"A Study on Teachers' Instructional Practices in Managing Lingual Diversity in Early Childhood Classrooms"

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KEY WORDS	ABSTRACT

lingual diversity at Early Childhood, data collection, moods of teaching, capacity building

The aim of the current study was to highlight the teachers' instructional practices in managing lingual diversity at Early Childhood Classrooms (ECCs) in district Quetta. To know the instructional practices of the ECE teachers in a multilingual situation, a case study design was adopted to pursue the study. A public girls Secondary school Nawa Killi (one of the most lingually diversified communities) was selected as a case. Two tools of data collection were adopted to understand the full depth of the current study i.e. fields notes and structured interviews of the teachers. The findings of the study reveal that teachers utilize multiple modes of teaching to address the lingual challenges. These instructional designs of the ECE teachers are adaptive according to need and interest of the pupils. The finding suggested that teaches use rote memorization, peer support, trans language, group based teaching and interactive teaching methods were the dominant method which were supported by both tools of data source. It is concluded from the finding that although teachers are utilizing multiple teaching techniques but they required more capacity building sessions to improve their instructions as there is a visible sense of fear, threat and controlling authority of the ECE teachers.

Introduction

Early childhood is a formative stage during which children develop foundational social, emotional, and cognitive skills. Equitable access to quality education during this period is essential, especially in increasingly multicultural societies. Diversity and inclusion in ECE refer to acknowledging and respecting the differences among children, including race, ethnicity, language, culture, ability, and socioeconomic background (de Bruin, 2019). Creating inclusive early learning environments can positively influence children's lifelong attitudes and behaviors, making it imperative to embed these values in both pedagogy and policy.

Diversity encompasses a broad spectrum of characteristics, such as racial identity, language, culture, gender, abilities, and family structure (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2021). In early learning contexts, embracing diversity means not only acknowledging these differences but also actively promoting practices that ensure equity and belonging for all learners (Boutte, 2016). Teachers play a central role in this process by modeling inclusive behavior, adapting instruction, and fostering classroom environments where every child feels seen and valued.

Inclusive education goes beyond physical integration; it involves modifying pedagogical strategies to meet the diverse needs of all learners, including those with disabilities and from marginalized communities. Studies show that inclusive settings contribute to better social skills, higher academic achievement, and improved well-being for all students, not just those traditionally marginalized (Barton & Smith, 2020; Trigueros et al., 2020). Inclusive practices during early childhood are especially impactful, as this is a critical stage for shaping attitudes towards others.

Teachers' attitudes and beliefs about diversity significantly shape their classroom practices. Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is an instructional approach that uses students' cultural knowledge and experiences as a foundation for effective teaching (Gay, 2018). Teachers with high levels of empathy and cultural awareness are more likely to implement inclusive strategies and engage students from diverse backgrounds (Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Villegas & Lucas, 2007).

Recent research highlights the positive outcomes of CRT in ECE. For example, Ladson-Billings (2021) underscores the role of teacher identity and intentionality in promoting equity, while Paris and Alim (2020) advocate for culturally sustaining pedagogy, which not only acknowledges students' cultural backgrounds but actively supports their ongoing cultural development.

Despite growing awareness, significant gaps remain in translating inclusive values into practice. Many educators report feeling underprepared to address diversity, particularly in classrooms with multiple languages or complex socioeconomic challenges (Gislason et al., 2021). Moreover, institutional support, including ongoing professional development and inclusive curricula, is often insufficient (Nisbet et al., 2022).

Policy frameworks may endorse inclusion, but practical implementation frequently lacks coherence. Campbell (2021) notes that early childhood settings need more context-specific strategies to support diverse learners effectively. There is also a need for focused research on how ECE teachers perceive and practice inclusion, particularly in underserved communities.

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The physical and social environment of the classroom plays a key role in shaping children's experiences of inclusion. Classrooms that incorporate diverse symbols, languages, and cultural references help children develop a sense of belonging (NAEYC, 2022). Collaborative consultation with specialists, such as speech therapists and special education professionals, can enhance teachers' capacity to create inclusive environments (Buysse & Wesley, 2006).

Teacher preparation programs must prioritize cultural competence, inclusive pedagogical practices, and empathy development. Research indicates that targeted training enhances teachers' readiness to engage with diverse learners (Banks & Banks, 2021). Ongoing professional development, mentoring, and reflective practice are also essential to support teachers in responding effectively to evolving classroom demographics.

Problem Statement

Quetta, the capital of the Province of Balochistan, is one of the mostly populated and diversified city in the region. The resident of the city comprises of 5 major indigenous community i.e. Pashtoon, Baloch, Baravi, Hazara and Urdu Speaking natives. These communities reside in culturally diversified environment and have different linguages. These culturally rich communities not only share a great history but they also have local knowledge systems of learning. The adults of the regions are not only speaking and understand multiple languages at a time but they also participated in their indigenous rituals. Although, cultural understanding of the norms, values and customs are not the focus of the study. But understanding of the lingual acquisitions process which is likely take place at early ages are the key point of curiosity for the researcher.

It is well established that language acquisition is significantly influenced during early childhood, and children tend to acquire a new language more rapidly in an Early Childhood Education (ECE) setting due to heightened neuroplasticity and rich language exposure (Lenneberg, 1967; Weisleder & Fernald, 2013; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017). There is no scientific evidence from the local context which highlight how the language acquisition processes are taking place in ECE classrooms. Moreover, how a multi lingual ECE teachers adhered to the needs and learning of the pupils in lingually diversified settings. Although other language acquisition of the pupils is not the purpose of the study but it is obvious that we do not have any information about the instructional practices of the ECE teachers in multilingual setting.

The main research question of the study is:
"What kind of instructional strategy is adopted by ECE teachers in a multilingual classroom?"

To answer this question, the current study tried to highlight the main teaching methodologies and design used by ECE teachers in local context. This study will not be the only about identifying the teachers instructional designs but it will also help in addressing key challenges arousing from a multilingual ECE setting.

Significance of the study

There is lack of scientific study which focuses on ECE and lingual diversity in local context, so the current study is one of the foremost study which highlighted the instructional practices of ECE teachers in addressing lingual challenges at ECE level in the region. Moreover, the current study helps the policy makers, school heads and ECE teachers in exploring relevant and appropriate instructional designs which are widely used by class instructors in

addressing key challenges arising in multilingual classrooms.

Research Methodology

The nature of the current study is descriptive, case study design was adopted to address the main research question. "A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 2018, p. 13). The case study method is adopted as it is not only provides contextual understanding but also it also helps in comprehension a real life complex situation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case selection process was a crucial point for the current study, so Government Girls Secondary School Nawa Killi was the case for the current study. The reason for selecting this particular public school was obvious, i.e. as this school is not only surrounded in densely diversified population but it also offers enrollment to pupils in ECE. Moreover, the participants (ECE teachers) were mostly non-speakers of the pupils enrolled in their classes. Most of the teachers' native language was either Urdu or Punjabi. Due to these reasons, GGHS Nawa Killi was selected a case for the current study.

 To develop an in-depth understanding of the situation, two types of data collection tools were adopted for current study. Firstly, fields notes were noted as initial tool for data collection. These notes help in identifying the practices teacher make during their interaction with pupils and it was done during the learning activity of the ECE. Moreover, taking field notes helps in identify and formulating the key interview questions to be asked from the teachers.

Secondly, a structure interview schedule was designed by considering the notes taken while visiting ECE section. The close ended questions were designed to know the instructional design of the ECE teachers in their classrooms. The interviews of the respondents were recorded for transcription purposes. Later on, the recorded audios were transcribed. The researcher by herself visited the school and interviewed the ECE teachers and field notes were drawn.

Data triangulation was done by collecting data from two sources: field nots and structured interviews. Initially filed notes were takes as it helps the researcher to understand the context of the study. Later on, structured interviews were conducted as it allows to understand the whole situation of the study. By doing so, it also entail valid and reliable results for the study.

Thematic analysis was done to observe the results. The inductive approach was adopted to compile themes of the study. After transcribing the initial interview, the over all interviewed text were read thoroughly, each corresponding answer of the interview schedule generate multiple themes. Initially, the interview transcripts were read multiple times to ensure familiarity with the content. Subsequently, initial codes were generated to capture significant aspects of the data. These codes were then grouped to form broader themes that encapsulate the primary ideas expressed by the participants. The themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represented the data, and final themes were defined and named. The analysis culminated in a comprehensive understanding of the key issues faced by teachers in a multilingual classroom environment. These initially generated themes were re-grouped into major themes. The following lines explain these major themes.

Findings and Discussion

The current aims to explore the instructional methods of ECE teachers. The following lines discusses the themes emerges from the data. Prior to explain the

results, it is important to highlight salient feature of the teaching staff of ECE. The demography of ECE teachers reveals that they have vast teaching experience, their qualification were Bachelor degree and most of the teachers do not have professional degree which deals in teaching to ECE setting. Furthermore, they do have a professional degree Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) but not attend a specific training or capacity building program related to teach in a lingually diverse ECE classroom. And most of the ECE teachers understand one or in some cases two languages.

Pedagogical Adaptation

One of the major themes emerges from the data was pedagogical adaptation of the ECE teachers. This theme includes teachers adopts multiple teaching methods during instruction to teach about a particular concept. As one of the teacher C stated *"I use different strategies because the normal traditional way of teaching is not effective here"*. It is evident from the data that teachers used multiple teaching methods while interacting a multilingual classroom.

Peer Group Teaching

Moreover, it was also revealed from both data set, that teachers do use group-based teaching methods. As one of the teacher (Teacher B) claimed *"We use the grouping method because individual attention is challenging due to the class size"*. Teachers uses peer group teaching, as the classroom is overcrowded. Peer group teaching was widely used by teacher in ECE setting. As Teacher F stated *"Firstly, we have to select a kid, which understands our language as well as their language. Who can deeply comprehend what we're saying and then convey that to the others the same way."* A kid who has understanding of Multilanguage, teachers uses him or her a main source for helping out teacher in the class. This was highly used by teachers as

also evident from the field notes. As noted in one field note , *"The class monitor tries their best to assist students with specific subjects when they encounter difficulties"* peer was used as linguistic support during instruction.

Teachers seeking peer linguistic support was not only limited to a similar class but a senior student was also helping teachers in their instruction. This phenomenon was quite new and interesting as in one of the filed note reflected that *" a senior student was available in the classroom, but there was no teacher, on enquiring, it seems that teacher assigned the whole class to her"*. Similarly, teacher also seek help from senior students if they can not deliver a concept in their language, or they do not understand the expectation of the students.

Using Interactive Teaching Tools

From the interview schedule of the teachers, it was obvious that teachers use interactive teaching tool like using body gestures, utilizing basic tools for delivering a concept and utilizing whiteboard. As one of the interviewers (Teacher D) claimed *"I use basic tools like stones, objects available in the area or school, pencils, and even students themselves to demonstrate concepts."* Similarly, another teacher also claimed that she uses interactive and visual learning teaching styles, as she (Teacher E) stated *"I also draw on the whiteboard so the children can learn and enjoy it"*. *"I use gestures and body language to aid understanding"* asserted by one teacher. This approach includes using hand gestures to count or involving students in interactive activities.

Furthermore, one of the teachers claim that she takes help from communication technology (mobile phone) as Av-aid during her instruction. In her (Teacher G) wordings *"We also use mobile phones to show pictures or videos to clarify concepts for the children"*, but this concept was not

supported by any other interviewers' views or by the data collected from field notes. The usage of technology is also evident from teachers' voices but it was not supported by the field notes.

Similarly, one teacher stated (Teacher A) *"I explain everything in story format to make it easier for them to learn,"* but this claim was not supported by the data taken from field notes. Although, the teachers use melodies tone during her class and repetitive format which usually adopted for rote memorizing. This mood of teaching was also supported by both set of data.

Teacher D utilizes another interactive and visual learning approach by using white boards and drawing the visuals of a particular concept. As Teacher D emphasized *"I also draw on the whiteboard so the children can learn and enjoy it".*

Teacher C employs a variety of teaching tools to aid in concept clarification, particularly given the linguistic challenges. The use of visual aids such as charts, cards, and sculptures on the whiteboard is emphasized to help students understand the material, especially in the absence of a shared language. *"We use various teaching aids such as charts, cards, sculptures on the whiteboard, and any object that helps clarify concepts"* asserted by teacher C.

Authority and Control

One of the themes emerges from the analysis was that teachers maintain and exhibits authority to organize classroom learning effective. As one of the filed notes reflects, *"In the absence of the teacher, the classroom environments was full of noise. Children were shouting at each other... But when the teacher arrived there is complete silence."* Through this mechanism, teachers maintain their presence in the classroom along with that it also help them to control the learning process.

From the data set from field notes, it was obvious that teacher do reinforce learning through fear and threat and this was not supported by the interview records of the teachers. The controlling style is evident in the connecting lines *"why you people are not doing pee before coming to the class."* Similarly, at another occasion, the threat the student due to no compiling her home work on due time as she asserted *"If she did not comply, she will ask her parents for a meeting at school".* As instructional design varies from teacher to teacher, one of the teacher praises few students as they not only maintain classroom decorum but also develop understanding of a particular concept. For example, *"She praised some students and those who did not perform well were assigned the old task to perform again."*

Traditional and Rote Learning

Traditional and Rote Learning theme was emerging from data sets. In ECE settings, teacher usually maintain an outdated teaching method. One of field note exhibits *"She wrote it in three steps and in the fourth step, she wrote it completely... This* practice took almost ten minutes." Similarly, *"The same process of learning occurred based on translation and rote memorization."* This traditional method may limit opportunities for creative thinking or independent exploration.

The *"rote memorization of the number from mathematic textbook content",* one of the observations from the ECE setting. Teacher uses this kind of instructional design as it allowed them to give her responsibility to a particular peer student who memorize a particular concept quickly. The recitation technique is helpful in remembering name, digits, and alphabets of a particular language.

Translation Technique

Teacher, I believe that a particular teaching methodology do not help her in a diversified classroom. She used multiple teaching technique to make learning more

effective and efficient. As she asserted *"I use different strategies because the normal traditional way of teaching is not effective here. First show them the picture then let them hear the voice and finally tell them the name of that particular object."*

The trans-language is also obvious in field notes data. As most of the teacher's involves in teaching English Terms and later they translate it in Urdu Language. But this was done by the most of the teachers. There was only a few teacher who translate the content from English to Urdu and later into the native language.

From the interview transcript of the teachers, it was reveals that teacher seek helps in translating a specific content from the senior students of the school. In some cases they seek helps from their own students. As teacher As one participant (Teacher C) explained: *"When students struggle with Urdu, I ask children who speak their native language to help them understand. This peer assistance helps bridge the language gap."*

Teacher G employs a strategy where students who speak the same native language help their peers understand the lessons. She states, "*When students struggle with Urdu, I ask children who speak their native language to help them understand.*"

Discipline and Equality

Teacher J approach in managing multilingual classroom is somehow different. As she asserted "*We emphasize discipline and equality, making sure that all students feel they are on the same level. We encourage them to speak their mother tongues at home but in school, we use Urdu since all subjects are taught in Urdu.*"

From the quote it reflects that she want to maintain discipline and equality in the classroom by allowing students to only speak in Urdu language. She consider that allowing students to speak only one language make them equal and it allowed them more discipline . And she consider Urdu language as one and only instructional language

Conclusion and Recommendations

The main purpose of the study was to observe the instructional style of ECE teachers in a multilingual class. The finding suggest that the selected school ECE section was comprises of pupil which have diverse background. Interestingly, few teachers know and understand the native language of pupils enrolled in ECE classroom. Surprisingly, teachers were mostly unaware about the socio-economic and cultural background of the pupils. And most of the teachers of the ECE section were not the native speakers of the local languages (Pashto, Balochi, & Brahvi).

It is concluded from the results of the current study that teacher of ECE uses multiple teaching styles. The prominent instructional designs which have strong evidence in data sets were peer instructions, rote memorization (a traditional teaching style), interactive instruction, translating method, and feedback and reinforcement. Rote memorization and peer instructional style are not only traditional in nature but it is also supported from the literature that kids who are enrolled in ECE classroom learn and memorize quickly through this method (Mazilescu, 2023).

The reinforcement method of ECE teachers was not unto the standard. It was quite surprising that few teachers treat students in a quite dehumanizing manner as shouting and yelling at them. This reflects that teachers do not know how to organize their class for learning, and make teaching more effective and interesting for pupils. This behavior of teacher also depicts that they do not have/ attended related professional capacity building session (Ashraf, Alam, & Gladushyna, 2024).

It is concluded that the ECE teachers of the current case study do not have the understanding of culturally responsive instructional styles. It is recommended that to make learning in ECE setting more effective, the policy makers should provide more training sessions to the ECE teacher which focuses learning in a multilingual setting by adopting cultural responsive instructional design. Based on the finding of the case study, it is recommended for the researcher interested in the field of ECE to investigate that what kind of instructional designs could produce better result in terms of effective learning in a multilingual context.

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