

PEDAGOGIC LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF A HEADTEACHER THAT FACILITATE TEACHING QUALITY ENHANCEMENT AT THE EEC LEVEL: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This research paper has emanated from the Ph.D. thesis research conducted by the author at the Department of Education, University of Karachi. It focuses on investigating the pedagogic leadership practices of headteachers that are instrumental in teaching quality enhancement at the ECE level. The qualitative case study was conducted at a community-based school in Hunza. The data is collected through structured interviews with various stakeholders, school audit, classroom observation, and internal document review. The deductive thematic analysis highlights four key pedagogic leadership practices influencing teaching quality enhancement at the ECE level. It includes ECE curriculum adaptation and enrichment, teachers' development, community engagement, and collaborative educational planning. The findings indicate the need to integrate a multitude of educational leadership theories and practices to make the ECE curriculum, teaching, planning and community participation developmentally appropriate. It highlights the importance of situational and contextual leadership to address the dynamics of challenges in rural areas of Gilgit-Baltistan, where the research site is situated. The research highlights the transformative potential of pedagogic leadership practices in enhancing teaching quality at the ECE level. It identifies the need to focus on developing the school as a learning community – where the headteacher may involve parents and community as pedagogic partners, involve them in customizing the ECE curriculum, develop the capacity of teachers in developmentally appropriate pedagogy, and engage multiple stakeholders in collaborative educational planning.

Keywords: Pedagogic leadership, ECE teaching, ECE quality, Teaching quality, Rural context, ECE in Pakistan, ECE in Gilgit Baltistan, ECE in Hunza, Quality enhancement, Headteacher

INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is foundational for young children's educational prospects with a long-lasting influence on their cognitive, social, and emotional development. Children who participate in high-quality EEC programmes tend to be better prepared for formal learning at the school. It may influence their academic performance, and they may develop effective socio-emotional abilities from a younger age (Evans & Judith, 2000). An Effective ECE programme depends multiple factors such as the quality of curriculum, assessment, teaching and parental involvement etc. Teaching quality is

essential among all other aspects of effective ECE experiences. Teaching quality is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Headteachers, as gatekeepers and enablers of educational quality, are required to drive the teaching quality enhancement agenda (Pradhan and Roswell, 2005). The Ph.D. thesis research conducted by the author indicates that the headteacher in reference plays three critical leadership roles in enhancing teaching quality. It includes the pedagogic, administrative, and systemic leadership roles and practices. In this research paper, the pedagogic leadership practices of the headteacher

that are linked to teaching quality enhancement are further investigated.

The research focuses on the dynamics of teaching quality enhancement and pedagogic leadership practice of the headteacher in the rural context of Gilgit Baltistan. The qualitative case study research was conducted in a community-based school in Hunza. Pedagogic leadership as a form of leadership underlines the role of educational leaders in shaping and improving teaching practice. It focuses on building the academic and social capital for the students, and professional and intellectual capital for the teachers (Meyer, & Bendikson, 2021). Within the context of EEC, pedagogic leadership becomes even more critical as it may directly influences children's early educational experiences.

The thesis research indicates that despite the well-established significance of pedagogic leadership in EEC, there is a need to investigate a variety of specific leadership practices of a headteacher that may facilitate or hinder teaching quality enhancement at the ECE level in the rural context of Pakistan. Although the existing literature provides valuable insights into the pedagogic leadership practice leadership and their application for ECE in urban areas, there is still a lack of empirical studies that may provide insights for the rural areas in Gilgit Baltistan. This qualitative case study seeks to address the research and knowledge gap by exploring the pedagogic leadership practices of headteachers in a community-based school in Hunza. The study aims to highlight the nuanced approaches, actions and strategies employed by the headteacher in enhancing teaching quality. Investigating these practices and their influence on teaching quality may provide valuable insights into improving early childhood teaching and leadership – subsequently improving the quality of educational experiences for young children in the community-based school in Hunza.

Rationale for the Study

This research is driven by the ever-increasing need to investigate and articulate key pedagogic leadership practices of headteachers linked to ECE teaching quality. Early Childhood Education (ECE) has proven to be critical for students' personal success and growth, and the socio-economic development of countries and communities (Evans & Judith, 2000). It becomes more important for human development

in rural areas. An effective ECE programme may provide rural communities and their children with a strong educational foundation to excel in the late stages of their lives. Compared to urban areas, ECE teachers and headteachers in rural areas are confronted with different opportunities, challenges and social realities. A preliminary literature review (Khan, Bhatti, Hussain, & Bano, 2017; Abbas, 2021; Ahmad, 2020) indicates that there is a need to bridge the knowledge and research gap partnering pedagogic leadership practices and their influence on teaching quality enhancement at the ECE level in rural areas of Pakistan, especially in Hunza.

Similarly, much of the research seems to be centred around the ECE programme delivery, and in-depth insights need to be developed to understand the Impact of the pedagogic leadership practice of the headteacher on teaching and learning quality. In the domain of ECE, applying principles of pedagogic leadership is particularly crucial due to the complex nature, scope and scale of early childhood development programmes. The complexity and dynamics may be addressed through a qualitative research method such as a case study. It may allow a holistic and in-depth investigation of complex phenomena within real-life settings. The findings of this study may develop insights and offer recommendations for headteachers, policymakers, and ECE programme managers to enhance teaching quality and subsequently improve the quality of learning for ECE children. The study may also provide insights into the professional development of headteachers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is structured around three reflective questions:

- 1- What is the definition, scope, and importance of pedagogic leadership, and early childhood education?
- 2- How pedagogical leadership is linked to the teaching quality at the ECE level.
- 3- What theoretical framework may be developed to investigate the research question in reference?

The following are perspectives developed from the existing literature for each question and questions.

A. The notion of pedagogic leadership

The notion of "pedagogic leadership" is a broad concept that has become increasingly popular in recent years in educational leadership, management and quality enhancement. It focuses on the direct influence of educational leaders, including headteachers, principals, and curriculum developers, on improving and developing teaching and learning practices in schools (Bush, 2017). Contrary to the classical model of educational administration that focuses on management and maximum utilization of resources, pedagogical leadership is more concerned with the instructional aspects, quality and relevance of educational outcomes (Leithwood, Seashore, Louis, 2011). Harris (2011) mentions that improved student learning outcomes and the promotion of effective teaching strategies are one of the critical concerns of pedagogic leadership.

The goal of pedagogical leadership in Hargreaves & Shirley's (2012) opinions is to attain educational excellence, and it is seen as a way of facilitating, streamlining and enhancing teaching and learning quality. In addition, the notion of pedagogical leadership is linked to the concept of transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006). A transformational leader is someone who provides vision and inspires and motivates others to perform at a higher level of excellence to actualize the vision. Leithwood et al. (2004) argue that a pedagogical leader strives to promote a culture of continual improvement and professional development among educators. Because of the transformational and instructional nature, the pedagogic leadership paradigm may positively influence teaching and learning quality by monitoring and facilitating instructional practices, providing support and resources for teachers, and transforming the culture and ethos of a school to make it a learning organization (Gronn, 2003). In the context of this research key pedagogical leadership practices may be investigated through an in-depth exploration of the headteacher's leadership practices that may facilitate or hinder the teaching quality enhancement at the ECE level.

B. Early Childhood Education (EEC) and the importance of high-quality teaching for effective ECE

Since the research focus is teaching quality enhancement at the ECE level, the concept, importance and scope of ECE have been investigated to identify the influence of pedagogical leadership on ECE teaching quality. Early Childhood Education (ECE) represents a critical phase in a child's educational journey and has garnered substantial attention in academic research and policy discussions. This section provides an overview of key concepts and related to EEC and underscores its significance.

ECE is an umbrella term, and Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) starts with prenatal care. The National Association for the Education of Young Children, USA (NAEYC, 2021) defines ECE as providing formal and informal education and development opportunities to children from zero to eight years old. Early childhood education has multiple connotations, such as preschool, early-year education, pre-primary, etc. Bennett (2005) considers ECE fundamental to shaping young children's social, cognitive, physical and emotional development. Research studies (Duncan et al., 2010; Pianta et al., 2009) have demonstrated that high-quality EEC teaching contributes to school readiness, academic achievement, and long-term success.

ECE is considered critical for children's personal growth and long-term human development in communities and countries. Although the effectiveness and quality of ECE depend upon multiple factors and stakeholders, quality teaching and effective pedagogy is critical. The importance of high-quality EEC teaching can be investigated from multiple perspectives. Still, the existing literature suggests that the following four dimensions make ECE critical for personal growth and social development.

1. Wholistic development: High-quality EEC experiences may facilitate holistic child development in multiple domains, including cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. Landry et al. (2000) argue that neuroscience research has demonstrated that the overall personality, and most importantly, a child's brain, undergoes rapid growth and development during the first few years of

life. At this stage, an experienced teacher may provide the right type of simulation, learning environment, learning experiences, and scaffolding necessary for the holistic development of a child.

2. School readiness: Research studies conducted by Barnett (2011) and Burchinal et al. (2000) demonstrate that high-quality ECE teaching supports school readiness by imparting necessary knowledge, teaching skills and competencies, guiding behaviours, and nurturing dispositions necessary to succeed socially and academically.

3. Long-term Socio-economic and educational benefits: Reynolds et al. (2011) and Schweinhart et al. (2005) argue that a high-quality ECE teaching and learning experience may motivate children from a younger age for lifelong learning. It may instill learning habits to help them complete their degree programmes and achieve economic and social growth.

4. Achievement gap mitigation: Duncan & Magnuson, (2013) state that high-quality teaching at the EEC level has the potential to mitigate achievement gaps that may emerge early due to socio-economic disparities in a child's life. It can facilitate inclusion and give all children equal opportunity to achieve positive learning outcomes.

C. The link between pedagogical leadership and ECE Teaching Quality

High-quality teaching and learning at the ECE level are not isolated processes. It depends upon many structures, processes, programs and stakeholders. As pedagogical leaders, headteachers play a crucial role in teaching quality enhancement. Leadership within educational institutions, such as schools and EEC centres, significantly influences the quality of teaching and learning experiences (Leithwood et al., 2004). Whether pedagogy, policy, or programme, headteachers/principles drive the overall quality enhancement agenda. Coleman & Glover (2010) believe that educational managers, such as school principals and headteachers, may simultaneously perform a variety of management and leadership functions, and pedagogic leadership is the core of the quality enhancement process.

Bush (2016) argues that the principals and headteachers, as pedagogic leaders, are expected to be directly involved in improving teaching and learning practices. Their role should transcend

beyond administrative tasks and focus on instructional leadership. Hallinger & Murphy (1985) and Gronn (2003) mention that closely related to pedagogic leadership, instructional leadership focuses on setting high expectations for ECE teaching quality, monitoring instructional practices, and supporting teachers, educators and parents. Bass & Riggio (2006) argue that the pedagogic leadership is transformational. Headteachers may inspire and motivate teachers, parents, students and the community to achieve higher performance levels. They focus on transforming the institutional culture and helping the school become a learning organization.

A number of studies have been conducted in the context of developed countries to explore the linkages between pedagogic leadership and ECE teaching quality. For instance, Bush (2017) and Leithwood & Seashore-Louis (2011) characterize pedagogical leadership in EEC as headteachers' active and instructional involvement to shape and enhance teaching and learning practices within early childhood centres. The study revealed that the headteachers who actively supports ECE teachers through coaching, mentoring, and providing resources and opportunities for professional development are able to improve their teaching practice. Their leadership may develop a culture of continuous learning and facilitate teaching practice. Dunkin (1987), Ward & Perry (2020), and Pasha, Shah, & Ijaz, (2021) argue that effective pedagogical leaders engage the community and ensure the effective involvement of parents in teaching and learning.

However, a meta-analysis of indexes of the six education journals (PJERE, PJE, JESS; PJER; BER; IJDEL) published between 2018-2022 indicates that a limited number of researches have been conducted in the field of ECE Pakistan. There is minimal demographic representation of rural areas and pedagogical leadership is a relatively less explored area. This research intends to bridge the research gap for rural areas and linkages of ECE teaching quality to pedagogical leadership.

The literature review suggest that the effective pedagogical leadership is critical to enhancing ECE teaching quality. Headteachers, as pedagogic leaders, play a vital role in creating a conducive environment for teaching and learning. They may directly impact

teaching practice and indirectly facilitate young children's development. Within the broader framework of pedagogic leadership this research focuses on gathering and analyzing data to explore the influence of multiple pedagogic leadership practices on teaching quality enhancement at ECE level.

D. Theoretical Framework: Transformational and Instructional Leadership in EEC

In the context of this study, two primary theoretical frameworks are essential for teaching quality enhancement. The first one is the pedagogic leadership as a transformational endeavour, and the second framework is the instructional measures. As argued by Bass & Riggio (2006), the transformational aspect of pedagogic leadership focuses on motivation, organizational change, vision and strategic interventions to enhance teaching quality. In this framework, headteachers facilitate, motivate and empower their team of educators to develop their academic capacity and help students achieve enhanced learning outcomes. Headteachers inspire their teams to set a compelling vision for teaching and learning quality. They identify and recognize their unique strengths and needs and customize staff development programmes to facilitate their growth. They provide intellectual and moral stimulation and encourage innovation, creativity and collaboration. They serve as role models, demonstrate commitment, value excellence, and prioritize learning and research. The transformational nature of pedagogic leadership, in this context, will be investigated to understand how the headteacher's ability to motivate and inspire EEC educators contributes to develop the school as a learning organization.

The second aspect of the pedagogical leadership is Instructional in nature. Hallinger & Murphy (1985) and Gronn (2003) state that the headteachers, as pedagogical leaders, provide support in instructional practices. They set higher expectations and clearly communicate the same with ECE teachers. They provide necessary support and resources, invest in their professional development, and improve their instructional practices. They actively monitor and evaluate their teaching practice and provide timely and constructive feedback to ECE teachers. An instructional framework has been employed to

determine how the headteacher's involvement in the instructional domain influences teaching quality at the EEC level.

Research Problem

The research problem for this study emerges from the Ph.D. thesis research conducted by the author focusing on educational leadership practices of a headteacher that facilitate teaching quality enhancement at the ECE level in a community-based school in Hunza. The thesis research findings indicate that three types of leadership practices of the headteacher are linked to teaching quality enhancement. It includes systemic, administrative and pedagogic leadership practices. This research article revolves around the need to comprehensively understand and document the specific pedagogic leadership practices employed by the headteacher in EEC settings to improve teaching quality. This problem revolves around the existing knowledge and research gap, which lacks an in-depth analysis of the practical strategies and actions taken by the headteacher in the rural context to enhance ECE teaching quality. The research problem is the absence of an in-depth exploration of pedagogical leadership practices within the rural context, which may negatively influence the development of effective leadership practices linked to teaching quality at the ECE level. This research article seeks to investigate the problem by conducting an in-depth qualitative case study - analyze pedagogic leadership practices and document implications for the ECE teaching practice and research.

Research question

"What pedagogic leadership practices do the headteacher at the community-based school in Hunza employ to facilitate teaching quality enhancement at the ECE level"?

Research objectives

This research aims to bridge the existing research gap and provide insights into the role of the headteacher in enhancing ECE teaching quality through pedagogic leadership practices in the rural context. The following are the three main objectives of the research.

- 1- To examine the pedagogical leadership practices of a headteacher in Early Childhood Education (ECE) settings.
- 2- To investigate how these pedagogic leadership practices enhance teaching quality at the ECE level.
- 4- To offer insights and recommendations for enhancing teaching quality through effective pedagogical leadership in Early Childhood Education (EEC) settings.

RESEARCH METHOD

The qualitative case-study approach has been employed to develop this research article in line with the thesis research methodology. The research site includes a community-based school in the Hunza District of Gilgit Baltistan. The sample included the headteacher, four ECE teachers, an ECE learning coordinator, twelve students, and twelve parents. The data was collected using in-depth structured interviews, focused group discussions, school audit, classroom observations extended over seven days, and internal documents review. Stakeholder discussions (via telephone) were conducted with two Government officials at the Department of Education-Gilgit Baltistan to triangulate some key findings. Deductive thematic analysis was employed to identify themes. The discussions on findings are followed by recommendations. The research ethics guidelines prescribed by the University of Karachi have been followed at every stage of the research.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Based on the deductive thematic analysis, the following four themes have emerged as key pedagogic leadership practices adopted by the headteacher to enhance teaching quality at the ECE level in the community-based school in Hunza:

1- Community Engagement and Collaboration:

The analysis of data (interviews, Focused group discussions and internal documents) indicates that the headteacher's pedagogic leadership begins with harnessing the community context by building strong ties to the local community. He actively engages with community leaders, parents, civil society and other stakeholders to create a collaborative educational environment. The headteacher's efforts to harness the parents' social context appear to be positively

influencing the teaching quality enhancement efforts. According to the data, the wider community and beneficiary parents place a high value on high-quality education and are aware of the significance of ECE. According to a number of parents who participated in the focused group discussion, the intrinsic motivation of the community, in general, and the parents, in particular, is founded in the culture and value system that region, A Prep II student's mother stated:

"My parents were not educated, and they did not have enough resources to feed us all, but still, they managed to educate me and my sibling. They were guided by elders and religious leaders that it would be difficult to survive without education in the future. Our elders understood that fact and worked hard to educate us all. Following in our parents' footsteps, my husband and I are earning, and we are spending that money to give quality education to our children. We know the money we spend on their education will be more useful than any other investment" (FGD. P2. July 6, 2019).

The headteacher seems to be capitalizing upon parents and the wider community's motivation to improve the physical learning environment and infrastructure, generate financial resources, and harness high-caliber human resources to enhance the teaching quality at the ECE level. Interviews with the headteacher, internal documents (School Development Plan, 2019) and focused group discussions with parents indicate that the headteacher involves and consults with the wider community and parents to make collaborative decisions aimed at teaching quality enhancement. Explaining the logic of collaborative decision-making, the headteacher stated:

"The point is teaching quality enchantment requires material and human resource support from the community. It is easier for us to educate and involve parents of our students through awareness sessions and parent-teacher meetings. But they are a small portion of the wider community. As a headteacher, the real challenging task for me is to motivate and involve the wider community. If we involve them in the key

decision-making process, they feel empowered and respected and provide the necessary support." (Int-HT. July 07, 2019).

The data indicate that developing the school's ECE brand and its program are among the crucial components of quality. For branding and marketing purposes, the headteacher has created alternate communication models. To raise awareness about ECE teaching and learning effectiveness, he involves ECE students and their parents as ambassadors and communicators. He reaches out to parents and the community through cultural platforms and works with local religious organizations. Community participation, open communication, image-building, branding, and marketing of educational programs appear to have become indispensable aspects of the quality enhancement agenda.

The data (Int. T1, July 06, 2019, FGD. P5, P9, July 06, 2019) indicate that the teaching quality enchantment phenomenon has a community value dimension. Community ideals, including meritocracy, fairness, inclusivity, pluralism, cosmopolitanism, child-centeredness, compassion, and teamwork, seem to be crucial for improving the quality of ECE instruction. It encourages parents to work with the school and cooperate with it (School Development Plan, 2019). Teachers are motivated to concentrate on their professional growth, driven by the ideal of meritocracy. The headteacher seems motivated to treat teachers, students, and parents fairly and equitably. By fostering a friendly and creative learning atmosphere, the headteacher fosters a culture of facilitation cooperation, respect for diversity, and merit – key traits of pedagogical leadership as a transformative endeavour. By responding to the unique needs and capitalizing upon the rural community's resources, values and ideals, the headteacher seems to build an effective teaching and learning ecology.

2. Teachers' development:

The data indicates that although the headteacher as a pedagogic leader is aware of the importance of teachers' capacity building for teaching quality enhancement at the ECE level. However, the government departments' lack of policy and regulation, absence of a teachers' capacity building framework, lack of a compressive teacher

development curriculum, and a lack of ICT integration negatively influence the ECE teaching quality at the research site. The education strategy, developed by the Education Department, Government of Gilgit \Baltistan (2014), strategically focuses on teaching quality enchantment through teachers' capacity building. However, the telephonic consultation with the Deputy Director, Model/Private Schools (Int. DDM/Ps. Feb 18, 2023) indicates that the policy provisions are yet to be developed for the private and community-based schools.

The internal document considers teacher development as the essence of pedagogic improvement. The situation analysis presented in an internal document (School Development Plan -2019) identifies teachers' development and lack of teacher support as key challenges affecting the quality of teaching and learning. The interviews with key stakeholders validate the analysis given in the school development plan. Interviews with key stakeholders, including ECE teachers and the ECE learning coordinator, indicate that teacher development is a random activity, and no structured mechanism, including the Education Information Management System (EIMS) is in place to develop ECE teachers and provide necessary academic support and feedback. Commenting on the lack of a structured teachers' capacity-building programme, the ECE learning coordinator stated:

"We had conducted a teacher training programme some time ago, mostly related to teaching methods and syllabus content. It was a short training programme because of funding. Our teachers may need more training. Along with teaching method and syllabus, our training programmes should address these issues as well". (Int. LC. July 07, 2019)

Interviews with ECE teachers validate the learning coordinator's claim. All four teachers interviewed stated that they have been working with the school for the last several years and attended a limited number of teacher training programmes. However, an interview with the current headteacher (Int. HT. July 6, 2019) and stakeholder discussions with the previous headteacher of the school suggested that several teacher training programmes have been

conducted in collaboration with civil society organizations. The diverse views on teacher training identify the inevitability of a structured data management system to develop a baseline, mentor key indicators and identify training and development needs.

Another critical finding related to teachers' development and support is the lack of rigor and comprehensiveness of the training content provided to teachers. The analysis of teacher training content reflects (internal document, 2019) a focus on basic ECE pedagogy and subject-focused content. New developments in ECE pedagogy and curriculum, such as blended learning, developmentally appropriate practice, and 21st-century literacies, were missing.

The classroom observation reveals that there is no culture of teacher reflection. The interview with the ECE learning coordinator (Int. LC, July 07, 2019) indicates she is responsible for teachers' development, observation and support. Still, she had limited time and resources to apply multiple teacher development models, including reflection, teacher research, mentoring, coaching, etc.

An interview with the headteacher (Int. HT, July 07, 2019) indicates that the use of technology for teacher development and support was limited due to a lack of electronic infrastructure, weak internet connectivity, and lack of training and technical competency of teachers.

3- Curriculum adaptation and enrichment:

The analysis of the ECE curriculum taught at the school indicates that it is academically appropriate. Still, it needs linguistic, cultural and social adaptation and enrichment to respond to the contextual and developmental needs of the rural area. The adoption seems inevitable to ensure that the ECE teaching and learning is situated in the social reality, and instructional strategies and resources are engaging for students.

Analysis of the ECE curriculum scheme (Internal document, 2018) and syllabus developed by ECE teachers of the school is aligned with the key learning areas, competencies and expected learning outcomes defined by the government Pakistan for ECCE. Post-data collection inquiry in March 2023 reveals that the new single national curriculum is implemented in the

GB, 2022 onwards, and the school plans to revise the syllabus accordingly.

Classroom observation reveals that the national curriculum for ECE is in English and Urdu languages. Still, the medium of instruction at the said school is the Brushaski language – the mother tongue of the ECE students. The interviews with ECE teachers (Int.T2, T3, July 06, 2019) and the Learning Coordinator (Int. LC, July 06, 2019) indicate that the lack of teaching and learning materials in the mother tongue of the child (local languages) may not be compensated with the verbatim translations by ECE teachers. The headteacher may need to develop a mechanism to translate or produce curriculum materials such as poems, stories, riddles, and plays in the mother tongue of ECE students.

During the interview (Int. HT, July 7, 2019), the headteacher informed the researcher that he was involved in curriculum planning. He facilitates ECE learning coordinators and teachers in yearly curriculum planning and enrichment exercises. Documents' analysis (pre-primary syllabus, 2018) validates the claims of the headteacher. During the interview (Int. LC, July 7, 2019), the ECE learning coordinator acknowledged the vision and efforts of the headteacher in the curriculum planning process and stated that his involvement makes it easy for her to implement the syllabus. They benefit from his knowledge and experiences because he has a degree in educational leadership and management and has an in-depth understanding and experience of the curriculum development process. However, an interview with the headteacher suggests that he is aware of the generic aspects of ECE. Still, it is not the area of his specialization, and he may need to engage with the theory, practice and the latest research in the domain of ECE.

The interviews with ECE teachers reveal that they were aware of the dynamics of curriculum development and enrichment, and they keep on enriching the curriculum based on their classroom needs and the directions of the headteacher. Interviews with the ECE learning coordinator and headteacher validate ECE teachers' claims. The learning coordinator's body language and facial expression reflected happiness and pride while showing the curriculum scheme and syllabus developed by her team of ECE teachers. Explaining

the curriculum enrichment and customization process, she stated:

"Sir, let me show the great work our teachers have done. This (pointing towards the pre-primary syllabus and curriculum scheme) is their creation. At the beginning of every academic year, my team engages in syllabus development and curriculum enrichment process. We have our resource file for each class with lesson and unit plans. Our teachers update the resource file, and we develop an academic colander". (Int. LC1, July 7, 2019).

Further probing by the researcher revealed that the curriculum enrichment and teaching resource file updates are not part of a well-defined quality enhancement mechanism or process. It is a routine yearly activity based on teachers' anecdotal classroom experiences and subjective understanding of the headteacher and learning coordinator. An interview with the headteacher revealed no mechanism exists to conduct research or consolidate teachers' reflection to analyze the efficacy and effectiveness of the curriculum delivery. The headteacher explained that the curriculum development process is orthodox and deemed a state function. He further stated that he had limited authority to change or adapt the curriculum to address contextual needs. He explained that the customization and curriculum enrichment process focus on delivering the existing curriculum and doesn't include efforts to respond to changing social, economic and technological needs. (Int. HT, July 7, 2019).

The researcher's reflective notes suggest that, on one side, the headteacher's views reflect an orthodox approach to the curriculum. Conversely, it indicates the need to re-imagine the curriculum as a living experience instead of a dead fossilized document. The curriculum adaptation as a leadership practice may address uncertainty, change and rapture created by new knowledge, which is essential to sustain teaching quality at the ECE level.

4. Collaborative Educational Planning

The interview with the headteacher (Int. HT. July 07, 2019) and internal document analysis (School Development Plan, -2019) indicate that the headteacher has adopted strategic planning principles and focuses on mission, baseline, aims and objectives, interventions and values. The

headteacher stated that these principles allow him to focus on teaching quality holistically.

Analysis of internal documents (School Development Plan – 2019) validates the claims made by the headteacher. The school development plan includes a SWOT analysis, long-term vision, medium-term goals and targets, and short-term objectives and strategic interventions. The plan includes monitoring and evaluation as an in-built feature of the planning process. Discussion with ECE teachers and headteacher indicates that the planning process is a collaborative exercise whereby the headteacher seeks guidance from the school governing body and involves the ECE learning coordinator and teachers in the planning process.

The researcher has critically analyzed the school development plan to understand the pedagogic value of collaborative planning. The analysis indicates that it lacks quantification, evidence and data analytics. A disconnect is evident between statistical trends and qualitative insights. Explaining the causes of the disconnect, the headteacher stated that the Education Information Management System (EIMS) is not yet consolidated, so meaningful insight and evidence may not be produced for SWOT analysis. This indicates the need to link EIMS, assessment, and teacher evaluation data with the planning process. It may enable the headteacher to develop evidence-based planning required for quality control and enhancement.

The data analysis (Int. HT. July 07, 2019; School Development Plan, 2019) indicates that the educational planning process is pedagogic in nature and is based on six pillars of school development, respectively: Teaching and Learning, Curriculum Development, School culture and environment, Parents and community, Leadership development, the Staff professional development.

In rural areas, where educational challenges may be more pronounced, these pedagogic leadership practices play a crucial role in creating a supportive and effective ECE environment that benefits both students and the community as a whole.

DISCUSSION

The findings illustrate the critical role that community engagement and cooperation may play in enhancing teaching quality in rural settings at the ECE level. Headteachers may establish a mutually

beneficial relationship between the school and the local community by actively engaging parents, involving local stakeholders, and seeking support from community leaders (Epstein, 2018). Community engagement may help headteachers with resource mobilization. Parental participation may be enhanced due to enhanced community involvement, trust-building and teamwork (Pomerantz & Moorman, 2010). As parents become active participants in their children's educational activities, they may help ECE teachers achieve positive learning outcomes – a favorable influence on teaching quality (Epstein, 2018). Due to the increased curriculum awareness and access to ECE materials, the school-community relationship may result in a more enriching pedagogic experience (Chigbu, 2017). A headteacher's efforts to engage and involve parents and the wider community may constitute an ecology of teaching and learning in the school. A conducive learning ecology is a prerequisite for teaching quality enhancement at the ECE level.

The findings indicate that a headteacher may facilitate teaching quality enhancement by fostering a culture of growth, learning, reflection and teacher research. As a pedagogic leader, they may actively engage in mentoring, coaching, training and facilitating best practices (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Gronn, 2003). A headteacher may develop a culture of learning, reflection and excellence in teaching, ultimately benefiting young children's educational experiences and outcomes (DeMatthews et al., 2016). The emphasis on continuous professional development of ECE teachers may directly influence the teaching quality. The findings also indicate that a headteacher may need to put in place a strong monitoring and evaluation mechanism backed by an integrated data management system. It may allow realistic analysis of teacher development needs, targeted training and identification of outliers. Findings on curriculum adaptation and enrichment suggest that headteachers as pedagogic leaders in rural areas may contribute to teaching quality by aligning the curriculum to contextual needs and dynamic learning experiences. Christensen & Morgan (2017) claim that the standard ECE curriculum may not always be aligned with the rural communities' unique contextual and cultural needs. A headteacher who facilitates curriculum adaptation

and enrichment ensures that teaching materials and pedagogy are developmentally, culturally, and pedagogically relevant, meaningful, and engaging. This approach enhances teaching quality by aligning the curriculum with local traditions. Enhancing student learning experiences and tailoring the ECE curriculum to the context and values of the community (Bauch, 2001)

The findings suggest that collaborative educational planning is a key pedagogic leadership practice that may help headteachers address quality enhancement holistically. It may help headteachers with curriculum customization, adaptation of appropriate innovative and differentiated pedagogy, allocation of resources, setting targets, adhering to realistic timelines, and monitoring learning to keep an eye on the learning trajectory (Schollaert, 2002). Headteachers and educational leaders may manage schools and educational originations through five fundamental functions: planning, coordinating, organizing or implementing, controlling and commanding (Schollaert, 2002).

The findings suggest that one of the curtail aspects of planning that seems to be negatively influencing teaching quality is the absence of an integrated education information management system. New & Cochran (2007) argues that a headteacher may need to focus on data and evidence-based planning and use technology in their administrative and management role. The data and analytics may allow a headteacher to analyze needs, identify trends, and devise focused interventions to enhance teaching quality. The findings indicate that the teaching quality is not limited to outcomes and numbers alone; the values, vision, standards and vision are equally important. The value dimension provides a moral base for teaching quality enhancement. without values guiding the planning process, education may become a market commodity and not a source of self-actualization, happiness, peace and growth.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations from this research may enhance a headteacher's capacity to provide pedagogic leadership – subquality, facilitating teaching quality enhancement at the ECE level.

Community engagement and participation should transcend beyond customary meetings and interaction. The headteacher should develop the

school as a community of learners whereby parents and ECE teachers actively participate in holistic child development as caregivers.

The teacher development and capacity-building programmes may need to be based on data and analytics. The headteacher may need to develop an integrated monitoring and support mechanism backed by data and analytics. They may need to focus on "how" and "why" of ECE pedagogy. The emerging needs, developments and technological context should guide ECE teacher education and development programmes.

The headteacher may need to focus on making the curriculum developmentally, socially and culturally appropriate to address the holistic child development needs in rural areas. Developing learning materials in local languages may facilitate effective curriculum adoption and enrichment.

Finally, as a pedagogic leader, the headteacher should acknowledge ECE's unique challenges and opportunities in rural areas and tailor the education management and planning process to offer innovative solutions to enhance teaching quality. It may require the Department of Education in Government in Gilgit Baltistan to develop policies, structures and programmes for the community-based school that may facilitate and incentivize pedagogic leadership practices. These recommendations can foster a culture of excellence in schools offering EEC services in rural areas and may help headteachers facilitate teaching quality at the ECE level.

CONCLUSION

The research highlights a variety of leadership practices adopted by the headteacher as pedagogic leader that are instrumental in teaching quality enchantment at the community-based school in Hunza, Gilgit Baltistan. Key findings indicate the importance of Community engagement and collaboration, Teachers' development: Curriculum adaptation and enrichment, and Collaborative educational planning as key pedagogic practices that have the potential to influence teaching quality enchantment at the ECE level. These practices, rooted in educational leadership theories such as instructional and transformational leadership, contribute to a holistic approach to nurturing ECE teaching quality in a rural context. The research highlights the need for comprehensive and context-

specific leadership practices. The recommendations provide a roadmap for enhancing teaching quality at the ECE level, emphasizing the importance of developing the school as a learning community – where the headteacher may involve parents as pedagogic partners, develop the capacity of teachers in developmentally appropriate pedagogy, and engage multiple stakeholders in collaborative educational planning.

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