



RESEARCH PAPER

Online Teaching at ECE: Perspectives of Early Childhood Educators

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This study was conducted to investigate the perceptions of teachers about online teaching for the students of early childhood education level whose age are from 3-8 years. For this purpose, 200 teachers at private schools of urban Islamabad were approached in which 197 have responded. A questionnaire on five point Likert scale was developed to take data from teachers. Data was analyzed through descriptive statistics. The findings of the research reflect that online teaching may not appropriate for the students of ECE as they need face to face interaction for individual attention which is not fulfilling in online teaching and the children performance are adversely affected. On the other hand, the findings also revealed that the children performance may not be clearly assess through online assessments procedures.

Introduction

Early childhood education is one of the most important stage of human life. It is the stage where a rapid growth of social, cognitive, and moral development of a child take place (Hamad et al., 2018). Usually, early childhood education refers to the period started from birth to 8 years where a child entered kindergarten. It's a period when a child learn problem solving, emotional and social skills and a relationship take place between the teacher and child which help to promote better learning of child at school. During early years of life, the child needs individual attention in classroom during learning process at school (Osho, Aliyu, Okolie & Onifade, 2014). Research has shown that brain develop with high rate around the age of three years therefore a suitable learning environment is essential during these years to bring forth the capabilities of child since early years (ISCED, 2011). Early childhood education accelerates the child mind for better adaptation from learning environment through activity and play method which results increase of physical size of brain (Campbell et.al, 2002; Shore, 1997; Mustard & McCain, 1999). Early childhood

education is not only important for the social and cognitive development of child, but it serves as a milestone in the career development and economic life of the individual. (Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Education, 2008). It has also positive effects on the child's upcoming academic capabilities (Fleer, 2001).

Covid 19 has changed the scenario of traditional teaching learning process which used to be held inside of the classrooms. During Covide-19 all educational institutions were closed for a long time. Children health and safety became the priority of parents and teachers. This situation limited the face to face interaction between children and teachers. Social distancing give birth to online mod of teaching at all levels of education all around the globe (Garbe et al., 2020). To maintain social distancing and due to closure of schools, online teaching was also arranged for children of ECE level. Early childhood education is a stage of schooling where individual attention is more required for clarity of concepts and focus of attention. But this important aspect of learning reduced in online mode of teaching as physical interaction was not there. Recent research of early childhood education shows that due to suspension of face to face classrooms, parents have experienced difficulty and stress while helping their children in learning (Spinelli et al., 2020). On the other hand, research also shows that the teachers faced difficulties to sustain the attention of small children during online classes (McPake, Plowman, & Stephen, 2013; Plowman et al. 2011). It may be due to the reason that teachers were not fully trained for online teaching and it was challenging for them (Dong, Cao & Hui, 2020).

Although online classes were the only solution during pandemic but a country like Pakistan where majority of the population is below the poverty line and living in remote areas, cannot afford the internet facility. While on the other hand, in urban areas the connectivity problem and low income of the families become the hurdle in online learning for their children (Azzahra, 2020). Online learning is challenging for young children with many aspects such as their technological abilities, face to face guidance from teacher, collaborative and interactive methodologies of teaching which make children to focus on learning are those parameters which may not fully achieved in online mode of teaching (Kim, 2020).

Digital technology such as smartphones, tablets, laptops, and the internet connection is needed as support equipment in online learning. There are some advantages of implementing online learning such as quick and efficient delivery of courses through geographical and time constraints, flexible, convenient, increased accessibility and interest for non-traditional students, increased participation rates, and cost-effective (Heirdsfield et al., 2007; Kim, 2020). However, there are some drawbacks of online learning for young children such as depend on the technological abilities of students and teachers, need parent/adult guidance, need more interactive methods to make young children focused on online learning (Kim, 2020). Research revealed that there are some barriers of online learning during pandemic such as: lack of technology support and training, absence of technical expertise, improper communication, poor connectivity, lack of students' readiness and barrier of financial

matters and services (Abuhammad, 2020). Lack of comfort of children with technology, insufficient skill of children and access to online devices and connectivity are the hurdles of online learning for young children (Danby et al., 2018). Keeping in view the importance of early childhood education and usage of technology for learning through online mode, this study is designed to find out the views of early childhood educators for teaching to young children through online mod.

Literature Review

During March 2020 WHO the world Health Organization declared the coronavirus or COVID-19 as a pandemic for all over the globe (World Health Organization, 2020). At that time, it was also suggested to stay at home for maintenance of social distancing. All schools, markets and institutions were closed and put lock down all over the world to reduce the spread of covid-19. The situation of covid-19 got worst and schools with all other sectors of life remained close for a long time. This results adverse effect on the learning of school going children especially on children who were beginners to school. As the pandemic was a sudden outbreak therefore the schools and teachers were not ready to handle the situation. But with the passage of time teaching through online with the help of technology was adopted. It was the only solution during the time of pandemic (Sen, Antara, & Sen, 2019). Pandemic changed the routine of children and they confined to homes. Playing and social interaction is one of the most important dimension of child personality, but it reduced due to pandemic (Garbe et al., 2020; Boland & Mortlock, 2020).

Preschool has a positive effect on the learning and social development of children, and they learn skills which are required for kindergarten schools (Ansari, Pianta, et al., 2020; Barnett & Camilli, 2002; Barnett et al., 2018; Pianta et al., 2009). It is evident from research that those children who attended preschools have better academic skills as to those who did not (Barnett, 1995). According to Ansari, Pianta, et al. (2020) a meta-analysis of 65 studies shows that children attended kindergarten have better understanding. This reflects that how much pre-schooling is important for children mental and physical health. As school provide the opportunity for learning through different activities within the learning environment. However, this learning environment in which the physical and social interaction reduced due to online teaching adversely affected the main purpose of early childhood education.

Online learning may be defined as “learning with technology or with usage of internet which may within synchronous or asynchronous environment” (Singh & Thurman, 2019). This mode of learning makes its place during the covid-19 and become popular all over the world even in the third world countries also. Which results shift in teaching learning process from fac to face traditional learning to online learning (Aldhafeeri & Khan, 2016). However, the research has shown its concerns for the quality of learning and social engagement of learners (Khurana, 2016). Study of Lau, Li, & Lee (2021) shows that the parents of children of preschoolers were satisfied about their learning independently, but this result was not satisfactory for

the amount of learning their children obtained during online classes. The study of Dong, Cao, & Li (2020) shows that the parents in China were not satisfied with online learning for their children. They recommend traditional learning for the children of preschoolers due to reason of lack of proper time of parents, lack of self-regulation and lack of their professional training to support their children in learning. It may be due to the reason that early childhood education is the phase where children need a support for making the foundation of academic life through proper trained and professional teachers. The children may not learn in a good way from parents at home rather they may learn better in a guided environment (Fretwell, 2021). There are some reasons which effect the efficiency of online learning and teaching, they are skill for management of time, availability of resources required for opportunity of online learning and disruptions and obligations of family (Kalman et al., 2020). Similarly, number of challenges are also involved in shaping the child- center learning settings such as the teachers who involve in online teaching process need to avail regular technology based professional proficiency along with their routine workload which burdened the teacher (Gillett, 2017; Swan, 2005).

Online teaching may be useful if it is implemented according to the principles of constructivism philosophy. The teacher may include facilitative learning, interactive learning, collaborative learning, and authentic learning strategies during online teaching to children of early childhood education (Huang, 2002). These strategies lead to a rich learning environment (Carwile, 2007) including use of hypermedia and online group discussions (Huang, 2002). It is a fact that sudden outbreak of pandemic brought many challenges for teachers of ECCE. Before pandemic teachers were not familiar with the use of learning technologies rather, they were using these gadgets remotely but during covid-19 online teaching burden and stressed the teacher of preschools. It also prolonged their working hours as they remain in touch with children for assigning and assessing their different tasks (Limbers, 2021). Research of Hong, Liu & Zhang (2021) shows that online teaching has changed the workload, working style and work content of preschool teachers. This research further argued that 74.5% preschools teachers reported for increase in their workload. This reflects that online teaching not only burden the parents and children but also teachers of preschools.

Material and Methods

This was a quantitative research design and survey method of research was used to carry out the different steps of this study. The results of the data were explained and elaborated in quantitative terms.

Population and Sampling

The ECE private schools of urban Islamabad were selected for this study. 200 ECE teachers were selected randomly from these schools.

Research Tool

A questionnaire was developed after a thorough review of literature for teachers. It was consisted of 5 point Likert scale such as, agree, strongly agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree. Different aspects of early childhood education level were included in the questionnaire on which the opinion was required according to the objective of the research. A questionnaire was validated through expert opinion. These experts were having at least five years' experience of teaching or course development of ECE level. Some minor changes were suggested by the experts and those changes were incorporated in the questionnaire. Similarly, reliability of the tool was also ensured through pilot testing. A questionnaire was distributed to 15 ECE teachers for the purpose of pilot testing. Responses were received and Cronbach's alpha was calculated through SPSS which was 0.84.

Results and Discussion

This section discusses the quantitative results of this research study. There are four main variables on which the sub items of the research were constructed, and opinion of teachers were obtained against each item. Percentages of the responses were calculated. The detail discussion of the results is as below:

Learning through online classes

S.NO	Statement	SA	A	NU	DA	SDA
1	Online classess helpful for ECE children	13.2%	26.4%	26.4%	20.3%	12.2%
2	Children feel burden due to online classes	0%	38.1%	21.3%	18.8%	21.8%
3	It easy to learn the concepts through online learning at ECE level	0%	15.2%	19.3%	48.2%	17.3%
4	There is no need of face-to-face teaching online classes are enough for ECE children	8.6%	7.6%	12.7%	34.0%	37.1%
5	Children concepts got clear through online classes without any assistance of parents	6.1%	11.2%	11.7%	46.2%	24.9%
6	Students feel confused due to sudden shift of online classes from traditional face to face classes.	25.9%	44.2%	15.2%	12.2%	2.5%

The above table reflects that the teachers responded that online classes remain helpful for the children of ECE during pandemic with 26.4% but on the other hand similar percentage showing undecided option for the statement. Similarly, 38.1%

responses of the teachers show that children were burdened due to online classes. 48.2% teachers were disagreed that online teaching helps ECE children to understand the concept easily, while 37.1% responses were strongly disagreed and 34.0% were disagreed that online classes are enough for learning than face to face classes. 46.2% teachers were disagreed that children learn concept without assistant of parents during online classes. Similarly, 44.2% teachers' responses reflect that children were found confused due to sudden shift of online classes from traditional classrooms learning.

Table 1
Managing Online Classes

S.NO	Statement	SA	A	NU	DA	SDA
1	Children independently take their classes	2%	15.2%	14.7%	43.7%	24.4%
2	I face no difficulty to manage online classes with my other tasks of job and home	10.2%	13.2%	15.2%	44.7%	16.8%
3	Children can easily attend their classes without support of parents	7.1%	5.6%	4.6%	52.8%	29.9%
4	Online classes negatively affected the co-curricular activities	28.9%	43.1%	16.8%	11.2%	0%
5	I have easy access to internet with good connectivity for online classes	14.2%	40.6%	13.7%	21.3%	10.2%
6	Online classes burdened the teachers financially	22.3%	43.7%	16.8%	15.7%	1.5%

This table depict that 43.7% teachers were disagree for the response that children can take online classes independently similarly 44.7% teachers were disagreed with the statement that teachers did not find difficult to manage online classes with other tasks. 52.2% teachers responded that children cannot take online classes without support of parents and 28.9% teachers responded that online teaching negatively affected cocurricular activities of young children. 40.6% teachers reported that internet connectivity was not good while 43.7% teachers found burdened financially due to online classes.

Table 2
Teachers Training for Online Classes

S.NO	Statement	SA	A	NU	DA	SDA
1	Teacher were fully trained before conducting online classes	0%	26.9%	17.3%	32%	23.9%
2	It is easy to arrange online classes for early years children	0%	16.2%	12.2%	44.2%	27.4%
3	Individual attention can be easily given to children in online classes	0%	17.8%	8.1%	44.7%	29.4%
4	Gain children full attention to learning during online classes	0%	25.9%	17.8%	37.6%	18.8%

The above table shows that 32% teachers reported that they were not fully trained for online teaching while 44.2% teachers said that it is not easy to arrange online teaching for children of ECE. 44.7% teachers reflected that it is difficult to provide individual attention to ECE children through online teaching and 37.6% teachers also responded that children did not provided full attention during online teaching.

Table 3
Assessments in Online Teaching

S.NO	Statement	SA	A	NU	DA	SDA
1	Online assessments correctly indicates the overall performance of the children	3.6%	17.8%	16.2%	50.3%	12.2%
2	Online assessments help to identify the weak areas of the academic performance of children.	3.65	26.4%	13.2%	41.6%	15.2%
3	Online assessments provide better feedback for improvement of children performance as compare to traditional/face to face assessments.	5.6%	12.2%	14.2%	48.25	19.8%
4	Online classes are recommended to be carry on in future at pre-primary level.	5.6%	14.2%	13.7%	40.1%	26.4%

This table shows that 50.3% teachers were not agreed for the statement that online teaching measure accurately the overall performance of children while 41.6% responded that online assessments cannot assess the weak areas of children. 48.2% teachers reported that online assessments cannot provide better feedback for

improvement of performance as compare to face to face assessments. 40.1% teachers did not recommend online classes for ECE children.

Discussion

This research study reflects that children of young age cannot manage their classes independently and they need support of parents for learning of concept and assessments. Beside that the teachers also responded that cocurricular activities also ignored during online classes which are the most essential dimension in the learning of children of ECE. These findings are in harmony with research of Stites et al. (2021) which state that online teaching negatively affected the learning of mathematics of young children as parents cannot support and guide their children up to the level as teacher can do. Similarly, the research of Dong et al. (2020) also is in harmony with the current study which reflects that many of parents in china were not in favor of online learning for their children as they think it does not appropriate methodology of teaching for small children while this study also reflects that children of Montessori level cannot absorb the learning through online mode, and it became also financially a burden for both teachers and parents. Shumba et al. (2020) also concluded in their research that there is a need of training of early childhood educators or caregivers for online teaching while this research study also endorsed that teachers were not properly trained for online teaching learning. The current research study depict that online classes are not recommended by teachers for future for young children as the clarity of concept become difficult for children in online teaching. The findings of Bao et al. (2020) also revealed that reading abilities and habits of children decreases with online learning. This may be because the young children develop the habit of use of digital gadgets for playing games and entertainment which may adversely affect their study habits. The research revealed that online assessments did not provide sufficient feedback to children which can improve their performance, similarly the research of Ahmad & Zabdi (2020) state that there is a need of improvement of online assessment procedures and techniques to reduce plagiarism and cheating to ensure accurate performance of learners.

Conclusion

Early childhood education is a milestone in the development process of human life. The overall personality and career development has a close relationship with the education and training provided to individuals during early years of life. This study concluded that early childhood education is an important aspect of children learning and teachers play a crucial role in this development process. Therefore, to guarantee the effective learning of children it is essential that face to face interaction need to be provided to children. This will ensure the individual attention for learning of children of young age and will enhance their learning span of time with focus of attention.

Recommendations

Based on this research, it is recommended that the children of early age may not be provided online classes for effective teaching learning process. Children of early childhood education needs to teach with face to face mod of teaching as they cannot take their classes independently.

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