

TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD  
EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT CURRICULUM IN NEPAL

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## ABSTRACT

of the dissertation of *Laxmi Devi Shrestha* for the degree of *Master of Philosophy in Educational Leadership*, presented on 28 November 2025, entitled *Teachers' Understanding and Practices of Early Childhood Education and Development Curriculum in Nepal*.

## APPROVED BY

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Dissertation Supervisor

The focus of my study was on the understanding and practices of Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) teachers on the early childhood development curriculum in Nepal. Specifically, I discussed the current understanding of the curriculum and implementation among ECED teachers who have limited formal education and training. Through their experiences and insights, I explored how the curriculum is being implemented in practice in the classroom of ECED. I have derived two major research questions to explore the level of understanding of the ECED curriculum and current implementation into the classroom, where schools are still having challenges in implementing it. I adapted narrative inquiry as my methodology, delving into the narratives of four purposively selected ECED teachers from Chandrapur Municipality, Rautahat, for my research.

Subsequently, I engaged in the reflective and analytical process to derive meaning from stories of ECED Teachers, exploring both commonalities and distinctive aspects of their experiences in practices of ECED. Like my own experiences as an ECD trainer and educator, the understanding of ECED curriculum and practices and my unique life experiences were also linked with ECED teachers' understanding during data analysis and discussion. Upon collecting the stories, I interviewed ECED teachers about their experiences with understanding of curriculum and proceeded with the steps of transcription, translation, coding, and categorization.

Subsequently, I formulated themes derived from the ECED teachers' perceptions of the curriculum and its effective practices into ECED classroom, challenges faced during implementation, and strategies used to overcome challenges.

Simultaneously, every participant in the interviews accepts that the early childhood education curriculum is needed for managing the classroom and learning process of early-aged children. The implications of the study underline that the teacher training unit consistently improves ECED teachers' teaching abilities and understanding of the ECED curriculum, helps teachers stay up to date on the latest educational techniques and takes advantage of professional development opportunities. Curriculum Development Centre is oriented for the implementation of ECED curriculum, to capacitate all ECED teachers to apply effective instructions and activities as per the curriculum.



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28 November 2025

## शोध सार

शैक्षिक नेतृत्वमा दर्शनशास्त्रको स्नातकोत्तर उपाधिका लागि लक्ष्मी देवी श्रेष्ठ को शोध प्रबन्धको शीर्षक “नेपालमा प्रारम्भिक बाल शिक्षा र विकास पाठ्यक्रमसम्बन्धी शिक्षकहरूको बुझाइ र अभ्यास” १२ मंसिर २०८२ मा प्रस्तुत गरिएको थियो।

मीनाक्षी दाहाल, पीएचडी.

शोध निर्देशक

यस अध्ययनको मुख्य उद्देश्य नेपालमा प्रारम्भिक बाल शिक्षा तथा विकास पाठ्यक्रमप्रति प्रारम्भिक बालविकास शिक्षकहरूको बुझाइ र त्यसको अभ्यासमा केन्द्रित रहेको छ। विशेषतः सीमित औपचारिक शिक्षा र तालिम प्राप्त गरेका बालविकास शिक्षकहरूको पाठ्यक्रमसम्बन्धी बुझाइ र कक्षाकोठामा त्यसको कार्यान्वयन अवस्थाबारे यस अध्ययनमा विश्लेषण गरिएको छ। शिक्षकहरूको अनुभव र दृष्टिकोणका माध्यमबाट बालविकास कक्षाकोठामा पाठ्यक्रम व्यवहारमा कसरी कार्यान्वयन भइरहेको छ भन्ने कुरा अन्वेषण गरिएको छ। यस अध्ययनका लागि दुई प्रमुख अनुसन्धान प्रश्नहरू निर्माण गरिएको छ, जसले बालविकास पाठ्यक्रमप्रतिको बुझाइको स्तर र विद्यालयहरूमा अझै पनि विद्यमान कार्यान्वयनसम्बन्धी चुनौतीका बीच कक्षाकोठामा भइरहेको वर्तमान अभ्यासलाई खोजी गर्दछ। अनुसन्धान पद्धतिका रूपमा कथात्मक अनुसन्धान (कथासन) अपनाइएको छ। यसअन्तर्गत रौतहट जिल्लाको चन्द्रपुर नगरपालिकाबाट उद्देश्यपूर्ण रूपमा चयन गरिएका चार जना बालविकास शिक्षकहरूको कथाहरूमा गहिरो अध्ययन गरिएको छ।

त्यसपश्चात् प्रारम्भिक बालविकास शिक्षकहरूको कथाबाट अर्थ निकाल्ने उद्देश्यले परावर्तनात्मक र विश्लेषणात्मक प्रक्रिया अपनाइएको छ, जसअन्तर्गत उनीहरूको अभ्याससम्बन्धी अनुभवका समानता र विशिष्ट पक्षहरू दुवैको अन्वेषण गरिएको छ। प्रारम्भिक बालविकास प्रशिक्षक तथा शिक्षाकर्मिका रूपमा मेरा आफ्नै अनुभव, पाठ्यक्रमसम्बन्धी बुझाइ र अभ्यास तथा मेरो जीवनका अनुभवहरू पनि तथ्याङ्क विश्लेषण र छलफलका क्रममा शिक्षकहरूको बुझाइसँग जोडेर विवेचना गरिएको छ।

कथाहरू संकलन गरेपछि पाठ्यक्रमसम्बन्धी बुझाइका अनुभवबारे बालविकास शिक्षकहरूसँग अन्तर्वार्ता लिइयो र त्यसपछि लिप्यन्तरण, अनुवाद, कोडिङ र वर्गीकरणका चरणहरू पूरा गरियो। यस प्रक्रियाबाट बालविकास शिक्षकहरूको पाठ्यक्रमप्रतिको धारणा, कक्षाकोठामा प्रभावकारी अभ्यास, कार्यान्वयनका क्रममा देखा पर्ने चुनौतीहरू तथा ती चुनौतीहरू सामना गर्न अपनाइएका रणनीतिहरूका आधारमा विभिन्न विषयवस्तु निर्माण गरिएको छ।

समानान्तर रूपमा, अन्तर्वार्तामा सहभागी सबै शिक्षकहरूले प्रारम्भिक बाल्यकाल शिक्षा पाठ्यक्रम साना उमेरका बालबालिकाको कक्षाकोठा व्यवस्थापन र सिकाइ प्रक्रियाका लागि अत्यावश्यक रहेको स्वीकार गरेका छन्। अध्ययनका निष्कर्षहरूले शिक्षक तालिम इकाइले बालविकास शिक्षकहरूको शिक्षण क्षमता र पाठ्यक्रमसम्बन्धी बुझाइ निरन्तर रूपमा सुधार गर्न, नवीन शैक्षिक प्रविधिबारे अद्यावधिक राख्न तथा व्यावसायिक विकासका अवसरहरू उपयोग गर्न महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका खेल्ने देखाएका छन्। साथै, पाठ्यक्रम विकास केन्द्रले बालविकास पाठ्यक्रमको प्रभावकारी कार्यान्वयनका लागि सबै प्रारम्भिक बालविकास शिक्षकहरूलाई पाठ्यक्रमअनुसार उपयुक्त निर्देशन र गतिविधिहरू प्रयोग गर्न सक्षम बनाउने दिशामा अभिमुखीकरण गर्नु आवश्यक रहेको निष्कर्ष प्रस्तुत गरिएको छ।



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लक्ष्मी देवी श्रेष्ठ  
उपाधि उम्मेदवार

१२ मंसिर २०८२

This dissertation, entitled *Teachers' Understanding and Practices of Early Childhood Education and Development Curriculum in Nepal* was presented by *Laxmi Devi Shrestha* on 28 November 2025.

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I appreciate and decide that my thesis will become a part of the permanent collection of the Kathmandu University Library. My signature below authorizes the release of my dissertation to any readers upon request for scholarly purposes.

  
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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work, and it has not been submitted for candidature for any other degree at any other university.



.....

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28 November 2025

## DEDICATION

I am dedicating this dissertation to the following people who have been part and parcel of my education and growth as a person: to my parents, and most of all, my late father, who provided unlimited support and encouragement that guided me towards education. He never doubted me and my ability and freely gave up his dreams and wishes that I should be able to follow mine. His constant inspiration and belief in me have been the foundation of my success, and to my beloved family members, whose love, understanding, and continuous support have been a constant source of strength throughout this journey. I would like to make a special dedication to my husband, who has supported me and strongly believed in me to be able to go through this journey. When he stands up patiently and tries to comprehend me, even in the most difficult times, his patience and comprehension have been priceless. To my sons, to their happiness, innocence and the love they have given me, which has made me not forget the reason why I am doing this.

And lastly, to all teachers, mentors and guides who have contributed to my academic and personal growth, whether directly or indirectly. They have given their wisdom, knowledge and advice, and their contributions have enhanced my life, and I cannot express how thankful I am to them.

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Laxmi Devi Shrestha,  
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## ABBREVIATIONS

ARNEC	Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood
B.Ed.	Bachelor of Education
BPEP	Basic and Primary Education Plan
CDC	Curriculum Development Center
CERID	Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development
CRC	Rights of the Child
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECED	Early Childhood Education and Development
EFA	Education for All
ERO	Educational Review Office
KU	Kathmandu University
KUSOED	Kathmandu University School of Education
MoEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
MPhil	Master of Philosophy
NCE	National Campaign for Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPC	National Planning Commission
PCRW	Production Credit for Rural Women
SESP	School Education Sector Plan
SLC	School Leaving Certificate
SSRP	School Sector Reform Plan
TOT	Training of Trainers
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VDC	Village Development Committee
WB	World Bank
WE	World Education
WHO	World Health Organization

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## CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

In this Chapter, I have outlined the introduction of Early Childhood Development (ECD) with the present understanding, with introduction, context of implementation, past experiences of ECD with national and local context and ECD teachers' understanding of curriculum and its implementation into the classroom. The subject of my research was the early childhood development curriculum in Nepal. I have reviewed the existing knowledge and practice in the sphere of curriculum and its implementation as considered by teachers of ECD with little formal education and training. By their experience and understanding, I got to investigate how the curriculum is being put into practice as it gets into daily classroom practice. The first curriculum of ECED was endorsed by the government in 2021, and it is based on the National Curriculum Framework and focused on one-year ECD as per the system. In the Early Childhood Development and Education curriculum, the policy document states that special attention is paid to involvement of children in overall development activities, formation of healthy habits, taking of individual safety precautions, hygiene and social habits, development of creative thinking, and language and communication skills development. The interests, abilities, and needs of children and their overall development are in focus, together with the provision of guaranteeing early childhood development by utilizing family and community resources and other resources in children's learning. Here, its goals, capabilities, areas, learning development and learning achievement, learning facilitation process, curriculum implementation criteria, evaluation process, and teacher role are stated in the context of the current situation.

### **ECD and its Importance**

There are various ECD programs, such as Early Childcare (ECC), Early Childhood Education (ECE), Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED), Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), and Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD), according to the nature of the services. The necessity of creating and sustaining ECD programs in the nation has been highlighted by Education for All (EFA) by 2015 (Adhikari, 2019). The terminology of early years or early childhood development (ECD) also including early childhood care development

(ECCD), early childhood care and education (ECCE), and the term early childhood care and education (ECCE) tend to be boarding's which refer to an assortment of interventions that take place to children and their families prior to the age of eight or the beginning of formal schooling, and the intention is the overall development of the child. ECD programs and places are diverse and include preschools that offer all-round early care and learning services, sizable facilities that give care to newborns and young children. Parenting and home-visiting programs, early stimulation, nutrition interventions, and other services related to healthcare are also possible (Excell, 2016).

The aim is not just to focus on the enrolment of children in the ECD programs but to improve the competencies of all the ECD workforces, including teachers, by providing them with the appropriate knowledge and skills to use the curriculum and learning materials. All children deserve a proper education with a local curriculum and their mother tongue at the initial level of school education. The curriculum of ECD modifies such rights in line with the constitution of Nepal. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) suggests that not only the brain of an individual should be ready to learn in the future but should also be given much concern, which involves cognitive stimulation and most importantly, should emphasize some of the important necessities such as the maintenance of hygiene, vaccination and giving positive emotional support among others (UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2001* as quoted by Bellamy, 2001). At an early age (in preschool), these positive social and child growth experiences, as well as a nurturing and positive environment, are often transformed into improved school readiness and subsequent academic accomplishments in such areas as reading and mathematics (Ramey & Ramey, 2004, as cited in Manning et al., 2017).

The early years of children aged 0-8 are very crucial for growth and brain development by shaping cognitive, social, physical, and emotional development, as well as language development. In the context of Nepal, ECD-aged children are facing many challenges of poverty, limited stimulation and interaction support from parents, a lack of health and nutrition facilities and low access to quality ECD services. Early learning, responsive care and child development interventions contribute to primary education readiness as well as lower dropout rates and repeating classes rates, which remains a problem in Nepal. Additionally, good quality ECD services combine health, nutrition, child protection, responsive care and early learning, so children develop as

an overall person and not just academically. Appreciating the significance of Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) in the human development process, the Ministry of Education (MoE), Government of Nepal (GoN), over the past few years have prioritized in a bid to expand equitable and inexpensive early childhood development services (Khanal et al., 2017).

### **The Local Context-My Narratives**

I am glad to be a part of the ECD sector in Rautahat district. I worked as a district trainer (educator and technical supporter) for the Basic training of ECED teachers. I remember those days at the beginning of my career development. Before being involved in ECD, I experienced teaching early-grade children in a private school. After this, I started my professional journey as an ECD trainer for teachers. Public schools of Rautahat district started pre-primary education after support from the District Education Office as per the ECED operational guideline 2005. Presently, the curriculum of ECED was endorsed by the government in 2020, and it is based on the National Curriculum Framework and focused on a one-year ECED as per the system. I took some time to explore how these teachers are grasping the new curriculum and what the current practices are like when it comes to implementing it. I still remember that there was no priority given to the ECD program and its importance. The qualifications of ECED teachers were not considered as per the learning needs of children, and the curriculum was limited to teachers with less than an 8th-grade education, who were hired for the ECED centers. As per the level of understanding and qualification of ECED teachers, schools face challenges in implementing the ECED curriculum 2021. For the teacher qualities, training is essential, through which students benefit from these qualities that are considered as a must for a teacher (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Goe, 2007; Rice, 2003; Wayne & Youngs, 2003; Wilson & Floden, 2003, as cited in Kucukturana, 2011).

As per my professional journey as an ECD trainer for more than one decade, the content of the training was mostly on enabling teachers to develop sound, effective teaching and learning materials in the ECED classrooms, as well as organizing orientation and awareness programs for teachers and parents. These tasks were aimed at enhancing their knowledge concerning play-based learning, child-friendly pedagogy, establishing a child-friendly environment and the necessity of the involvement of parents in the early development of children. During this process, I was playing an active role in co-facilitating the workshops, showing teachers how

low-cost and locally available materials can be used on a day-to-day basis in the classrooms for quality ECD interventions, and how they can use creative approaches in the expected training course of their work. For quality ECD interventions, the qualification and training play a major role. The robustness of the correlation between the teacher qualification with training and the quality of early childhood learning facilities has enabled policymakers and educational practitioners at large to learn to rest on strategies that will help them achieve improved learning outcomes in children at their early learning stages (Manning et al., 2017).

With the parents, I collaborated well as I assisted them in understanding their complementary roles in the holistic development of children at home. Through these experiences, I worked as an ECD trainer in Rautahat district, where I got hands-on experience regarding the challenges and opportunities of the implementation of the ECED curriculum into these various community settings. This work experience not only added to my competencies as a trainer, but also to my dedication to assisting teachers, children, and families to achieve improved early childhood outcomes.

Based on my knowledge and experience, it appears that not all ECED teachers had provided ECED operational guidelines previously, and only some were familiar with them, as discussed previously with the Education Units of Local Government. Who was responsible, and how were ECED teachers teaching with/ without being informed of the curricular mandate in ECED? How are ECED teachers applying the curriculum? These questions used to arise in my mind constantly and require a close examination while discussing the scenario of ECED curriculum implementation in the ECED centers. As per my present experience as an education leader, we still have gaps in the implementation of ECED Curriculum 2019, and ECED teachers are not engaging in curriculum training. The Local Education Unit Offices may need to provide training, support, and monitoring, which are still missing. Since 2020, it has still not been provided to ECED teachers at the Local Government level. Every ECED program needs to be meticulously created to represent the requirements and culture of a community, and each program needs to be ensured for implementation.

When starting the ECED program, Rautahat district also grasped the opportunity to operate 10 ECED centers for different local governments. Due to a lack of budget and resources, the refresher training was missed for all teachers and minimal learning materials in the centers. The teachers did not receive the ECED curriculum, and they entirely depended on the training. I was involved in TOT

training and conducted the training for ECED teachers by using my own knowledge, experience, and locally available resources. During training sessions, I faced the problem of the availability of different training materials as per the prescribed curriculum framework. In this situation, I didn't have any choice at that time. Local knowledge, practices and materials are instrumental in conducting training and teaching and learning processes during basic training of teachers. We had not considered the community's understanding of care learning of children at that time. In all instances, programs are founded on the traditional community values of child rearing, while incorporating best practices in early learning, nutrition, health, communication with children, and school readiness (Soudée, 2009). Now, the time has changed for the opportunity of ECED programming after the School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) and other policies and strategies. The ECED program became mainstream in education in Nepal.

The government and public sectors accepted it as a foundation of education, and non-governmental sectors also initiated the ECED program. On the same note, an enabling environment has the potential to enable a mother to participate more in economic activities at large outside the home, although a limited amount of time per day, as is affirmed in a report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO (2006). According to NPC's ECD Strategy 2020-2030, even today, several themes are used to conduct numerous services associated with ECED centers, such as early learning, health and nutrition, and safety and sanitation facilities. So, the teachers must be acknowledged and trained about the ECED curriculum to ensure the children's holistic development in ECED centers.

According to the ECED Curriculum, the teachers of ECED in Nepal realize that this curriculum pays special attention to the holistic growth of the child in the sense that it deals with physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and language development of the child. Some of the great elements provided in the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2019 include this kind of provision in integration and competency-driven curriculum, and much would rely on the capacities and tools teachers possess. The classroom offers no clear course of action with regard to curriculum framework implementation.

Early Childhood Development and Education Curriculum involvement in the all-round development of children in NCF 2019, developing healthy habits, adopting personal protective measures, hygiene and social habits and behaviors. I discussed

and explored the teachers' understanding and implementation of the curriculum of ECED for enhancing the learning opportunity for all children in their context. The educational needs of the children go hand in hand with future life skills, knowledge, and values. The teachers of ECED play a very crucial part in shaping the learning abilities and enhancing the potential of kids using an ECED curriculum that addresses their personal interests. Quality learning outcomes can bring about significant changes in children's learning as well as parents' perceptions in the community. Although high-quality provisioning is essential for the best learning and development of children enrolled in ECEC, studies undertaken in Australia, Europe, and the US over the past 20 years have revealed that parents typically choose childcare as ignorant customers (Cryer & Burchinal 1997; French et al., 2011; Mocan 2007; Sollars 2017, as cited in Fenech et al., 2019).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2019 wanted to bring revolutionary changes in the curriculum at the school level (Curriculum Development Center [CDC], 2019). The Government of Nepal (GoN) has endorsed the ECED curriculum 2019, which requires child-centered, play-based, and culture-relevant pedagogy to promote school-readiness and equitable access to early learning and child development of ECED-aged children. However, the successful execution of such a curriculum is greatly hinged on the intelligence of the teachers, coupled with their proficiency in the subject as well as classroom performances. Similarly, previously, the ECED curriculum guidelines were not practiced by the ECED teachers. Local governments have the right to implement education and all responsibilities in the local area. However, newly elected local-level representatives are not aware of the subject matter.

Even though teachers get regular training programs and seemingly commit to them through policies, they still find it challenging to implement the principles of the curriculum on a practical level. Some studies and reports cite inefficiencies that range from excessive rote-learning, a relative absence of play-based education, and insufficient classroom resources, and the failure to adapt to the different cultural and black cultural backgrounds of children. Educators tend to complain about the lack of understanding between conventional teaching methods and the new curriculum requirements, and on the systemic level, lack of professional development, monitoring and resource constraints become the obstacles to implementing the new curriculum.

Some studies indicate that just involving the children in the educational factors that truly appreciate and portray other cultures can work magic in terms of development. I mean, we are discussing strengthening their abilities, making them more self-conscious, and providing them with real values of diversity of beliefs as well as culture. Moreover, ECED programs incorporate skills-based activities in the classroom and complement early learning and development programs with an emphasis on language, reading, /and numeracy skills in children (Joo et al., 2020). The brain ties that control the physical, social, cognitive, and emotional functioning of children develop fast during the first few years of life and have the most potential to rest and change (Akhter, 2013).

ECED teachers follow the appropriate stimulation approach as the curriculum for early learning and development, which are essential to strengthen their motivation, critical thinking, problem-solving, mathematical thinking, greater creativity, motor skills, and critical thinking (Nastasi & Clements, 1993, as cited in Akhter, 2013). However, many ECED teachers might not have had enough training when it comes to understanding the curriculum fully, its goals, and how to put it into action. It might make teachers feel less confident and, in turn, that could mean children aren't getting the support they really need in the classroom. I studied the ECED Teachers' understanding of the ECED curriculum and its implementation in the classroom.

The teachers in ECED are frequently diverse in terms of their educational backgrounds, and most of them have inadequate pre-service training or other in-service training. This makes one wonder how they perceive the meaning of the objectives, the principles and the pedagogical strategies of the curriculum. Although the new ECED curriculum has more experiential and inclusive learning with child-friendly classes, it has insufficient resources, no timely training, and is not monitored by the Education Units of Palikas. ECED Teachers are at liberty to either stick to rote procedures or make their own adjustments depending on the experiences they undergo, instead of adhering to the new curriculum. Few studies capture the voice and experiences of teachers in the implementation of the ECED curriculum. This study examined the disconnect between policy rhetoric and classroom practices by examining the meaning of policies and the lived experiences of teachers, and how local situations and contexts influence the implementation of curriculum.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to explore the teacher's understanding of ECED curriculum and its implementation into the classroom. Specifically, the study aimed at exploring the conceptual understanding of the curriculum amongst teachers in addition to exploring their stories, experiences, and knowledge in applying it in actual classroom situations.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do the ECED teachers understand the early childhood education and development curriculum?
2. How do the ECED teachers narrate their experiences and learnings on implementing the ECED curriculum into the classroom?

### **Rationale of the Study**

I am interested in conducting such research on Teachers' Understanding and Practices of early childhood education Development (ECED) curriculum in Nepal because I believe that teachers are the centrepiece in building the foundational phase of children's learning and development. Although Nepal has established policies and curriculum in ECED, effectiveness is greatly hindered by how teachers grasp and apply that knowledge in the classroom.

A significant challenge many teachers in Nepal, particularly those in the rural and marginalized communities, are subjected to includes a lack of training, poor facilities and varied classroom needs. All these have a direct impact on the interpretation and practice of the curriculum. This dissertation can be used to establish this lack of continuity between the curriculum design and the reality in the classrooms, and also bring out counter-strategies that teachers have already implemented to overcome the obstacles. Professionally, I am also motivated by my experience in the ECD sector, where I have witnessed both the positive effects of having an effective curriculum and the troubles teachers are subjected to when there is a lack of support. I am convinced that interviewing the teachers will not only provide them with a voice but also create evidence used to institute training, supervision, and support provisions.

Furthermore, I am motivated to investigate the way in which teachers in Nepal have conceptualized the ECED curriculum, their own practice of classroom experience, challenges or possibilities they are facing to practice the ECED curriculum. Model training and curriculum were centered more on the training of

teachers to create effective teaching and learning tools in the ECED classrooms, and conducting orientation and awareness programs for the teachers and parents. These activities are aimed at reinforcing their knowledge on play-based learning, child-friendly pedagogy and the role of parent participation in early childhood development of children. During this work, I was actively involved in the organization of workshops, the demonstration of local and cheap materials that can be used in classrooms, and incentives to teachers who need to implement creative approaches in everyday work. I also engaged parents to ensure that they understood how they could help nurture the holistic development of children in the home. Based on these experiences, I was a trainer myself, under the ECD program in the Rautahat district and obtained firsthand experience about the issues and opportunities behind implementing the ECED curriculum in various communities. This active role learning contributed not only to the improvement of my training proficiency but also increased my commitment to improving teachers, children, and families' outcomes in early childhood education.

Early childhood education development centres were not mainstream in education before. The national curriculum of ECED was developed and approved in 2020. However, the local governments still need to implement the national curriculum of ECED and allocate adequate resources for ECED in a local context. As per the present context, ECED teachers are still not aware of the new curriculum, and local governments are not providing the new curriculum to all schools. Furthermore, the ECED teachers are the same who are not qualified as per the new curriculum. The education level is very low, but the curriculum is denuding the higher-grade teachers, where we have only grade 8, SLC pass teachers or below. As we all know, the early period of life is the foundation of human life. As far as my knowledge goes, the new curriculum has not been implemented in my Municipality. So, I explored the present situation of implementation of the new curriculum with the understanding of teachers and practices of activities as per the curriculum for the learning outcomes of children of ECED centers and teachers' engagement for overall child development. In this manner, the study would be able to offer an insight into how teachers interpret, modify, and reflect on the curriculum and bring to light the opportunities and challenges of establishing quality early childhood education.

It's essential to focus on building healthy habits during these formative years of children. Simply, there is a lack of enough research, most especially on how such

curricula are designed. To harmonize policies across the sector of preschool and compulsory education and ensure that children attain age-appropriate education and school preparation objectives, which lead to longer-term economic and sociopolitical objectives (Wood & Hedges, 2016). Resources for ECED were limited when it came to early learning, child development and support to achieve school readiness. The local governments must allocate more resources for the capacity development of ECED teachers and policy reform.

### **Delimitation in the Study**

The research area was confined to the Chandrapur Municipality in Rautahat, which was selected. The result would be of local context and cannot represent all districts in Nepal. Only considers early childhood education and development settings (ECED centers) as curriculum, and not the early primary grades and other curriculum. Constraints to teacher understanding and practices of curriculum in ECED classrooms are not limited to all ECED stakeholders. The research was narrowed to the ways teachers feel and use a holistic approach, only in classroom practice, but not in the home/community learning context.

### **Organization of Dissertation**

The dissertation starts with Chapter I, Introduction, which provides the background of Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) in Nepal, the importance of the role of teachers, the research problem, goals, and research questions. The next chapter, Chapter II, is the Literature Review, which determines the views of the world and country about the ECED curriculum, uses of the ECED curriculum, theories of early learning, teachers' knowledge and competencies, curriculum implementation frameworks and contextual influences in Nepal ECED classrooms. Methodology, Chapter III explains the research design, philosophical perspective, sampling methodology, participants, data collection instruments and tools. The chapter of Data Analysis presents the interpreted data in a logical manner in the form of themes, including curriculum understanding of teachers, planning practice, and classroom activities. Chapter IV summarizes the teachers' understanding of curriculum. Further, Chapter V explains the experiences and learning of ECED teachers about the implementation of the ECED Curriculum. Finally, the Conclusion, Chapter VI, presents the Insights, Discussion, Conclusion and Implications of the study.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I narrated my journey of inspiration in reaching into the narratives of ECED teachers as their understanding of ECED curriculum and practices into the classroom and learning and experiences of ECESD for early learning and child development. Also, I described the aim of my research, formulated research questions, and explained why this investigation is needed. As per the ECED curriculum, I had focused on the practices of use and understanding the contents of the curriculum. I explored the present situation of implementation of ECED curriculum with the understanding of teachers and practices of activities as per the curriculum for the learning outcomes of children of ECED centers and teachers' engagement for overall child development. I explored the present situation of implementation of the new curriculum with the understanding of teachers and practices of activities as per the curriculum for the learning outcomes of children of ECED centers and teachers' engagement for overall child development.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I have outlined the literature review with the empirical review of existing research works on ECED and curriculum practice. I focused on emerging issues of ECED context with the discussion of Global, National and Local context of ECD program and implementation of ECED, research context. Furthermore, the literature was reviewed in relation to present practices of curriculum and quality ECED. The policy level review was discussed in this chapter. ECED is discussed in detail by the School Sector Development Plan (SSDP). A policy direction has been taken by the SSRP to increase the ECED programs by putting more focus on the quality and equitable distribution to fit the needs and demands.

As reported by SSDP (2016-2023), learning readiness has commanded a tremendous surge in ECED/PPE in the near past and has gone hand in hand with reduced dropout and repetition rates in the lower classes. This being the case, the draft National Strategy for Early Childhood Education Development 2077-2088 formulated by the National Planning Commission to realize the realization of one common principle and it is this concept, definition and vision to ensure that the governments at all three levels have one common understanding on the concept, definition and vision of ECD (National Planning Commission [NPC], 2020).

#### **Global Recognition of ECD**

From the fetus to the age of 8 is known as the early childhood development age (NPC, 2020). It is proven that 90 percent of brain development, and mostly cognitive, physical, social, emotional, and cultural developments, occur in this age. So, it is the most important age (World Bank, 2015). ECD has been recognized as a foundation for basic education. Dakar Framework for Action (2000-2015) recognised that underpinning a reality of maximizing the potential of a child, since the best way in which a child can achieve their maximum potential is by stimulating within the first eight years of life, physical, psychosocial, emotional, cognitive and linguistic development (UNESCO, 2006).

Furthermore, ECED has been a means of cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development and quality enhancement in early literacy and math skills, as well as crucial opportunities to enhance the ability of young children to grow and

learn (ECED Strategy 2022 -2030). ECED education cannot be overemphasized, and the role ECED teachers play is a significant role in the present and future formation of a child. Teachers of ECED, therefore, need to be prepared and equipped to attend to the sensitive needs of the young ones. In practice, however, as I had to do, many ECED teachers are not well prepared, mostly due to low academic performance and poor professional growth. Besides, the ECED importance has also been mentioned in Sustainable Development Goal No.4, which is devoted to education and aimed at achieving a transformation within 15 years (According to a News and Press release by Relief web, October 22, 2022). This is in response to making early childhood critical to a global agenda of change (ARNEC, 2016). As per the context of health and nutrition, there are a few opportunities for ECED teachers to develop their capacity and experiences.

Improving early childhood care and education (ECCE) is a global concern as demonstrated through several research projects, policies, social and advocacy activities (Nsamenang, 2006; Woodhead, 2006, as cited in Shehadeh, 2008). The 2019 International Conference of Education for All (EFA) and the 2000 World Education Forum at Dakar both had as their primary objectives to improve the lives of young children and primary education. The Jomtien Framework of Action of the 1990s also had the aim to expand ECCD programs, such as family and community interventions, especially among the poor, disadvantaged, and disabled children. Similarly, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) make ECD one of the critical areas on the agenda of the twenty-first century. Regarding the global context of access, the latest information provided by UNICEF and UNESCO on ECCE enrollment of children between the age of three to the age they enter primary school in 196 nations before the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID 19) pandemic was a rate of 54 percent, countries with low-income were at a 21 percent rate and countries with high-income had a rate of 79 percent (McCoy et al., 2021, as cited in Raikes et al., 2023).

A similar approach is advanced by the Nurturing Care Framework, which recommends multi-sectoral action to produce environments where nurturing care is facilitated in children. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) embraces a comprehensive approach to the definition of ECD, which includes delivery of services and programs that help in the survival, growth, development, and learning of children. This involves taking care of health, nutrition, hygiene, and cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development of

children before they enter formal education to school-age years by means of formal, informal and non-formal settings (UNESCO, 2006). ECED has been a means of cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development as well as quality enhancement in early literacy and math skills, as well as crucial opportunities to enhance the ability of young children to grow and learn. The global nature of ECED is intertwined with the nurturing care framework, which is a complete and holistic picture of a child in his/her early years.

The Nurturing Care Framework is a product that was developed by the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, and other partners, aimed to inform policy and programs facilitating the best possible development of young children. The new Nurturing Care Framework relies on the latest evidence in terms of how early childhood development is promoted. It draws superior policies and services based on such knowledge in a bid to help parents and caregivers provide nurturing care to the infants effectively (WHO, 2018). As per my professional experiences and present context, the local government, education units and schools are not focusing on the integrated and holistic approaches that combine the areas of health, nutrition, security, and responsive caregiving based on the new curriculum.

According to my interpretation based on the above context, ECD has been identified as one of the important pillars where the life of children is enhanced, and their holistic development is guaranteed. The ECCE has always been a priority in international frameworks like the Jomtien Framework (1990), the Dakar World Education Forum (2000), and the Education for All (EFA) programs that specifically aim to assist the poor and the underprivileged in society. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) further reinforce ECD as a key twenty-first-century agenda. The Nurturing Care Framework, as the WHO, and the holistic approach of ECD, as UNESCO, highlight the use of multi-sectoral approaches that involve health, nutrition, hygiene, and cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development using both formal and informal environments.

### **Early Childhood Development in Nepal: History and Context**

As per the present context of ECD program implementation, the entire evidence supports the improvement of primary education through the preparation of young children for school. The first phase of BPEP-1992-1997 ran 1038 Shishu Kakshas (pre-school classes) in thirty-six districts, Research Center for Educational Innovation and Development (Shrestha, 2023). The Ministry of Education and Sports

established an Early Childhood Development Section in 1999 to oversee the developmental requirements of Early Childhood Development within the country. The Program Implementation Plan (PIP), Ministry of Education (1999), had clearly spelt out the policies and strategies regarding compulsory primary education, access to education for all, expansion of community-based ECD programs and strengthening the capacity of the stakeholders of education. The ECD operational guideline 2062 was the first government's operational document of the ECD program, which focused on four domains of child development, for the procedure of operating the ECED centers and capacity development of ECED teachers. But the qualification of the ECD teachers under SLC might be nominal remuneration. Following the guidelines of Basic and Primary Education Project (BPEP) II, a community that wants to open a Shishu Kakshya (child-care centre) first sets up a management committee to do the fine-tuning of how an ECD centre will be run and then only will they formally seek permission to run the center with the District Education Office (UNESCO, 2006).

The Ministry of Local Development and UNICEF started a project called Production Credit for Rural Women (PCRW) in 1983. The project initiated home-based and centre-based childcare programs in some districts, aiming at releasing the women from looking after their children (Bernal et al., 2019). The objective of that project clearly shows that it was also not started from the child rights perspective, but instead to support women to participate in the income-generating activities.

Mascarenhas and Desai (2016) covered a project in the state of Maharashtra, India, that was designed to improve the participation of women in income-generating activities such as childcare programs so that women could be able to attend training programs to be able to engage in income-generating activities without having to take care of children.

As per the Flash Report of 2023/24, a total of 1,286,526 children are enrolled in various ECED centers/PPC programs. In line with this, 639,877 (49.7%) out of the 1.2 million children are enrolled in government-funded ECEDs or PPCs, with 646,649 (50.3%) being enrolled in privately operated ECEDs or PPCs. The 4-year-old children's admission into ECED was kept constant at 70.6% between 2022/23 and 2023/24, with the GER in ECED/PPEs climbing to 99.9% in 2023/24 - up by 4.9% in 2022/23 (MoEST, 2023). However, 29 % of children are not receiving the benefits of one of ECED/PPEs facilities, highlighting the issue of access in ECD commitments. ECED Program is intended to provide necessary support to every child

aged 3 to 5 years to realize his/her right to survival, protection, and care. However, the ECED program of the government is mainly focusing on education. Protection, care and nutrition issues are not focused on the ECED centers, and the curriculum is also only focused on the learning sector.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) in 2023 points to the fact that SESP intends to make sure that every single kid does not have to be disadvantaged in terms of education. It mentioned the key issues, such as the development of curricula, the training of educators and ECED teachers, and the enhancement of access to early childhood education, as well as the determination of where funding needs to be allocated. But after a little digression, we are now coming into another gear with the Sixteen Fiscal Plan of 2024-2028, which will also be very keen to establish affordable and inclusive early childhood education, but also school education. Overall, they are considering healthcare and education. It happens to be a neat association between secondary education, entrepreneurship and employment opportunities.

Additionally, we are also targeting an all-round approach towards making education better for all children by the National Planning Commission (NPC, 2024). Nepal ECED policies, legislations, procedures, programs and plans like BPEP I and II, EFA National Plan of Action (2004-2009), Strategic Paper for Early Childhood Development in Nepal (2004), SSRP (2009-2015) and SSDP (2016-2022) were in existence many years ago. At this point, there are SESP (2023-2032), National ECED Strategy, and Sixteen National Plans that are in operation to improve ECED services.

In pre-primary education, gender parity is a problem because there are 82 girls for every 100 boys in the ECED/PPCs (GPI 0.82). The Nepal government has published curriculum guidelines for children aged 3 and 4 years for the first time in 2007 from the ECD Section at the Department of Education. After the 8th amendment of the Education Act, the curriculum was developed by the Curriculum Development Center (CDC) in 2021. Presently, the Nepal government has already published the national curriculum framework of ECD 2021. However, the ECED teachers are still not aware of this new curriculum. Consistent with the need to ensure that marginalized children who live in remote regions lack access to the ECED program, such efforts are made continuously and will never be enough. Unless special measures are adopted according to SESP, it may be problematic to increase their accessibility into ECED. With that in mind, there is a necessity to identify specific measures to

enhance pre-primary net and gross enrolment rates in provinces with low rates (MoEST, 2023).

### **Understanding of ECED Curriculum and Quality Standard in ECED**

According to the ECD Curriculum, it prioritizes the use of language for expression and communication. Identification of nutritious food items and daily use by following healthy habits and good social behavior and demonstrating the model as required. Use of thematic learning and creative thinking in the process of performing daily tasks, and involvement in all-round development activities and use of basic skills in them. In this regard, this approach is necessary to uphold the constitutionally given rights of children of ECD age in Nepal and to direct the development of federal, provincial, and local policies, plans, and programs (NPC, 2020). Besides parents, ECD teachers also play a major role in the effectiveness of the child learning process during early childhood. Most ECD programs understand why professional development is important and provide educators with some type of training because it is projected that increases in the knowledge and/or practices of care providers will lead to improved child development (Joo et al., 2020).

Early intervention is effective not only in eradicating a problem but also makes further interventions more cost-effective and more likely to be successful (WHO, 2018). Curriculum frameworks are important to provide directives to early childhood practitioners to recommend successful implementation of sustainability knowledge in practice (Weldemariam et al., 2017). One of the most important strategic interventions has been acknowledged and given priority; ECD by the Government as well as the international organizations working in Nepal, which includes a variety of programs from developing human resources to creating low-cost models that fit the country's particular circumstances, School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP, 2009). According to Moss and Pence (1994, as cited in Excell, 2016), quality in early childhood care is not an objective and universal truth, but it is a created notion, subjective in nature, and value-contingent, and it is contingent on values, beliefs, and interests.

The outcomes of the ECED operational guideline 2062 included different factors such as program vision, aims, and elements, parent involvement, children with special needs contexts and evaluation. The second part will give information on the curriculum of early childhood development, both in terms of the age-specific learning outcomes and in terms of the learning outcomes based on the core areas of subject and

the learning areas. As per examples of the theme-based activities in the third portion, seven titles are provided. Every title includes a subtitle and the number of weeks it will take to complete an activity.

### **Understanding of ECED Curriculum 2077 (2022)**

ECED Centers were running with the curriculum guidelines prepared by the then Department of Education in 2003. It was not formalized by the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC). Later, standardize the ECED centers and develop a positive attitude towards knowledge and intelligence. Later, the CDC approved the ECED curriculum 2019 and endorsed it by the Government in 2020. The ECED curriculum 2020 promotes healthy living with nutrition support, teamwork, self-reliance, attaching importance to honesty, morals, socialization, and physical development among the children. However, the management of the ECED centers is under the former ECD operating guidelines of 2004. The objective of the ECED curriculum is to develop children's latent potential so that they can live fulfilling lives in the future through play and engagement with their environment.

According to the policy document, the enrolment of children in all-round development activities, the establishment of healthy habits, the engagement of personal safety measures, the establishment of social and hygiene habits, the acquisition of language and communication practices, and creative thinking are all factors which are emphasized in the ECED curriculum. Center-based ECD programs have proved very popular in the nation. The Curriculum Development Centers (CDC) have prescribed and are in the process of implementing the ECED curriculum 2021 (Dahal, 2024). It relies on the national curriculum model and adheres to the global conceptions of ECCD.

The previous experiences of implementation of the ECED curriculum are considered during the preparation of this curriculum. It has also considered the availability of teachers, ECED teachers' professional development, and the teaching learning process. It emphasizes developing the physical, cognitive, emotional, social, cultural, moral, safety and environmental skills, including language and numeracy skills. The ECED curriculum gives importance to the competencies of teachers, learning achievements, skill learning, class hours, learning environment, and learning process. It gives more emphasis on parental engagement, disability inclusion, the roles of ECED teachers, parents, management committee, as well as the community and the learning outcome of the children.

The introductory sessions, the refresher and workshop sessions are also important to enhance the knowledge of the teachers regarding the curriculum. Nevertheless, ECD teachers do not participate in capacity building post-new local government system, and the budget has not been presupposed with training. Providing comprehensive early childhood development (ECD) choices that will help every child in the 08 years age category grow physically, cognitively, socially, emotionally, and linguistically is not easy. Nevertheless, over the last three decades, a range of policies, plans, and programs has been established to enhance access to ECD services and their quality, along with the Constitution and the already established legislation that puts much value on the domain (NPC, 2020). However, the primary professional growth tool for teachers is training, yet it doesn't seem to be very effective. This may be because of the mechanisms used to conduct training, but more research is required to create training programs that are effective in terms of their contents, methods for implementation and continuing support, and systems for tracking or accreditation (MoEST, 2022).

The NCF 2019 offers young children under the age of four a year of early childhood development as well as physical, moral, cognitive, emotional and social development and care activities. SSDP (2015-2023) will enhance the physical, social, emotional, mental, spiritual and moral development of young children, and thus form a rights-based perspective in early childhood care and education, as well as readiness of the children to formal schooling. On the same note, the Fifteenth Plan has come up with a strategy to incorporate early childhood development and education programs in the school curriculum and make them compulsory for all students. The Local Government Operation Act, 2018 provides similar rules for implementing, monitoring, assessing and enforcing policies, laws, standards and planning of early childhood development and education at the local level. SESP has all children experiencing quality early childhood care, development and pre-primary education that is harmonized to SDGs (Center for Education and Human Resource Development [CEHRD], 2023).

Admission of young children has also been associated with the shortage of child daycare providers, thereby subjecting ECED teachers and other support staff members to increased pressure in dispensing their duties and diverting attention to providing ECED services as intended. The ECED strategy and new curriculum are placed on the website of MoEST. However, due to the capacity of ECED teachers,

they cannot access it easily for their use. Here are the significant gaps in the implementation of the new ECED curriculum as per the plan. According to the Educational Review Office report of 2021, the government of Nepal has invested a great deal of money in ECED. This involves establishing and sustaining the ECD centers, establishing the curriculum, the Early Learning Development Standards (ELDS) and the Minimum Standards of ECD Centers. The government also brought ECED programs into the basic education as it was deemed in SSDP in 2016. But ECED centers are still facing challenges in recruiting qualified teachers to run the centers. The development of pre-primary education was impeded by various problems, as it was associated with vague benefits, insufficient governmental funding, the difference in approaches on the government agency that should handle policy, and the lack of trained teachers (Khanal et al., 2017).

### **National Context**

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, UN agencies, especially UNICEF and some of the INGOs working for children, particularly Plan Nepal, Save the Children Norway and Save the Children US, and I/NGOs made significant contributions in the development, promotion, and expansion of ECD programs in Nepal, especially targeting marginalized communities in the remote areas. The Ministry of Education developed the BPEP in 1991, which included Shishu Class as one of the main activities. This suggests that it is challenging to promote the holistic development of a child in such an environment (MoE, 2009). According to the SSRP 2009-2015, the aim of ECD is "to expand access to quality ECD services for children of four years of age to prepare them for basic education" (MoE, 2009). As per this quality standard, the study will explore the understanding of ECD Teachers on the Curriculum for quality ECD and its implementation into the classroom.

The Strategic Paper of ECD 2004 has mentioned that "ECD" is an umbrella terminology covering the whole program targeted to children from zero to five years of age. In principle, it is agreed that, irrespective of the various terminologies used, the ECD programs should focus on the holistic development of children. The Constitution of Nepal provides adequate ground for taking affirmative efforts to secure children's equitable access to ECD programs as a fundamental right of children. Every child shall have the right to education, health, maintenance, proper care, sports, entertainment and overall personality development from the families and the State. Every child shall have the right to elementary child development and child

participation, Constitution of Nepal 2015. Nepal, a signatory of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989 and the World Declaration on Survival, Protection, Participation and Development of children, is committed to addressing the basic needs of children and protecting their rights in the country. Likewise, the Local Government Operation Act 2017 has commended the local Governments with the responsibility for initiating, developing and ensuring ECD services at the Municipality levels.

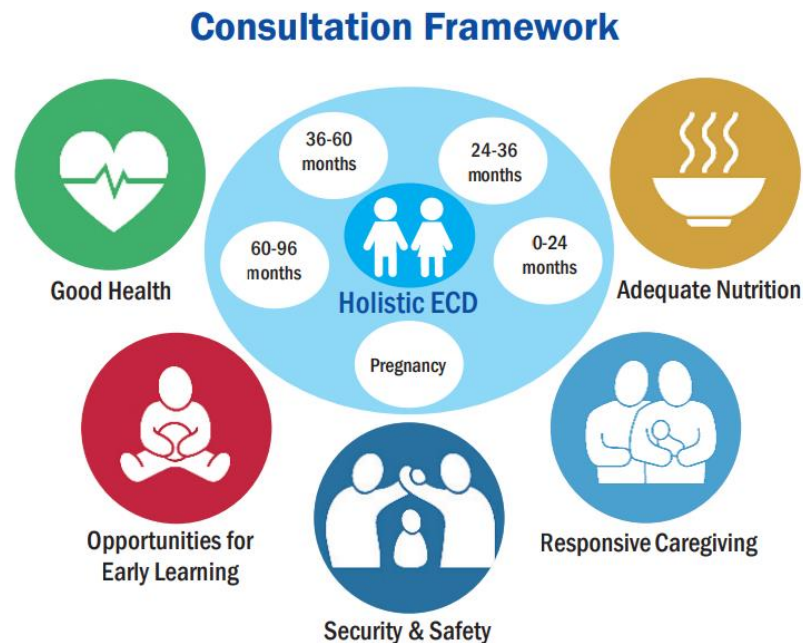
Moreover, the country requires specific policies and programmatic interventions on early childhood development to enhance the social-emotional and cognitive development of children. It would also help ensure that the children who grow up can be productive members of society or a nation who can make a difference in the future (Schwartz et al., 2019). As per my understanding, the Constitution, Local Government Operation Act of 2018, Compulsory and Free Education Act of 2018 and Children Act of 2018 all include ECD legality. However, there is poor enforcement of policies and programs to facilitate equal access to quality ECED services with capacity development of ECD teachers. Based on the context of ECD programming and policies, the formation of Shishu Kakshas as the BPEP and subsequent ECD Section in the ministry indicates that the ECD was slowly becoming institutionalized. However, the policies and operational guidelines put more focus on preparing schooling and community participation; little emphasis was placed on the larger aspect of child rights, care and protection considerations. The qualifications and payment of ECD teachers also appear insufficient, which indicates the lack of priority given to professional capacity.

### **Policies Review**

UNESCO also has a broader view on how to define ECD, so the ECCE facilities and programs will support children to develop in all areas of life from the moment they are born till the moment they enter primary school. It means that increasing young children's nutrition, health, cognitive, and psychosocial development, as well as, in some cases, their social protection, which requires several policies and initiatives together referred to as ECD. In this context, it has been essential to examine the existing policies and strategies of ECD from the viewpoint of the curriculum and practices of ECD in Nepal.

The Basic and Primary Education Project (BPEP, 1992) made a clear distinction between the concept of ECCE and ECE, which states that an ECCE initiative caters to the complete developmental requirements of a child, including

custodial care, nutritional support, socialization, education, and personality growth. Most ECE programs are simply the "feeder" system for primary education (World Bank Group, 1992). Community-based ECD centers typically offer child-friendly and stimulating learning and development opportunities to about 25 children aged 3 and 4 years old from disadvantaged and marginalized families where there are not any other accessible and affordable ECD services for them.



In 2008, the Government of Nepal approved the School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) Core Document as strongly recommended by the National Planning Commission and the Ministry of Finance. Based on the overall framework of the Core document, Ministry of Education (MoE) developed SSRP, a “long-term strategic plan” in the education sector, which entails the key strategic interventions and resource allocation. Whereas SSRP was cautious to include Early Childhood Development (ECD) in the formal education system, it has now assumed a policy position to expand ECED programs. Following the introduction of the education reformation, which involved the SSRP School Sector Development Plan (SSDP). According to SSDP (2016-2023), access to ECED/PPE has greatly grown recently in terms of learning readiness and is closely associated with decreased dropout and repeat in early grades (MoE, 2009). School Education Sector Plan (SESP) 2023- 2030 Similarly, The National Strategy for Early Childhood Development 2077-2088 was created with developed by NPC serving as the convener, the line ministries at federal, provincial, and local level are the key to implement this strategy UN agencies as well

as national and international nongovernmental organizations are collaborating with government for the effective implementation of the strategy.

As it is stressed within the Strategy Paper of 2061 of Nepal, the holistic development of all children should be a matter of primary concern. In the same light, fetal development to eight years old is usually termed as the ECD phase (NPC, 2020). This stage has been noted to be the foundation of human life, whereby about 90 percent of the development of the brain takes place. The most important part of an individual is mainly in the formative years, as physical, social, emotional and cultural development are primarily developed during the same. This is possible through the provision of access to health, nutrition, safety, and educational services to children in an integrated way. The plan promotes a multi-sectoral approach that should create partnerships with different stakeholders, such as various government departments, non-government organizations, and community groups. In the same way, the national curriculum structure is given to the Early ECED curriculum, which is essential in developing the entire childhood of a child. These comprise acquisition of social skills, hygiene, personal safety precautions and establishment of healthy habits. Through a combination of these aspects, the curriculum enables the children to be ready for future learning and personal development, which is the starting point of their growth and development in totality.

ECD legality was incorporated in the Constitution, Local Government Operation Act of 2074, Compulsory and Free Education Act of 2075 and Children Act of 2075. The school Sector Development Plan (2073-2080), Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Plan II (2075/76-2079/80), and the National Strategy for Early Childhood Development 2077-2088 (NPC, 2020) also have provisions related to ECD as per the Fifteenth Plan (2076/77-2080/81), National Policy on Children 2069 (2012).

Furthermore, the ECED curriculum spelled out that by the year 2077 B.S., all children must have the opportunity to develop physically, socially, cognitively, emotionally, and linguistically, according to the ECED plan of 2077-88 (NPC, 2020). The curriculum states that children's participation in all-around development activities, the formation of healthy habits, the adoption of personal safety measures, the development of social and hygiene habits, the development of language and communication skills, and creative thinking are all given weight in the Early Childhood Development and Education curriculum. The early childhood development and education curriculum is aimed at equally involving children in activities that

contribute to the comprehensive development of children, the formation of healthy habits, the acquisition of personal safety measures, cleanliness and social behavior, and it also focuses more specifically on the formation of creative thinking as well as language and communication skills (CDC, 2020).

Moreover, ECCD has proved to be a cutting-edge mechanism of fostering physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development. It enhances early reading and numeracy skills and provides important opportunities to sustain and enhance children's learning and development. ECD Strategy (2077-2088) supports the idea of allocating finance to ECD to improve the quality of early learning and the provision of basic capacities to young children to ensure their further effective growth. ECCD plays a vital role in the maturation of human beings and in the making of a fair society.

According to the National Education Policy 2019, its emphasis is that for early childhood development classes and child development centers, it will be arranged to provide the necessary number of teachers, depending on the number of students attending classes. The legally required qualification of teachers who facilitate classes on child development will be established at the Secondary Education Exam (Class 10) level or higher. Those teaching and facilitating in child development classes with qualifications that are below the required qualifications will be provided with the chance to enrol in regular and special training programs to upgrade their qualifications. Moreover, the minimum wages and social security provisions will be offered to the early childhood development teachers as per the laws. The execution of such teachers would be evaluated on an annual basis, and a reward and penalty system would be put in place.

Furthermore, I am motivated to investigate the way in which teachers in Nepal have conceptualized the ECD curriculum, their own practice of classroom experience, and the challenges. Although the curriculum was centered more on the training of teachers to create effective teaching and learning tools in the ECD classrooms, it also included conducting orientation and awareness programs for the teachers and parents. These activities are aimed at reinforcing their knowledge on play-based learning, child-friendly pedagogy and the role of parent participation in early childhood development of children.

### **Theoretical Review**

ECD is the collective name given to all cognitive, social, emotional and physical development of the child (Akhter, 2013). The ECD curriculum of Nepal has elements in it which promote social and emotional schooling. This can be attributed to the provision of a conducive environment under which children thrive in terms of their safety, love, and value. The ECD curriculum lays a lot of stress on the facilitation of children into being more self-aware and self-sufficient, which are the most important aspects of social interaction, such as emotional control. Heckman (2000) argues that a healthy diet, physical fitness, and exercise in the ECD age are significant key factors in brain development. Getting a favorable atmosphere currently gives the children the chances they need for their holistic development, which improves their health, future academic success, employment prospects, and performance (NPC, 2020). For example, in ECD centers, outdoor play, engaging with play materials for gross and fine motor skills, healthy meals, and regular exercise can promote physical development, which is essential for the overall health and well-being of children in ECD centers.

According to Lewis and Lindsay (2000) and Qvortrup (2009), as stated in Moloney (2011), children are considered human resource units and the future guardians of societal ideals, nationalism, and other beliefs like retirement. The traditions that carry the information, skills, and good practices related to ECD that have been passed out through the years in Nepal have never been documented, researched and printed. Also, the implementation of the new knowledge used in many nations around the world has not been studied widely or researched (NPC, 2020). Although ECD strategy focuses on policies, strategies, and programs, there are still obstacles in budget allocation and capacity of Teachers in the way of providing children from different categories who are falling behind in terms of social and economic well-being as well as geographic remoteness with access to high-quality services. Instead of knowledge completely being internal in people, cultural activities and by using the Vygotsky theory of intellectual adaptation tools (memories, mnemonics, and mind-maps), individuals can learn (Abderrahim & Plana, 2021). Children of ECD memorize by practicing the classroom activities done by teachers for literacy activities with the context of the old curriculum and focus on memorising the letters and numbers rather than social activities.

The constructivist theory argues that children construct their knowledge, and this is achieved through the interaction of their thoughts with the social and physical reality (Piaget, 1977). This opinion argues that though a teacher cannot impart knowledge to the students, they can facilitate teaching. Educators who use constructivist approaches provide an environment which promotes the continuous building of new knowledge by the children (Broderick & Hong, 2011). In developing the age-appropriate activities of ECD, the curriculum practices should be in line with the stage of the child to realize maximum learning. Although there is a great deal about the differences between these two theories on the construction of knowledge by young children in terms of early learning activities at the ECD centers, both theories give an insightful observation on the construction of knowledge among young children. The theory proposed by Piaget puts a lot of significance on the individual cognitive development of children, and the capacity of individual children to actively make new knowledge based on their experiences with the world. The features of children aged 3-5, through 4-5 hours of interaction with the children at the centers are carried out by ECD teachers through play and communication. The theory of Vygotsky, however, highlights the importance of social relations and culture in the learning and development of children. Vygotsky was convinced that through communication with those who possess more experience, children acquire something new. He further supported the culture safety tool (language, symbols and other forms of mediation) that contribute to learning and development. Both Piaget and Vygotsky have acknowledged the role of active exploration of the world around them and socialization in the learning and development of children. Nonetheless, as Piaget stressed the significance of personal exploration and experimentation, Vygotsky placed an emphasis on social interactions and cultural tools in supporting the learning of children.

As an example, children in the infancy stage require activities that will stimulate their senses, whereas preschoolers require activities that will develop their cognitive and social-emotional development. Piaget argues that children are the ones to construct meaning about the world based on experiences they undergo, and these are combined in the form of structures (Piaget, 1952). Piaget discovered that there are four stages of development, namely the sensorimotor stage, preoperational stage, concrete operational stage and formal operational stage. Every stage is characterized

by a specific form of the world's perception and thinking. In addition, this research was in line with the child development theory and the cognitive theory of Piaget.

When applied to early childhood education, the two theories indicate that the teachers and caregivers ought to put children in a condition to discover and explore, as well as experiment, and at the same time interact with them with meaningful social processes and offer them the cultural tools to learn. For example, the teachers may invite the children to participate in practical activities, as well as offer them a chance to interact with other children and have fun.

Jean Piaget's definition of cognitive development depended on how the child relates to the environment; that is, the child is said to be constructive. Children will be very active in building and making their own schemas (cognitive structures that organize and explain what is known) and will do their best to process the surrounding world (Huang, 2021). I have used this theory in my study as a theory guide.

The constructivist Theory is mainly developed by Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, who emphasize that children build knowledge actively in terms of their interactions with the surrounding world, with peers, ECD teachers and adults. Learning is not the mere process of acquiring facts but an active process in which children derive meaning by depending on past experiences, exploration and social interaction. This theoretical orientation is coherent with my study on understanding of curriculum that aims to capacitate the ECD teachers for implementation into classrooms with child-centered and play-based learning activities and methods based on the new curriculum. Constructivists say that people build knowledge in the process of interactions with other people, exchanging ideas, views and experiences. Through the process of collaborative activities, students can construct a more profound insight into intricate ideas, get trained to value other opinions, and develop their communication and teamwork (Hamid et. al., 2024).

The ECED curriculum of Nepal is highly focused on learning by activities and child centered pedagogy, and integrating play in the learning process. Whether or not teachers perceive learning as the production of knowledge or memorization, the study can explain how they learn the ideas of the curriculum by applying constructivist theory. The implicit or explicit association that teachers have with constructivist ideas is seen in the definition of terms such as play-based learning and holistic development.

## **Empirical Review**

The curriculum of ECED is an essential element of the learning and development of children. Teachers have a very significant role to play when it comes to the local implementation of this curriculum, and it is vital to get to know what they think about it in relation to enhancing its effectiveness. According to the international scene, empirical research studies have been commissioned and conducted several times to investigate the knowledge of teachers about the pre-primary curriculum. Understanding of early childhood development curricula among teachers has been researched a number of times. Aquino et al. (2017) also note that the introduction of the kindergarten curriculum has gained massive coverage as the world requires early childhood education due to the ever-growing urge. The overarching purpose of this curriculum is to provide young children with the set of knowledge and skills they will require professionally and personally in the future.

Another study by the Albert Shanker Institute of the US (2009), Reading, mathematics, and science are the key topics of much of the study on young children's learning, since these subjects have a rich body of research that has revealed discoveries that imply preschoolers can learn more than what was traditionally believed to be the preschool curriculum. I am going to examine ECED teachers' perceptions of the importance of various aspects of the curriculum, as well as their readiness to implement it. As per my experience on teachers' training to ECED, it is only focused on one-year ECED for children of 4-5 years with classroom activities for literacy and numeracy.

As per the present context, other factors like teacher quality and managerial abilities are less clear, but the physical facilities and educational resources are readily apparent (Pande, 2009). The researcher discovered that there is sufficient interior equipment and supplies, but not enough outdoor equipment or supplies. According to the researcher's observations, there is less room, which may also be a factor in outdoor activities, and they also lack sufficient finances for outdoor items or equipment (Koirala, 2014). Even though no specific curriculum crafted to engage ECD-age children existed, learning should be guided through practices that favour the physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development of children. The 2006 ECD Curriculum of the Department of Education did right to stress holistic development of the children (Pande, 2009). Interdependence of any form of child development dimensions is another important aspect and should be supported within the ECCD continuum. It is

essential that government agencies, non-State actors, and other organizations that govern health, nutrition, water, sanitation, hygiene, education, social welfare, protection, and the environment consult with families and communities and collaborate to generate effective policies, programs and operational guidance.

In other words, investment in ECD services is imperative in providing benefits not only to children attending ECD programs now but also to future generations (Danziger & Waldfogel, 2000). A good socialization habit developed at the early stage of an individual's life will eventually contribute to creating a civilized society. The study of the topic of children's learning compared to other issues like nutrition has been researched more slowly to be comprehended, but with the increased recognition of the importance of providing a learning environment, and the governments and policymakers are becoming increasingly enlightened, they cannot resist listening. It has been demonstrated that learning and development are not simple processes, and this has begun to change this mentality.

The need to integrate practice and some key findings of the study was a necessity, more so for the ECD professionals (UNESCO, 1998). It has been alluded to earlier, there has been an upward trend in restricting ECD to get the children ready to school at pre-schooling levels or in a way used as a means of ensuring that the child is occupied when the parents are out at work.

After reviewing several empirical studies, I came to this point of understanding that over the years, the ECED curriculum in Nepal has been gradually changed towards holistic child development, where physical, emotional, social and cognitive aspects are taken into consideration. The ECED curriculum 2021 represented a major change in that it formally recognized that learning should not be primarily aimed at getting children ready to enter primary school, but should instead foster a variety of interdependent areas of development. The other aspect of my realization is the fact that the ECED curriculum cannot be implemented alone in an isolated way; it needs multi-sectoral cooperation between education, health, nutrition, water, sanitation, protection, and social welfare agencies to benefit the development of children. Without this holistic approach, the curriculum may be left to little more than a one-dimensional tool of education instead of a holistic approach to child well-being.

Empirical research also indicates that in the past, ECD was at times considered as a means through which one can prepare children to be taken to school or to keep

them busy as parents went to work instead of addressing the rights, care and development of children. Such a school-readiness orientation continues to affect practice in numerous situations. However, over time, increasing awareness at the international level and in Nepal itself has come to the realization that investment in ECD services has long-term payoffs to children, families and society in terms of socialization, life skills, and lifetime learning capabilities.

### **Research Gap**

The problems of ECD in my personal experience were the poor educational background of ECD teachers, less training, and an opportunity to develop knowledge and capacity building on the social and economic status of people of poor origin, a mixed culture society, and poor awareness of parents on ECD. Past research regarding the subject of ECD has been carried out before; however, none of the studies focused directly on the topic of ECD as a curriculum specific to this province. In Nepal, Rautahat district was considered the poorest district and the most backward in terms of education when compared with the other 77 districts, and this fact makes it a special district of concern to me. I feel that ECED curriculum in Nepal may be conceptually well in terms of holistic, integrated and child-centred development, but in practice may be limited by scarce resources, disproportionate teacher capacity and conflicting priorities of school preparation and childcare support depending on ECED strategy, Curriculum, Plans and Policies. According to the ECED Strategy 2077-2088, the government is encouraging “schoolification”, growing formal academic engagement at the expense of unstructured learning conditions in the name of school readiness (Ring et al., 2019, as cited in Dahal, 2024), where ECD teachers still need their capacity to implement the new curriculum. The ECED Strategy is giving low priority to ECED teachers’ capacity.

In our case, we did not conduct much research to establish the effects of the understanding and implementation of ECED curriculum on children, which in our case are academic achievements, social-emotional development, and school readiness. Their knowledge of the curriculum and its application in the classroom should be extended to ECED teachers. There is a need to conduct additional research to establish the long-term results of ECED curriculum knowledge and practices among ECED teachers. The majority of ECED curriculum studies have been carried out in Western countries, and therefore, they might not capture the reality of all children of different cultural affiliations in our setting. Consequently, the ECED curriculum ought

to be modified to suit diverse cultural groups of children. The implementation and knowledge of the ECED curriculum by the teachers is crucial to carrying out ECED centers with various activities depending on the curriculum. More research is required in the field of ECED and teachers' capacity to use the curriculum, particularly in Madhes Pradhesh (Province no 2). As per the front-line employees of community schools, qualified ECD teachers are essential for the quality of services. The low academic standard of teachers required to be a grade 12 graduate is recommended to be increased (Dahal, 2024). As many groups provide training, it is not clear whether they are consistent and of high quality. Resources are another important challenge in the whole of Nepal (Buck et al., 2020). An insufficient salary, vague instructions, and other resource shortages are only a few examples of problems that several teachers have mentioned (UNICEF, 2019). Although the number of ECD centers has grown, quality remains a significant challenge, even though Nepal announced its focus on ECD (Buck et al., 2020).

## CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I have deliberated on methodological ideas and research design for supporting this study. The chapter summarizes how narratives are a method of inquiry that serves for interpreting narrative stories linked with social and cultural perspectives. It applied the multi-paradigmatic research design to understand and make meaning of ECED curriculum practices in the ECED centers. I applied this qualitative research design by conceptualizing and analyzing ECED teachers' experiences, cases, stories and interpreting the findings to know my subjective world. Furthermore, I followed the meaning-making and knowledge construction via lived experience stories of ECED Teachers on curriculum practice.

### **Philosophical Foundations of Research**

I have examined the decoded textual information of so-called themes that were developed on the coded data of the ECED teachers, as far as understanding and practices of the curriculum are concerned. I have sought patterns (perception of new curriculum and ECED," use and challenges," and benefits) and interesting statements in how they understand the curriculum among repeated themes. The explication of the deciphered stories of ECED teachers is an insightful idea on how the curriculum is understood.

### **Ontological Belief**

The curriculum of early childhood might be influenced by social, political, cultural, economic and the experiences of the stakeholders. In that condition, people think differently, hence my ontology belief is based on multiple realities. My ontological standpoint was to explore the multiple realities of participants, which helped to reveal the understanding of curriculum in early childhood education and development, and to find the teachers' experiences and practices of ECED curriculum in early childhood centers.

### **Epistemological Perspective**

I made a close and trustworthy relationship through participation to get individual experiences, knowledge and subjective understanding of my epistemological beliefs. I applied the simple interpretation for understanding and making meaning of ECED curriculum practices in the ECED centers. Through

research, we need to consider the system of principles and beliefs as per the research philosophy. I conceptualized and analyzed experiences of the ECED teachers on ECED curriculum with my ontological and epistemological viewpoints, as well as on the formulation of appropriate research methodology.

As per my experiences and knowledge, every human being is different; they have their own understanding and perception about phenomena to find various stages of power practice and present the situation of society by interacting. I derived the experiences as stories and views of participants on the ECED curriculum through in-depth interviews and observation, as per my context. I outlined a methodology approach for this inquiry. My epistemological belief was based on the notion of the constructivist standpoint, which describes subjective knowledge based on the experiences of the curriculum of ECED. I explored and interpreted with ECED facilitator understanding experiences and practices side through, interviews and observation in their ECED center or official setting. The bunch of ontology and knowledge of epistemology were essential for research to extend the beliefs and knowledge through the study.

### **Axiology**

We could not contribute and skip the value of participants; research adds to the researcher's value because all humans see guides and live their lives with values. Research, culture, thoughts, actions, social norms and activities driven by diverse values. So, the role of value is very meaningful, and impact influences the values of different groups of participants as well as the side of research, as mentioned by Creswell et al. (2011). There was a role of different values in my research study. As mentioned above, there was no possibility of value-free research; it was value-laden in every step of the study. The value of participants' beliefs, as well as my value, is explained by searching for the answer to what, why and how constructed by human beings. As per the narrative inquiry, as a researcher, I couldn't be separated from this uniqueness. In this situation, the value of researchers and participants might influence and impact the ideas, expression, views, and voice interaction. I have respected the value of participants, their knowledge, and the source of new insight and ideas. So, the axiology of my research explored the commitment, opinion, views, feelings, expectation, and emotion on ECED curriculum, as well as my resource value, which is based on the resilience factors linked with ECED curriculum. The participating

experiences and lines provided me with the opportunity to explore new ways of thinking, dimensions of their great insights and genius ideas.

### **Research Paradigm**

In my study, as per my ontological, epistemological and axiological beliefs, my paradigm of study is interpretative. My research Paradigm focused on the subjective and multiple realities of ECED teachers' participant experience in the ECED curriculum. There were different participants with their different thoughts and stories. There should be personal thoughts, and hence understanding and analyzing the reality of the world. It supported the verification and opportunity to be the near reality of various participants with different organizations.

Under the framework of the qualitative research paradigm, we have interpretivist, constructivist, critical theory, phenomenology, grounded theory and ethnography paradigms. Hence, I have applied narrative research as the Interpretivist Paradigm, which helped me to connect different views, stories and experiences about the ECED curriculum in the present situation. In this way, as an interpretive researcher, I started with the individuals and understood their thoughts and interpretations of the community and world around them. I explored the knowledge, thoughts, in-depth interviews, observation, interaction with participants' experiences and behaviors and stories of participants covered stories and cases as narratives. This study is concerned with different facilitators' stories and views of understanding the world through the facilitators' experiences. Hence, meaning was constructed from the participants' stories, linking with the experiences of the researchers as well. Therefore, I collected the experiences, thoughts, concepts and stories from participants who were representatives from ECED teachers and interpreted the experiences for meaning making with a narrative interpreter paradigm. 4 ECED teachers from diverse backgrounds and ethnicities (Bramin, Chhetri & Janajati)

### **My Research Approach**

Based on my research paradigm, the research approach was qualitative. The primary objective of my study was to gather opinions, ideas, practices, and the status of the Early Childhood Development and Education (ECED) curriculum. To fulfil this, I applied the use of qualitative research where one gathers both group and personal narratives in the form of stories and makes sense of social activities. Since qualitative research emphasizes the meaning and the meaning-making process, the interpretation was the centerpiece of this kind of research. Alternatively, qualitative

researchers are convinced that the effort to interact with such meanings can lead to the discovery of a better and in-depth comprehension of more significant social and psychological undertakings. They also believe that people's behaviors and cultures always have some sort of meaning (Willig & Rogers, 2017). This study collected the narrative stories of different participants with different cultural and social statuses.

In my research inquiry, I collected different participants' thoughts, views, and stories. Narrative research is a qualitative research methodology in the tradition of narrative inquiry, where the dominant research approach makes use of story analysis and elicitation to gain better insight into individuals, communities, and societies (Wolgemuth & Agosto, 2019). Narratives of Teachers aid in presenting a series of stories that could be obtained during the data collection process through in-depth interviews and observations. I perceived that narratives provide a detailed construct out of which one understands how people perceive the world, as shown in their stories. My research design uses narrative inquiry as a research methodology. I explored the different participants' (working as teachers) views as stories and interpreted them collectively and reflected on their experiences. The methodological strategy of narrative inquiry also helped me to understand the issue, and I built it considering the feedback of my research participants (Seiki, 2014, as cited in Subedi & Shrestha, 2020). Sometimes, though, narrative researchers may wish to interpret life stories that are not of individuals. They could, as an example, be concerned with human lives in general as represented in literature or in social science and think about the general and the exceptional in the body of life stories and what they thus permit or forbid (Wolgemuth & Agosto, 2019).

### **Research Design**

I collected narrative stories and cases of ECED, including the practices of the ECED curriculum by ECED teachers. Teachers still have not adapted to the new ECED curriculum by using activity-based teaching in ECED. The cases and stories of ECED teachers were narrative and used as a method for inquiry by storytelling as the case and stories. I tracked the process of meaning-making and construction of knowledge through the narrative of lived experience stories of ECED teachers about how to practice the curriculum, knowing as interpreting and constructing from personal writing with the narrative of the cultural, political, and social context of individuals (Belbase et al., 2008). The origin of storytelling runs deep within the landscape of exploration. Narrative as a way of inquiry is a new trend area that is

based on several branches such as anthropology, arts, historical, literary, cultural studies, psychological, sociology, and educational research (Barrett & Stauffer, 2009). Furthermore, I collected the stories of facilitators' in-depth interviews and observations, including observation of ECED centers.

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) employ the method of narrative inquiry that accepts the importance of narrative storytelling as an effective source of knowledge with which teachers consider their own practical knowledge and the formation of such. Life stories and personal narratives have been the method that many teachers have used as a means of understanding the teaching and learning process. I have collected the cases and stories of ECED teachers and their understanding of the implementation of the ECED curriculum. The objective of a narrative inquiry method was to interpret the significance that individuals assign to their environment and to gain comprehension of it. I integrated my own experiences of ECED training as a trainer and practices of the ECD curriculum by storytelling my own stories. Despite being new to the social sciences, this narrative inquiry has philosophical roots in the humanities and other areas that go under the umbrella term of narratology (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). This study would not explore only the participants' thoughts and experiences; it was integrated into the researcher's experiences, too.

### **Research Site and Participant Selection**

I could find different appropriate participants in Rautahat district due to my home district; it was easy for me to spend adequate time in the field in Rautahat, which obviously helped to increase the trustworthiness of my research. I selected the local government, Chandrapur Municipality, which was in the northern part of Rautahat, where I had started my professional journey as an ECD practitioner and trainer. Chandrapur Municipality has 62 (4 community-based and 58 school-based) ECED centers. I selected purposefully 2 (Two) ECED centers and Teachers from community-based ECED and another two ECED centers and ECED teachers from schools among 62 ECED centers based on training experiences (trained and untrained teachers), cultural and ethnicity background of communities (Chandrapur Municipality, 2026)

Potential participants were identified-ECED teachers were identified by purposeful sampling or contact with schools, and ECED centers directly. Purposive sampling was used in such a manner that it served as a case that would allow numerous details to be learned. To capture a mixture of ECD teachers, I chose centers

that belong to different regions of Chandrapur municipality. The study area was diversified, selecting one from the Chaudhary community, one from the Terai-based community, one from the Pahadi community and one from the mixed community Centers where children aged 3-5 attended.

### **Introduction of the Respondents**

My first research participant is Sarita, 33 years old female with a tall, slim, slightly dark complexion, another cast group background. She lives in Chandrapur. She has worked for the last 5 years and has no training at all. She is not informed about the new ECED curriculum, and she has low skills for materials development as well. She is also engaging in teaching the upper class as per the request of the school management.

My Second research participant was Niru, 45 years old and belongs to Janajati. She passed only grade 10. She was not informed about the new ECED curriculum, and she has low skills for materials development. She has 18 years of experience running the ECED centers in her community with basic training. Niru was managing 40 children within one center. Her classroom was almost empty of learning materials. My third research participant was Kabita, 40 years old and belongs to another caste group. She passed +2. She has worked for the last 14 years and has the basic training and refresher training. She knows nothing about the new ECD curriculum, nor does she possess high skill in materials development. She is also engaging in teaching the upper grades. Kabita was managing 26 children within one center. My fourth research participant was Sukhi Devi, 47 years old and belongs to the Janajati caste group. She passed only grade 8. She has worked for more than 24 years and has the basic training and refresher training. She has medium skills for materials development. She is not informed about the ECED curriculum 2021 as well.

### **Data Collection Tools and Techniques**

As per the nature of my ontology, epistemology, and my research paradigm, I collected and captured the personal, social, and professional experiences and stories of understanding Teachers in ECED Curriculum and implementation. The views and thoughts of participants with their experience and practices of the ECED curriculum. Thus, the in-depth interview and observation were key methods to generate information in my study. Looking at this notion, I had a conversation with the participants about the ECED curriculum, asking broad, open-ended questions. In the same way, I collected the participants' ongoing behavior in a natural situation, and I

observed the behavior and practiced the present status of the ECED curriculum in the ECED Center. In other versions, research can capture data on what participants were opposed to, and what they say they do (Ciesielska et al., 2018).

As I explained before, I used an in-depth interview to collect the experiences of ECED Teachers on the ECED curriculum and implementation into the classroom. I designed a series of open-ended questions to carry out a detailed interview of the participants based on my research purpose and questions. Given the demographic characteristics of the participants, the questions were designed in a simple and straightforward way. The sequencing of the questions is in such a way that it facilitates the gathering and obtaining of what the participants thought, opinions and what is occurring as the participant behaves in a natural situation or setting is observed. I also observed ECED classrooms that are conducted by the teachers to obtain additional information and make sure that the information which was given with the help of the participants corresponds with the reality of classroom practices. I, myself, conducted the observation and supported in grounding the reality of the ECED teachers' understanding of the curriculum and implementation into the classroom.

### **Field Work Process**

Field work was a way of collecting authentic information or data collection. After finalizing all tools and processes of my research, I approached the field work with participants' interviews and observation for understanding and practices of the ECED curriculum. Before entering the field, I planned for details for an interaction meeting with four selected participants (based on trained and untrained ECED teachers), contact information, and finalized the tools for the interview. Firstly, I contacted the related stakeholders and organization bodies like the local educational department and the responsible person for research. As per my understanding, gatekeepers are essential mediators for accessing study settings and participants within social networks. The gatekeeper may be a person with the power to grant or withhold access to people or situations during research into organizations. Firstly, I visited ECED centers to inform them about my research area and related topic and collected consent from ECED teachers and principals of the school. I used to visit many times for interviews and observations according to participants' suitable time because it was the beginning of a new session of ECED and school, as well as the summer vacation had started. I consulted with 4 ECED teachers for their narrative

story of 2 ECED centers from community-based and two from school-based. Field work was the essential thing; it was a much-needed part of research, after obtaining legal permission.

### **Data Collection**

I collected all information on the location, ECED centers and details of ECED teachers, their experiences, cases, stories and perceptions, and understanding of ECED curriculum practices by observation and interviews. I consulted with Schools, School Management and Local Government as needed. I developed the interviews and observation checklist and maintained a degree of comfort in the interactions with research participants. During my study period, I made a quality relationship field site and proceeded with my interview and observation with the participants. Following the procedure of fieldwork during research, I interviewed my four participants (ECED Teachers). I prepared the guiding questions to collect the experiences and views of ECED teachers on the ECED curriculum. I was aware of my research questions while preparing the guiding questions. At the same time, I did my best to make the interview more meaningful and straightforward by using probing and emerging questions.

### **Field Experiences**

I have interviewed teachers in ECED to understand their conceptual knowledge about the curriculum and classroom observations conducted at 4 ECED centers to see how that knowledge is applied to practice. My first visit to ECED teachers had a mixed degree of clarity. As per the first visit, some teachers said that they were more dependent on the training manuals, and others had their own interpretation of the curriculum according to their teaching experience. They have indicated the restriction of accessing updated curriculum documents, a language barrier and diverse professional development. I have applied the thematic analysis approach for data analysis. According to Braun and Clarke's (2006), the thematic analysis framework is actively used in qualitative studies based on given phases such as familiarizing the data, generating the codes, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, refining and naming themes and producing the report. Thematic analysis (TA) is a method for identifying and analyzing patterns of meaning in a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006, as cited in Joffe, 2011).

### **Data Organization, Analysis and Meaning-Making**

I used the naturalized transcription method using this specific kinds of transcription I engaged what was said and also preserved the different elements of the interviews other than the verbal content, such as nonverbal language contextual aspects and the interaction between me and participants after transcribing the data, I began to analyze the data scratching various codes embedded in the transcribed data as suggested by the Cope and Elwood (2009). After thoroughly reading the transcription, I identified the codes and similar codes, which were organized in various categories and later generated in meaningful themes linking with research questions. As we know, qualitative research was always interpretive in every stage, I interpreted the data meaning through analysis of politeness, thematic structures, social and cultural referents, and collective narrative research.

### **Quality Standards**

In my research, I have ensured and maintained the quality standards and strictly followed them. I paid my full attention and honesty to get answers to my research questions. I maintained the quality standards of qualitative research as well as the narrative approach in specific. I took care of the richness of the information gathered rather than the huge amount of data gathered. My involvement was explored and expanded as needed for research activities and tasks. I tried my best to use the appropriate research method as per my ontological and epistemological beliefs of the study. I am conscious of making sure the research findings are, though rich, comprehensive and well developed. This study explored the story that maintains the qualitative standards and trustworthiness.

### **Trustworthiness**

I collected thick information regarding past, present, and future narratives about ECED teachers regarding their understanding and practices of the ECED curriculum. I collected detailed information about ECED teachers' personal and social contexts. In gathering the data on the understanding and implementation of the curriculum of ECED, I procured the respondents to give me stories of their experiences. The narratives are gathered out of the past, present and future of respondents and in the normal social setting where the respondents live. The cases identified through ECED centers, and other places where the respondents can comfortably share their experiences. I paid full attention and honesty in obtaining answers to my research questions. I explored stories that maintain truth-worthiness

while taking care to account for interpersonal relationships and interactions that comprise the participants' lives. Additionally, I ensured that the insights and conclusions drawn from the study are grounded in data.

### **Reflexivity**

I have maintained reflexivity and pedagogical thoughtfulness within the multi-paradigmatic research design. As per my experiences and understandings of ECED curriculum and its practices, I critically observed the stories of ECED teachers, cases, events, moments, and concepts from my narratives as well as ECED teachers' narratives. As I reflected on my real-life experience and heard the anecdotes of ECED teachers about curriculum implementation, I interpreted their values, beliefs, and practices using descriptive narratives and not using numeric data; thus, I gained the underlying meanings, contextual facts, and underlying insights that are contained in their experiences.

### **Temporality**

As per my study on understanding of the curriculum by ECED teachers based on their experiences, temporality is essential in that the stories provided by the teachers consider how this understanding has evolved over time. Teachers explained their first experience with ECED curriculum and training (past), explained what they do and what does not work in classrooms (present), and what they want or hope to receive in terms of improved training and support (future).

### **Spatiality**

I have selected the schools and communities of Chandranigahapur, where I have gained experience in ECD training and education. For shaping the stories and experiences of ECED teachers, I have concentrated on ECED centers, both community-based and school-based ECED, observed and interviewed ECED teachers, where the narratives of teachers influence where they work. Spatiality is considering the physical environment of ECED centers with the availability of six learning corners, play materials, outdoor games materials and how these things support implementing the ECED curriculum

### **Sociality**

Sociality is the relationship and situational aspects of the research procedure. Sociality focuses attention on the thoughts, feelings, and moral reactions of the participants and events and actions. Place focuses attention on both locations where people lived and places where the events of inquiry take place (Caine et al., 2022).

The personal backgrounds, emotions, moral attitudes/dispositions, and hopes of the researcher and the participants also affect the storyline. As per my study, the personal belief of an ECED teacher regarding child-centered learning can impact the process of them telling their experience of the classroom.

### **Confidentiality and Anonymity**

As I carried out a research study, I explained to them what my research is all about and how I would go about it. I introduced myself and the aim of the research study. I guaranteed the confidentiality and anonymity of my participants (ECED teachers) in my line of inquiry, and I provided liberty to the participants. Informed consent was also taken by the participants. It implies giving them information on the study, its reason, process of doing it, risks, and benefits, as well as their willing consent to take part in the matter. Confidential and only accessible to researchers was the personal information and data of all the participants.

Narrative inquiry should be responsive to the inner and outer conditions where feelings and moral dispositions, and the outer cultural, institutional, and political conditions, form the experience. When collecting data, I made sure to respect the privacy and feelings of the participants and consider sociality during the analysis and the connection of the data. I pursued the ethical concerns of my research study and concerned myself with the no-harm conduct and observed sensitivity to the socio-cultural practices of the participants.

The young children were a vulnerable population; hence, I made sure that their rights were not violated and their well-being was not at stake. I was not intending to hurt or upset any children and made sure that the children were at ease with what was done during the study. Moreover, they always receive the verbal permission of parents or guardians to record the data of children.

### **Research Ethics**

I had been considering the ethics of research and applied the given guidelines of research for conducting the study. Informing the participants about the purpose of the study was solely an academic purpose (Akaranga & Makau, 2016). The social, economic, and cultural historical background information explored the place and the time for the trustworthiness of the study. During the interview, I took consent and started the interview. Fouka and Mantzorou (2014) state that the researchers need to consider the dignity of research participants and subjects as per the ethics, which is equally important in publishing the research findings (as cited in Akaranga & Makau,

2016). I also made sure that whoever participated in the study did not care about their race, ethnicity, gender, or any other factor that may influence the study. I was honest in the citation of the previous works to avoid plagiarism in my inquiry. I was not arguing about the experiences of my participants under the curriculum of ECED. I was honest about not causing any harm to the beliefs/faiths of society and groups. I used pseudonyms for the actors of my study participants who were represented in the study. Moreover, I have been following the ethical guidelines prepared by Kathmandu University School of Education (KUSOED) more sincerely.

## CHAPTER IV

### CURRICULUM UNDERSTANDING OF THE TEACHERS

In this chapter, I have discussed the major themes by thoroughly analyzing the transcribed data from interviews with ECED teachers and observations. I have interpreted the transcribed data as ECED teachers' narratives by reflecting on the meaning of each theme and sub-theme in relation to my research questions. I have looked and discussed recurring themes such as perception of new curriculum and use, training and implementation of new curriculum, challenges during implementation and suggestions of teachers for overcoming the challenges.

Similarly, I explored my experiences working as a trainer in ECED fields by meshing the narratives of the research participants. I narrated my experience as an ECED trainer and linked personal experiences to the experiences of ECED Training graduates who have experienced exclusion as teachers, with or without the ECED curriculum, in the teaching and learning process in the ECED classrooms.

#### **ECED Curriculum: An Invisible Giant**

I explored the understanding of the curriculum through in-depth interviews, observation and interaction with participants' experiences. Behaviors and stories of participants were covered and discussed as cases and narratives. Therefore, I collected the experiences, thoughts, concepts and stories from ECED teachers and interpreted the experiences for meaning making from stories of ECED teachers as a narrative interpreter paradigm.

As per the training guidelines of the Government, ECED teachers were trained for 10-16 days based on curriculum goals and methods. But local governments and schools did not distribute the curriculum widely. Teachers should run through a curriculum, plan age-sensitive activities, as well as liaise with assistants and children. Though teachers are consciously aware of child development and employ play-based forms in the classroom, the issues at ECED centers prevent the effective use of their capabilities.

I have analyzed the interpreted narratives of identified themes from coded data related to the understanding of curriculum by ECED teachers, thoroughly analyzing the transcribed data from interviews with ECED teachers. I have looked and discussed recurring themes such as perception of new curriculum and use, training and

implementation of new curriculum, challenges during implementation and suggestions of teachers for overcoming the challenges. Though the local government education unit is implementing ECED in the schools, they have limited opportunities for curriculum-based training for the capacity development of ECED teachers. ECED teachers perceive ECED as the teaching center for the alphabet and numbers, with some educational activities mainly focusing on classroom activities. ECED teachers gave their views only on educational activities, as little on the curriculum and had less understanding of holistic development. They have requested the daily activities planned and needed to be displayed on the wall, and requested some additional teaching and learning materials for regular activities. As per the ethical norms, I had not spoken about the issue of requests of ECED teachers for materials.

*In the summer days of 2080, I was in the school where the classes were disturbed by the heat wave. It was, as a matter of truth, one of those hot days when you can feel the sun beating down. The schoolyard was gazillion percent vacant and not a single bunch of kids scampering about, only the headmaster and a few teachers doing what they could at the office, down to the final grains of last-minute details, since it is all about to begin. I went over to the ECED center to interview Sarita, the magazine teacher at the ECED center. Once I entered the classroom, I saw this small television set on the wall, which was not connected to any electricity. It was simply cute to display the TV on the wall. And across the way on another wall, there was a warm mattress pile of cotton just suited to the taking of a good old-fashioned nap by the little ones. Other books were placed either with no order.*

*And speaking of it, I should not forget about the bright BARDNAMALA, these colorful visuals and text presenting math and English concepts. It made it a very warm feeling house. And these were plain pictures of the months of the year, and days of the week, and were simply suspended across the room, ready to be seen by anybody. All this was organized to make a warm reception for the children on arrival. Sarita stressed the necessity of a good and friendly atmosphere within the ECED facility. It is all about that visual splendor! During our conversation, my gaze ran through the different learning resources available in all six learning corners of the room. Sarita has a good point; to allow the children to thrive, the classroom should be non-dangerous as well as a positive environment and establish a child-friendly learning environment to capture the attention of the children when dealing with classroom work. They must feel free, they must bring out their feelings, and they must*

*be able to become very involved in their learning process. She said that when they feel safe and respected, then children tend to be much more willing to discover things, ask questions and make mistakes during their learning activities. And those are the types of things that are so important to their development.*

As per the above quote, Sarita, an ECED teacher, reflects on her experiences and practices regarding early childhood education, particularly focusing on the needs of materials, lack of training and resources in implementing the updated ECED curriculum, including low monitoring. Sarita mentions that most of her time is spent engaging in playing and singing with children and using some materials during the class. ECED teachers and parents need to interact with children, which stimulates early development.

According to the Consultative Group for Early Childhood Care and Development, all aspects of the future of a child, including their health, nutrition, growth, learning, thinking and reasoning abilities, interactions with other children and adults, are determined by experiences, care, and stimulation in their early age (Dahal, 2024).

Sarita really highlights a tough situation here. ECED teachers do not have enough training to grasp those new updates and ideas for new classroom activities. As per the interview with Sarita, she feels overwhelmed regarding the previous training and support. It simply shows what the policies attempt to do and what is happening on the ground. It is as though the intentions are good, but then the teachers of ECED, such as Sarita, are hanging with no support needed to carry out those changes in the curriculum. For brain development during the ECED age, nutrition, physical exercise and fitness are essential (Heckman, 2000). Getting a favorable atmosphere currently gives the children the chances they need for their holistic development, which improves their health, future academic success, employment prospects, and performance (NPC, 2020).

Based on the views of Sema, as a member of both the family and society, a child undergoes growth and sustains development. Children's knowledge and skills are directly connected to the support they obtain in their environment and the people with whom they communicate in terms of the overall development and learning (Sema, 2021).

However, I didn't find curriculum-related activities in the classroom. Sarita elucidated on her challenges when she said,

*Truly speaking, I am really facing a hard time in the way of creating a good learning environment and yet to add to my teaching skills. I have not practiced with the ECED Curriculum, and I am rather lost as far as communicating and practicing this new approach in the classroom is concerned. I always asked my Headteacher to support the teaching and learning materials and training. Also, during my class, I assess how my children are engaging and developing. I just want mostly to make my children behave and ensure that they play without quarrels and share snacks during tiffin time. I have not received any training on the new course content on ECED as well.*

According to the discussion of findings of narratives of understanding on curriculum and training, peer sharing mobile meetings of ECED teachers is important, according to the request made by Sarita. This might be applicable here in the context of how ECED teachers might learn about the revised curriculum, and this might be through training courses or learning from other peers. These teachers of ECED who are subjected to various time pressures stand a higher chance of following the curriculum. They also perform the material of better visual quality, like teachers educated at a bachelor's degree level and trained in ECED (Schwartz et al., 2019). Social learning theory pays attention to the importance of observation and modelling during the learning process. Sociocultural theory is a theory developed by Lev Vygotsky that relies on the cultural, social and historical context in developing the perception and learning of individuals. Moreover, people acquire knowledge through watching the behavior of other people, their attitudes, and the results of such actions. As per the understanding and attitudes of ECED teachers, children get opportunities for learning by observing the whole practices and behaviors of ECED teachers.

According to Niru (my second research participant),

*Consistently, we observe that children wash their hands before eating, brush their teeth, comb their hair, wear clean clothes, and use the restrooms. As a result, these behaviors help them appear neater and cleaner overall than their peers who have not enrolled in ECED. According to parents, their children not only practice good personal cleanliness but also help seniors build bathrooms and develop hygienic practices in their houses. Additionally, children are practicing brushing their teeth and washing their hands at home after practiced in ECED.” They repeated the action of personal hygiene by observing their friends at the ECED center. They were cultivated by the*

*actions of one another. ECED curriculum is not only education-oriented on teaching and learning process, but also on personal attention to development and behavior change.*

Bandura achieved that learning could take place in a direct experience or by observation, which is also referred to as observational learning or modeling. According to Bandura, children learn through observing, imitating and internalizing the behaviors of other people, especially their adults, who are important, like teachers (Bandura, 2001). This theory becomes evident in the ECED classroom setting in multiple aspects, including teachers acting as role models of behavior and young children imitating how their teachers talk, sit, share, listen, as well as near conflict resolution. On the same note, whenever teachers treat children with kindness, respect, and patience, children replicate such social interaction modes.

With reference to the ECED teachers imparting knowledge regarding the revised curriculum, the theory of social learning indicates that the teachers can be imparted the knowledge through observation and learning of the behaviors and the practices of the experienced educators or through organized training programs where they observe and acquire the knowledge which is taught by experienced teachers in the programs. *I have learnt how to control an ECED classroom to maintain a good and orderly learning environment, which is the skill I have gained as an ECD-trainer. I gained skills in the production of teaching and learning materials related to the age group of 3-5-year-old children; I used my professional experience in the field of teaching, creativity, and an excellent knowledge of child development. I had encouraged the teachers to present a stimulating and nurturing environment which helps lay a ground basis towards the future learning experience a child will undergo. For creating the learning environment, creating a package includes skill-based training with participatory methods by engaging in materials development, experience sharing, group work, skill-based learning, and the use of different learning materials. During the basic and refresher training, I have practiced the observation micro-teaching practices of ECED teachers.*

While observing the ECED classrooms, supplementing the insights gained from interviews with four ECED teachers allowed me to analyze various aspects of their daily schedule of the class, teaching practices, including activity planning, utilization of materials, children's engagement in the daily classroom activities, and assessment methods throughout the observation process. In my second observation, as

an example, I found out that Sarita was the one leading the morning session by the time I entered the classroom. I observed daily routines, classroom routines, pedagogic approaches, learning corner materials, teaching material creation and evaluation procedures. Observation exposed how teachers apply the given materials as per the daily plan and use of teacher guidelines and curriculum in their classrooms, and highlighted their understanding of its practical significance. I observed the effective lesson planning process and delivery in the classroom.

Children started to play while running as per the game rules. Indoor and outdoor games support the physical development of children; hence, teachers can create a learning environment for all children. After the game, the teacher stimulated the children by means of energetic and pleasant rhymes. When the children were directed to look up at the reading wall, indicated by a long stick, curiously, they cast an eye upward. Similarly, as per the narrative data, after the views of Sarita, she expressed her idea about the game. Children learn to work together, share personal space and take turns through group participatory games like RUMALLUKAI. They learn important social skills such as communication, cooperation and compromise. The game RUMALLUKAI has allowed children to interact as they can play the game with their school friends, and this helps in building friendships and learning how to socialize in a positive, active environment. For children, playing is the most important thing. Additionally, young toddlers acquire knowledge by active participation and experience. As interests, skills and social contexts of students play their role in learning processes, play-based learning is a core component of ECCE curriculum (Gul, 2023).

To explore the training experience of the participants, I asked them questions in my inquiry (Adhikari, 2019). The last few years have witnessed an increased understanding of the need to have a curriculum (or pedagogic framework) in early years environments, and have resulted in many countries around the world publishing new national (or state) curricula (Sofou & Tsafos, 2010). The ECED curriculum is designed to ensure that learners are grounded in scientific knowledge by the time they finish nursery school (Andiema, 2016). As outlined in narrative stories, Early Childhood Development (ECD) teachers possess a comprehension of the growth and development of children aged three to five. They are knowledgeable about the way children learn and grow by playing. Moreover, they prove to create caring relations with every child, being respectful to his/her situation, characteristics, and cultural

background. ECED teachers practice activities for children, formulate comprehensive curriculum plans on a daily, weekly, monthly, and long-term basis, and ensure the creation of a friendly environment for children to share meals and snacks with their peers (NCE, 2015).

ECED teachers had an active participation in training programs to make them understand the goals and objectives set as well as methodologies to be used in the former ECED curriculum. These sessions generally focused on the developmentally appropriate practice and what learning outcomes should be expected at the early childhood level. This is an important fact because the present New Curriculum has not been promulgated by local governments. In other words, the teacher must skillfully plan daily activities according to the age of the class. Working closely with assistant teachers, the teacher plans carefully lessons and activities where the children also contribute (Clasquin-Johnson, 2011). The teachers had an awareness of child growth and development. They showed their own play-based approaches for children to indulge in indoor and outdoor games and sports. Challenges, however, stood as a hindrance to their practical demonstration of knowledge and skills possessed across the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) centers within the region (NCE, 2015).

### **Familiarity with Curriculum**

My first research question explored the ideas and practices of the new ECED curriculum, which was familiar or not to ECED teachers. Kabita mentioned that there have been some solid improvements in the Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) classrooms without any orientation and training based on the new ECED curriculum. She got more toys, teaching tools, and just better overall facilities without any instructions on how to use them. Kabita pointed out that there are some real challenges when it comes to using these resources effectively.

*As an example, most of the teachers are not conversant with the contents of the curriculum, hence it becomes difficult to incorporate it in their day-to-day lessons and classroom operations. Although such resources do exist, they are not necessarily made available because teachers may lack the training and support required to take full advantage. There is still a gap between what resources are available and what happens in the classroom. That can be a real hassle for teachers who are already misrepresenting a million things in their*

*busy schedule. It makes them practice even strictly and requires skills for use during daily activities in the classroom.*

When proper use of teaching learning materials is made by linking with the curriculum, it's all about helping children to learn, supporting work in the group, and independence, while also discovering their hidden talents. The big goal here is to build their self-confidence and encourage a positive position on making changes in society and nurturing relationships with others. According to Sociocultural theory, learning takes place in the form of social interaction, cooperation, and directed participation (Vygotsky, 1978). Children are influenced by their teachers and colleagues in their attitudes towards their own ability and their capacity to initiate social change. Based on the experiences of ECED teachers on teachers and children's interactions, which support learning. Heckman (2000) argues that a healthy diet, physical fitness, and exercise in the ECD age are a significant key factor in brain development. Classroom activities with interactions and by using the Vygotsky theory of intellectual adaptation tools (memories, mnemonics, and mind-maps), individuals can learn (Abderrahim & Plana, 2021). Children of ECD memorize by practicing the classroom activities done by teachers. It also helps them keep their emotions in check when times get tough or when they're celebrating their wins during the play. On top of that, it wants to foster a sense of national pride, appreciation for different cultures, and those essential human values. Neeru states:

*The materials we receive seem to be easily destroyed by the children during play. Previously, we used to prepare a variety of learning and teaching materials for training. We shared training skills with other teachers earlier. Presently, after managing the ECED by Palika, it is not implementing training and capacity development for enhancing techniques and methods for ECED. In the past, we used to receive monthly supplies like glue, markers, cardboard paper, and color paper during meetings, but not anymore. I know that the government has already formulated guidelines for teachers regarding what and how to teach and run the ECED classroom, but we have not received any guidelines or curriculum. I think the guidelines can support us with a range of activities and the details for preparing the classroom. There is a comprehensive plan based on age factors, specifying what should be taught to children and what needs to be covered for those aged 4-5 years. Hence, we*

*need to train on a new curriculum for applying the method, which can support holistic child development with language development.*

Neeru put it well when she said, “*The curriculum is so important for us; it gives me new methods and ideas that really help with running the center.*” It’s all about creating a child-friendly learning environment and supporting ECED teachers in conducting activities based on the curriculum. With the new ECED curriculum, she mentioned that it supports her in figuring out how to apply and communicate new teaching methods in the classroom. The ECED curriculum can help teachers design lessons, set goals, and figure out how ECED children are doing overall. Due to not having enough teaching, learning and playing materials, dealing with big class sizes, or the varying levels of parent involvement can complicate things. Some parents demanded that their children be taught letters and numbers by enrolling them in ECED class. It seems that they are more focused on the academic side of things than on the development. Parents frequently worry that their children may be "playing all day" instead of learning the fundamentals, which include the traditional abilities of literacy and arithmetic (Pradhananga, 2015).

Similarly, Kabita pointed out how crucial it is for ECED teachers to keep learning, interacting with peers and getting support. This way, they will be able to get proper insight into the curriculum and will be able to make the most of what they have in front of them. The training sessions during which the teachers could familiarize themselves with the curriculum content and practical recommendations on how to use the materials would enable the teachers to carry out all this much better. It is all about making them successful. Indeed, curriculum structures are very useful to ECED teachers in terms of planning lessons as well as activities. According to the opinions expressed by the ECED teachers, the new curriculum must be proximate to the developmental requirements and its ability to improve the learning outcomes of children. According to Sukhi Devi:

*I would be able to easily prepare the local materials in one day, including subject-wise materials. I will be able to carry out day-long classes in each subject after having prepared materials relating to that subject. The experience as a learning process has made me very knowledgeable. I had a significant problem because I did not incorporate a daily work regimen. I had no idea how to approach the aspect of teaching, what to teach and when to teach. By developing a daily work schedule, I now successfully manage more*

*work than merely the children's attendance. I find time for every subject, like weather, family and personal subjects, and neighbors' interactions. In this way, I'm capable of covering various subjects without deviating from a routine. As a result, we will be able to attend to the individual developmental needs of each child and set our lessons in such a way that will result in increased child involvement and learning results.*

Overall, these results help us to realize that it is essential to know the opinion of teachers in terms of curriculum planning and curriculum implementation stages because their experiences might help in building relevant interventions to support ECED programs and to achieve effective results among young learners.

### **Use of Curriculum in a Classroom**

ECED teachers are really paying attention to the overall growth of children by engaging in different activities based on the curriculum and training. However, ECED teachers and school management focus more on literacy, numeracy and language instead of diving into physical and emotional development. Children come from different communities with different languages and backgrounds. Sarita emphasized

*I am the only teacher responsible for the ECED class for conducting different activities as per the activities schedule of 4.5 hours. But I am also responsible for supporting higher grades in class due to the teachers in my school. Health and nutrition agendas are equally important for ECED children; however, we are not practicing for growth monitoring and physical development. We just weighed and distributed food items to children. Parents are sending their two-year-old children and children aged 4-5.*

As per the views of Sarita, the schools and local governments are not given priority to ECED, and in many instances, they made their policies and programs consistent with the principles given in health and nutrition. This does not guarantee completeness, evidence-based interventions, and advantageous care of the general health of young children through advantageous care plans. Under-nutrition is involved in the stunting of childhood growth and development. The first 1000 days of life from pregnancy to a child's second birthday are critical, with important opportunities for up to 5 years of age for reducing undernutrition (Zaidi et al., 2018). As per narrative stories of ECED teachers, parents are not able to regularly contribute daily meals to their children, and the school is practicing providing daily meals as per the supplementary support of the local government. This support is essential for

enhancing the nutritional status of children for development. Building blocks for brain development are provided by proper nutrition, which guarantees that children receive the energy and nutrients they require for the best possible cognitive development. Malnutrition and low-quality diets could even block the way of cognitive development in a child by affecting their ability to learn, concentrate and fulfil their potential to the fullest (Abbas et al., 2023, as cited in Abbas & Karim, 2023).

Kabita said:

*I have been equipped with newfound knowledge on the conduction of ECED centers, and I transformed my classroom into a learning environment with teaching materials. I have established the six learning corners where I joined the children to stimulate creativity, and sensory activities became a daily routine. Some traditional teaching methods were deeply rooted in my daily routine of ECED activities. I noticed positive changes after the use of materials.*

As per the discussion with Kabita, ECED teachers tried to follow the daily schedule. However, they are spending time drilling the sounds of the alphabet (ABCD, KA KAA KI KEE) by focusing on language learning rather than overall cognitive development (critical thinking, logical reasoning, problem solving, memories and attention). Children are missing the opportunity for holistic child development based on a new curriculum that focuses on holistic child development. The theory of Vygotsky, however, highlights the importance of social relations and culture in the learning and development of children. Vygotsky was convinced that through communication with those who possess more experience, children acquire something new. He further supported the culture safety tool (language, symbols and other forms of mediation) that contribute to learning and development.

They must change their instruction modes and resources, as well as classroom situations and environment, to suit the new ECED curriculum 2021. As Nyongesa (2020) puts it, teacher preparedness seems to be the single most critical component in the successful delivery of an ECED curriculum (p. 61). Teachers are known to cite that they have genuine problems about establishing an excellent learning environment during class. It can be reduced to the lack of resources and the fact that some children can find it difficult to work with language tasks, even in math. In the recent past, much has been promoted in the need to enhance these learning spaces. When asked why they chose this option, some teachers defended their choices by indicating that

they considered free-choice activities as a waste of time. So, stressing the role of a day-by-day timetable, it becomes the main structure of designing each day as a daily schedule according to the implementation and practices of the curriculum. Due to the resource availability, ECD teachers have not established six learning corners. Some teachers find it difficult to use learning corners because of the resources and facilities available for the environment (Atisu, 2022).

When referring to reasons to support the claim that six separate learning areas are conducive to wholesome child development, ECED teachers used the implicit absence of the new curriculum, training and needs of the six separate learning areas. Awareness of the need for curricula or pedagogical principles in early childhood facilities has considerably improved over the last fifteen years. Based on the analysis of the theoretical orientation, which is coherent with my study on understanding of curriculum that emphasizes capacitating the ECD teachers for implementation into classrooms with child-centered and play-based learning activities and methods based on the new curriculum. Constructivists say that people build knowledge in the process of interactions with other people, exchanging ideas, views and experiences.

According to Sukhi Devi:

*Initially, there was a poor ECED facility within our communities when we began the community-based ECED, as supported by one of the NGOs. Before the sessions of parental education, children used to have irregular attendance. NGOs slowly began the process of building a new structure that created a conducive learning atmosphere among the children. At the same time, there were upgradations in the school structure and boarding facilities. As a result, there was an increment in the child attendance. Nowadays, the situation is quite different, and in a positive way, the situation is noticeably improved; there are food supplies and teaching materials that are provided by the province and the local government, and now the conditions are much better than before. One of the NGOs did carry out the reconstruction of new facilities, which greatly enhanced the slaughter situation as far as the children were concerned. At the start, I did not have any resources to make instructional material, but now, I have learned how to make teaching material. I can develop local-level materials in a single day, subject-specific materials. Once materials on a specific topic are prepared, I can run whole-day sessions on the topic. This learning process has armed me with a lot of knowledge.*

She has pointed out the advantages of materials development training, which was strength-building, and that it could significantly improve her performance in teaching and gave her the proficiency to create materials herself that would allow her to master her own shortcomings and those minor doubts that they all had. The ECD Teachers need to prepare the physical classroom with sitting arrangements, a collection of teaching and learning materials, and other activities to support the learning of the young children based on curricular requirements (Ebrahim et al., 2019, as cited in Zama, 2024). The theory of Vygotsky, however, highlights the importance of social relations and culture in learning and development of children through engaging in the use of materials and interactions. Vygotsky was convinced that through communication with those who possess more experience, children acquire something new.

Based on my own experiences on the implementation of ECED curriculum, I have been working as a trainer for ECED teachers in the past 1-decade and have found out that the new ECED curriculum reverberates the ideals of child-centered, activity-based and play-oriented pedagogy. Nevertheless, it must be disseminated to every ECED teacher and train in accordance with the teaching practices in the classroom. They observe that a lot of teachers continue to use formal instruction (lectures, drills), which goes against the plans of the curriculum. According to the trainers, successful curriculum implementation necessitates engagement, practical resources, learning areas, and exploration instead of teacher-centered teaching.

### **Chapter Summary**

ECED teachers generally know the curriculum exists; however, they do not have in-hand training and orientation on it. As per their work experience, they have really understood the goals of the curriculum, the importance, and how to apply them, the needs of materials and support for them. They need to be ready to apply the curriculum, which is arguably the most important factor in the effective implementation of an ECED curriculum. They understand that a good curriculum is the best way of directing classroom practices, but maintaining a balance and satisfying the language and growth needs of little ones is no easy feat. They say that this is just a waste of time, but really, its activities are so significant towards the development of children. Then there is the problem of having a daily rhythm to follow. It is also commonly known that teachers find it difficult to stick to their plans, whereas such a plan is very crucial in defining their teaching. Additionally, let's not

forget that another big hurdle is the absence of an updated curriculum and adequate training for those development domains.

I have analyzed this emergent theme of play-based learning to develop theoretical insights into the experiences and practices of ECED teachers like Sarita, Neeru and Sukhi Devi. We have still gaped into policies and classroom practices followed by a schedule that continues due to the lack of training, curriculum updates, and learning resources, leading teachers to focus more on drilling on daily routines rather than structural learning outcomes and child development based on the ECED curriculum.

## CHAPTER V

### EXPERIENCES AND LEARNING ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ECED CURRICULUM

This chapter highlights those experiences and implementation of curriculum based on the experience of ECED teachers, as well as my own experiences, which are very important instructional resources. Teachers can play a critical role in supporting daily activities and learning. Taking into consideration the importance of such relationships, it is obvious that ECED teachers need to ensure that they offer appropriate learning experiences and focus on the importance of continuous professional growth to improve their teaching strategies. With the aid of a combination of practice and theory, the teachers have formed an environment that helps not only in the growth of the children but also adds significant value to the socio-cultural development of the child, following various activities. About the reflection of the consequences of effective curriculum materials, connection to the promotion of high-quality teaching practices and improvement of the process of learning among children, the ECED teachers' role should be addressed concerning establishing meaningful links between the content of the curriculum and the teaching materials and relevance of the continuous professional development in this context.

#### **ECED Teachers' Role for Early Learning Child Development**

When children dive into play with peers in the ECED center, interact with all sorts of learning materials, and soak in different educational activities at ECED centers, some amazing things can happen. Such experiences have the actual capacity to enhance their ability to think, enable them to accrue friends and even help in their emotional wellbeing. Then there is Vygotsky, who takes this entire discussion another step further. By identifying the importance of such interactions and the cultural context, he goes on to indicate that it indeed plays a big role in aiding the cognitive development of children. Using a multicultural perspective, Gay (2000) argued that curriculum content must be culturally relevant among children whose cultural backgrounds differ across the board (as cited in Yang & Li, 2022). Moreover, through these activities, one will be able to establish a conducive and dynamic environment of learning, which will foster passion and interest in learning among the children being supported in the ECD centers.

The research by Brown and Shorrock (1998) suggests that the deployment of a constructivist framework that puts the learner in the position of power and covers all aspects of teaching and learning processes would help educators to substantially explain how they might meet the educational rights of children (as cited in Abderrahim & Plana, 2021). Piaget also believed in cognitive development as a continuous activity, claiming that all children, regardless of various environmental settings and different cultures all around the world, have the same pattern of cognitive development (Hockenbury & Hockenbury, 2011).

As per the discussion with Sarita on the role of teachers in ECED, she expressed her views as:

*We are practicing the daily routines, which do not merely amount to filling the whole day with activities. We become part and parcel of classroom life (especially during social experiences, as per the views of respondents). We are practicing interacting with all children in different areas. Our children in ECED centers can learn by interacting with us and their peers, which influences the developmental aspect of a child. We need to link the curriculum with teaching materials to promote high-quality practice in teaching and help children engage in the learning process. Our role as ECED teachers should be examined regarding the means of ensuring meaningful links between teaching materials and the curriculum content, and the selection of professional development in this aspect. However, we are not supported by the schools and education units of Local Governments for teaching and learning materials. We can play a critical role in establishing a stronger connection between our children and the environment.*

As per the socio-cultural theory of development by Vygotsky, it places emphasis on the importance of such interactions. It is apparent that ECED teachers realize that they are not only teachers but also core actors in the social and cultural development of the ECD Children they handle. Some individuals perceive ECD teachers as daycare workers, but others are sure that they play an essential role in child development and guarantee their academic success later (Madondo, 2021).

Health and nutrition aspects in the ECD are not a concern to most respondents who just concentrate on teaching and learning through singing, interacting, dancing, utilization of social materials and managing classes, etc. Based on the Socio-cultural development theory of Vygotsky, which is my framework, I have adopted a broad

outlook to decode the complex nature of the role of ECED teachers as a scaffolding tool among children. Literature on the approach to curriculum in the field of early childhood education is based, in turn, on the sociocultural theories of development advanced by Vygotsky and Rogoff, which is recognized (Edwards, 2003). As per the Vygotskian philosophy, the origin of the construction of knowledge in the sphere of Vygotskian philosophy lies in social interaction as opposed to individual cognition. Knowledge is constructed jointly, and the co-construction process is facilitated through tools and artifacts in a unique setting and culture (Shabani, 2016, as cited in Oosthuizen & Roberts, 2021).

### **Play Materials and Teaching Learning Process**

I was immersing myself in some information on the relationship between the curricula, teaching and learning resources on early childhood development (ECD) programs. It would be interesting to note how the curriculum is being organized to fit in well with the teaching tools of our choice. Preparation of learning instruction materials in the classrooms is usually the core of an ECED teacher. It includes the likes of educational toys, puzzles, letters and picture card games, visual aids, amongst other activities that occur practically that can, in an actual sense, lure ECED children and enhance their learning.

Regarding this, Niru pointed out that:

*One of the major causes of failure of the teaching and learning process in ECED centers is a lack of proper materials and low skills for the development and use of materials in the classroom. Despite the emphasis on the significance of various activities and the use of materials during the training periods, the situation in schools is different when we are usually promoted to higher grades due to the shortage of teachers. When my colleagues and I studied how to make teaching aids, such as charts and play tools, they were mostly vulnerable and could be torn apart by children quickly, and the school does not help in refilling them. I remembered that earlier on, supplies like glue, flour, paper, and so on were regularly supplied, which helped to prepare materials, but it is no longer being done now since the Municipality assumed the running of ECED.”*

Niru further reported that,

*There were no sustained capacity-building and training opportunities available to teachers for materials development. Moreover, the government*

*prepared the new ECED curriculum focus with age-specific learning plans that are designed to accommodate 4-5-year-olds.” Similarly, according to Sarita, effective teaching requires the use of different approaches such as activity-based, child-friendly and play-based, which support the interactive learning process. In the process of giving knowledge, it is worth noting that the previous training did not dictate certain measures as the ultimate most appropriate way of teaching kids. Rather, the focus was on teaching what is familiar to them and trying to educate the children. Overall, it appears that there is a disconnect between the training we have received and the existing teaching practices used at the school. We want to understand how the focus and resources changed because it looks like the original training was not fully adapted to the realities of our teaching setting. On the other hand, I always strive to present a variety of materials in my Early Childhood Education Development (ECED) classroom. These resources include low-cost materials and processed materials, which I buy in the market. Buying materials on our own is hard because of our low salaries, and it is even harder when we are not supported by the system.*

The stories of ECD teachers bring out the aspect of changing the classroom into a dynamic learning space using the teaching and learning materials. I have engaged them in preparing the learning materials during the conduct of training for ECED teachers. The constructivist theory (Piaget, 1977) states that Children develop their knowledge when they engage their minds with physical and social reality. This school of thought argues that teachers are incapable of imparting knowledge to their students but can assist in the process of learning.

Here is the interesting part. Where Piaget's theory is concerned, the theory comes into play and relates to some work in how children attain their executive skill development by using teaching and learning materials. It can be quite true that when children are invited to think about actions that require them to plan, inhibit impulses, and think flexibly, cognitive skills are enhanced. It fits the bill of what Piaget said on problem-solving. Therefore, by offering such activities, we are not spending the time; we are fulfilling the needs of children by improving their thinking process. Based on my own experiences and stories of ECED teachers, the teaching and learning materials were used to engage the children, and the children asked different questions. As per observation of ECED centers, I have found that some learning materials are

used in the centers, and children are also engaging in the learning process by using the materials.

Since my work is that of an ECED teacher trainer, the play materials are the key to the successful early childhood pedagogy, as they need a systematic connection with the competencies of the curriculum and their daily activity organized in learning corners. I have emphasized that the ECED teachers need to demonstrate the use of materials and then give children room to investigate on their own so that they develop holistically in terms of cognitive, social, emotional, and physical aspects. ECED teachers, however, also complain of difficulties that include material shortages, use of formal teaching, lack of classroom organization and lack of training in how to use the materials meaningfully.

Early childhood education also involves playing. Children are not just having fun and joy when playing games, but they are also learning actively with one another. They also have an opportunity to develop experiences, to come up with new ideas and to experiment with concepts. The teachers also must develop play activities that resonate with what they would want the children to learn. It is not a matter of just playing, rather it is a matter of drawing those links between whatever they are doing and the educational aspirations. Besides, play also ensures children can stitch their thoughts and experiences together, and this process is essential in constructing knowledge and the ability to achieve objectives. Thus, playtime is much more than fun and joy. It is an essential element of the learning process (Saracho, 2010). As far as I have observed, there are certain gross holes in the learning resources at ECED centers. There is more to it than having sufficient resources. There is even a certain hang-up on the part of teachers, and I believe this is partly due to low wages. Teachers at ECED were formerly paid minimal pay, but now the local governments are covering subsidies on the salary, which can make a difference in how involved they are with the tools and resources provided.

As per Kabita's perspective, I really agree with her regarding the safety and security perspective as per the nurturing care framework. As per her narrative of ECED teachers, she expressed her views that ECED is a safe place for children (Safe room, building, furniture, materials, keeping, lighting, required space). The Room Code of Conduct rules are included and followed in the classroom. Child-friendly stay has been managed, enough spaces for playing, and it is easy to perform in the classroom. There are six learning corners, namely, 1) Language, 2) Pre-Mathematics,

3) Role play and music instruments, 4) Creativity, 5) Construction, and 6) Science, which have been recommended as per the minimum standard of the ECED center. Similarly, the supplementary reading materials, including storybooks, reference materials and teachers encourage pre-literacy activities according to the daily work schedule. Kabita highlighted her experiences of training and said that:

*After training, we were taught that certain teaching methods would be effective, but the reality in the school setting seems quite different. However, the current situation at school is different. The tools we were supposed to receive from training are either unavailable or have been damaged by the children during play, things have really changed since the days when we used to get our monthly goodies like gum, markers, and paper. I am just using child-friendly songs, stories, and even poems rather than the other six learning materials. It appears that there is a discrepancy between the training which we got and the teaching mode being used at the school. We would like to know about the change of priorities and resource allocation because it seems that the general training was not completely in harmony with the realities of our working conditions in the field of teaching. After not receiving the educational materials from schools, I tried to make local materials and used them.*

It turns out that classrooms that encourage exploration, creativity, and sensory experiences really help children with learning and playing, not just in their thinking, but also socially and emotionally active participation (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002).

The research indicates that using teaching materials can really boost how effective instruction is in these early settings (Epstein et al., 2011). Using other materials, ECED teachers provide children with practical experiences which will help them understand those difficult abstract concepts as well as promote active learning, which is so very important. Teaching and learning materials adopted in classroom activities go a long way in determining the effectiveness of ECD. Curriculum may be described as a collection of material resources with which the teachers apply a curriculum (Madondo, 2021).

### **Capacity for Materials Development and Practices**

These main ideas can be brilliantly expressed in the form of the below (the second temporary story) that describes the view of the teacher on the ECED everyday routines with play and the adaptive decisions that Sukhi Devi makes as a part of the

curriculum (Makovichuk et al., 2017). The children should be observed playing with their friends and communicating with them, as well as participating in other daily activities, after their first conversation with Sukhi Devi. According to opinions regarding Sukhi Devi's interpretation of community-based ECED, she said that the Community ECED center offers a rich learning and development experience to about twenty-five (25) children between the ages of 3 and 4 years of disadvantaged and marginalized families in the community. Such families do not have options for other affordable ECED services. The center is run by teachers who have attained a minimum of ten years of education. The teacher must give the children four hours (10 am -2 pm) of the day, 6 days a week (Sunday to Friday), to perform a variety of activities.

Looking back, Sukhu Devi remembers that her first training was but 10 days, following an old curriculum. She said that,

*The training was primarily about simple songs, narrative, and bringing about play-based activities. We focused at that time was to do what was directed without deciding whether the approaches were sound and long term. As the years passed, I never got to renew or update my training and as a result I practiced what I had been taught during this brief training on materials development. However, even with my experience, I see an insularity between what I am teaching and what the children really need today. The Municipality has not offered me the updated ECED curriculum that should aid in creating more creative, as well as contextually relevant materials. I have never had any training or orientation on how to incorporate the new changes into her classroom practice. Consequently, I do not develop materials much based on innovation or evidence-based methods, but on my previous experiences. But I have had some strengths due to my many years of classroom experience. The young child also learns through adaptation of songs and rhymes; fun is combined with learning of numbers and letters.*

These activities demonstrate her strength and determination regardless of institutional lapses in training and assistance. To create the learning environment, various teaching and learning materials are implemented in ECED centers with six learning corners. According to Aquino et al. (2017), introduction of kindergarten curriculum has also received massive coverage as the world needs early childhood education since the whole world needs it because of the increasing need. The general

aim of this curriculum is to provide young children with the combination of knowledge and skills that they will need at work and in personal life in the future.

As per the observation of ECED centers, the materials are used by ECED teachers who are made by local materials and production of teachers. Letter cards, picture cards, word cards, letters and objects, and number dominoes and flash cards with images and words, alphabet, and number charts. Most of the play in early childhood classes involves children interacting with one another. They must interpret the nonverbal and verbal clues of each other simultaneously to realize what is transpiring in the social environment (Bremme & Erickson, 1977, as cited in Atisu, 2022).

Based on the class observation, the teaching and learning materials, such as the Alphabet chart, number chart, homemade flashcards, stones, sticks, bottle tops, clay, and picture books, were designed by the teachers. At the start of the lesson, the teacher indicates the sounds in the alphabet chart and requests the children to repeat them. ECED teachers and children counted the bottle tops in an exercise; they intensely touch and move materials. Teachers facilitated the short storytelling session with the help of a picture book; however, the child did not necessarily have an opportunity to view the pictures. Similarly, the teaching materials are predominantly teacher-directed, restricting child exploration.

### **Practice Gaps in the Implementation of the Curriculum**

My research participants shared the curriculum frameworks as essential guiding documents. Such frameworks usually propose the purpose, aims, as well as learning standards of children. It supports ECED teachers for understanding methods, techniques and tools for conducting the class. Curriculum framework is needed as culturally relevant, developmentally right and able to adjust to the uniqueness of the needs of the children within their communities.

*According to my 10 years of teaching and learning experience, I simply practiced the songs, played with materials and danced with children as our former practices. The ECED curriculum is not in our hands, and still, the updated ECED curriculum has not been provided to us as per the plan by the Municipality. Initially, we trained for only 10 days as per the old curriculum guidelines and no training for understanding the new updates by supporting the children's learning activities.*

She does her work either positively or negatively. It really is, she has learned a lot about her past, mostly good, and not-so-good. This was a big problem, as Sarita mentioned, she simply does not have access to the revised ECED curriculum. Above that, she thinks that she has not been trained well to understand and make use of those new updates. This is literally translated into the gap between policy and practice. Even teachers such as Sarita, who are figuratively left hanging when it comes to the implementation of such changes in their curriculum, find it difficult.

This is one of the forms of learning where you discover some things by trial and error, and that is really what the ECED teachers are doing, adjusting their methods to what they observe in real life. Thus, as a way of ensuring that the children are taken care of, some ECED teachers have been employed by the school administration to aid the school children in various teaching processes. The teachers of ECED did not actually prepare a certain syllabus of early childhood development as opposed to the day-by-day plan. On the contrary, they emphasized the wholesome development of children.

ECED Teacher need to have a bunch of ideas, experiences, and fun activities during their lessons. As per the understanding of the teaching process based on the curriculum, Niru expressed her views that *the learning process and method of teaching are unsuitable and ineffective due to inadequate materials and their proper use; we discussed that during training. What we gained during training seems to be the opposite of what we're implementing here at school due to inadequate materials and curriculum. When we got to the school, the head teacher always advised that in return for teaching the class of grade one or two, because the school does not have sufficient teachers, we teach forcefully. To build the children's potential, we must carry out different activities using materials in the ECED classroom. However, the school is not ready for the materials, and we have only prepared some materials.*

One of the teachers (Sarita) shared that,

*To achieve success in ECED, one needs to be a teacher who strives for improvement in all aspects of learning development within their capacity by training and mentoring during professional work on ECED. To enhance my teaching techniques, I have delved into materials such as YouTube, Google, and even TikTok after communicating with my friend. The number of useful videos is just enormous! Frankly, I am not only talking about my personal development; I am also writing about making up teaching materials that apply*

*to our local situation. Because of this, I can run my teaching sessions in a way that makes me feel more traditional and relatable.*

As per the present context, other factors like teacher quality and managerial abilities are less clear, but the physical facilities and educational resources are readily apparent (Pande, 2009). The researcher discovered that there is sufficient interior equipment and supplies, but not enough outdoor equipment or supplies for the use of the equipment and learning materials. According to the researcher's observations, there is less room, which may also be a factor in outdoor activities, and they also lack sufficient finances for outdoor items or equipment (Koirala, 2014). We were a little bit familiar with the previous curriculum of 2062, which guided us more toward playing rather than engaging in materials development. But training and mentoring are not regular due to the resources of local governments. “The facilitator's training package was revised and implemented, but due to the high turnover of ECED teachers, most of the ECED centers have untrained teachers” (Dahal, 2024, p. 39).

The first Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) curriculum guideline of assessment, Nepal 2062, covered very broad components that entailed program vision and purpose, components, parent participation, children with special needs conditions, and assessment. This course mainly focused on the management of ECED programs. In this regard, Sarita said that,

*According to my ten years of classroom experience and education, only previous training is supporting, which consisted of merely practicing the songs, playthings, and dancing with children. We cannot decide on the ECED curriculum, and the new ECED curriculum given by the Municipality has not arrived. At the very beginning, we experienced ten days of training according to the outdated curriculum and did not receive any guidance on how to pursue the newest changes and simultaneously help the children to complete their educational tasks. As our experience has grown over time, we have put our past experiences, whether positive or negative, into practice.*

Sofou and Tsafos (2010) mentioned that “the curriculum must serve as a guiding and supportive tool, enabling teachers to be flexible. The way in which a teacher chooses to utilize it is at their discretion; it is not dependent on how the State formulates it (p. 415).”

Educators' role is a very responsive one, and educators must participate in the process actively and analytically through reflective thinking and an knack of

interpretation to know how students will feel about the curriculum. Makovichuk et al. (2017) note that this perspective underlines the fact that the curriculum of early childhood is always contextualized in immediate communities about social, cultural, and familial practices. Several countries are hence putting a lot of investment in the early years of education. ECED teachers need to give all children equal chances to grow and thrive during classroom activities and play. It is not only about academics but also about their whole development (Murtaza, 2011). This is so beneficial to an extent that they change their lives with this kind of approach. The aim of the ECED curriculum that the Government implemented in 2062 was the initial planned curriculum of the ECED program, which only focused on the four areas of child development. Nevertheless, ECED teachers were hired at a lower than SLC level with little pay. According to the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology stated in 2022, the major priority of the School Education Sector Plan (SESP) is to promote such objectives as the provision of equitable access to education, the effective involvement of children in the learning process, the improvement of the overall quality of the education process, as well as the strengthening of the administration and control of schooling.

Among the range of topics covered by the SESP, there are curriculum development, facilitator training, access to education, and priority of funds. A good socialization habit developed at the early stage of an individual's life will eventually contribute to creating a civilized society. The ECED program targeted at disadvantaged families may contribute to reducing participation in crime in the long run (Heckman & Masterov, 2007). In light of early childhood care and education (ECCE) being the key to creating foundations for successful individuals and communities, the ECCE programs and delivery system must embrace indigenous learning. We indeed should concentrate on building an educational atmosphere that is child-centred. It must be light-hearted, welcoming, and it should be conscious of the environment and gender. And we should not forget about the significance of multilingual education in ECD, and the main language of instruction should be the mother tongue (UNESCO, 2022).

The learning and development of the children takes place both in informal settings like home and formal settings like the ECED Center. ECED, as a place for formal education, needs a quality learning environment to stimulate its learning and development. Use of appropriate learning materials, application of appropriate

teaching methodologies and parental care at home are the major components for better learning of a child. In Nepal, the way ECED teachers view curriculum frameworks and how they prepare learning materials can really be shaped by a bunch of different factors.

### **Teacher Training and Adaptation of the Teaching Learning Process in ECD**

All respondents claimed they were ready to continue the professional development of ECD teaching and learning activities, as they had previous training experience, but they knew that the local government education unit cannot be blamed for the current needs of ECED teachers since a new scheme was developed in the capacity of teaching strategies and child development, which is essential in terms of offering the best training to every ECED teacher. Sarita pointed out that the educational tools of playing were effective. The reason why the play was used as a teaching method was to a great extent affected by the positive attitude people had towards ECD teachers. Such factors as accessibility of play materials and motivation received by the teachers were believed to be very important in shaping the use of play as a method of teaching (Kekesi et al., 2019). All language and pre-math skills-related materials were placed in six learning corners, and ECD teachers were practicing with them. Vygotsky really stressed how important social interaction and cultural context are for children's cognitive development. So, when we think about what ECED teachers do, his theory points out that learning together. After group activities and connecting with adults, it helps children grow their thinking skills. Sarita expressed that,

*As an untrained ECED Curriculum, I am uncertain about how to effectively communicate and apply the new teaching and learning process in the classroom. I am just managing the discipline of children in the classroom, playing together without fighting, and sharing things with each other during tiffin time. I have not received the training on the new course contents of ECED. As per previous training, we had enhanced our knowledge and practices of ECED by operating the centers, including organizing both indoor and outdoor activities with children.*

One of the ECED teachers, Sarita, succinctly expressed her interest in training with a material development approach. As per the response of the ECED teachers, the ECED curriculum conceptualized as per the methodology and is easy to instruct children by managing the classroom. The ECED teachers are lacking formal training

and have a limited understanding of instructing young children in their classrooms. This valuable experiential knowledge was not tapped into during the initial entry into the learnership (Erasmus, 2019). Similarly, the chosen activities for children should have significance during instruction and the learning process in the classroom.

### **My Understanding as my Narrative Data: Trainer's Views on Curriculum and Implementation**

*I am glad that I have been one of the contributors to the ECD sector in Rautahat district. As the district trainer, educator and provider of technical support, I had a significant part in the Basic Training of ECD. In retrospect of my beginning career, when I am writing about it today, I cannot help but consider my experience working as a teacher in a private school among young children. There were some eye-opening experiences. Subsequently, I transferred to a different role as ECED teacher trainer. When pre-primary education was introduced in the government schools in Rautahat district, it was a great courtesy to the District Education Office and the 2005 curriculum framework. However, to be honest, there was a time when the ECD program was sort of neglected. It did not receive the attention that it required, and this was frustrating. They simply did not fit in with what those little people were supposed to learn. I cannot believe that they were taking in individuals who had not completed eighth grade to be employed at ECED centers. I have been doing it and excelling in designing creative and innovative teaching materials that can attract the attention and interest of children in ECD, and have been assisting ECED teachers in preparing them. They have modified the activities so that after the training, learning is fun and interactive.*

Based on the former Strategy, it will particularly focus on the provision of a comprehensive growth of children with an eye to planning, organizing, and implementing ECD activities and involve the local entities like GOs, NGOs, INGOs and CBOs in the support of the planned activities along with the expansion of the community and the school based ECED centers with special emphasis on vulnerable and underprivileged children. The wording should be really pushing, more ECED centers not only in schools but also in the community, especially to those underprivileged children or children who are in a vulnerable position. Since 1990, investment in Nepal has been on a steady increase to boost the quality of education in children. Promoting the education of young children and academic achievements, as well as the all-round development of a child throughout various stages of life, is what

has been introduced through the Early Childhood Development (ECD) policy. Early childhood development programs are, however, not evenly coordinated and of equal quality, leading to inadequate and unequal access to the programs, especially among children under 3 years. As a result, it is urgent to increase the multi-sectoral reach of high-quality programming that incorporates health, nutrition, security and safety, responsive care giving, and early learning (Khanal et al., 2017).

As per my own experiences, at the local level, various policies, plans, and programs pertaining to health, care, nutrition, learning, and protection are put into action. Nonetheless, there is no integrated system to embrace the holistic requirements of children in terms of health, care, nutrition, learning, and protection, from pregnancy to the early stages. Presently, we still have a discussion on the timeframe of ECED, one ECED or two years ECED. The School Education Act is under discussion. As developed by skills, it also covers creating a positive and inclusive learning environment with materials development and six learning areas as per the minimum standard of the ECED center. For creating the learning environment, the package includes skill-based training with participatory methods by engaging in materials development, experience sharing, group work, skill-based learning, and the use of different learning materials. When I conducted the basic training of ECED teachers, I was also given a role for micro teaching practice by the ECED teachers.

*I have truly achieved the art of running an ECED classroom, hence ensuring that the classroom is not only organized but also a good learning environment. Being an ECED trainer, I possess good experience in formulating teaching and learning materials specifically for little ones, and to be precise, for ECED children. I have used my practical teaching background with creativity in materials development and use, and a good understanding of children's development. I have put my heart into the ECD sector in Rautahat.*

*As an ECD trainer, I had a few hats on as an educator and as an NGO activist for ECD. I worked on the development of teaching and learning materials for these inquisitive little minds during Basic Training of the ECED teachers. It is a simple fact that these ages of 3 to 5 years are just ready to absorb everything that comes around them. Being a Basic Training facilitator, I had an aim to assist the teachers of ECED, equipped with the skills and knowledge that they really needed for conducting the ECED centers. I presented dynamic discussions regarding children's growth and development, teacher practices and how children should be taught according to their*

*age and the importance of individual learning experiences. Being a professional trainer was not my only commitment. I understood the importance of teaching and learning materials, hence took some time to develop materials that would create imagination in the young learners. The flashcards with colors, interactive storybooks, and letters and picture cards are a nice treat for children. It was amazing to watch the ECED program, which had been kind of overlooked before, really gain grip.*

The ECED teachers have the significant responsibility of providing each child in their care with a quality early learning experience which considers their individual needs. This is particularly critical to the importance that they play in making sure that learners with special needs get the right care. Traditionally, researchers pay more attention to the cognitive aspects of the connection between the physical and mental development of children, the identification of the positive role of physical activities in intellectual development, and the stimulation of mental processes. At first, a child will develop an idea about what the body can do, learn about how to exercise and develop senses (Zakharova et al., 2020).

International experience indicates that interventions on ECD have the capacity to safeguard children against poverty and that national investments in quality ECD programs among young children can eliminate poverty and inequality in society substantially (Ashley-Cooper et al., 2019). The studies demonstrate that development of valuable emotional, cognitive, and behavioral skills occurs at an early age.

Furthermore, presently, the first curriculum of ECED was endorsed by the government in 2021, and it is based on the National Curriculum Framework and focused on a one-year ECED as per the system. The ECED Curriculum 2021 has focused on cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development and quality enhancement in early literacy and math skills, as well as crucial opportunities to enhance the ability of young children to grow and learn with culture, too.

As per this curriculum, the Ministry of Education conducted training for teachers as per basic training of 10-16 days. Now, based on the Teacher Professional Development module, one month of training is planned. It was also not uniform during the training from 2008. After the new constitution and education policies, the government revised the new ECED curriculum. The Local Government Operation Act of 2074 BS has the provisions of implementing, monitoring, evaluating and regulating the local level principles and provisions of laws, policies, standards and planning with regard to early childhood development and education. Article 39 (2) of the

Constitution 2015 guarantees the entitlement of every child to education, healthcare, proper care, sports entertainment, and comprehensive personality development from both the family and the state. Similarly, Article 39 (3) reinforces the issue that every child has the right to early childhood development and participation (Nepal Law Commission [NLC], 2015).

The vision of the Education Act of 2028 (Ninth Amendment) is a description of one year of education to focus on children aged four. On the same note, Article 11 (1) in the same Act stipulates that the regulations for the operation and management of early childhood development and education shall be as prescribed. Upon this there is a need to highlight the fact that the new curriculum focuses on helping a one-year early childhood development program of children under the age of four which according to the curriculum provides activities that help in gearing towards the development of a child in regards to being physically, mentally, intellectually, emotionally and social and as well as caring about this age group. However, according to the knowledge, nevertheless, ECED teachers are not completely trained and even informed about the curriculum.

The comprehension understanding of the curriculum states that the Early Childhood Development and Education Curriculum is to lay the foundations of the all-round development and education of children within a one-year cycle of the elementary preschool program. To meet the provisions of the policy document, the Early Childhood Development and Education curriculum holds a specific focus on the interaction of children with a variety of developmental activities. These activities aim at the development of a healthy lifestyle and habits, safety of their person, cultivation of hygiene and social habits, development of thinking and creativity, and development of language and communication.

In the meantime, ECED teachers added that they have not been provided with the curriculum and training according to the new curriculum. It is in the light of these conditions that early childhood researchers have noted (as discerned through experience, such as that of assessors) that early childhood teachers face problems about implementing the new curriculum despite their limited understanding and ability to deal with the curriculum. Any change in the curriculum is likely to confuse the teachers as to what they should do (Suarta, 2019). I am concerned, as explained to teachers at the ECD department, what is the need for a curriculum for young children? We propose that a curriculum cannot be regarded as a replacement for play for

children; however, the latter is a powerful framework within which the early childhood curriculum is inherently built (Makovichuk et al., 2017). There are two things that make a school-based ECED center stand out from the crowd. Primarily, the location and the way it is dealt with. So, in these centers, the School Management Committee, or SMC for short, plays a crucial role. In contrast to community-based centers where they have their ECED Management Committee to run things their own way, there is an instance when school-based centers establish their sub-committee under the SMC. This sub-committee specifically pursues the matters of ECED. It goes like teamwork. This arrangement assists the ECED center to fit perfectly into the whole structure of the school and still retain its own color. Speaking about the ideas of Kabita, many physical facilities, play materials, and educational resources are organized now. Nevertheless, ECED teachers are struggling and being challenged even after being given a wide range of training, including refresher courses within the last fourteen years. Disability-friendly, child-friendly or tele-learning training; whichever may have been experienced, they have done some good in the transformation of knowledge and skills. And this has made my job very much easier, honestly, not very much harder.

When we refer to Early Childhood Education and Development, or simply ECD, we are referring to two huge parts, which are education and development. The development is not good only in the straight form, instead it is an energetic process of getting to know as the children acquire the knowledge by socializing with the adults, by touching the items and by observing their environment. There is this framework, the so-called Teaching through Interactions, that defines what needs to be made effective in the classroom experiences in terms of both learning and growth. Consider such things as behaviors management, emotional support and instructional support. They are, as it was stressed by Pianta and Hamre way back in 2009 (that you can see in Wolf et al., 2019). And physical space in Early Childhood and Care settings is another issue we should not forget. It is crucial in helping kids to play and evolve, as Sando (2019) states. The correct environment can really help the way children learn and develop. According to the talk with ECED teachers, many ECED teachers are working without vital training, and in those cases where they are trained, they do not have the chance to get regularly trained refreshers, mainly when there is a high rate of trained teachers. This widespread issue stems from the fact that the Education Units of the municipality plan training to meet the needs of teachers in new centers, but

overlook the training needs of new teachers in existing centers due to budgetary constraints.

### **Management Practices and ECED Implementation**

The chairperson and members of ECD Management Committees lack orientation on the concept of holistic child development, governance, management, and monitoring of ECD programs. The connection between language and behavior is emphasized, with behaviorists considering language as one of the behaviors manifested by human beings (Chepkwony, 2018). Vygotsky's main idea was that learning was the driving force of the developmental process, in that children's learning was done through others, and children learn (or acquire) the knowledge and practices of the host society they interacted with (Edwards, 2003). Similarly, according to constructivist theory (e.g., Piaget, 1977), Children build their knowledge by interacting their thoughts with the social and physical reality. This view contends that while teachers cannot convey knowledge to students, they can help with learning.

Sarita highlighted her experiences in ECED management. She said, *I am a single ECED teacher managing the school-based ECED center. Each day, I make use of a 4.5-hour activity schedule with some songs and rhythms for children, which should help the children play, learn, and socialize. I attempt to perform the activity-based approach to learning in the ECED class, but I encounter several difficulties. I am managing the seating arrangement with carpet and p-forms, which supports group work and play. We are unable to manage the daily meal for the nutrition of children as an integrated approach. There is no full practice of health and nutrition practice in managing the ECED that are vital to the lives of young children. We are just conducting the activities, and we are not practicing the assessment process in ECED management. The tracking and physical development assessments are major components of ECD My school only practices weighing and providing the deworming tabs to the children. This is not all that is needed to guarantee healthy development, but without training, resources, and structured assistance, I feel constrained in the amount that I can do.*

Based on the narrative of Sarita, without regularly monitoring their nutritional status and measuring it, many children and their parents are often not educated enough to undertake formal education and work requiring labor, often struggle to get their day without nutrients as their parents get up to start work. When planning the

physical environment of the room, it was considered to ensure that the learners may easily interact with themselves and the teacher during the process of teaching and learning, and to facilitate the effective teaching and learning process (Bassey & Ogobi, 2021).

As per my work experiences and stories of ECED teachers, many ECED teachers are now in the field performing, but without basic training. Even the educators who have received training find it hard to travel to the regular refresher courses. The problem is everywhere, and it is caused by the continuously changing number of trained teachers. An intentional approach needs to be put in place where the fantastic Socio-cultural development theory of Vygotsky is used as a guiding theme, or rather a theme in incorporating a wide variety of activities in the ECED classroom. Interactive classroom activity is the skill that ECED Teachers require. Label those different social activities which follow the ideologies of the Vygotsky theory. Make sure that the activities are age-based and that they accommodate the developmental stages of the children. Within the Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) curriculum standards, the initiative of early childhood education provides the children with opportunities to develop their own knowledge actively.

The idea behind this proposition can be traced back to the initial identification associated with Piaget, in which the knowledge acquisition involved assimilation and accommodation of the information base received through the firsthand experiences of the children to their internal schemes and representations of the external world” (Edwards, 2003, pp.251-252). Although these educators are actual fans of personal growth in the professional sphere, a lot of them are still disappointed by the local authorities. When there is not enough support available, it is difficult. Imagine that with no teaching material aimed at teaching, no updated curriculum or reasonable training, how are they supposed to do it well? And just to mention something about salaries.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter plunges into the experiences that the Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) curriculum has. I am a result of deep interviews, personal observation, and experience as an ECD trainer. It is interesting as well as quite discouraging to examine the plight of the ECD Training graduates, particularly the problems of exclusion in the ECED classroom. Educators have mentioned that it is urgently needed for good basic training. They wish to be in a better position to guide

an ECED classroom, particularly regarding what children must learn. It is also extremely essential to remember what teachers, parents, and students think in designing the curriculum.

These narrations give an illustration of the experiences of ECED teachers implementing the curriculum. It also became evident during the chats with teachers that much emphasis is put on educational activities, yet there is an obvious lack, as far as the capacity to teach the new curriculum is concerned, honestly. My visit to ECED classrooms and interviews with teachers allowed me to have a true picture of their everyday tasks, practices in teaching and evaluation of children.

The teachers know how children learn and develop, and instead of sticking to the standard techniques, they use play-based ones to make the learning process interesting. However, the twist is that, when it is time to demonstrate what they have learned and apply their knowledge in the form of skills, they encounter some bottlenecks. There are certain challenges affecting those Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) centers which hold them back. To sum it all up, the chapter enters a narrative interpreter approach, which is about nothing other than the way meaning is constructed through the stories of participants. In addition, it relates the experiences of the author as a trainer in ECD, which brings a personal aspect to the entire discussion. It is rather complicated, to be sure, but there is a lot to learn from it.

## CHAPTER VI

### INSIGHTS, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, I have presented insights into the discussion, conclusions and implications of the study. According to the accounts of my experiences and responses of respondents, overall, the ECED teachers of the study areas offered important insights regarding the issues, achievements, and adaptations adopted during the implementation of the ECED curriculum and practices. Today, the ECED teachers are in difficulties because, although the local governments have the mandate to support adequate materials and training following their operations, the local governments are failing to provide adequate support. This case reflects a discrepancy between what is required and the level of what is provided to ECED Teachers in terms of resources and training in the country. ECED teachers are not very aware of thematic learning and creative approaches. Therefore, the ongoing professional development is necessary according to the research and conclusion. The curriculum must be employed in a flexible way to advocate physical, emotional, intellectual and social development in children with the active participation of parents and communities.

#### **Insights and Discussion**

The ECED teachers expressed their interest in being committed to lasting professional development with respect to teaching and learning activities in the field of ECED. They recognized the role played by their previous experiences of training in the development of this commitment. ECED teachers explained the challenges they encountered. The respondents are obviously keen to develop in their careers. However, the point is that they realized that the structure of the local government simply does not satisfy the short-term needs of the ECED teachers. It is kind of unsuitable. It is wide at the level of provision of skills that would lead to effective teaching and a sound understanding of child development. These are critical towards providing the best training to all ECED teachers.

Instead of the use of strategies such as playing, singing and dancing, they have been training Nepali and English letters as required by parents. It is hard to handle big classrooms containing 35-40 children, particularly when one has not been through training on the ECED Curriculum. A problem exists in this regard as far as communication and the ability to adjust to new modes of teaching. Therefore,

although they have undergone the preceding training, which contributed to their understanding of the early childhood development practices, there is a gap as far as the curriculum is concerned, and it needs to be applied in the classroom. They do believe in the strength of a natural and interesting learning setup, which causes curiosity among children as well as exploration in them. Jean Piaget's definition of cognitive development depended on how the child relates to the environment; that is, the child is said to be constructive. Children will be very active in building and making their own schemas (cognitive structures that organize and explain what is known) and will do their best to process the surrounding world (Huang, 2021). I have used this theory in my study as a theory guide. Other key attributes in the case of environmental preferences include the sitting arrangement, spacing, grouping, wall display, temperature, lighting, and noise level, among others. These are influential factors for the learners in various ways and can be directly associated with the learning styles of ECD children (Chepkwony et al., 2018). This issue truly demonstrates the fact that it is essential to ensure that the administrative structures can evolve in line with the needs of the individuals engaging in early childhood education. That is just a matter of ensuring that the workforce on the ground is assured that they have the support and means to perform in their jobs adequately. By making sure that we provide inclusive ECD to all, we create grounds that every child stands equally on receiving good opportunities to succeed (UNESCO, 2022).

When asked about the elements impacting their ability to facilitate according to the prescribed training and curriculum planning, all respondents emphasized the necessity for fundamental training to enhance their capacity in guiding the ECED classroom based on the learning needs and interests of the children under their care. They showed a strong interest in getting training that zeroes in on the methods and practices laid out in the ECED curriculum. That should really be the starting point for shaping future policies.

This case reflects a discrepancy between what is required and the level of what is provided to ECED Teachers in terms of resources and training in the country. And, about the current standards of the Department of Education, which was introduced in 2010, 10 teachers should make sure that children are clean and tidy, making them actively participate in different kinds of activities. Teachers need to ensure that they properly plan classes, accept the intended activities and create an atmosphere according to the interests of the planned curriculum. Probably the most creative aspect

of teaching is the development of a total learning environment for the learners in a specific activity. Learning environment encompasses the nature of the learners, the objectives of teaching and learning, the activities that will support learning best and the assessment strategies that will best measure and motivate learning that imbues the learning environment (Chepkwony et al., 2018).

Simple and locally available materials like leaves, sticks, rocks, jars, bottles and caps, sand and seeds, etc. can be used to make teaching learning materials to use in the classroom and at home, where the parents can help to make these materials. “From this point of view, the child, while learning a particular operation, acquires the ability to create structures of a certain type, regardless of the diverse materials” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 36). Additionally, the parents’ engagement is helpful in creating a conducive learning environment for children to play, learn and grow and support teachers to change their traditional teaching style. These materials provided to the teachers help with making attractive ECED centers and effective teaching of Early Literacy and Math (ELM) skills to children aged 3-5 years. After maintaining six learning corners in ECED centers using the materials made by parents, children are learning by themselves and enjoying a joyful and friendly environment, which has supported their learning in early literacy and math skills. The kind of learning corners depends on the curriculum of ELM, the activities that the teachers have planned and the materials available. This theoretical orientation is coherent with an understanding of curriculum that emphasizes capacitating the ECED teachers for the preparation of materials and implementation into classrooms with child-centered and play-based learning activities and methods based on the curriculum. Constructivists say that people build knowledge in the process of interactions with other people, exchanging ideas, views and experiences. Besides, such experiences have permanent implications on intellectual capacities that determine future learning capabilities. Based on the above, it may therefore be concluded that quality early childcare and education inculcate in children's social skills, by having them interact in a stimulating positive environment, with adults and peers interaction (Momodu, 2021).

In the context of rural Nepal, parents were rarely involved in the ECED program as teachers did not involve them. Some parents could not manage their time to visit ECED since most of them were busy with their household work. But once parents became aware of the importance of their involvement in the education of their children, they started visiting the ECED centers and supported developing different

learning materials using local resources. The benefits of parent involvement are visible in our project area, such as improvement in teaching behaviors of the teachers, attendance and learning achievements of the students. As per the perspective and understanding of curriculum, the general insights of ECED were provided based on common practices up to their last knowledge update by the training.

Teachers of ECED decoded the curriculum in accordance with the local context and incorporated a cultural component, languages, and materials that are specific to the community so that the curriculum could be more pertinent and attractive to the young learners. Nevertheless, the local government does not guarantee training interventions according to the consultation of ECED teachers. There is a lack of an assessment of the overall effect that the preschool curricula have on the preparedness of children related to school, more specifically in language acquisition and literacy skills (Darrow, 2010). Educators who use constructivist approaches provide an environment which facilitates the continuous building of new knowledge by the children (Broderick & Hong, 2011). The individual who has been most involved with developing the constructivist approach to language learning, Jerome Bruner, outlined the task of the language learner in three-fold: to learn the linguistic system, to learn to refer and express meaning and to do something with words and communicate successfully (Bruner, 1983, as cited in Behrens, 2021). In developing the age-appropriate activities of ECED, the curriculum practices should be in line with the stage of the child to realize maximum language learning.

As per the findings, it draws attention to the difficulties faced by ECED teachers, especially regarding their skills for conducting and facilitating the classrooms and the absence of capacity-building for the revised curriculum, they are facing challenges applying the curriculum in the classroom. It also highlights some of the key gaps in the implementation of the curriculum, despite active training of teachers. I know, these teachers are attempting to apply the play-based methods, and they also have quite an understanding of child development. Consequently, we are going to be able to focus on the development needs of each child and adjust our classes in a way that ensures increased activity and learning outcomes. According to the views of Sarita, it is revealed that the perception of the teachers towards the curriculum is very diverse and includes such aspects as perception, application, obstacles, and advantages. Some of the teachers think that it is difficult to implement the curriculum even though it is theoretically sound, because of its large scope and the

need for more practical support. To have all this, we must facilitate ECED teachers throughout the process of lifelong learning and help them acquire those practical skills. Speaking of the idea of how to plan a curriculum that will really work in various settings, it is essential to discuss ECED teachers, parents, and, as we say, the children as the primary stakeholders. This simply means the overall development of a child, building self-dependency, and nurturing these good attitudes.

To truly revolutionize early learning and child development, we must source out local resources so that parents can be part of the process in the production of instructional materials. It is just like putting up the groundwork and then putting on the finishing touches.

All participants highlighted the need for providing the ECED curriculum and curriculum-based training. Still, training for enhancing their skills based on interaction with them. Through their experiences and insights, they have explored how the curriculum is being implemented in practice in the classroom of ECED and how they are facing difficulties due to a lack of learning materials, training, monitoring and physical facilities. ECED Strategy (2077-2088) supports the idea of allocating finance to ECED to improve the quality of early learning and the provision of basic capacities to young children by enhancing the capacity of ECED teachers.

The ECED teachers are experiencing the pinch as far as implementation of the curriculum is concerned. They have identified some of the huge gaps between what they are supposed to do and the resources they must work with. This is not merely a problem of the teachers, but all the school management, teachers and parents must be in line to accomplish this new curriculum being in action. Today, even the curriculum targets self-sufficiency and all-around growth of the children. However, there are certain severe hiccups, such as bad infrastructure, that matter. Nevertheless, in those classrooms which are child-friendly, we have the example that early learning and development may be supported with the help of properly used resources and parents' participation. Nonetheless, as there are different local-level policies and programs regarding health, care, nutrition, learning, and protection, there is no balanced framework to respond to the complete needs of children from prenatal to early childhood. Although four-year-olds are required to undergo one year of pre-primary, there is another huge gap in services and programs that facilitate the learning and development of children younger than four in their homes and communities.

## **Conclusions**

As per the findings, simultaneously, every participant in the interviews accepts that the early childhood education curriculum is needed for managing the classroom and learning process of early-aged children. Most participants expressed the need for training as per the new curriculum, which can support teaching and learning activities as per the children's age, interest, local classroom conditions, and availability of materials. When asked about the elements impacting their ability to facilitate, all teachers are aware of the importance of the teaching and learning materials, but still, they demanded training and course contents for the use of the teaching materials which support distinct methods tailored for child development. Prescribed training and curriculum planning, all respondents emphasized the necessity for fundamental training to enhance their capacity in guiding the ECED classroom based on the learning needs and interests of the children under their care.

They were also keen on acquiring training that focuses on the methods and practices spelt out in the ECED curriculum. That should really be the starting point for shaping future policies. This way, this will be achieved by imparting practical skills, enabling them to adapt to social and practical norms, and instilling a mindset of continuous learning among ECED teachers and educators. In addition, it is essential that government agencies, non-State actors, and other organizations that govern health, nutrition, water, sanitation, hygiene, education, social welfare, protection, and the environment consult with families and communities and collaborate to generate effective policies, programs and operational guidance.

The research was based on understanding the interpretations of the ECED teachers of the ECED curriculum and the application thereof in their classrooms. Based on my observations, it is evident that teachers in the year 2077 still miss the chance of being involved in the capacity building training as regards the curriculum in ECED.

## **Implications**

As per the understanding and practices discussed, ECED teachers are less conscious of the application of basic skills, participation in all-around development activities, and the use of thematic learning and creative thinking while carrying out daily chores. Early acquisition of fundamental social and learning skills is necessary, as are later skills that facilitate the acquisition of new ones, boost self-esteem, and inspire them to study more. The competencies and capacity of ECED teachers for

adapting the curriculum are essential, and need to design the new training based on the curriculum as requested by ECED teachers.

The insights of the study add significant information to the existing body of knowledge on early childhood education and development in Nepal since the study critically analyzes how teachers conceptualize and implement the underlying purposes of the national ECD curriculum and practices. The curriculum is constructed as a one-year preparatory course which is supposed to assure the full development of children with a focus on physical health, personal safety, hygiene habits, language and communication, socio-emotional development, creativity, and early cognitive skills. As per the discussion, the ECED teachers have a general understanding of these curriculum purposes. The lack of depth in their understanding is that most of them lay more emphasis on the official statements of objectives as opposed to the conceptual underpinnings of the curriculum that they are supposed to be executed with. The research thus reveals a big gap in curriculum understanding and curriculum implementation.

More importantly, the research illustrates that ECED teachers tend to reflect curricular expectations as a set of things that must be done instead of the framework, which entails active work of the child, play-based approaches and developmental suitability. Even though the curriculum focuses on interaction of children with various developmental activities, classroom practices observed show that there was little integration of interactive, exploratory and experiential learning strategies. The knowledge about the goals of the curriculum to the teachers does not necessarily translate into the type of pedagogical strategies, guided play, meaningful interactions, and continuous assessment that would facilitate the integrated development that the curriculum is meant to achieve. This study confirms that meaningful implementation of the Early Childhood Development and Education curriculum in Nepal would require enhancement of teachers' pedagogical content knowledge, increasing the ability to translate the goals of development into practice, and receiving institutional support. This input is crucial in enhancing the quality and purpose of early childhood education to conform to national policy ambitions.

### **Policy Provision**

According to the Local Government Operation Act 2074, the Local Governments take charge of managing education from Early Childhood Development (ECD) all the way up to Grade 12. Schools really need to collaborate with these local

authorities. Based on the findings, it is apparent that there are certain major gaps and issues as far as the implementation of the new ECED curriculum at the local level is concerned. This comes as a surprise, especially given the fact that everyone is aware of how crucial it is in terms of enhancing the development of children and addressing problems of resource allocation for curriculum training. It's high time that education units got their policies in coordination with proven strategies in health, nutrition, early learning and caregiving.

### **Educators/ Trainers**

According to what was discovered about the perceptions of the training needs, all the respondents, to bring about an easy, natural and undertaking kind of learning experience to the children, the learning environment must be designed in a way that it should appear natural and, in this way, develop a sense of security and freedom that all can be able to access to learn freely. The efforts of schools and teachers must be to lobby for broad-based and standardized planning regarding the training of ECED teachers so that they may understand the updated curriculum better and help fill the loopholes in the application of the curriculum.

The ECD teacher plays a significant role in the Early Childhood Development and Education center in the process of teaching and learning a language, and a competent teacher can prove to be very efficient in the selection of the learning materials, their design and deployment (Ogott, 2011, as cited in Murundu et al., 2014). On the same note, parents ought to be incorporated in the awareness exercises and need to appreciate the significance of play as one of the elements of early childhood development. At home, they must allow play and communication, which are interactive, to supplement what is taught in a structured way. Therefore, the Educators and trainers should be able to develop the awareness package to be conducted to incorporate the curriculum and parents' roles in ECED implementation.

### **Teachers**

ECED teachers are less aware of thematic learning and creative thinking in the process of performing daily tasks, and involvement in overall development activities and the use of basic skills in them. They need to acquire basic learning and social skills at a young age, and subsequent abilities for making it easier to learn new skills, as well as build confidence and the motivation to learn more. ECED teachers really need to keep pursuing ongoing professional development. Also, it's important for these teachers to look at the curriculum not as a strict guideline but as a flexible

framework. And let's not forget about the daily schedule and teaching strategies. They really must involve parents, education units, and the community, too.

It is essential that ECED teachers give emphasis on activities that enhance physical, emotional, intellectual and social development. That is, this is in line with the objectives stipulated in the revised ECED curriculum. It is simply building the proper development of our youngest students. The facilitator usually performs 16 days of basic training on early childhood development (ECD) before taking up the position and is exposed to 6 days of refresher course after one year of facilitating duties. According to the ECED curriculum, ECED teachers are expected to engage in various activities to facilitate learning within the classrooms. As per the understanding of ECED teachers regarding curriculum, it can support them in facilitating of the classroom by interactive and engaging teaching methods to capture the attention and foster the participation of young learners.

#### **Schools, Parents and Education Units of Local Governments**

Schools and Education units need to ensure the provision of child-friendly teaching learning materials, disability-inclusive, and safe learning environments. When questioned about the factors influencing their capacity for facilitation as per the training and curriculum planning, all respondents demanded that they need the basic training for capacity to facilitate the ECED classroom as per the learning needs and interests of their children. Hence, the local government distributes the ECED curriculum and provides training on a regular basis. They are interested in training methodology and practices of ECD as per the prescribed curriculum content. Simultaneously, they should be prompted to inquire and engage with each other by asking questions.

ECED Teachers, who were my respondents, acknowledged the needs of teaching and learning materials and their usages, but demanded training and curriculum assistance to be able to use them in child development. They emphasized the need for training in accordance with the new ECED curriculum, depending upon the age, interests of children, local conditions, and available resources. Schools and Education Units of Local Government need to ensure the provision of child-friendly teaching learning materials, disability-inclusive, and safe learning environments. The basic and ongoing mentoring and coaching to improve the teaching skills to improve the skills of teaching and the focused area was on the curriculum-based teaching alongside assessment and practical skills. The efforts of schools and head teachers

must be to lobby for comprehensive and standardized planning regarding the training of ECED teachers so that they may understand the updated curriculum better and help fill the loopholes in the application of the curriculum.

ECED teachers are no longer aware of thematic learning and creative approaches. Therefore, the ongoing professional development facilities are necessary according to the research and conclusion. The curriculum must be employed in a flexible way to advocate physical, emotional, intellectual and social development in children with the active participation of parents and communities. Even when teachers are given basic training and refresher training, there is still a need to focus more on interactive and engaging approaches to enhance the overall development of young learners. Consequently, we are going to be able to focus on the development needs of each child and adjust our classes in a way that ensures increased activity and learning outcomes.

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## APPENDIXES

## ECED/School Observation

Mahendra Ma.Vi. Raiyatole

Chandrapur-2

2080/02/31

15<sup>th</sup> June 2023

- Total ECD Children in classroom-22 Attend.
- Himai, Pahad, Terai (Geographical area) made.
- Flooring with carpet (poly, carpet and mat)
- Three slide, swing, basketball stand.
- Wall decoration.
- Plastic furniture (for child) Child friendly.
- More materials and congested (room should be expanded)
- White board
- Parents meeting call.
- Playing materials.
- Children puts materials in same box for collect.
- T.V time (Newly students)
- Rhymes and sounds of animals.
- Parents meeting with Smc school Principal.
- Every last day of month – PTA.
- Second meeting
- Principal Mrs. Kamal Thapa conducting the meeting in child club hall of school.
- Mostly Danuwar, Rai, Kuswar (Majhi) Parents are coming.
- Meeting minute by Principal (ECD to 5) (6-10) two meeting conducted in every month.

- **Moring meal (Khaja Time)**
  - **(8:30 to 9)**
  - **(Babita -Aya Didi) Absent**
- (Delicious Biscuits) Rs 10 Per children.
- All children eat biscuits (Black with cream, Blue rapper – not cream)
- Khaja time with TV sounds.
- Childrens are not connect with meal.
- No pray and handwash before meal.
- 9:15 AM (After morning meal)
- Curriculum implementation is not satisfactory.
- ECD facilitator need more training.
- After morning meal- Copy/pencil use reading on white board by facilitator.
- Mostly facilitator use her time to care children and reading-writing.

10:05 AM School off.

- **Gyanpunja Bal Bikash Kendra (Community Based)**
- Chandrapur-2**
  - **Jamamtoki tole**
  - **Shree Nawa Binayak Primary School**
    - **18<sup>th</sup> June 2023**
    - Observation:
      - Total students (158) ECD – (C B - 26), (S.B- 25)
      - Materials are very poor.
      - Students have their own school bag provided by municipality. (New Bag) 2080/02/32
        - (15 June 2023)
          - No play materials, teaching materials.
          - No paint in wall (only wall decoration)
          - Reading on wall.
          - No daily routine, weather chart, Birthday chart.
          - No subject materials.
          - Not following ECD curriculum and daily routine by facilitator.
          - Tarabaji lai/ hatti song (Hatti Geet) about १,२,३
          - All children wearing new bag when singing song. They don't want to exchange their bag with friends. If they mix the bag, they will get the problem to recognize the newly received bag.
          - Next attached rooms sound (teaching by next teacher) clearly arrived in ECD room.
          - One child playing the wooden play materials self. All materials are not child friendly and seems very old and need to replace.
          - Teaching A,B,C,D (Reading)
          - Childrens are happier to play available materials then read the wall painting alphabet, Byanjamin barna. - (क-ज़) (A to Z)
          - Random classroom routine.
          - Very hot in morning time too.

- Play materials before morning meal (Breakfast)
- Asking, putting all materials in their place – children want to go for meal.
- Making line to go in next building or room for meal.
- (Haluwa Khaja) morning meal.
- Lines made for distributing meal.
- Two lines are for ECD and other class.
- Teacher also took same meal.
- Breakfast routine.
- Community based ECD visit.
- New curriculum सम्बन्धित stake holder हरुको अनभिज्ञता, प्रयोग नभएको र बालबालिकाहरुलाई विद्यालयको पुरानो शैलीमा नै पढ्नपाठन ।
- Local government, SMC, ECD facilitator र School Principal सबैको सहयोग भए facilitator ले curriculum को प्रयोग गर्न सक्ने देखियो ।
- Technically ECD को Knowledge नभएको municipality र सम्बन्धित ward ले वितरण गरेको व्याग,कपि, पेन्सिल ( १ प्याकेट) ले ECD children's को development को concept को New ECD curriculum लाई कतै पनि नहुने देखियो ।
- Municipality को Education Depart संग पनि interview / ECD curriculum information बोट र यसको प्रयोग, तालिम र सहयोग बोट कुराकानी गर्नपर्ने देखियो ।
- Training, orientation continuously follow up and feedback नभएको ले facilitator n] curriculum अनुसार कक्षा संचालन नभएको
- Local government मा सबै power decentralization भएर आए पछि भन ECD संचालनका हरेक पक्ष (support , feedback, nutrition food मा quality कम भएको, ECD facilitator को curriculum मा नै आधारित भएर कक्षा संचालन गर्नुपर्छ भने कुरामा नी कमी अएको वा ECD facilitator ले जसरी जे जस्तो गरी कक्षा संचालन गरेपनि फरक पढेन भने अवधारणा विकास भएको ।

**Shiva Shakti Adharvut School**

• **Chandrapur- 8 , Hatisar**

**9<sup>th</sup> July 2023**

- Room: (2 ECD) But 1 is collaborated with grade one (I)
- Soundbox- song and playing, passing cup with pencil hold.
- Children are dancing and singing
  - Song: “Nilo Akashma gham lageko charaharu udeko Swagat gareko.
- 10 chairs (small plastic chair) 5 red colors (5 blue colors, 4 cotton mats, 1 aluminum box (closed))
- Singing songs respectively (one/one students)
- One fan, wall t.v. (small 18 inch) 1 soundbox as teaching, learning materials.
- Wall painting (alphabet a to z with picture)
- Math: 1- one to 10- Ten (! to !) -Ps — bz\_
- National Anthem and symbols.
- 12 months name (Nepali and English) (Baishakh/January)
- 7 days name (in Nepali and English)
- s,sf,ls,sL===== -vM\_ ;Dd
- -!—!))\_ but all paintings are expired. (1 to 100 is clear in vision but ! to !)) is not clear (erase))
  - This room (building was made by support of plan Nepal.
- One hanging chart (A,B,C,D /1,2,3,4 /s,v,u) as teaching / learning materials.
- Facilitator reading wall painting. A/B/C/D- Picture asking with children too. What is this? / How does it sound? How many legs of cat.....like same. Counting the cat legs -1,2,3,4
  - tail-? 1 tail of cat, dog means kukur,puchhar parts of dog's body – asking facilitator and all children are counting.
- After wall reading – play rail-gadi.
- Two children bring 4 packets of noodles.
- TV watch time.
- Students watch T.V. facilitators checking homework done by children.
- 16 children are attendants and 16 copies.
- Different colored bags and pencils are there.

- Facilitator checked and gave H/W
- Fourth period bell rang.
  - It's tiffin (khaja-break)
- Khir (rice pudding) Grade I and ECD children have their breakfast (tiffin) before 1 period than other classes.
- Bowl (kachaura) and spoon (chamcha) are used to eat.
- Two lady helpers in school to make khaja (tiffin) or breakfast.
- 35 students eating on land without using mats.
- Cemented (baranda) is the sitting area to eat tiffin.
- All children sit in cemented land (baranda) without any mats or chakati.
- Drink water after eating (steal glass).
- Some children threw meal or rice pudding.
- Facilitator writing H/W in remaining copy.
- Children are going toilet and one teacher saying, "use toilet for urine not outside or ground".
- After eating rice pudding, it's rest time for children and H/W time for facilitator.
- Using mobile and sound box for children's song. Childrens are watching mobile video. Sleeping with support of stomach and head up.
  - Sound is very loud.
- One whiteboard is used as needed. Board marker and duster are near the facilitator.
- Childrens are free in classroom. Nobody is standing, all are watching mobile and fighting. They are free to do what they want.
- Some are crying.
- Facilitator saying no to 'badmas'.
- Teachers are taking tiffin 'Rice pudding'.
- I also took 2 spoons of rice pudding.
- It is little bit sweet but smelling the rice.
- Little bite coconut is used in rice pudding.
- One parent came to take ECD children home. (Kale aaija) (calling from windows)
- Facilitator asked why he was taking it home.

- Grade 4 or 5 class students go home so, abishar also taking home by sister.
- CC camera is there in classroom and Baranda too but no materials and any teaching, learning materials in ECD classroom.
- Exchange class by facilitator of ECD and Grade I.
- One (one ECD facilitator is taking Grade I class (19+23) children in two ECD, but class are combined.
- One ECD facilitator is feeling unwell so, she left the school after tiffin break. (headache problem)
- One ECD facilitator is serving both ECD and grade I class at the same time in ECD room.
- Grade I and ECD students are joining same class after tiffin break.
- Facilitator asking who is Gyani? Class I or ECD class?
- All children are sitting round with banding hands.
- Two facilitators are for ECD, but these are combined class ECD. One of them is taking grade I class. They both exchange class after tiffin break. When one is absent in class another handles the class in her own way.
- There are two ECD centers, one is community based, and another is school based ECD but there are only one class (combined) one of them serves class Grade I. It seems noe (three grade- two ECD and one (grade I) is in same class today.
- In this situation they are not taking ECD class activities as guided by ECD curriculum.
- Facilitator is doing yoga(meditation).
- She is telling close eyes and remembers that they are going to eat meat and Bajar to eat ice cream and other things.
- Meditation after singing songs.
- Laughing all children.
- Making straight leg and counting the finger by !,@,#,\$, -Ps, b'O{, ltg ,rf/, kfFr\_
- Counting the fingers of hand !,@,#,\$
- Asking children how many fingers are both two hands?
  - Children's: !) j6f
- Again, hand in land and counting finger.

- Playing rumal lukai game.
- Giving drinking water by bottle and glass.
- Children are shouting and making noise, some are sleeping, some are talking, some are playing with each other.
- 6:30 to 11:15
  - (5:15 hrs) time spent in school or ECD. ECD students also left ECD at 11:15 AM as usual school time start.
- Again, sound box song plays and students are dancing and clapping.
- Dancing group wise/ next group.
- 11:00 parents came to school to take children.
- Facilitator giving bag to children, Copy and H/W also distribute. Pencil served by school. Facilitator kept pencil in ECD only copy distribute class in one.
  - 11:10 Am
- Parents are coming to take children. 3 parents only come.
- There is no any chart, daily routine
- As classes are not conducted as the facilitator are active but they are not following any activities as ECD class and curriculum.