



ROLE OF TEACHERS IN ENHANCING QUALITY OF ECCE IN ECCE CLASSROOM: A CASE STUDY OF DISTRICT BAHAWALNAGAR

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Abstract

The study aimed to investigate the role of the teacher in improving the quality of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) classroom in District Bahawalnagar, Punjab, Pakistan. Mixed-method research was used. The study involved secondary school teachers, head teachers, and caretakers from 50 selected secondary schools from 5 tehsils, and stratified random sampling was used for the selection of the respondents, with 150 respondents. A semi-structured questionnaire, including demographic data, questions about teachers' roles in ECCE, challenges, and open-ended questions, was used for data collection. Frequency, percentage and descriptive statistics were obtained through quantitative analysis (SPSS), and qualitative responses were analysed thematically. The results showed that the respondents clearly agreed on the importance of teacher roles in respect to communication development ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 1.44$), social interactions ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 1.44$), nurturing classroom environments ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 1.46$), emotional understanding ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 1.26$), and shaping behaviour and attitudes ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 1.26$). The areas that they felt needed improvement were instructional methods ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 1.45$), self-confidence and independence ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.49$), and adapting strategies for diverse learners ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 1.39$). Results from the qualitative analysis highlighted that the respondents appreciated: being creative (14.7%), being positive (12.7%), communicating effectively (12.0%), and being consistent and fair (11.3%) as important teacher qualities. Because the study found teachers to be key agents of improving the quality of ECCE classrooms, it recommends that teachers receive further training in developmentally appropriate practices, improve emotional support for children, effective communication, and inclusive classroom environments.

Keywords: Early Childhood Care and Education, Teacher Role, Classroom Quality, Social-Emotional Development, Communication Skills, Teacher Effectiveness, Bahawalnagar

1. Introduction

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is one of the most important investments in human development that has wide-ranging implications for children's cognitive, social, emotional and physical development in the formative years (Manning et al., 2019). Educators' knowledge, skills, attitudes and practices in these settings significantly influence the quality of the services provided in ECCE. ECCE teachers enable children to learn, support children's social-emotional growth and design learning environments that support children's multi-faceted development (Blewitt et al, 2021).

In other countries, studies have consistently shown that the quality of the teacher is the most important variable affecting ECCE program results (Suchodoletz et al., 2023a; Rafiq-uz-Zaman, 2025a). Process quality



indicators (PQI), especially teacher-child interactions and classroom management, have been associated with child outcomes in many domains such as academic achievement, behavioural skills, social competence, and motor development (Suchodoletz et al., 2023b). Although ECCE is important around the world, there are still great inequalities regarding access to quality ECCE programs and the preparation of ECE teachers, especially in low and middle income countries (LMICs) (Rad et al., 2022 ; Rafiq-uz-Zaman, 2025a, 2025b).

ECCE has also not reached the mature level of its development in Pakistan and is implemented unevenly at the provincial and district level (Akram et al., 2020). Government of Punjab has tried to incorporate ECCE into secondary schools, so that children aged 3-5 years have basic learning experiences in ECCE classrooms. The quality of these is, however, widely variable and the different roles teachers play in improving the quality have not been systematically studied at the district level. There is limited existing research available on teacher competencies, pedagogical practices and systems to support quality ECCE provision in the Pakistani context.

The southern part of Punjab, District Bahawalnagar, poses a distinct problem for analysis of the quality of ECCE. The district is strategically situated, has a high population density, but has less research and resource focus. An analysis of teachers' perceptions of their roles in improving the quality of ECCE in this context can give the policy and practice makers some insights about how to improve ECCE.

1.1 Research Problem

Although the importance of ECCE has been acknowledged, little empirical knowledge exists about how the role of teachers is perceived and implemented to improve the quality of their classrooms in Pakistan. The quality of ECCE classrooms is not well documented in District Bahawalnagar and there is a lack of clarity on what teacher competencies, pedagogical practices and support is needed to improve outcomes of ECCE in this district. This study aims to fill in this gap.

1.2 Conceptual and Theoretical Foundation

1.2.1 Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory. The sociocultural theory of Lev Vygotsky underpins the role of teachers in ECCE education. This theory focuses on how learning is a social process that takes place between a developing child and a more knowledgeable adult (teacher, peer, family member) and in a cultural context (Lantolf & Poehner, 2023). The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is a fundamental construct in Vygotskian theory, where it is believed that the difference between what children can do on their own and what they are able to do with support from a more competent person is what makes up the ZPD (Silalahi, 2019). The teachers work in this zone, offering systematic support, scaffolding, so that children can gradually take care of their learning.

1.2.2 Constructivist Learning Theory. According to the constructivist learning theory, knowledge is not passively transmitted by teachers to students, but rather actively built by students as a result of their reflection on experiences (Chand, 2023). This theory is based on the work of Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner, and stresses the importance of building upon existing knowledge with new experiences and social interaction. In ECCE settings, constructivist approaches promote child-centred and enquiry-based learning in which children play active role in meaning making.

Constructivist teachers enable students rather than teach them, ask meaningful questions that stimulate students' thinking, offer opportunities for exploration, and build learning communities (Jumaah, 2024). This is especially pertinent for ECCE because play-based learning, open ended exploration and child-initiated inquiry are considered to be developmentally appropriate (Parker et al., 2022).

1.2.3 Developmentally Appropriate Practice. Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) is a broad-based approach that has been developed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and focuses on the need to consider developmental appropriateness (the match or mismatch between the activities and children's developmental capabilities), responsiveness to individual differences, and cultural responsiveness (Wibowo et al., 2024) at the same time when using effective practice in early childhood. The DAP framework supports teachers in making decisions on curriculum, instructional, assessment, and class organization.

The teachers implementing DAP show evidence of understanding of children's development across



domains, awareness of individual variation in development and learning, and the ability to provide contexts that support all children's development, use of varied instructional strategies, ongoing assessment, and partnership in a respectful manner with families and communities (Wibowo et al., 2024). Within this framework, teachers are seen as having to be knowledgeable, reflective and responsive in order to provide quality ECCE for young children and families.

1.3. Research Questions

The study addressed the following research questions:

- 1) What are the key roles that ECCE teachers, head teachers, and caretakers identify as important for enhancing classroom quality and supporting children's development across multiple domains?
- 2) To what extent do respondents perceive different teacher roles (communication, social facilitation, environment creation, assessment, behaviour support, creativity, emotional support, instructional methods, confidence-building, and adaptation to diversity) as important for ECCE quality?
- 3) What qualities, skills, and competencies do respondents believe are essential for effective ECCE teaching?
- 4) What are the perceived challenges in implementing quality ECCE practices, and what suggestions do respondents offer for improvement?

1.4 Research Objectives

- 1) To identify the key roles teachers perform in enhancing ECCE classroom quality, including communication development, social interaction facilitation, classroom environment creation, and assessment of child development.
- 2) To determine the perceived importance of different teacher roles in relation to supporting behaviour formation, creativity enhancement, emotional well-being, and instructional effectiveness.
- 3) To examine factors that respondents identify as essential for improving teacher effectiveness in ECCE classrooms, including professional qualities, skills, and competencies.
- 4) To identify challenges faced by ECCE staff in implementing quality practices and to explore suggestions for addressing these challenges.

2. Literature Review

2.1 ECCE Quality and Teacher Effectiveness

The quality of ECEC can be measured in a variety of ways, including process quality measures such as teacher-child interactions, instructional practices, emotional support provided, and structural quality measures such as teacher qualifications, ratios, and the nature of materials used in the classroom setting. Studies have shown that process quality factors are more closely linked to child developmental outcomes than are structural factors alone, underscoring the importance of teacher-child interactions (Suchodoletz et al., 2023a). In their extensive meta-analysis on relationships between ECCE quality and child outcomes, Suchodoletz and colleagues determined that increased ECCE quality was significantly correlated with better child academic achievement, child behavioural skills, child social competence and child motor skills, even after controlling for child demographics (Suchodoletz et al., 2023b).

Teacher qualification is viewed as a key component of the quality of ECCE and is found to be associated with overall quality of the programme in a positive way, with higher teacher educational levels showing positive relationships with programme structure, and language development support and reasoning skill promotion (Manning et al, 2019).

2.2 Teacher Role in Communication and Social Development

Communication is essential to early childhood learning, and teachers have a pivotal role in children's language and communication development. Responsive interactions and linguistic richness during teacher-child interactions have been shown to play a significant role in children's language development and cognitive growth (Yang et al., 2021a). The quality of teacher-child interaction includes three important dimensions: emotional support, classroom management, and instructional support, and research suggests that the classroom management and instructional support aspects are positive predictors of children's receptive vocabulary development over time (Yang et al., 2021b).

2.3 Teacher Role in Emotional Support and Classroom Environment



Children's emotional development and well-being have tremendous implications for the emotional quality of the ECCE classroom, which encompasses teacher-child interactions in terms of responsiveness, warmth, and sensitivity (Thümmeler et al., 2022). In the classroom setting, teachers are important figures of attachment that can help to moderate children's stress, facilitate emotion regulation and foster emotional competence (Thümmeler et al., 2022).

Classroom environment quality encompasses emotional aspects, as well as physical classroom organization, materials available, and the way classroom is managed that conveys safety and predictability (Khalfaoui et al., 2020). A systematic review of factors that impact positive classroom climate in multicultural early childhood classrooms found eight factors: teacher-student supportive interactions, peer interactions and friendship formation, child engagement, teacher training in emotionally supportive environments, and trust-based teacher-family relationships (Khalfaoui et al., 2020).

2.4 Teacher Adaptability and Inclusive Practices

The inclusion of ECCE practices means that teachers will have to adjust their pedagogy, expectations and support to meet the needs of diverse learners (You et al., 2019). Teacher self-efficacy (TSE) regarding the effective implementation of inclusive education has been found to be significant for inclusive education to positively impact all children, including children with disabilities and developmental differences. The need for teachers to gain confidence and sense of efficacy in supporting diversity is identified as important for their professional development in inclusive practice (You et al., 2019).

2.5 National and International Research Context

Research on teacher-centred quality improvement in ECCE is a key theme across the world. To support the implementation of evidence-based practices (EBP), teachers need to engage in continuous professional development (CPd) has been shown in various settings such as Asia, Africa, and the Middle East (Aroca et al., 2022). In South Asian settings especially, the resource limitations, teacher training inadequacies, and fluctuations in quality standards have been recognized as recurring challenges in the field (Yu et al., 2022).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The researcher used mixed methods research as a research design to comprehensively examine the role of teachers in improving the quality of ECCE classrooms. A mixed-method approach was used that merged quantitative data (frequencies, percentages, mean scores) and qualitative data (thematic analysis of open-ended responses), to provide both breadth of understanding across all the teachers' role dimensions and depth of understanding in relation to the respondents' views of essential qualities and challenges.

3.2 Population and Sampling

The target population was ECCE teachers, head teachers, and caretakers of secondary schools having functional ECCE classrooms in District Bahawalnagar. The district was divided into five administrative tehsils using stratified random sampling (SRS) technique, namely Bahawalnagar, Minchinabad, Chishtian, Haroonabad, and Fort Abbas. 10 schools were sampled from each tehsil. One ECCE teacher, one head teacher, and one caretaker from each school were selected, making 150 respondents (50 ECCE Teachers, 50 Head Teachers, and 50 caretakers).

3.3 Instrumentation

The data were gathered using a structured questionnaire with multiple sections: Demographic data (respondent role, experience, qualifications), ten items concerned with specific roles of teachers in ECCE on a five-point Likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree), open-ended items asking respondents about the challenges they faced within the ECCE classroom and suggestions for improvement, and a final item where respondents were presented with a list of teacher qualities they saw as important for ECCE teaching and had to select the ones they considered most important.

The 10 areas of teacher role included: (1) ability to develop communication skills, (2) ability to foster children's social interactions, (3) ability to create a nurturing and inclusive classroom environment, (4) knowledge of and understanding of how to monitor and assess children's development, (5) ability to shape children's behaviour and attitudes, (6) ability to encourage creativity and problem-solving, (7) understanding and support of children's emotional well-being, (8) instructional methods and curiosity, (9) ability to foster



self-confidence and independence, and (10) ability to adapt strategies for diverse learners.

3.4 Pilot Testing and Reliability

A pilot study was done before conducting the main data collection to test the clarity of the items in the questionnaire and to determine if the items were suitable. A pilot study was conducted with 30 respondents from 10 schools to test the clarity of the questionnaire items and to determine whether these items are suitable. Minor editing for clarity of language. Reliability of the instrument was assessed by applying the Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which is a value of 0.80, it is good for internal consistency and reliability of the measurement instrument.

3.5 Data Collection

The data were gathered during a six week period by direct administration of the questionnaires to all respondents in their schools. The questionnaire was administered individually, with research assistants on hand to explain the questions. Ethical issues were adhered to with informed consent of all participants, voluntary participation, maintaining confidentiality by using coded identifiers, and data was kept securely.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis in SPSS software version 26 was done quantitatively. Frequencies, percentages, and mean scores (with standard deviations) were computed for each item of each questionnaire, as well as for all respondents. Qualitative responses to open-ended questions were analysed using thematic analysis, which involved a code of responses being created inductively and themes emerging from the data.

4. Results

4.1 Quantitative Findings: Frequency Distribution of Teacher Roles

Table 1 shows respondents' opinions on the role of teachers in improving quality in ECCE. In general, strong majorities supported all 10 items regarding teacher roles, with "agreed" and "strongly agreed" responses ranging from 60.7% to 76.0% across items.

Table 1

Frequency Distribution of Respondents' Agreement with Statements about Teacher Roles in ECCE (N = 150)

Statement	SDA	DA	N	A	SA	Total	A + SA
Communication skill development	24 (16.0%)	0 (0.0%)	12 (8.0%)	35 (23.3%)	79 (52.7%)	150 (100%)	114 (76.0%)
Promotion of social interactions	24 (16.0%)	0 (0.0%)	12 (8.0%)	34 (22.7%)	80 (53.3%)	150 (100%)	114 (76.0%)
Nurturing and inclusive classroom	24 (16.0%)	0 (0.0%)	12 (8.0%)	23 (15.3%)	91 (60.7%)	150 (100%)	114 (76.0%)
Child development monitoring and assessment	12 (8.0%)	12 (8.0%)	12 (8.0%)	68 (45.3%)	46 (30.7%)	150 (100%)	114 (76.0%)
Shaping behaviour and attitudes	12 (8.0%)	12 (8.0%)	12 (8.0%)	46 (30.7%)	68 (45.3%)	150 (100%)	114 (76.0%)
Creativity and problem-solving encouragement	24 (16.0%)	0 (0.0%)	12 (8.0%)	57 (38.0%)	57 (38.0%)	150 (100%)	114 (76.0%)
Emotional understanding and well-being	12 (8.0%)	12 (8.0%)	12 (8.0%)	46 (30.7%)	68 (45.3%)	150 (100%)	114 (76.0%)
Instructional methods and curiosity	23 (15.3%)	24 (16.0%)	12 (8.0%)	46 (30.7%)	45 (30.0%)	150 (100%)	91 (60.7%)
Self-confidence and independence	35 (23.3%)	12 (8.0%)	12 (8.0%)	57 (38.0%)	34 (22.7%)	150 (100%)	91 (60.7%)
Adapting strategies for diverse needs	23 (15.3%)	12 (8.0%)	24 (16.0%)	46 (30.7%)	45 (30.0%)	150 (100%)	91 (60.7%)

Results showed significant consensus in the significance of teacher role in promoting communication development, as 76.0% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed. Likewise, 76.0% felt that teachers



actively encourage social interactions among young children, agreeing or strongly agreeing. The strongest endorsement was for the role that teachers play in establishing nurturing and inclusive classroom environments, with 60.7% strongly agreeing that classroom atmosphere is much influenced by teacher approach and behaviour. Similarly, there was a high rate of agreement (76.0% combined) about the teachers' roles in monitoring and assessing child development, shaping behaviour and attitudes, fostering creativity and problem-solving, and supporting emotional understanding and well-being.

Relatively lower endorsement was received for three dimensions, instructional methods (60.7% agreed/strongly agreed), self-confidence and independence development (60.7%) and adaptation of strategies for diverse learners (60.7%). These are areas that should be treated with special emphasis in professional development programs.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics: Mean Ratings across Teacher Roles

Table 2 presents mean scores and standard deviations for each teacher role dimension, providing insight into the average level of respondent agreement with each statement.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Teacher Role Dimensions (N = 150)

Teacher Role Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation
Communication skills development	3.97	1.44
Promotion of social interactions	3.97	1.44
Creating nurturing and inclusive classroom	4.05	1.46
Monitoring and assessing child development	3.83	1.19
Shaping behaviour and attitudes	3.97	1.26
Encouragement of creativity and problem-solving	3.82	1.37
Supporting emotional understanding and well-being	3.97	1.26
Instructional methods and curiosity stimulation	3.44	1.45
Supporting self-confidence and independence	3.29	1.49
Adapting strategies for diverse learners	3.52	1.39

Generally, there was moderate to strong agreement with mean scores of between 3.29 and 4.05 on a five-point scale across all dimensions. Creating nurturing, inclusive classrooms (M = 4.05, SD = 1.46) was the highest mean score, indicating that this dimension was endorsed the most. This discovery resonates with research evidence and the focus on classroom climate and teacher-child relationships as integral to the quality of ECCE.

The mean scores of 3.97 were obtained for communication skills development, promotion of social interactions, shaping behaviour and attitudes and supporting emotional well-being, which was interpreted as respondents' perception of equal importance of the dimensions.

The mean scores for three dimensions were quite low. Having the lowest mean score (M = 3.29, SD = 1.49), teachers' support of self-confidence and independence indicated least consensus on teachers' roles in this dimension. Instructional methods and curiosity stimulation (M = 3.44, SD = 1.45) and adapting strategies for diverse learners (M = 3.52, SD = 1.39) also had lower means, suggesting that there was less consistency of opinion within the respondents and that there could be a need for support on these areas.

4.3 Descriptive Findings

The findings of this mixed-methods study with 150 respondents (ECCE teachers, head teachers, and caretakers) across 50 schools in District Bahawalnagar, Punjab, showed a high level of overall consensus on the role of teachers in the process of quality improvement. The quantitative data show mostly positive results for all 10 core items with a mean score of 3.78 ± 0.27 on a 5-point Likert scale (the overall mean score was positive). The internal consistency was good (Cronbach's alpha = 0.80).

This was followed by the three items tied for the second highest endorsement, which centered on communication, social interaction and emotional understanding in the classroom (all M = 3.97, 76.0% agreement); the single most high endorsed item being "A nurturing and inclusive classroom environment is largely influenced by the teacher's approach and behaviour" (M = 4.05 ± 1.46 , 76.0% agreement). Overall, 71.4% of all responses (613 responses + 458 responses) were either "Strongly Agreed" or "Agreed" and only



19.8% were either “Strongly Disagreed” or “Disagreed”.

4.4.1 Statistical Significance and Effect Sizes. There were highly significant differences when the mean for all items was compared to the neutral point (3.0) using a one-sample t-test, $t(9) = 9.22$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 2.92$ (very large). This shows that the perceptions of the respondents are well above the neutral level and there is a high level of agreement that teachers significantly improve the quality of ECCE. The ratio of between-item variance to within-item variance is 0.0720 to 1.8894 which indicates moderate consistency of agreement across items, implying some differentiation in perceived roles of teachers.

4.4.2 Areas of Greatest and Lowest Agreement. Three items received a significantly lower agreement ($M < 3.6$): (1) A teacher's method of instruction has an impact on child enthusiasm and curiosity ($M = 3.29$, 60.7%); (2) Effective teachers adapt to diverse needs ($M = 3.52$, 60.7%); (3) Teachers help children develop self-confidence and independence ($M = 3.44$, 60.7%). Also, the three had the highest standard deviations ($SD = 1.49, 1.45, 1.39$, respectively), suggesting more variability in responses and possibly some disagreement in responses to these specific teaching functions.

4.4.3 Qualitative Insights: Teacher Qualities for ECCE Enhancement. Open-ended responses ($n=150$) identified ten key teacher qualities ranked by frequency:

- 1 **Creativity** ($n=22$, 14.7%) — designing engaging, playful learning activities
- 2 **Positive attitude/Enthusiasm** ($n=19$, 12.7%) — motivating active child participation
- 3 **Effective communication** ($n=18$, 12.0%) — building trust and guiding learners
- 4 **Consistency/Fairness** ($n=17$, 11.3%) — fostering safe learning environments
- 5 **Observational skills** ($n=17$, 11.3%) — identifying developmental progress

Notably, "Classroom management" received the lowest frequency ($n=8$, 5.3%), and "Child psychology understanding" ($n=10$, 6.7%) and "Patience/Empathy" ($n=12$, 8.0%) were underrepresented despite their theoretical importance.

4.4.4 Alignment with Global ECCE Research. The results are congruent with the international evidence about the effective practice of ECCE. The teacher quality problem can be substantiated with facts from research conducted at Bahawalnagar and in the broader context of Pakistan where the systemic issues are highlighted. What is reported is more than 95% of the teachers of ECCE and caregivers in the district not adequately professionally trained and about 70% of the classes with multiple age groups under a single caregiver (A parallel study in the district, 2024). As a result of this scarcity, the stakeholders expect the qualified teachers to take up the various roles of emotional support, curriculum delivery, behavioural modelling and developmental assessment of the students, which is similar to the various dimensions highlighted in the quantitative responses in the current study.

These teacher roles are recognized and endorsed by international documents. The emotional understanding, classroom atmosphere creation and communication abilities of teachers are highlighted as key attributes for ECCE settings (Duguryil et al., 2025). Furthermore, research conducted in a variety of settings ranging from Jamaica to China shows that training teachers in behaviour management and socio-emotional competence has a direct impact on children's outcomes, as highlighted by the respondents for nurturing school environments and emotional atonement.

The qualitative data, which emphasize creativity and positive attitudes, illustrate the contemporary teaching approaches that emphasize play-based and child-centred approaches to learning. Classroom management is less emphasized among respondents' priorities, but studies indicate that this could be due to contextual factors: In under-resourced contexts, teachers may instead use informal classroom management rather than formal methods (Peleman et al., 2019). While the literature emphasizes the understanding of child psychology, this understanding seems not to be a priority for teachers in this study, suggesting a lack of this competency in teacher preparation. However, the importance of understanding child psychology, as emphasized in the literature, is not that important for teachers in this study, which might suggest that there is a lack of understanding of child psychology during teacher preparation.

4.4.5 Synthesis: Bridging Quantitative-Qualitative Findings. The data indicate a consistent picture of teacher effectiveness that focuses on a relationship-based, emotional approach to teaching and learning rather than administrative skills. The items with high levels of agreement are essentially relational



(communication, social interaction, atmosphere creation). In contrast, there was less agreement on items related to instructional methods and diversity accommodation, which demands the need for technical skill and resources. The analysis of this pattern indicates that teachers' role is perceived as creating supportive interpersonal environment in limited material settings, and not sophisticated, differentiated instruction in the case of Bahawalnagar context.

4.4.6 Limitations and Implications. Limit generalizability due to the cross-sectional design, self-report Likert scales, and context-specific sampling to one district. The clustering of responses in the positive (71.4% in top two) may be due to social desirability bias or widespread perception of the significance of teachers' role. While a favourable differentiation is found in the mean scores, this is only modest (range 0.76 on a 5-point scale) and does not provide much information in regard to prioritizing specific interventions.

For policy, these findings highlight the need for teachers to be recognised as a pivotal role but it's not enough. Addressing systemic constraints identified in parallel research, which are professional development provision, reduced class sizes, and resource allocation needs to be addressed in the implementation of quality improvements (Rafiq-uz-Zaman, 2024). The focus on 'creativity' and 'enthusiasm' rather than 'formal psychology knowledge' implies a need to blend theory with practice and engage pedagogy within training programmes.

4.5 Qualitative Findings: Essential Teacher Qualities

Table 3 shows the frequencies and percentages of the responses to an open-ended question where respondents were asked to state the important qualities required to be an effective ECCE teacher.

Table 3

Key Qualities Identified by Respondents as Essential for Improving ECCE Teaching (N = 150)

Quality	Frequency	Percentage
Creativity	22	14.7%
Positive attitude and enthusiasm	19	12.7%
Effective communication	18	12.0%
Consistency and fairness	17	11.3%
Strong observational skills	17	11.3%
Professional training in ECCE methods	15	10.0%
Patience and empathy	12	8.0%
Adaptability	12	8.0%
Classroom management	8	5.3%
Understanding of child psychology	10	6.7%

Creativity (14.7%), positive attitude and enthusiasm (12.7%) and effective communication (12.0%) were the most common qualities mentioned. The results indicated that the respondents appreciated teachers who have imaginative approaches to teaching, optimistic dispositions and good communication skills with the children and family.

Another significant quality identified by 11.3% of respondents is consistency and fairness. Respondents have an understanding that consistency and fairness are important in the classroom. Likewise, 11.3% recognised strong observational abilities as being essential, which suggests that they had an awareness that the knowledge and understanding of children are key to responsive teaching.

Moderate emphasis was placed on formal preparation for ECCE methods, as identified by 10.0% of the respondents. This discovery indicates the potential space for policy interest since respondents have acknowledged the importance of ECCE specific training, though this was not as strongly stated as other attributes and therefore may be a need for more focus as a strategy to improve professional development.

5. Interpretations

5.1 Teacher–Child Communication

This study's findings are consistent with and build on international research on the role of teachers in ECCE quality. The high scores across most of the teacher role dimensions (76.0% agreement/strong agreement) indicated overall consensus in the literature on the teachers' multifaceted role in supporting children's development (Blewitt et al., 2021). The teachers' role in setting the classroom climate for nurturing



and inclusive learning environments ($M = 4.05$) reinforces the results of research indicating that classroom climate is a crucial component of quality ECCE and child outcomes (Khalfaoui et al., 2020).

The high ratings for communication-related teacher roles are consistent with the vast research literature on the role of high-quality teacher–child communication in language and cognitive development (Yang et al., 2021b). The mean scores for social interaction promotion ($M = 3.97$), emotional support ($M = 3.97$) and behaviour shaping ($M = 3.97$) are also very high, indicating that teachers are aware of the importance of these for children's social-emotional competence, and that the importance of these is reflected in the research literature on early childhood outcomes (Thümmeler et al., 2022).

5.2 Areas of Strength: High Consensus Dimensions

Respondent agreement was highest on teacher roles in establishing nurturing and inclusive classroom environments ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 1.46$). This is especially encouraging, since classroom environment quality has been documented as having a significant association with child development, across cognitive, social, emotional and behavioural domains (Suchodoletz et al., 2023a). The high mean indicates that the District Bahawalnagar respondents believed that teachers play a key role in creating safe, welcoming and supportive classroom environments.

The mean score of the respondents on communicating development, promoting social interaction, providing emotional support and shaping behaviour was 3.97, where there was a strong agreement about these practices. This indicates that the teachers in District Bahawalnagar ECCE services are aware of the significance of teacher roles that directly support the relationship, communication, emotional well-being and prosocial development of children, which are repeatedly cited as outcomes in developmental studies as influenced by the quality of the teacher-child interaction (Eadie et al., 2021).

5.3 Areas Requiring Attention: Lower Consensus Dimensions

Three dimensions had significantly lower mean scores and may need focused professional development and/or policy attention. Development of self-confidence and independence had the lowest mean score ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.49$), indicating a lower consensus and less likely practice of aspects of self-confidence and independence. This area may be due to poor preparation or lack of clarity about pedagogical strategies that support child confidence and independence development from the respondents.

Instructional methods and curiosity stimulation ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 1.45$) had the second lowest mean score. This could indicate that respondents were not as confident about the specific methods of instruction they believe support child engagement and curiosity, or that they may feel that there are barriers to use in District Bahawalnagar contexts. Instructional quality is highlighted as a key factor in supporting cognitive development and academic learning trajectories (Suchodoletz et al., 2023a), therefore, this should be given attention.

Adaptation of strategies for diverse learners ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 1.39$) had the third lowest mean score, indicating that respondents may feel less prepared or confident in how they will teach a child with diverse learning needs, abilities, and backgrounds. This discovery confirms previous studies that pointed out the need for teacher preparation and continuous professional development to implement inclusive practices (You et al., 2019).

5.4 Qualitative Themes: Essential Teacher Qualities

Creativity (14.7%) and positive attitude and enthusiasm (12.7%) and effective communication (12.0%) were the most common factors identified as essential qualities through qualitative analysis. The results of this study offer valuable background information for the understanding of how the respondents perceive – define – teacher excellence in ECCE contexts.

There are indications that effective early learning teaching and learning will need imaginative, flexible and creative approaches, and the attention to creativity reflects a recognition of this. The creative teachers can adjust the materials and strategies that are suitable for children's interests and needs, prepare new learning environments, and present an example of creative problem solving (Wahyuningsih et al., 2020).

Positive attitude and enthusiasm focus on understanding how dispositions of the teacher impact classroom climate and children's engagement with learning. The positive emotions that teachers (Eadie et al.,



2021) bring to their work support children's motivation and well-being.

Third being effective communication, respondents find teachers who effectively communicate with children, families and colleagues to be valued. Communication skill refers not only to the communicative competence, but also to being able to listen to the others, respond to them and communicate with them in a culturally appropriate way (Yang et al., 2021b).

Consistency and fairness (11.3%) and observational skills (11.3%) were both mentioned, indicating that both were seen as important, with the respondents also acknowledging the need to look closely at children and understand them through the lens of consistency and fairness. These characteristics demonstrate an understanding that children develop best in environments that are consistent and where children's teachers have a thorough knowledge of the children's development and needs.

Professional training in ECCE methods was the least mentioned quality (10.0%). The finding is potentially problematic as it indicates that preparatory formal education in ECCE is recognized by some respondents, but not all of them see the value of formal preparation in ECCE as a prerequisite. This might be due to the lack of ECCE specific professional development in the district, or perhaps because of the lack of importance placed on ECCE. Teacher preparation and qualifications are consistently shown to be important correlates of ECCE quality in international research (Manning et al., 2019) and is therefore worthy of policy attention.

5.5 Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The qualitative result of respondents' appreciation of creativity, enthusiasm, and communication can be combined with quantitative data on the high level of endorsement of communication development, promotion of social interaction, and emotional support roles. The results indicate that these are considered to be important teacher roles and that qualities of teachers (creativity, enthusiasm, communication skill) are required to carry out these roles.

Overall, the endorsement of instructional methods and adaptation for diversity is somewhat lower, and the number of citations for professional training is somewhat lower, indicating a possible lack of understanding or confidence about these areas. Targeted professional development in the areas of differentiated instruction, evidence-based pedagogical strategies and inclusive practices may improve quality throughout the district.

6. Conclusion

This case study of District Bahawalnagar explored the understandings of teacher roles of ECCE teachers, head teachers and caretakers in improving the classroom quality. The results in this study show that the teachers are perceived as key players in various aspects of ECCE quality improvement, especially in fostering nurturing and inclusive classroom environments and in supporting communication, social interaction, emotional wellbeing and behaviour development.

The study shows that there are several important findings:

1. There is a general awareness of the multiple aspects of the teacher's role: Respondents were able to identify that high-quality ECCE programmes need teachers to be able to support development in cognitive, social, emotional and behavioural areas.
2. Classroom environment and emotional support are widely recognised priorities: The most significant response was for the role of the teacher in maintaining a supportive environment and supporting the emotional needs, which indicated that this is a major priority.
3. Areas of critical gaps exist in specific dimensions: Less consensus on instructional methods, diversity adaptation, and independence building indicates the need for professional development and policy support.
4. Teacher qualities are important: Responses showed that, in addition to the formal qualifications, the qualities of the teacher are important, including creativity, enthusiasm, communication, consistency, observation, and empathy.
5. There is a need to address professional preparation issues: There is an inadequate focus on professional preparation for ECCE, indicating the need to focus more on this dimension.

In general, the results indicate that teachers are important actors in enhancing the quality of ECCE classrooms in District Bahawalnagar. To improve children's developmental outcomes in the district, targeted



professional development, adequate resources, and policies that emphasize quality improvement will need to be provided to support teachers.

7. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the results of this study:

7.1 Teacher Professional Development

These recommendations outline a comprehensive ECCE teacher training program focused on child development, classroom management, and differentiated instruction for diverse learners. It emphasizes practical, evidence-based learning through mentorship, feedback, and systematic observational assessment to track individual child needs.

7.2 Classroom Management Support

Supply materials and resources that facilitate effective classroom organization, such as age appropriate learning materials, furniture and visual aids to support independence and organizational skills.

7.3 Child-Centred and Play-Based Teaching

Advocate play based learning that sees play not only as a medium of learning in the early childhood years but also as a foundation. Teachers' professional development should include learning about how to facilitate high quality play that promotes learning across domains (Parker et al., 2022).

7.4 Observation and Assessment Skills

Increase teachers' skills in conducting regular, formative assessment that involves observation and documentation to inform instruction.

Give training on portfolio assessment and other alternative assessment methods that reflect learning in a variety of contexts and domains.

7.5 Emotional Support and Child Psychology Training

Provide information on child psychology, emotional development, and trauma-informed practices to support professional development and awareness of children's emotional and behavioural needs.

7.6 Improved ECCE Classroom Resources

Provide sufficient resources for materials, books, manipulatives, and technology that will allow for a variety of approaches to learning and are culturally and linguistically responsive.

7.7 Policy Support at District Level

Set clear ECCE quality standards detailing outcomes of teacher qualifications, classroom setup, teaching strategies and assessment.

8. Limitations

This study has a number of pertinent limitations to be noted:

Geographic scope limitation: 50 Secondary schools of District Bahawalnagar were studied. Results might not be applicable to other districts of Punjab, other provinces of Pakistan or to other educational settings.

Restricted stakeholder views: The study has received responses from only ECCE staff (teachers, head teachers and caretakers). Integrating parent's and children's perspectives would have enriched understanding of quality experiences.

Self-reported data: The reliance on questionnaire data introduces potential for response bias, social desirability bias, and measurement error.

Minimal observation of implementation: The study looked at the views of the respondents, but did not directly observe actual practices in the classroom, so it was limited in understanding what teachers are doing as opposed to what they think they should be doing.

Lack of outcomes data: The study was not able to gather data on children's developmental outcomes, which restricts the ability to connect the teacher role to children's outcomes.

Sample composition: All respondents were from secondary schools, the findings might not be applicable to standalone ECCE schools or private schools.

9. Future Research Directions

Gaps in the current knowledge base should be picked up in future research:

Multiple stakeholder voices: Future research should incorporate parent and child voices on the



quality of ECCE and the effectiveness of teachers, for more comprehensive understanding.

Public and private ECCE settings: A comparison of quality and teachers' roles in government-operated and private ECCE settings may shed light on how contextual factors affect the actual implementation.

Conduct classroom observation studies: Direct observation of teacher-child interactions and classroom practices would complement self-report data and provide insight into implementation of quality practices.

Enlarge geographic scope: Multi-district or province-wide studies could allow for the examination of regional variation and allow for the identification of contextual factors affecting quality.

Research on outcomes and correlates: Research into the relationship between teacher characteristics, professional preparation, and classroom practices and child developmental outcomes would yield information as to which specific teacher factors are most influential in child learning and development.

Investigate training-outcomes linkages: longitudinal studies to determine if teachers who participate in quality professional development exhibit improved classroom practices and if that is the case, whether they also see improvements in child outcomes would bolster the understanding of effective training to improve.

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Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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