



Original Article

Unlocking Play-based Teaching: Analysing the Attitude and Practices of Teachers at Early Childhood Education Level

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to investigate teachers' attitude and practices for using play-based teaching method at early childhood education (ECE) level, and to assess challenges faced by ECE teachers in implementing play-based teaching method at ECE level. Quantitative research design and survey research method was adopted to conduct this study. The research population included all 3,517 male and female ECE teachers in government schools of Khushab District. The research sample consisted of 348 early childhood education instructors selected through stratified selection technique. Self-developed research instrument was used to collect the data from the respondents. It was found that ECE instructors had a favourable attitude to the play-based teaching at ECE level. They were of the view that play-based instruction enhances engagement of children in learning however, organizing activities for play-based instruction was labour-intensive. ECE Teachers implemented regulations and facilitated play-based activities while considering the intellectual abilities, emotional traits, and sociocultural backgrounds of their pupils. Teachers are suggested to design play-based teaching activities considering students' interests, individual characteristics, and time constraints. Providing the required support, guidance and professional development opportunities to the teachers through online and face-to-face mode can be helpful for adopting play-based teaching at early childhood education level.

Keywords: *Attitude and practices of teachers, Early childhood education level, Government schools, Play-based teaching method*

INTRODUCTION

Early education of a child is critically important. Early childhood learners learn best when they are engaged in engaging activities. Human development naturally occurs between birth and the age of eight (Khalil et al., 2022). Play is an important way to learn throughout childhood, and it lays the groundwork for later years by fostering the development of social skills, emotional stability, cognitive abilities, and good physical and mental health. Teachers may impart information to their pupils in a variety of methods. Play-based learning is a natural and innovative approach to provide children information that develops their capacity for critical thought (Lungui & Matafwali, 2020).

Aldhafeeri et al., (2016) stated that although play is a complicated concept, it is nevertheless seen as an enjoyable activity that includes engaging in linguistic, physical, and mental interactions with objects, peers, adults, or the surrounding environment. Through play-based learning, children stay active and engaged. It is described as a setting where pupils actively participate rather than just listening. The primary goal of play-based learning is to use interactive tactics and activities. Teachers in play-based learning environments foster student interaction, critical thinking, and creative problem-solving. Play-based learning is seen to be a crucial component of early childhood education quality (Fonsén & Soukainen, 2020). When using play-based learning, teachers create an environment in which students may build knowledge that is infused with their own experiences. This constructive approach to

play-based learning is thought to be more successful than the conventional approach. Play-based education improves students in all aspects; yet, it is advised that teachers' ability be built in order to execute a play-based early childhood education curriculum (Lungui & Matafwali, 2020). In order to teach academic topics in a play-based preschool setting, administrators should provide their teachers with the necessary trainings as well (Hansen, 2018).

One of the sustainable development objectives is quality of education, which will reach many targets by 2030, including the number of competent teachers, their percentage, their training, and other things. Instructors must to be familiar with educational strategies that enhance students' learning. These methods ought to pique pupils' interest in their academic assignments. In order for pupils to provide their best efforts. However, it is thought to be challenging to implement play-based learning in government ECE classrooms in the Khushab area. ECE instructors may encounter several challenges. Early childhood education is the foundational level of education at which children acquire knowledge and apply it to later stages of development. Play-based learning is supported by a unified national curriculum. Even at the ECE level, teachers in Pakistan undergo pre-service and in-service trainings, yet many teachers are hesitant to use play-based learning strategies. According to Jay and Knaus (2018), it takes time to grasp early childhood pedagogy that promotes play-based learning, and schools let teachers to carry out their job in their own ways in order to implement effective play-based pedagogy. According to Martlew

et al., (2011), in order for teachers to adopt play-based teaching techniques, they must have access to resources and training.

The researchers observed that instructors at government schools were reluctant to use play-based learning and preferred to provide lessons in a conventional manner. Researchers found that, given the existing situation, ECE procedures do not align with children’s interests. Consequently, the goal of this research study is to identify the attitudes, difficulties, and practices of ECE instructors about the play-based teaching technique. According to Hunter (2019), parents and school employees have unfavorable opinions on play-based learning. He noted many obstacles ranging from inadequate environment resources to the effective establishment of a play-based learning environment. Another hurdle was unwillingness of the management to support the deployment of play-based learning. It is imperative that the Khushab District look at how play-based learning is implemented and how teachers’ abilities are evaluated while working in such a setting. Determining the instructors’ skills for play-based teaching is crucial for this reason. This research study shed insight on the attitudes, play-based teaching methods used by ECE instructors and difficulties faced by them in this process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pedagogical Competencies and their Indicators

Having strong pedagogical competences is crucial for effective instruction. According to Swart et al., (2019), pedagogical competences are associated with relevant knowledge of theories, techniques, and practices. Mastering the traits of the pupils involves recognizing their individuality in biology, psychology, sociology, ethics, and culture. Mastering learning theories and principles of learning is linked to gaining expert knowledge of different instructional methods, tactics, processes, and procedures, as well as educational learning theories and principles. Curriculum development is the process by which a teacher creates a syllabus based on the most important learning objectives and executes lesson plans customized to the requirements of the pupils in their class. The educational materials that teachers choose, arrange, and categorize may be tailored to the specific requirements of their students. Activities for learning in the education: the teacher is able to create and carry out a comprehensive lesson plan. Teachers are able to customize their instruction for each pupil. Teachers may modify how they employ different instructional materials and techniques based on the requirements of their pupils.

Table 1
Pedagogic competencies and students’ characteristics

No.	Pedagogic competencies	Emphasis
1	Mastering the characteristics of students	Contextual factors, including one's biological, psychological, ethical, social, and cultural.
2	Mastering learning theories and principles of educational learning	Several ways of working, thinking, and studying.
3	Curriculum development	The educator formulates a syllabus based on the main targets of the curriculum and employs lesson plans aligned with the goals and learning context. Educators can select, organize, and manage instructional resources based on students' need.
4	Educational learning activities	The educator assembles and executes a comprehensive instructional framework. An educator may implement instructional activities tailored to the requirements of pupils. The educator may assemble and use diverse instructional materials and resources according to the pupils' characteristics.

Teachers’ Attitude and Play-Based Teaching Method

According to Altmann (2008), the French word attitude comes from the Italian word attitude, which in turn comes from the Late Latin words aptitudî and aptitudin. Katz (1960) argues that attitudes are the sum of a person’s thoughts and feelings about a given topic

or person that influence their propensity to respond in a certain manner under specific conditions. Attitudes influence people’s responses to various stimuli, and this idea highlights their motivating component (Vargas-Sánchez et al., 2016).

The “tacit” assumptions that instructors make about their students’ classrooms and the content

they are learning are characterized by Kagan (1992). Educators' stances harden, students show signs of reluctance to change, and classroom procedures reflect this. Incorporating personal and cognitive adjustment to new ideas is what a teacher attempts to do when he wants to improve his attitude. Confidence in presenting pertinent information is a hallmark of a knowledge-based cognitive attitude. Keeping a level head in every situation is facilitated by adopting an emotional attitude. The behavioral attitude considers how we respond to certain stimuli (Abate, 1999). The essential features of an "attitude" according to Altmann (2008) are its cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components. The way a teacher approaches the play-based technique of instruction is crucial. In a play-based classroom, a teacher may easily accomplish his aims via cognitive, behavioral, and emotional attitudes (Suwastini et al., 2022).

Methods of Instruction in the Play-Based Approach

The pedagogy of play-based learning is quite compatible with the ECE curriculum. Active learning, cooperative learning, guided discovery learning, problem-solving, project-based learning, inquiry-based learning, and Montessori education are some of the ideas that support these approaches (Utami et al., 2021). Both teacher-led and teacher-guided sessions may benefit from these methods. Utami et al. (2021) have proposed the term "playful integrated pedagogies" to characterize these methods.

Fun pedagogies, according to Utami et al. (2021), may be more successful than conventional and intensively monitored ones in developing students' social, emotional, physical, cognitive, and creative talents. Students' expectations of classroom playfulness must be included in any framework for play-based learning practices to be effective. The creation and assessment of educational activities are significantly impacted by teachers' perspectives on the efficacy of play-based learning. Questions about the level of support for play-based education among systems, schools, administrators, and instructors remain unresolved. In order to encourage students to develop strong connections and in-depth knowledge, should teachers consider and use play-based pedagogies?

The Role of Play in the Classroom and Its Difficulties

When considering the costs and benefits to kids, play-based techniques are expensive but highly successful kind of education. But implementing play-based teaching in the mainstream classroom is not easy.

Teachers encounter several obstacles in play-based instruction, including an absence of implementation guidelines, curriculum overload, and resource scarcity (Lungui & Matafwali, 2020). Lack of resources, pupils' varied skills, an overloaded curriculum, and varied individual needs compound the difficulties of adopting less regulated and guided play for toddlers with mood swings. When working with children via play, it is crucial to be sensitive to their emotional needs. This can only be accomplished if institutions put themselves in the position of teachers and do what it takes to fix problems that crop up so that classes can keep running smoothly.

Theoretical Framework

A friendly classroom setting is ideal for teaching students in grades 1-3 via play. According to the National Curriculum Council (2020), the ECE era begins in first through third grade. A child's natural curiosity, desire to investigate the world around them, and capacity to take on new tasks all need uninterrupted time for active learning. Adults who can relate to and encourage their interests are essential, and they are always on the lookout for group projects to participate in. There is less early-year reference to active learning research, and the material they must master is cryptic. On the other hand, a large amount of research has shown the benefits of moving away from passive learning methods like teacher exposition or lectures and toward active learning approaches that foster skill and technique development (Bonwell & Eison, 1991).

In order to guide students towards learning and complete assignments, a teacher needs professional skills. According to Hunter (2019), when a teacher creates an atmosphere where children may play, he or she is actively participating in play-based learning. That is why it is essential for educators to strategize, evaluate, and react to their students' behaviors. The importance of play for children's growth and development has been the subject of several theoretical discussions. Learning via doing, a component of play-based learning, was emphasized by educational theorist John Dewey. According to Dewey, children acquire new ideas and facts via play (Kusmaryono et al., 2022). Play, according to Jean Piaget, is a crucial component of a child's maturation. He theorized that play promotes cognitive and linguistic growth. The play-based learning environment is deeply rooted in theories of child development and socio-cultural context. Day and Pennington (1993) found a clear connection between children's spontaneous experimenting in play and the scientific inquiry process. Speech, self-awareness, cognitive processing,

and self-regulation are all supposedly enhanced during play, according to Vygotsky. While playing, a child's conduct is consistently above normal for his age; it's almost as if he's standing on tiptoe (Day & Pennington, 1993).

Teachers use the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) to guide their students as they build their knowledge and skills in a certain area (Cullen, 2001). This ZPD principle is based on play-based pedagogy, which seeks to encourage children to investigate interesting things via play. Play, according to recent research cited by Taylor and Boyer (2020), enhances children's social skills, competencies, learning inclination, and topic comprehension throughout the curriculum. The amount of time a teacher spends on it sends 'messages' about its value and worth, and it is viewed as a crucial component of high-quality early childhood education for these reasons (Sudargini & Purwanto, 2020). Cognitive development is concerned with a child's academic performance, while social development is concerned with the child's capacity to constructively collaborate with others (Mastrangelo, 2009). The instructor employs a variety of pedagogical strategies, including child-initiated, adult-led, structured, and free play. The learning aims, tasks, and anticipated answers for adult-led activities are defined for groups.

Pedagogy in play-based learning environments follows a cycle that begins with designing the setting and variety of activities and ends with additional planning after assessment, reflection, evaluation, and observation. Here, the dissemination of relevant data and expertise is of paramount importance. Establishing a conducive learning atmosphere is the primary priority. Secondly, it is crucial to design activities and establish adult roles, since activities should be fun and tailored to the level of the children. Adults play the role of guide, evaluating student needs and reflecting on their progress. Additionally, he assesses learning while keeping an eye on the big picture.

The first educational zone is one in which adults take the lead, while the second is one in which children take the lead. Engagement and educational tactics for adults and children are formed by these two zones. The term "pure play" describes unstructured, child-led play (Taylor & Boyer, 2020). The students pick their own objectives and teachers play the role of mediators or co-players. The adult in charge of a structured play zone guides the activities and embedded material in a lighthearted manner. Due to the restricted selection of youngsters, the instructor supplies these activities, which are also known as work or non-play.

The focus of this study is on play and how it might teach children social skills, namely how to work together. Children may develop social skills and learn to work through disagreements with their classmates via group play. Affective development, including the capacity for empathy and emotional expression, is also associated with play. Physical competence, motor skills, and hand-eye coordination are all aided by play (Ali et al., 2018). The results of this research will have a major impact on how educators see play-based learning. Their perspective on the value of play-based learning may also shift away from the conventional wisdom on how to best educate children. The term "play-based teaching" is used in this study to describe an approach to education in which children learn in an engaging and stress-free environment. In this model, the instructor acts as a guide and the students study alongside one another. Building on the theoretical framework, the researcher gathered data and created a tool to aid in the research process.

Objective of the Study

The objectives of this research study were:

- To investigate teachers' attitude towards play-based teaching at early childhood education (ECE) level.
- To find out practices of teachers for using play-based teaching method at ECE level.
- To assess challenges faced by ECE teachers while implementing play-based teaching method at ECE level.

Research Question

- What is the attitude of ECE teachers towards play-based teaching method?
- How do teachers plan to implement play-based teaching method at ECE level?
- How do teachers implement play-based teaching method at ECE level?
- What are teachers' practices to assess student learning while using play-based teaching method at ECE level?
- Which challenges teachers face while implementing the play-based teaching method at ECE level?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted quantitative research design and descriptive survey method to collect data from a sample of ECE teachers. The survey research method was helpful in collection of data from a large sample size

while providing a broad overview of the competencies of ECE teachers in implementing play-based teaching method. The population of this study consisted of all 3517 male and female teachers at ECE schools of Khushab District; 1752 male teachers and 1765 females were the population of the study. The sample

of the study was selected through stratified random sampling technique. It consisted of 348 ECE teachers (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970) with 182 male teachers and 166 female teachers keeping in view their proportion in the population. The data were collected from the urban, rural and semi urban areas.

Table 2
Sample of the study

	Strata's	Male teachers			Female teachers		
		Primary	Middle	Secondary	Primary	Middle	Secondary
1	Rural area teachers	39 (49.36%)	32 (51.61%)	21 (51.21%)	49 (65.33%)	42 (73.68%)	25 (73.52%)
2	Urban area teachers	33 (41.77%)	27 (43.54%)	17 (41.46%)	21 (28%)	12 (21.05%)	7 (20.58%)
3	Semi urban area teachers	7 (8.86%)	3 (4.83%)	3 (7.31%)	5 (6.66%)	3 (5.26%)	2 (5.88%)
	Total	79 (43.40%)	62 (34.06%)	41 (22.52%)	75 (45.18%)	57 (34.33%)	34 (20.48%)
			182 (100%)			166 (100%)	

Self-developed Likert scale employed for this study, consisted of five response options against each item including strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree. There were four factors in this instrument: Attitude of ECE teachers' towards play based teaching method, planning for play-based teaching method, implementation of play-based teaching method, and assessment of student learning while implementing play-based teaching method. A checklist based item was added in the instrument to determine the familiarity and use of various types of play by ECE teachers in their classes. Ediyanto and Kawai

(2023) used a survey method to measure the attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education. A pilot study was conducted and its results were used to ensure the reliability of the research items. For this purpose, 40 (11.49%) respondents were given the questionnaires and data were obtained. The respondents of pilot study were excluded from the actual study. As actual sample of the study was 348 respondents, according to Connelly (2008), a pilot study sample can be 10% of the actual sample. Using the SPSS software, Cronbach's alpha coefficient reliability was calculated.

Table 3
Cronbach alpha reliability of Scale on play-based teaching method

Scales	a
Awareness and use of play-based teaching method	.767
Attitude of ECE teachers' towards play based teaching method	.788
Planning for play-based teaching method	.707
Implementation of play-based teaching method	.878
Assessment of students' learning while implementing play-based teaching method	.757
Play-based teaching method (overall scale)	.921

Table 3 depicts the reliability of the instruments with the help of Cronbach's alpha value. All of the reliability values of subscales are above .7 which shows that the instrument is reliable for the selected sample to get the desired results. The data were collected through

personal visits. In total, 348 questionnaires were distributed among the respondents and the response rate was 100%. The analysis includes descriptive statistics with frequencies, percentages, mean, and standard deviation.

RESULTS & FINDINGS

Table 4

Awareness about and use of various types of play by ECE teachers

Play Type	Number of teachers aware of play types(A)			Number of teachers used play types (B)	
	N	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Dramatic play	348	280	80.5%	68	19.5%
Fantasy play	348	290	83.3%	58	16.7%
Exploratory play	348	34	9.8%	314	90.2%
Manipulative play	348	54	15.5%	294	84.5%
Small world play	348	37	10.6%	311	89.4%
Game with rules includes letter, counting, sound, shape and color etc.	348	50	14.4%	298	85.6%
Physical plays	348	266	76.4%	82	23.6%
Digital plays	348	278	79.9%	70	20.1%
Symbolic plays	348	273	78.4%	75	21.6%
Rough and Tumble play	348	285	81.9%	63	18.1%
Social play	348	28	8.0%	320	92.0%
Communication play	348	33	9.5%	315	90.5%
Deep play	348	41	11.8%	307	88.2%
Creative play	348	276	79.3%	72	20.7%
Locomotors play	348	278	79.9%	70	20.1%
Mastery play	348	281	80.7%	67	19.3%
Recapitulative play	348	283	81.3%	65	18.7%
Object play	348	39	11.2%	309	88.8%

Table 4 shows the play types which ECE teachers are aware of and use practically in classrooms. The highest percentage of social play, communication play and exploratory (92%, 90.5% and 90.2% respectively) shows that teachers used these types in the classroom for better learning of students. Then object play, small world play, deep play and games with rules including letters, counting, sound, shape and colour etc. have percentages of 88.8, 89.4, 88.2 and 85.6 respectively. This shows that ECE teachers used different play types to engage students in the learning process.

Approximately, more than 75% of the teachers are familiar with the dramatic play, fantasy play, digital play, physical play, symbolic, rough and tumble play, creative, locomotors, mastery and recapitulative plays. Most of the teachers are familiar with the unique play-based method like Creative, locomotors, mastery, recapitulative, physical, digital, symbolic and rough and tumble play but these types are rarely applied in the classroom. More than 80% of the teacher used the exploratory, manipulative, small world, games, social, communication and deep plays in the ECE classrooms.

Table 5

Mean and standard deviation of the factors

Factors	N	Mean	SD
1	348	4.07	.379
2	348	3.96	.396
3	348	4.04	.409
4	348	4.00	.437

1: Attitude towards play based teaching method

2: Planning for play based teaching method

3: Implementation of play-based teaching method

4: Assessment of students' learning while implementing play-based teaching method

Table 5 presents the mean and standard deviation of ECE teachers' responses regarding various aspects of play-based teaching method. Teachers had the most favourable attitude towards play-based teaching (mean= 4.0708; SD = .379). Planning for play-based teaching followed closely with a mean of 3.96 and a standard deviation of .396. The implementation of play-

based teaching method also received a high mean score of 4.04 and a standard deviation of .409. Assessment of student learning during play-based teaching secured a high mean score (M = 4.0014; SD = .437). Overall, the high mean scores across all factors showed a general positive attitude and implementation of play-based teaching.

Table 6

Descriptive statistics of responses of male and female ECE teachers on play-based teaching method

Factors	Male			Female		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
1	182	4.09	.36	166	4.05	.39
2	182	3.98	.38	166	3.94	.41
3	182	4.02	.43	166	4.05	.39
4	182	3.98	.48	166	4.02	.38

1: Attitude towards play based teaching method

2: Planning for play based teaching method

3: Implementation of play-based teaching method

4: Assessment of students' learning while implementing play-based teaching method

Table 6 presents the mean and standard deviation of ECE teachers' responses on play-based teaching methods with respect to gender. The highest mean score was reported by male teachers for their attitude towards play-based teaching (M = 4.09, SD = .36), indicating a slightly more favourable perspective as compared to female teachers (M = 4.05, SD = .39). The lowest mean score was observed for male teachers on planning for play-based learning (M= 3.98, SD= .38)

and assessment of student learning (M = 3.98, SD = .48), while female teachers had a slightly higher mean on assessment of student learning (M = 4.02, SD = .38). For the implementation of play-based teaching, both genders showed minimal differences; male teachers had a mean of 4.02 (SD = .43) and female teachers reported mean score 4.05 (SD = .39). Overall, both male and female teachers demonstrated similar, positive attitudes and practices toward play-based teaching.

Table 7

Gender wise comparison of responses of ECE teachers on play-based teaching method

Factors	Female	Male	Mann- Whitney U Test	Sig value
	Mean Rank	Mean Rank		
1	174.38	174.61	15085.500	.979
2	172.48	176.35	14770.000	.628
3	180.30	169.21	14143.000	.214
4	179.40	170.03	14292.500	.287

- 1: Attitude towards play based teaching method
- 2: Planning for play based teaching method
- 3: Implementation of play-based teaching method
- 4: Assessment of students' learning while implementing play-based teaching method

Table 7 shows no statistically significant gender differences in ECE teachers' responses to play-based teaching methods across all factors. The highest mean rank for females was in the implementation of play-based teaching method (180.30), while the lowest was in planning (172.48). Similarly, males had their highest mean rank in planning (176.35) and their lowest in

implementation (169.21). However, p-value for all the factors i.e., attitude (p=.979), planning (p=.628), implementation (p=.214), and assessment (p=.287) are above the .05 level of significant, indicating no statistically significant gender wise differences on all factors.

Table 8

Mean and Standard deviation of ECE teachers' responses on play-based teaching method with respect to age

Factors	26-30 years			31-35 years			36-40 years			40+ years		
	N	Mean	S.D	N	Mean	S.D	N	Mean	S.D	N	Mean	S.D
1	23	3.77	.46	64	4.00	.42	232	4.11	.34	29	4.13	.41
2	23	3.85	.57	64	3.98	.49	232	3.96	.36	29	4.13	4.03
3	23	3.92	.519	64	3.99	.49	232	4.05	.38	29	4.13	4.05
4	23	3.84	.59	64	3.92	.58	232	4.04	.38	29	4.13	3.97

- 1: Attitude towards play based teaching method
- 2: Planning for play based teaching method
- 3: Implementation of play-based teaching method
- 4: Assessment of students' learning while implementing play-based teaching method

Table 8 presents the mean and standard deviation of ECE teachers' responses on play-based teaching method with respect to different age groups of teachers. The highest mean score was observed among teachers over 40 years old for both attitude towards play-based teaching (M = 4.13, SD = .41) and planning for play-based teaching (M = 4.13, SD = .403). In contrast, the

lowest mean score was reported by teachers in the 26-30 age group, particularly in their attitude towards play-based teaching (M = 3.77, SD = .46) and planning for play-based teaching (M = 3.85, SD = .57). It suggests that older teachers had more favourable attitude and use of play-based teaching method as compared to younger teachers.

Table 9

Comparison of ECE teachers’ responses on play-based teaching method with respect to their age group

Factors	26-30 years	31-35 years	36-40 years	40+ years	Chi-Square	df	Sig value
	Mean Rank	Mean Rank	Mean Rank	Mean Rank			
1	76.02	149.62	187.92	200.19	48.179	3	.000
2	139.00	180.33	175.26	183.69	6.081	3	.108
3	159.65	162.43	179.24	174.98	2.833	3	.418
4	134.52,	155.77	185.12	162.57	13.329	3	0.004

- 1: Attitude towards play based teaching method
- 2: Planning for play based teaching method
- 3: Implementation of play-based teaching method
- 4: Assessment of students’ learning while implementing play-based teaching method

Table 9 shows a comparison of ECE teachers’ responses to play-based teaching method based on age groups, using Chi-Square tests. For attitudes toward play-based teaching, significant differences are found ($\chi^2 = 48.179, p < .05$). Teachers over 40 years of age (M = 200.19) have the most positive attitudes, followed by those aged 36-40 years (M = 187.92). In contrast, teachers aged 26-30 years (M = 76.02) exhibit the least positive attitudes. In planning for play-based teaching, no significant differences are observed ($\chi^2 = 6.081, p =$

.108). For implementation of play-based teaching, no significant differences are evident ($\chi^2 = 2.833, p = .418$), indicating comparable effectiveness in implementation across different age groups. On student assessment in play-based teaching, significant difference was noted ($\chi^2 = 13.329, p = .004$). Teachers with over 40 years (M = 4.13) show the highest mean score on assessment, while those aged 26-30 years (M = 3.84) show lowest mean score.

Table 10

Mean and standard deviation of ECE teachers’ responses on play-based teaching method with respect to experience

Factors	1- year			1-5 year			6-10 year		
	N	Mean	S.D	N	Mean	S.D	N	Mean	S.D
1	8	3.79	.23	15	3.76	.46	16	3.82	.55
2	8	3.95	.47	15	3.85	.71	16	3.93	.60
3	8	4.00	.35	15	3.98	.61	16	3.91	.55
4	8	3.85	.43	15	4.08	.77	16	3.97	.52
Factors	11-15 years			16-20 years			20+ years		
	N	Mean	S.D	N	Mean	S.D	N	Mean	S.D
1	42	3.79	.61	249	4.15	.24	18	4.15	.45
2	42	3.75	.74	249	3.99	.22	18	4.17	.36
3	42	3.69	.64	249	4.10	.29	18	4.12	.37
4	42	3.69	.63	249	4.06	.32	18	3.83	.52

- 1: Attitude towards play based teaching method
- 2: Planning for play based teaching method
- 3: Implementation of play-based teaching method
- 4: Assessment of students’ learning while implementing play-based teaching method

Table 10 displays the mean and standard deviation of ECE teachers’ responses on play-based teaching methods based on their years of experience. The highest mean score was observed among teachers with 25 or more years of experience for their attitude

towards play-based teaching (M = 4.15, SD = .45) and planning for play-based teaching (M = 4.17, SD = .36). In contrast, the lowest mean score was reported by teachers with 1-5 years of experience for their attitude towards play-based teaching (M = 3.77, SD = .46) and

implementation of play-based teaching (M = 3.70, SD = .65). This suggests that teachers with more experience generally have a more favourable perspective towards

play-based teaching methods compared to those with less experience.

Table 11

Comparison of ECE teachers' responses on play-based teaching method with respect to experience

Factors	1- year	1-5 year	6-10 year	11-15 years	16-20 years	20+ years	Chi-Square	df	Sig value
	Mean Rank	Mean Rank	Mean Rank	Mean Rank	Mean Rank	Mean Rank			
1	50.63	78.27	131.50	114.21	195.93	192.19	83.961	5	.000
2	127.13	156.13	168.13	149.70	178.37	220.83	16.556	5	.005
3	174.25	164.57	155.81	94.90	189.08	183.58	47.310	5	.000
4	117.88	217.87	157.16	96.95	190.59	137.31	59.660	5	.000

1: Attitude towards play based teaching method

2: Planning for play based teaching method

3: Implementation of play-based teaching method

4: Assessment of students' learning while implementing play-based teaching method

Table 11 showed a comparison of ECE teachers' responses to play-based teaching method based on their years of experience. For attitudes toward play-based teaching, significant differences are observed ($\chi^2 = 83.961, p < .05$). Teachers with 16-20 years (M = 195.93) and 25 or more years of experience (M = 192.19) exhibit the most positive attitudes, while those with less than 1 year of experience (M = 50.63) show the least positive attitudes. In the planning for play-based teaching, significant differences are noted ($\chi^2(5) = 16.556, p = .005$). Teachers with 25 or more years of experience (M = 220.83) excel in planning, followed by those with 6-10 years (M = 168.13) and 1-5 years (M = 156.13). Teachers with 11-15 years of experience (M =

149.70) and 16-20 years (M = 178.37) have lower mean ranks.

For implementation of play-based teaching, significant differences are found ($\chi^2(5) = 47.310, p < .001$). Teachers with 16-20 years of experience (M = 189.08) and 25 or more years (M = 183.58) show higher effectiveness in implementation, whereas those with 11-15 years of experience (M = 94.90) have the lowest mean rank. In assessment practices, significant differences are evident ($\chi^2(5) = 59.660, p < .001$). Teachers with 1-5 years of experience (M = 217.87) and 16-20 years (M = 190.59) perform best in assessment, while those with 11-15 years of experience (M = 96.95) have the lowest mean rank.

Table 12

Mean and standard deviation of ECE teachers' responses on play-based teaching method with respect to qualification

Factors	N	B.A/ B.sc		BS/M.A/M.SC			M.Phil			Ph.D		
		Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
1	2	4.0714	.10102	39	3.7985	.52049	281	4.1002	.34704	26	4.1621	.32170
2	2	4.5000	.70711	39	3.8000	.60871	281	3.9665	.34829	26	4.1615	.35336
3	2	4.1176	.16638	39	3.8205	.59178	281	4.0643	.37757	26	4.0769	.32889
4	2	4.4375	.26517	39	3.8109	.66446	281	4.0129	.40297	26	4.1298	.25856

1: Attitude towards play based teaching method

2: Planning for play based teaching method

3: Implementation of play-based teaching method

4: Assessment of students' learning while implementing play-based teaching method

Table 12 presents the mean and standard deviation of ECE teachers' responses on play-based teaching methods based on their qualifications. Teachers with a Ph.D. reported the highest mean scores across all

factors, particularly in their attitude towards play-based teaching (M = 4.16, SD = .32) and the planning of play-based methods (M = 4.16, SD = .35), indicating a strong endorsement of this approach. In contrast,

teachers with a BS/M.A./M.Sc. qualification showed the lowest mean scores, especially in attitude towards play-based teaching (M = 3.80, SD = .52) and assessment of students' learning (M = 3.81, SD = .66). This suggests

that more highly qualified teachers tend to have more positive views on the use of play-based teaching methods compared to those with lower qualifications.

Table 13

Comparison of ECE teachers' responses on play-based teaching method with respect to qualification

Factors	B.A/ B.sc	BS/M.A/M.Sc	M.Phil	Ph.D	Chi-Square	df	Sig value
	Mean Rank	Mean Rank	Mean Rank	Mean Rank			
1	85.50	103.01	183.81	188.29	36.674	3	.000
2	261.25	145.18	173.82	219.17	18.129	3	.000
3	199.25	134.12	181.39	158.67	12.233	3	.007
4	333.50	140.74	176.23	194.23	15.780	3	.001

- 1: Attitude towards play based teaching method
- 2: Planning for play based teaching method
- 3: Implementation of play-based teaching method
- 4: Assessment of students' learning while implementing play-based teaching method

Table 13 compares ECE teachers' responses to play-based teaching method based on their qualifications (B.A/B.Sc, B.S/M.A/M.Sc, M.Phil, Ph.D), using Chi-Square tests. For attitudes toward play-based teaching, significant differences are noted ($\chi^2(3) = 36.674, p < .001$). Teachers with Ph.D. qualifications (M = 188.29) and M.Phil. Degrees (M = 183.81) show the highest positive attitudes, whereas those with B.A/B.Sc (M = 85.50) and B.S/M.A/M.Sc (M = 103.01) have notably lower attitudes. In planning for play-based teaching, significant differences are observed ($\chi^2(3) = 18.129, p < .001$). Teachers with B.A/B.Sc qualifications (M = 261.25) had the highest mean score in planning, followed by

Ph.D. (M = 219.17), M.Phil. (M = 173.82), and B.S/M.A/M.Sc (M = 145.18). For implementation of play-based teaching, significant differences are evident ($\chi^2(3) = 12.233, p = .007$). Teachers with B.A/B.Sc (M = 199.25) and M.Phil. degrees (M = 181.39) showed higher mean ranks for implementation, while those with Ph.D. (M = 158.67) and B.S/M.A/M.Sc (M = 134.12) were lower. For the assessment practices, significant differences were found ($\chi^2(3) = 15.780, p = .001$). Teachers with B.A/B.Sc qualifications (M = 333.50) had the highest mean rank in assessment as compared to M.Phil. (M = 176.23), Ph.D. (M = 194.23), and B.S/M.A/M.Sc (M = 140.74).

Table 14

Mean and standard deviation of ECE teachers' responses on play-based teaching method with respect to locality

Factors	Urban			Rural			Semi urban		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
1	117	4.1142	.31333	208	4.0752	.36138	23	3.8106	.66611
2	117	4.0120	.37443	208	3.9346	.33298	23	4.0087	.81459
3	117	4.0860	.34130	208	4.0501	.36947	23	3.6880	.77338
4	117	4.0288	.43623	208	4.0168	.36965	23	3.7228	.79679

- 1: Attitude towards play based teaching method
- 2: Planning for play based teaching method
- 3: Implementation of play-based teaching method
- 4: Assessment of students' learning while implementing play-based teaching method

Table 14 presents the mean score and standard deviation of ECE teachers' responses on play-based teaching methods based on their locality. Urban teachers consistently reported the highest mean score across all factors, particularly in their attitude towards play-based teaching (M = 4.11, SD = .31) and

implementation of the method (M = 4.09, SD = .34), indicating stronger support for play-based teaching. In contrast, semi-urban teachers exhibited the lowest mean scores, particularly in attitude towards play-based teaching (M = 3.81, SD = .67) and implementation (M = 3.69, SD = .77), suggesting a more reserved or less

favourable stance. Rural teachers were placed between other two groups of ECE teachers, with moderate mean scores across all factors, reflecting a generally positive

but less enthusiastic perspective compared to urban teachers.

Table 15

Comparison of ECE teachers' responses on play-based teaching method with respect to locality

Factors	Urban	Rural	Semi urban	Chi-Square	df	Sig value
	Mean Rank	Mean Rank	Mean Rank			
1	179.93	177.51	119.65	11.096	2	.004
2	159.75	166.39	221.17	12.078	2	.002
3	179.54	180.87	91.24	24.679	2	.000
4	179.92	177.43	120.48	10.773	2	.005

1: Attitude towards play based teaching method

2: Planning for play based teaching method

3: Implementation of play-based teaching method

4: Assessment of students' learning while implementing play-based teaching method

Table 15 compares ECE teachers' responses to play-based teaching method based on locality (urban, rural, semi-urban), using Chi-Square tests. For attitudes toward play-based teaching, there is a significant difference across localities ($\chi^2(2) = 11.096, p = .004$). Urban (M = 179.93) and rural teachers (M = 177.51) exhibit similar, more positive attitudes, while semi-urban teachers (M = 119.65) show significantly lower attitudes. In planning for play-based teaching, a significant difference is observed ($\chi^2(2) = 12.078, p = .002$), with semi-urban teachers (M = 221.17) having the highest mean rank, indicating stronger planning

efforts compared to urban (M = 159.75) and rural teachers (M = 166.39). For the implementation of play-based teaching, there is a notable difference ($\chi^2(2) = 24.679, p < .001$), with urban (M = 179.54) and rural teachers (M = 180.87) being more effective, while semi-urban teachers (M = 91.24) face significant challenges in implementation. Finally, in assessment practices, a significant difference exists ($\chi^2(2) = 10.773, p = .005$), where urban (M = 179.92) and rural teachers (M = 177.43) demonstrate more robust assessment practices, while semi-urban teachers (M = 120.48) are less effective in assessment.

Table 16

Other challenge (s) teachers face In ECE class

No	Challenges	N	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Face difficulty	348	39	11.2%
2	Individual differences	348	21	6.0%
3	Language problem	348	29	8.3%
4	Facing challenges to develop moral values	348	23	6.6%
5	Difficulty maintaining discipline	348	44	12.6%
6	Non-cooperative behaviour	348	38	10.9%
7	Problems of controlling the students	348	51	14.7%
8	Students fall sometime in injury during play activities	348	39	11.2%
9	ECE environment should be safe	348	22	6.3%
10	To maintain the interest level of the students	348	25	7.1%
11	Lack of resources, AV aids	348	17	4.9%

Table 16 depicts the challenges faced by the teachers in ECE teachers. The percentage score 11.2% shows that the teachers faced difficulty during teaching through

play-based teaching method whereas 14.7% teachers faced challenge to control the students in ECE class while teaching with play-based method. A number of

(12.6%) teachers highlighted that they faced problems in disciplining the students in ECE class. Teachers also highlighted other problems like individual differences (6.0%), language problems (8.3%), developing moral values among students (6.6%), non-cooperative behaviour (10.9%), and students injury situations during play based activities (11.2%), ECE environment should be safe (6.3%), maintain the interest level of students (7.1%), and lack of resources (4.9%).

Discussion

During childhood, play is a crucial means of learning; it helps children build strong social and emotional foundations, strong cognitive capacities, and healthy physical and mental bodies, all of which are necessary for success in later years. This research set out to investigate the perspectives of ECE educators on the efficacy of play-based learning. Teachers believed that play-based teaching was more enjoyable than other methods, because it helped students become more engaged, made them feel more comfortable sharing important information, led to better learning outcomes, and the development of critical thinking skills. In addition to helping ECE kids grow physically, it improves their social skills and knowledge. Additionally, the research found that there are a number of challenges that instructors at the ECE level have when implementing play-based learning. Consistent with previous research, this study found the same results as Bubikova-Moan et al., (2019). Finding out how ECE professionals all around the globe feel about PBL was the main goal of the research. A meta-analysis of 62 research from 24 countries shows that people's views on the degree to which play and learning are conceptually compatible is diverse. People in PBL might play more than one role, but they are not always clear about when and how they should pitch in. Lastly, practitioners talk about many challenges they have had with PBL implementation, the most common of which was the pressure from policies and curriculum.

This study reported the challenges faced by the ECE teachers in Khushab, namely play-based teaching activities keeping in view the students' interests, their individual characteristics, and time constraints. Fesseha and Pyle (2016) conducted a secondary research to explore how kindergarten teachers in Ontario conceptualized and applied play-based learning (PBL). Results showed that participants' understanding and implementation of play-based learning in kindergarten classes varied. Despite universal support for PBL, more than half of the participants voiced concerns about kindergarten curricula in Ontario that did not

fully include PBL. They reported about the troubles faced by them in play-based teaching. The research was somewhat comparable to what Theobald et al., (2015) found. The focus of this study was how children conceptualize play, and the relationship between play and learning. Australian teacher-researchers investigated how students saw play in the context of their daily classroom activities in a paper. This paper stressed the interconnected nature of play and learning, two complex concepts that are often confused for being separate.

CONCLUSION

It was concluded that teachers considered play-based teaching engaging for learners. They hold the view that play-based teaching was more effective than other teaching methods due to various reasons including its ability to captivate children, boost teachers' self-esteem, facilitate learning, foster critical thinking, enhance enjoyment, and advance students' social, cognitive, and physical development. Play-based activities were guided by the teachers. Preparing lessons that involved play activities, was time-consuming. Teachers faced problems in the planning of play-based lessons due to change in the mood of the children. In adult-directed play, students participate in activities designed to develop their motor skills, social skills (by role-playing and group work), and morals. Empowering children through play can help them to develop their social, emotional, and cognitive capacities. Instructors address student challenges as they play.

Educators face a number of difficulties while implementing play-based learning, according to the results of this research study. Due to a lack of resources, heavy curricula, overcrowded classrooms, and students' diverse needs, teachers find it challenging to adopt play-based teaching in their class. Managing early childhood education (ECE) students through play can be challenging for a number of reasons including discipline, dealing with students' unique qualities, language barriers, students' lack of cooperation, potential harm from play, insufficient resources, and students' lack of interest.

Recommendations

The study recommends that schools provide instructors the necessary tools and support to adopt play-based teaching in their classes. It would greatly benefit the majority of students at early childhood education level, increasing their engagement and academic performance within the school time. Teachers faced difficulty in the assessment of student learning in

play-based activities. Therefore, training workshops and professional development opportunities for teachers may be arranged through online and face-to-face mode by teacher education institutes and school principals so that they can effectively assess student learning in play-based activities. Teachers faced challenges in free-play activities to execute it within class time. Therefore, necessary support, guidance and supervision from the head teachers, senior teachers/mentors and experts in this field may be provided to ECE teachers to manage their class time while adopting play-based teaching for their class.

Competing Interest

The authors had no competing interests.

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