



RESEARCH PAPER

Relationship Between Teachers' Perceptions and Practices of Assessment in Early Childhood Education

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the relationship between teachers' perceptions and practices of assessment in Early Childhood Education (ECE). Assessment is an important yet complex element in Early Childhood Education (ECE). It provides essential information about the cognitive social, emotional, and behavioral development as well as academic progress of the children. A quantitative survey research design was used. The data was collected, through online and in-person administration of a self-developed survey questionnaire, from a sample of 400 teachers of pre grade one (nursery and prep classes) in the public and private schools located in two randomly selected tehsils of Lahore, Pakistan. Results of the study indicated that early childhood teachers had positive perceptions and practices of assessment. Moderate to strong correlations were also found among teachers' perceptions and practices of assessment in early childhood education. In service training programs may be designed for improving teachers' conceptions, perceptions and practices of assessment at ECE level.

KEYWORDS Assessment Perceptions, Assessment Practices, Early Childhood Education

Introduction

The decisions about the quality of teaching and the learning are often based on the results of classroom assessment. However, when assessment is used only as measure of performance, it leads to the use of traditional classroom practices rather than improving these practices. To achieve high-quality outcomes of education, educators must understand that assessment is just one component of a broader learning ecosystem and they must possess the specialized skills to implement these procedures effectively. In the context of Early Childhood Education (ECE), effective teaching and learning depend heavily on having trained professionals who maintain a positive outlook and a deep understanding of developmental milestones and evaluation techniques. Traditionally there are two primary approaches to assessment, assessment of learning (summative) serves as a comprehensive overview used to classify and report on a student's level of achievement at the end of an instructional activity. Whereas assessment for learning (formative assessment) as highlighted by Earl (2013), is a shift from making final judgments to providing helpful feedback that improves future learning and progress.

In addition to the theoretical and technical knowledge of assessment, functionality and usefulness of classroom assessment requires teachers to integrate their perceptions and knowledge with their teaching and assessment practices. According to Linn & Miller (2005), this continuous reflection enables teachers to monitor student learning and progress and modify their instructional methods accordingly. Assessment of learning in early childhood education is very important for the wholistic development and future educational prospects of children. Research has highlighted importance of knowledge of effective assessment strategies and implementation skills for effective assessment of

students' learning at all educational levels. However, a limited number of studies have focused on the relationship between assessment perceptions and practices of teachers at early childhood education level.

Literature Review

This is an established fact that education at all levels aims to develop positive behavioral changes in students. Extensive research highlights that assessment results are used as indicators learning and development of students (Wong, 2007). Therefore, assessment is considered to be the cornerstone of all school-based activities, accounting for a significant portion of the teaching-learning process (Zolfaghari & Ashraf, 2015). In addition to measuring progress, these assessments provide teachers with robust data to interpret learning outcomes, motivate students, diagnose specific learning difficulties, and improve instructional quality through pedagogical reflection (Brookhart, 1999; Martinello, Lauris, & Brasolotto, 2011).

Evaluating students is a crucial component of Early Childhood Education (ECE). Several Researchers (Dunphy, 2010; Earl, 2013) have highlight that teachers across all grade levels, especially in early childhood education acknowledge the significance of assessment. Similarly, several research studies also suggested that because teaching and evaluation are so foundational during a child's formative years, early assessments demand careful consideration, planning and implementation (Bowman, Donovan, and Burns ,2001;). In ECE, assessments act as vital tools for understanding and improving a students' educational progress. Assessment provides educators and policymakers with the necessary data to monitor student progress, identify learning gaps, and create individualized educational strategies. Additionally, a nation's broader educational policies and practices are heavily shaped by these evaluation methods (Alam, 2022; Madani, 2019).

Several research studies underscore the value of early childhood assessments. Their primary functions include tracking developmental milestones, guiding the selection of appropriate learning programs, and pinpointing students who require specialized interventions. Moreover, these assessments facilitate communication between educators, families, and specialists, and also evaluate the overall effectiveness of ECE programs, and engage parents directly in their child's learning process (Neisworth, 2011; Copple & Bredekamp, 2006; Puckett & Black, 2000).

In Pakistan, mostly, classroom teachers are responsible for all assessment related activities. However, literature indicates that these teachers often lack sufficient knowledge and formal training in conducting effective, carefully designed and high-quality assessments (Khattak, 2012; Richard & Conklin, 1992). Investigating teachers' conceptions and, practices in this area is, therefore, a fundamental prerequisite for establishing an efficient and modern assessment framework as emphasized by Haynes, Lisic, Goltz, Stein, & Harris, 2016). Despite the evolving landscape, the traditional paper-and-pencil format remains the globally dominant and most trusted method of evaluation (Narathakoon, Sapsirin, & Subphadoongchone, 2020; Zhang & Burry, 2003).

This study focused on the assessment perceptions and practices of teachers at early childhood education level (pre grade one). As suggested by the results of the previous studies perceptions influence the practices of teachers, it is imperative to develop a comprehensive understanding of the cognitive frameworks that underpin teacher behavior. By analyzing the relationship between the assessment perceptions and classroom assessment practices of Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers, this study aimed to identify innovative practices that benefit both educators and learners. The significance of this research lies in its potential to bridge the gap between theoretical perceptions and actual classroom practices of assessment at ECE level. Furthermore, this inquiry reflects on current assessment procedures to better comprehend and address students' learning

difficulties. Ultimately, this research intends to provide ECE practitioners with evidence-based techniques to improve educational quality while enriching the broader body of literature on classroom assessment at ECE level in Pakistan.

Material and Methods

A correlational survey research design was used for this study. The sample of study comprised of 400 teachers of nursery and kindergarten classes (Pre grade 1) from public and private schools located in two tehsils (Shalimar and Lahore City) of Lahore, Pakistan.

Data about the two main variables of study i.e. teachers' perceptions and practices of assessment was collected through a self-developed questionnaire based on the review of literature. This questionnaire was validated by three experts in the field of assessment and evolution. Thirty three statements about the perceptions of teachers were grouped under eight factors (assessment conceptions, assessment purposes, assessment techniques, collaboration and communication, oral and monthly tests, grading and reporting, and play-based assessments) and 37 statements about assessment practices were grouped under ten factors (classroom assessment procedures, anecdotal records, checklists, portfolios, questioning, observation, performance evaluation, monthly exams, oral examinations, grading, and reporting). Sampled teachers were personally requested by the researcher to fill in the questionnaire on a five point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree) after ensuring the confidentiality and ethical use of data.

Results and Discussion

The following sections presents the results of the descriptive (mean and standard deviation) and correlation (Pearson's Correlation) analysis.

The descriptive analysis of 72 questions about teachers' perceptions of assessment grouped into eight factors is presented in table 1.

Table 1
Teachers' Assessment Perceptions

Sr. No	Perceptions	M	SD
1	Assessment Conceptions	3.58	1.07
2	Assessment Purposes	3.71	1.08
3	Assessment Techniques	3.66	1.06
4	Collaboration and Communication	3.62	1.07
5	Monthly test	3.68	1.03
6	Oral Test	3.66	1.05
7	Play Based assessment	3.61	1.14
8	Grading and Reporting	3.69	1.07

As shown in table 1 teachers had positive conceptions of assessment with a focus on holistic development ($M= 3.58$) of students. Teachers were of the view that main purpose of assessment is to help in planning appropriate learning experience for children assessment support child growth and development ($M= 3.71$) and that the use of assessment techniques improve the classroom teaching process. Teachers perceived that sharing of assessment results with parents is important aspect ($M= 3.62$) and monthly test should be conducted regularly as the results of monthly tests help teachers in better instructional planning ($M= 3.66$). They agreed play-based assessment should align with the principals of ECE and developmentally appropriate practice ($M= 3.61$) and grading in ECE should focus more on developmental milestones rather than academic achievement ($M= 3.69$).

Table 2
Teachers' Assessment Practices

Sr. No	Assessment Practices	M	SD
1	Classroom Assessment Practices	3.59	1.09

2	Portfolios	3.13	1.23
3	Questioning	3.67	1.04
4	Observation	3.64	.97
5	Anecdotal Records	3.26	1.15
6	Oral Test	3.71	1.00
7	Grading and Reporting	3.44	.90
8	Checklists	3.25	1.00
9	Performance Assessment	3.41	1.01
10	Monthly Tests	3.78	.95

Table 2 presents the assessment practices of teachers. These results indicate that most of the teachers believed that their assessment approaches were effective and beneficial for their students ($M= 3.59$). They used portfolios, ($M = 3.13$) questioning, ($M= 3.67$) oral exams ($M= 3.71$), monthly tests ($M= 3.78$), and performance-based assessment ($M= 3.41$), in their classes. Moreover, they agreed that students' results reflect their teaching abilities and they provide feedback to students for further improvement.

Table 3
Correlation between Teachers' Assessment Perceptions and Practices

		Practices									
		Classroom assessment practices	Portfolios	Questioning	Observation	Anecdotal Records	Oral Test	Grading and Reporting	Checklists	Performance Assessment	Monthly Test
Perceptions	Conceptions about assessment	.71**	.59*	.63**	.72**	.60**	.50**	.53*	.69**	.59**	.48*
	Purpose of Assessment	.65**	.63*	.57	.52	.58**	.45**	.65*	.69**	.50**	.51*
	Assessment Techniques	.66**	.65*	.58**	.65**	.46**	.49**	.66*	.62*	.47**	.54*
	Collaboration and Communication	.61**	.56*	.64**	.63**	.49**	.40**	.53*	.53**	.48**	.48*
	Monthly test	.59**	.53*	.54**	.61**	.40**	.43**	.58*	.59**	.461**	.60*
	Oral Test	.68**	.63*	.64**	.67**	.61**	.518	.71*	.72**	.65**	.62*
	Play based assessment	.66**	.57*	.58**	.58**	.41**	.434	.63*	.68**	.49**	.47*
	Grading and reporting	.70**	.66*	.64**	.59**	.50**	.51**	.65*	.69**	.59**	.55*

As shown in table 3 all factors measuring teachers' perceptions were correlated with all factors measuring their assessment practices as reflected by values of correlation coefficient ranging from a lowest value of $r = 0.38$. to a maximum value of $r = 0.72$. Assessment conceptions are strongly related with classroom assessment practices. ($r=0.7$) and performance assessment ($r=0.59$), questioning ($r=0.63$), observation($r=0.72$), anecdotal records ($r= 0.60$), checklists ($r= 0.69$). Whereas the factor of conceptions of assessment was moderately related to oral test ($r = 0.50$), and the grading and reporting ($r = 0.47$).

Conclusion

This study revealed that early childhood teachers generally had positive perceptions and practices of assessment. These results stand in line with previous research by Black and Wiliam (1998) that emphasized the influence of teachers' views / perceptions on the use of various assessment methods and strategies. The results also support the recommendations of research conducted by Shepard (2000), that assessment procedures must be in line with the teaching and learning process. This study indicated strong correlation between

teachers' perceptions and their practices of assessing students in early childhood education. The results suggest in order to bring an effective change and improvement in the assessment practices of teachers their beliefs and perceptions about effective assessment practices may be improved through professional development programs that support a deeper comprehension and application of the effective assessment methods.

In conclusion, this study provides empirical basis to design and refine instructional strategies and assessment frameworks within early childhood education. The findings reflected that ECE educators generally maintain a positive perception of multiple aspects of assessment, ranging from foundational concepts and purposes to practical applications like portfolios, oral testing, observation, and grading. Furthermore, this research identifies a moderate to strong correlation between teachers' beliefs regarding assessment and their actual classroom practices of assessment, thereby highlighting the necessity for targeted professional development at the ECE level.

Recommendations

Base on the results of the study, it is recommended that

- In service training programs may be designed for improving teachers' conceptions, perceptions and practices of assessment at ECE level.
- Educational policymakers may develop mandatory guidelines requiring the use of a variety of assessment techniques in early childhood education, thereby ensuring student assessment aligns with a holistic educational framework.
- Longitudinal research study may be conducted to further investigate the effectiveness of different assessment strategies for the learning and wholistic development of students in early childhood education.

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