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Role of Teachers in Developing Meta-cognition Skills in Early Childhood Education Learners: A Survey

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ABSTRACT

Early Childhood Education is a combination of moral, intellectual and social lessons for physical, mental, social, emotional and linguistic growth and development of early childhood age children. The success and failure of a preschool depends on the teacher who is the backbone of the preprimary school. It needs special training of the teachers, as if they are competent enough to deal with the children of this age, understand their needs and teach them according to their own abilities and capabilities. The current study was designed to investigate the role of teachers in developing meta-cognition skills in early childhood education. The objectives of the study were to understand the concept of early childhood Education and to recommend different instructional strategies to make effective ECE possible. The research was carried out in educational institutions of Bahawalpur-Pakistan. A questionnaire for the early childhood educators was administered. The ordinal scale was used for the responses and Microsoft excel program was used for the statistical analysis of the data. This study has been carried out with the viewpoint to know the current situation of early childhood education, the role played by teachers and to find out the strategies necessary to be carried by them. This study reveals that there is a

lack of guidance for the teachers. They need to be trained and given practice of some effective instructional strategies. This study has thrown light on different instructional strategies which can be used for teaching language, mathematics, science, social studies, religious education and creativity. The researchers' conclusion with suggestions and recommendations was also summed up at the end of the study.

Key Words: Investigating, Developing, Role, Teachers, Meta-cognition Skills.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Early child hood education (ECE) in Pakistan has been neglected both by the government and the organizations involved in providing education since 1947.In recent years, some efforts have been done to provide early child hood education in private and non-governmental organizations, but the situation in government sector is pathetic. Early Childhood Education is a combination of moral, intellectual and social lessons for physical, mental, social, emotional and linguistic growth and development of early childhood age children. The government of Pakistan, as well as, the government of Bahawalpur, in their plans, has given third priority to early child hood education. ECE has existed in Pakistan since the 1970s in formal primary schools. Officially the practice suffered discontinuation in the 1980s. However even then, the quality of teaching in katchi was debatable. "Children were taught in a traditional way with the teacher standing at a blackboard directing the children. Rote memorization was encouraged. Overall, young children had a poor start in education which was a concern for most people. In the private sector, there were early childhood provisions which mainly used Montessori approaches catering only to the needs of the elite and the upper-middle class of the society" (Juma, 2004).

In public schools, the qualification required for teaching in *katchi* class is the same as that for primary school i.e., higher secondary education certificate plus one-year teaching certificate. The Districts usually adopt the same criteria except where suitable staff is not available and relaxation of criteria is exercised. Private work in ECE is however comparatively hopeful in Sindh with reference to the achievements of the public sector. In Sindh, the Agha Khan Education Service, Pakistan has been implementing the "Improving Pre-Primary and Primary in Sindh (IPPS)" in community-based rural schools since 1995; the Aga Khan Foundation has additionally launched the "Releasing Confidence and Creativity" program in a 100 schools in Sindh with the collaboration of the Sindh Education Foundation and other NGOs. Furthermore, the Teachers' Resource Centre (TRC) is implementing the Early Childhood

December, 2022
Volume: 7, No: 2, pp.52-70
ISSN: 2059-6588(Print) | ISSN 2059-6596(Online)

Education Program (ECEP) in Karachi government and district municipal schools since 1998. TRC has additionally developed the national curriculum for pre-primary education. Several NGOs have developed teaching- learning materials for ECE. These include Children's Resource International (CRI); the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF); the Teachers' Resource Centre (TRC) and the College of Home Economics, Lahore. Various kinds of teaching and learning aids such as blocks, charts, posters, handbooks, flashcards, teachers' guides; planners; teachers‟ kits; etc. have been developed by several organizations. "Early childhood is a highly sensitive period marked by rapid transformations in physical, cognitive and social and emotional development…(because) it is a time of remarkable brain development that lays the foundation for later learning…(and) it is more cost effective to institute preventive measures and support for children early on to compensate for disadvantage as they grow older."

Pakistani government has given funding to the provincial governments. Bahawalpur government has also invested in ECE out of its own budget in its Provincial Plan of Action in 2003. The focus is on providing ECE by means of material resources, but the human resources also count a lot. Especially, the role of teacher in ECE is very much important and it is being neglected. The success or failure of a preschool depends on the teacher who is the backbone of the preprimary school. It needs special training of teachers, as if they are competent enough to deal with the children of this age, understand their needs and teach them according to their own abilities and capabilities. Maturation orientation works employing principles of growth and development and Constructivist orientation works keeping cognitive structure of teachers in concern. Either early childhood educators do not know the theories and their implication in education or the concerned authorities do not bother it.

1.2 **Statement of the Problem**

Ministry of Education (2006) has provided a list of objectives of early childhood education, i.e. to develop child potential to learn and grow, to provide an appropriate environment ensuring safety, to use play way method and concrete experience in teaching and learning, to prepare a child for formal schooling and to develop awareness of basic cultural values and norms. The statement of the problem was; "Role of Teachers in Developing Meta-cognition Skills in Early Childhood Education".

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the current study were:

1. To understand the concept of developing meta-cognition skills in early childhood education.

December, 2022
Volume: 7, No: 2, pp.52-70
ISSN: 2059-6588(Print) | ISSN 2059-6596(Online)

2. To have insight into different approaches to instructional strategies in early childhood education.

3. To understand the problems related to instructional strategies faced by the early childhood educators.

4. To understand the current instructional strategies being practiced at early childhood education level.

5. To recommend different instructional strategies to make effective early childhood possible.

1.4 Research Questions of the Study

RQ1. How to develop meta-cognition skills in early childhood education learners?

RQ2. How to tackle the problems related to instructional strategies faced by the early childhood educators?

RQ3. How to understand the current instructional strategies being practiced at early childhood education level?

RQ4. What different instructional strategies should be recommended to make ECE effective possibly?

1.5 Significance of the Study

It was hoped that the study would be helpful in the following;

1. Making teachers committed to improve early childhood education. They can ensure it by providing child centered activities and by focusing on the child needs i.e., social, moral, intellectual and emotional.
2. Widening the concepts of early childhood educators by providing different techniques adopted or suggested by the educationists.
3. Enabling the teachers to foster development of 4H's (hand, heart, head and health) and nurture the teachers' natural potentialities.
4. Preparing teachers to provide a stimulating and joyful environment including healthy atmosphere, exposure to books, pictures, magazines, opportunities for playing, observing, exploring, experimenting and problem solving etc.

December, 2022
Volume: 7, No: 2, pp.52-70
ISSN: 2059-6588(Print) | ISSN 2059-6596(Online)

LITERATURE REVIEW

Early Childhood and its Importance

Early Childhood age is an age, which is denoted differently by different educationists, psychologists, scholars and scientists. To some, it consists of the age three to six (Sahu &Wikipedia) and to some, it spans the human life from birth to age eight (NAEYC). Whatever the duration it may be, but the majority of the researchers is of the view that early years of a child's life are very important. As these are the years, in which the growth of all aspects of one's personality is shaped, i.e. physical, mental, emotional, social, linguistic, analytical and creative.

Base for physical development is made during this life span. Whatever the atmosphere is provided to the child regarding religion, the child addicts to that. According to Sahu, over eighty percent of the human personality, including its attitude & aptitude is shaped before the age of six. Bloom states that fifty percent of the intelligence measured at age 17, is achieved by age four.

Developmental Domains during this Age

There are 5 mainly different developmental domains of children which all relate to each other. They are easily referred to as the **SPICE** of life:

Social - Refers mostly to the ability to form attachments, play with others, co- operation and sharing, and being able to create lasting relationships with others.

Physical - Development of Fine (small) and Gross (large) Motor Skills.

Intellectual - The process of making sense of the world around them.

Creative - The development of special abilities creating talents. Music, Art, Writing, Reading, and Singing are all ways for creative development to take place.

Emotional - Development of self-awareness, self-confidence, and coping with feelings as well as understanding them.

Watson and Wilson (2003) argue that five major skill areas in human development are 1) Physical, 2) Emotional, 3) Social, 4) Cognitive and 5) Developmental learning skills (p.23). It means that the teachers need to be aware of these areas and their characteristics for the better results of their teaching.

Early Childhood Education

The term Early Childhood Education refers to the group setting for the children between the ages of three to six years old. These settings, according to AIOU (2002), are designed to provide care, supervision and education for them outside of their homes.

December, 2022
Volume: 7, No: 2, pp.52-70
ISSN: 2059-6588(Print) | ISSN 2059-6596(Online)

Objectives of Early Childhood Education

Ministry of Education, Pakistan (2006) has provided a list of objectives of early childhood education, i.e.

To develop child potential to learn and grow

To provide an appropriate environment ensuring safety

To use play way method and concrete experience in teaching and learning

To prepare a child for formal schooling

To develop awareness of basic cultural values and norms

Characteristics of Early Childhood Age Children

Here we try to describe briefly about the characteristics of the children of early age, so that it may be easy for the teachers to develop and prepare instructional strategies for them.

Physical and Motor Development

The gross motor skills of the children improve increasingly and are helpful for fine motor skills, i.e. there is coordination between what the children want to do and what he is able to do.

The role of early childhood educators is to encourage each child's development by accepting their prior experiences. Early childhood educators need to observe constantly the children's growth patterns and development of the motor skills in them. The educators need to consider and give value to the positive aspects of the development of the children, i.e. what the children can do, instead of what the children cannot do. The role of the teacher is very important for this kind of development, as, he can help the child to adopt the skills, which he wants to gain. Individual differences among the children regarding this phase need to be kept in mind by the educators. For better physical and motor development of the children, the educators need to employ different kinds of plays.

Cognitive Development

According to Piaget's description, the children during the age level of 2 to 6 are pre- operational. Many scholars accept one of the approaches proposed by him, Social Constructivism which emphasizes the active role of the children in constructing their own understanding. Activity in this sense also refers to mental activity.

According to Vygotsky, the role of the adults in cognitive development of the children is much more important rather the activities of the children chosen by themselves. Early childhood

December, 2022
Volume: 7, No: 2, pp.52-70
ISSN: 2059-6588(Print) | ISSN 2059-6596(Online)

educators are in a very strong position to lead children's learning. Educators can give chance to the children to learn what they may not be able to learn by themselves.

Psychosocial and Emotional Development

During these years, the children's interactions within themselves and with the elders, as well as teachers take on new dimensions. Much of the play is decided through interaction and negotiation. They need to have solitary as well as cooperative play. Many families and early childhood educators emphasize the provision of playing opportunities for social and emotional development of the children. They should be given open ended experiences, choices at mealtimes and flexibility in indoor / outdoor experiences (Arthur et al., 1998). With the interaction with others, children develop a self-concept as well. The task of adults according to Arthur &others is to make them feel good about themselves, no matter what the circumstances are.

Educators need to be aware of the development of the concepts in the children. Individual differences and diversity should be positively handled. Preschoolers are moving from what Erikson terms „autonomy vs. shame" into the „initiative vs. guilt" stage. So, the educators need to encourage the initiative both verbally and through the environment provided to them. Using indoor and outdoor activities can better bring social development of the children, as the children experience different problems and find out solution by their own experience.

Language Development

The children at this stage not only explore but also refine their understanding of the meaning of the language words. The development of language arts occupies almost the entire school day; in reality language is taught from the time the first the child enters the class room in the morning until the last child goes home. The teacher teaches both directly, through activities and experiences and indirectly through her own speech, language and behavior. (Preface, Mathew, 2005). Tough, (1976), has given the aims of the language used by early childhood children:

Self-maintaining language, i.e. my truck, my doll.

Directing language, i.e. give me water, let us play.

Reporting language, i.e. my mum is making new dress for me, my doll is wearing red suit.

Reasoning language, i.e. Farah fell down because she is learning to walk.

Moral Development

Much of the understanding of moral values during this age level is based on the notion of fairness. Meaning that what is considered to be fair and good is morally acceptable. Through

December, 2022
Volume: 7, No: 2, pp.52-70
ISSN: 2059-6588(Print) | ISSN 2059-6596(Online)

interactions, children develop the ideas of what is expected in the society. Negotiation not only enhances children's ability to solve problems but also encourages them to adopt the perspectives of others. Educators must provide the models of pro-social behavior. They should facilitate different types of social interactions within play. The fears of the children should be given proper time to be handled.

Role of Teacher in Early Childhood

The role of the teacher in Early Childhood Education is significant, as he has the responsibility to make the children ready for schooling and also providing base for the child's complete development. Froebel compared the child to a seed and likened the teachers or caregivers to gardeners. The teachers have two functions according to Harlen, i.e.

- Encouraging the child's curiosity.
- Provide real learning activities.

The teacher's role is better played if she keeps the following characteristics:

- Provide nice learning environment.
- Plan and set up that environment.
- Always notice and value the child.
- Give plenty of positive reinforcement.
- Give opportunities to all the teachers.
- Use new technology.
- Be gentle and loving (Rao, 1997).

Problems Faced by Early Childhood Educators in Applying Instructional Strategies

According to Ministry of education, Pakistan 2003, Shahida Mohiuddin, Hunzai, 2006, Juma, 2004, there are many problems faced by the early childhood educators:

- Lack of proper training both in the public and private sectors.
- Lack of resources, i.e. teaching kit, balls, blocks etc.
- Big size of the class
- Lack of interest of teachers
- Lack of proper classroom
- Lack of cooperation of the society
- Lack of government support in terms of financial allocation
- Wastage of 2-5 years age of the children
- Lack of an agreed amount of social values
- Domestic problems
- Contradictory situation at home and school
- Lack of commitment of teachers

December, 2022
Volume: 7, No: 2, pp.52-70
ISSN: 2059-6588(Print) | ISSN 2059-6596(Online)

- Lack of exemplary personality traits among teachers
- Use of rod
- Lack of command over language by teachers
- No laboratory

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study was analysis of the early childhood education in government and private schools of Bahawalpur-Pakistan. The study dealt with the improvement of the teaching learning process at pre-primary at present, so the researchers used the descriptive method of research. The data was collected from the teachers, principals and educationists in the form of questionnaires and observation sheets. These tools for data collection were used because of less expensiveness, ease of administration and suitability to the problem.

Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of the early childhood educators of the early childhood education institutions in Bahawalpur-Pakistan. The students learning in these institutions were observed during teaching learning process.

Development of Tools

After going through the related material, an initial draft of the Questionnaires and observation sheet was formatted. All the items were checked for unnecessary repetition. After the recommendation and suggestions of Supervisor, final draft of the tools was prepared.

Sample of the Study

Simple random sampling method was used by selecting samples from private and government schools throughout Bahawalpur-Pakistan. Two hundred teachers and thirty principals from ECE institutes from Bahawalpur-Pakistan were selected randomly.

December, 2022
Volume: 7, No: 2, pp.52-70
ISSN: 2059-6588(Print) | ISSN 2059-6596(Online)

Data Collection

The researchers visited the schools, carried out observation and collected data from the teachers. Other personnel also helped a lot in collecting data.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

The researchers themselves administered the questionnaire to the teachers and principal and observation of the children. The data collected through the administration of the questionnaires and observation sheets was tabulated. The analysis of the data was made by the data collected from the questionnaires and filling observation sheets. The data collected from the above mentioned research tools, was tabulated, analyzed and interpreted using percentages as statistical techniques in Microsoft excel program and the conclusion was drawn on the basis of the findings and finally, recommendations were made on the basis of data analysis. The data was analyzed by using different tables.

4. Results and Data Analysis

Table 4.1 ***Teachers develop thinking skills of students through the provision of different learning experiences.***

Responded	Frequencies	Percentage	Mean
Strongly agree	44	19.1	
Agree	82	35.7	
Undecided	52	22.6	2.54
Disagree	38	16.5	
Strongly disagree	14	6.1	
Total	230	100.0	

Table 4.1 respondents were asked teachers develop thinking skills of students through the provision of different learning experiences. According to the data, 19.1% respondent strongly agreed, 35.7% agreed, 22.6% of respondent undecided, 16% disagreed and 6.1% strongly disagreed with the statement. The mean 2.54 support the statement. So the majority of the respondent 54.8% agreed that teachers develop thinking skills of students through the provision of different learning experiences.

December, 2022
Volume: 7, No: 2, pp.52-70
ISSN: 2059-6588(Print) | ISSN 2059-6596(Online)

Table 4.2 ***Teachers promote the cognitive ability of students by giving them individual attention.***

Responded	Frequencies	Percentage	Mean
Strongly agree	55	23.9	
Agree	74	32.2	
Undecided	50	21.7	2.44
Disagree	46	20.0	
Strongly disagree 5		2.2	
Total	230	100.0	

Table 4.2 respondents were asked teachers promoted the cognitive ability of students by giving them individual attention. According to the data, 23.9% respondent strongly agreed 32.2% agreed, 21.7% undecided, 20.0% disagreed and 2.2% strongly disagreed with the statement. The mean 2.44 support the statement. So the majority of the respondent 56.1% agreed that teachers promote the cognitive ability of students by giving them individual attention.

Table 4.3 ***Teachers classify the material according to the students thinking ability.***

Responded	Frequencies	Percentage	Mean
Strongly agree	53	23.0	
Agree	90	39.1	
Undecided	41	17.8	2.36
Disagree	41	17.8	
Strongly disagree 5		2.2	
Total	230	100.0	

Table 4.3 respondents were asked teachers classify the material according to the students thinking ability. According to the data, 23.0% respondent strongly agreed, 39.1% agreed, 17.8% of respondent undecided, 17.8% disagreed and 2.2% strongly disagreed with the statement. The mean 2.36 supports the statement. So the majority of the respondent 62.1% agreed that teachers classify the material according to the students thinking ability.

December, 2022
Volume: 7, No: 2, pp.52-70
ISSN: 2059-6588(Print) | ISSN 2059-6596(Online)

Table 4.4 ***Teachers identify students learning experience to develop their meta-cognition.***

Responded	Frequencies	Percentage	Mean
Strongly agree	45	19.6	
Agree	87	37.8	
Undecided	46	20.0	2.50
Disagree	41	17.8	
Strongly disagree	11	4.8	
Total	230	100.0	

Table 4.4 respondents were asked teachers identify students learning experience to develop their meta-cognition. According to the data, 19.6% respondent strongly agreed, 37.8% agreed, 20.0% of respondent undecided, 17.8% disagreed and 4.8% strongly disagreed with the statement. The mean 2.50 support the statement. So the majority of the respondent 57.4% agreed that teachers identify students learning experience to develop their meta-cognition.

Table 4.5 ***Teachers enhance discussions in classroom for students' cognition.***

Responded	Frequencies	Percentage	Mean
Strongly agree	40	17.4	
Agree	85	37.0	
Undecided	64	27.8	2.40
Disagree	32	13.9	
Strongly disagree	9	3.9	
Total	230	100.0	

Table 4.5 respondents were asked teachers; enhance discussions in classroom for student's cognition. According to the data, 17.4% respondent strongly agreed, 37.0% agreed, 27.8% of respondent undecided, 13.9% disagreed and 3.9% strongly disagreed with the statement. The mean 2.40 support the statement. So the majority of the respondent 54.4% agreed is that teachers, enhance discussions in classroom for students cognition.

Table 4.6 ***Teachers do self-monitoring in classroom for students cognition.***

Responded	Frequencies	Percentage	Mean
Strongly agree	51	22.2	
Agree	74	32.2	
Undecided	68	29.6	2.43
Disagree	27	11.7	
Strongly disagree	10	4.3	
Total	230	100.0	

Table 4.6 respondents were asked teachers do self-monitoring in classroom for students cognition. According to the data, 22.2% respondent strongly agreed, 32.2% agreed, 29.6% of

December, 2022
Volume: 7, No: 2, pp.52-70
ISSN: 2059-6588(Print) | ISSN 2059-6596(Online)

respondent undecided, 11.7%disagreedand4.3%strongly disagreed with the statement. The mean 2.43 support the statement. So the majority of the respondent 54.4% agreed that teachers do self-monitoring in classroom for students cognition.

Findings, Conclusions Suggestions and Recommendations

Findings

On the basis of data analysis and its interpretation following findings were made:

54.8% agreed that teachers develop thinking skills of students through the provision of different learning experiences. The mean 2.54 support the statement.

56.1% agreed is that teachers promote the cognitive ability of students by giving them individual attention. The mean 2.44 support the statement.

62.1% agreed that teachers classify the material according to the students thinking ability. The mean 2.36 supports the statement.

50.8% agreed that teachers make groups of students according to their cognitive skills. The mean 2.54 supports the statement.

57.4% agreed that teachers identify students learning experience to develop their meta-cognition. The mean 2.50 support the statement.

59.1% agreed that teachers provide the opportunities to students for their better understanding. The mean 2.46 support the statement.

56.5% agreed that teachers guided the students for their better understanding of the topic. The mean 2.43 support the statement.

52.6% agreed is that teachers asked the students to perform the different activities to develop thinking skills. The mean 2.53 support the statement.

51.8% agreed that teachers tell students to make plans of learning activities. The mean 2.49 support the statement.

55.2% agreed is that teacher checks the schedules of students learning activities. The mean 2.43 support the statement.

54.2% agreed is that teachers encourage students to asked questions which they have in their mind. The mean 2.46 support the statement.

54.3% agreed that teachers motivate students to think independently. The mean 2.41 support the statement.

December, 2022
Volume: 7, No: 2, pp.52-70
ISSN: 2059-6588(Print) | ISSN 2059-6596(Online)

53% agreed is that teachers asked the students to know about the ideas, how to deal in different situations. The mean 2.43 support the statement.

54.4% agreed is that teachers, enhance discussions in classroom for students cognition. The mean 2.40 support the statement.

57.8% strongly agreed is that teachers develop students' vocabulary through different activities. The mean 2.38 support the statement.

48.7% agreed that teachers outline activities that will help them achieve their goals. The mean 2.49 support the statement.

58.4% agreed that teachers develop and practice skills necessary to achieving their personal goals. The mean 2.50 support the statement.

51.3% agreed is that teachers express likes and dislikes about learning activities. The mean 2.54 support the statement.

57.4% agreed is that teachers share and explains their own learning preferences and learning strategies to others. The mean 2.32 support the statement.

54.8% agreed that teachers describe how ones learning preference affects how one learns information of students. The mean 2.43 support the statement.

55.7% agreed that teachers provided feedback to about students' needs/preferences. The mean 2.42 support the statement.

52.7% undecided that teacher concludes the discussion in classroom to think on other area. The mean 2.46 support the statement.

54.4% agreed that teachers do self-monitoring in classroom for students cognition. The mean 2.43 support the statement.

60% agreed is that teachers conduct conferences for cognition development of students. The mean 2.35 support the statement.

Conclusions

In the light of the analysis of data and findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

- Majority of students agreed that teachers develop thinking skills of students through the provision of different learning experiences.

December, 2022
Volume: 7, No: 2, pp.52-70
ISSN: 2059-6588(Print) | ISSN 2059-6596(Online)

Majority of students agreed that teachers promote the cognitive ability of students by giving them individual attention.

Majority of students agreed that teachers classify the material according to the students thinking ability.

Majority of students agreed that teachers make groups of students according to their cognitive skills.

Majority of students agreed that teachers identify students learning experience to develop their meta-cognition.

Majority of students agreed that teachers provide the opportunities to students for their better understanding.

Majority of students agreed that teachers guided the students for their better understanding of the topic.

Majority of students agreed is that teachers asked the students to perform the different activities to develop thinking skills.

Majority of students agreed that teachers tell students to make plans of learning activities.

Majority of students agreed is that teacher checks the schedules of students learning activities.

Majority of students agreed is that teachers encourage students to asked questions which they have in their mind.

Majority of students agreed that teachers motivate students to think independently.

Majority of students agreed is that teachers asked the students to know about the ideas, how to deal in different situations.

Majority of students agreed is that teachers, enhance discussions in classroom for students cognition.

Majority of students strongly agreed is that teachers develop student‟s vocabulary through different activities.

Majority of students agreed that teachers outline activities that will help them achieve their goals.

Majority of students agreed that teachers develop and practice skills necessary to achieving their personal goals.

Majority of students agreed is that teachers express likes and dislikes about learning activities.

December, 2022
Volume: 7, No: 2, pp.52-70
ISSN: 2059-6588(Print) | ISSN 2059-6596(Online)

Majority of students agreed is that teachers share and explains their own learning preferences and learning strategies to others.

Majority of students agreed that teachers describe how ones learning preference affects how one learns information of students.

Majority of students agreed that teachers provided feedback to about student‟s needs/preferences.

Majority of students agreed that teacher concludes the discussion in classroom to think on other area.

Majority of students agreed that teachers do self-monitoring in classroom for students cognition.

Majority of students agreed is that teachers conduct conferences for cognition development of students.

Recommendations

The researcher does following recommendations, after intensive study of the phenomena.

There should be discussion between teacher and pupils while planning for activities. Teachers should consider aims of education while planning for activities. Teachers should plan for activities prior to teaching.

Cognitive skills should be taught through repetition of activities.

Teachers should use unified activities to teach many concepts at a single time.

Indoor setting of the classroom should be made according to the needs of the children.

The teachers should select outdoor environment according to the requirements of the safety of the children.

Teachers should use the things available in the classroom keeping hygienic point in mind. They should make the choice of activities keeping safety point of the children in mind, they should prepare classroom environment free of weather intensity.

Teachers should use concrete material for learning of science and math concepts.

Teachers should use more than one method for teaching each concept.

Every day, the teachers should not observe a routine time schedule. Teachers should consider mealtime a time to teach some concepts to the children.

The resources are not more important than the teacher’s creativity. Teachers should use their own creativity and imagination during teaching. The teachers should not be contented with the

teaching learning material available to them. Rather, they should try to make material themselves as well.

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