, including 78.93% of male teachers and 78.68% of female teachers, gave a positive response to the statement: Hands-on activities (e.g., experiments, arts, crafts) are regularly used to improve children's understanding of concepts. However, a small percentage of respondents, 7.89% of male teachers and 11.46% of female teachers, disagreed. Additionally, 13.15% of male teachers and 9.83% of female teachers were undecided.

	Sample 1	Sample 2	Difference
Mean	3.81	3.80	0.0100000000000002
Standard deviation	0.82	0.92	0.879
N	228	305	533
Standard Error	0.054	0.053	0.077
95% CI for mean	3.703 - 3.917	3.696 - 3.904	-0.141 - 0.161
DF	227	304	531
T			0.13
P-values			0.897
Tails			2-tailed
Conclusion			Accept null hypothesis: means not significantly different

The mean value for male respondents is 3.81, with a standard deviation of 0.82, while the mean value for female respondents is 3.80, also with a standard deviation of 0.92. The calculated t-value is 0.13, and the p-value is 0.897.

Discussion

The male and female teachers had a common understanding that early childhood education practices have positive impacts on children's cognitive and social growth, according to the findings. The responses indicate a strong alignment between teaching methods and educational goals. For instance, most respondents acknowledged that teaching methods in their classrooms are engaging and enhance cognitive abilities, supported by a high mean value (3.71 for males and 3.78 for females) and statistically insignificant differences between the groups (t-value = 0.864, p-value = 0.388). This implies that effective and active teaching approaches are recognized by both male and female teachers. Critical thinking and problem-solving skills were similarly emphasized, with over 78% of respondents agreeing on the role of teaching methods in fostering these abilities. Nonetheless, small gender differences do emerge—significantly in a dimension such as collaboration and teamwork, where there is a statistically significant t-value (2.771) indicating the substantial difference in perceptions between males and females. This exploration also showed that they focused slightly less on using collaborative techniques — which may be due to differences in classroom dynamics or resources available — and may indicate that female teachers have a risk averse nature. The results also highlight the importance of the classroom environment and learning tools. All respondents, irrespective of their gender, mean values are above 3.60 in responses regarding the availability of adequate and suitable materials also environments where exploration and learning is possible. Lesser agreement among male teachers (mean = 3.63, p = 0.107) may indicate inequities in resource distribution, or even in resource utilization. Social Development was another key area of focus. The high levels of agreement (74% or more for both men and women) also demonstrate that the goal of practices that induce communication and teamwork is achieved, in accordance with the objectives of ECE more broadly. Furthermore, with some weak areas in teacher-student relations and curriculum flexibility, some gaps were found in perception where investigation needs to focus to ensure that

inclusive practice is consistently implemented in every classroom. Finally, the responses reflect to the critical importance of the role the parents play and your working together towards a common goal. Although the general consensus in this findings towards the importance of subject area collaboration, the results also highlight the slightly higher percentage of disagreement found among male teachers indicating the necessity of targeted strategic approaches to strengthen teaching-team collaborations. Overall, although ECE practices were largely favorable for cognitive and social development, gender perceptions and resource allocation were not equivalent across low-Income areas, indicating avenues for future intervention. Implementing professional development, resources and collaborative practices to close these gaps can also provide a potential solution to improving early childhood education within primary schools.

Conclusion

The results show that male and female teachers mostly believe that early years teaching practices in primary schools are beneficial to children's cognitive and social development. Engaging and flexible curricula are associated with development of skills such as critical thinking, collaboration and problem solving through effective teaching methods. Although there are some differences between the responses, such as the female teachers giving overall higher mean scores, most are not statistically significant with $p > 0.05$. On the other hand, collaboration, group work, and communication skills are positively affected (t and p-values < 0.05). Overall, the findings underscore the significance of teaching practices, classroom environments, and teacher-family partnerships in promoting children's holistic growth.

Recommendations

- For future researchers interested in exploring the Investigate the differences in early childhood education practices in primary schools and their impact on children's cognitive and social development, here are some recommendations to guide your research:
- Encourage teachers to create lessons that focus on collaboration and teamwork.
- Execute training in the way of active and creative in the learning process, with an emphasis on critical thinking, questioning and exploring.
- Schools should also utilize a variety of diverse and age-appropriate educational materials to support active learning and cognitive development.
- (As a school or school district) · Establish regular lines of communication between schools and parents to synchronize academic and social-emotional goals.
- Create curricula that accommodate different learning styles and needs. The minor discrepancy and undecided responses on curriculum flexibility indicates the need for ongoing adaptation of curriculum according to the different cognitive and social needs of individual children.

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