

Implications of the Creative Curriculum from the Perspectives of Educators in Qatar University Early Childhood Center

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Abstract

To better understand the effectiveness of any implemented early childhood curriculum, it is vital to pay attention to the experiences of early childhood educators who practiced that curriculum. The purpose of this research is to investigate early childhood educators' experiences with the Creative Curriculum that has been implemented at the Early Childhood Center of Qatar University since 2015. In this phenomenological research, the methodology includes: (a) in-depth phenomenologically based interviews, (b) follow-up online interviews, and (c) a focus group meeting with the teachers. Eight early childhood educators with a wide range of experiences presented their own experiences with the Creative Curriculum. The findings revealed that by implementing the Creative Curriculum, teachers were encouraged to integrate all aspects of the Curriculum. Teachers were inspired to pay close attention to their children's physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development and to respond appropriately. This research provides insights and future implications about this specific curriculum in the early childhood field.

Keywords: Creative Curriculum; Educators' perspectives; Children; Early childhood education; Qatar

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تطبيقات المنهاج الإبداعي من وجهات نظر معلمات مركز الطفولة المبكرة في جامعة قطر

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ملخص

لفهم فعالية أي منهج يُنفذ في مرحلة الطفولة المبكرة، من الضروري الانتباه إلى خبرات معلمات هذه المرحلة في ممارسة هذا المنهج وتطبيقه. يهدف البحث إلى استقصاء تجارب معلمات الطفولة المبكرة بعد تنفيذ المنهج الإبداعي المطبق في مركز الطفولة المبكرة بجامعة قطر منذ عام 2015. تركز المنهجية في هذا البحث النوعي على: (أ) المقابلات المتعمقة المباشرة، (ب) المقابلات عبر الإنترنت، (ج) مقابلة نهائية مع المجموعة المركزة من المعلمات المشاركات بالبحث. في هذا البحث قدمت ثمانية من معلمات الطفولة المبكرة مجموعة واسعة من الخبرات المتعلقة بتجاربهن الخاصة مع المنهج الإبداعي. كشفت النتائج أن المنهج الإبداعي شجع المعلمات على دمج جميع الجوانب النمائية لدى الأطفال، كما وجههن لإعطاء عناية خاصة بتطور الأطفال بدنياً واجتماعياً وعاطفياً ومعرفياً، وللاستجابة بشكل مناسب لتطور الأطفال. يقدم البحث استشرافاً مستقبلياً لتطبيقات المنهج الإبداعي في مجال الطفولة المبكرة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المنهج الإبداعي، وجهة نظر المعلمات، الأطفال، تربية الطفولة المبكرة، قطر

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© 2022، المعضادي، الجهة المرخص لها: دار نشر جامعة قطر. تم نشر هذه المقالة البحثية وفقاً لشروط Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0). تسمح هذه الرخصة بالاستخدام غير التجاري، وينبغي نسبة العمل إلى صاحبه، مع بيان أي تعديلات عليه. كما تتيح حرية نسخ، وتوزيع، ونقل العمل بأي شكل من الأشكال، أو بأية وسيلة، ومزجه وتحويله والبناء عليه، طالما يُنسب العمل الأصلي إلى المؤلف.

1. Introduction and Literature Review

In early childhood education, there is an increased interest in learning about early learning environments' components, especially their implemented curricula. Indeed, investigating early childhood curricula can improve the understanding of school readiness among preschoolers (Cassidy et al., 2003). Miller (2011) suggested that curriculum model serves as source of a theoretical framework that guides the effective early childhood education program. Further, the early childhood curriculum encourages children to be ready to learn (Bauman, 2012).

Many early childhood curricula are implemented worldwide. However, only six curricula are widely known as early childhood curriculum models, including the Bank Street developmental-interaction Approach, the Dodge Creative Curriculum for preschool, the High/Scope Curriculum, the Kamii-DeVries Constructivist Approach, the Montessori Method, and the Direct Instruction Model (Lunenborg, 2011). The current study explores the implications of the Dodge Creative Curriculum, which has been recently implemented at Qatar University Early Childhood Center (QU-ECC).

The Dodge Creative Curriculum is designed to be a "developmentally-appropriate curriculum" that is designed to individually consider children's strengths, needs, experiences, cultural backgrounds, beliefs, and practices. Each implemented method in this curriculum matches the developmentally appropriate practices (Teaching Strategies, 2016). Specifically, this curriculum highlights 38 objectives covered in 10 learning areas: social-emotional, language, physical, cognitive, literacy, mathematics, science and technology, social studies, the arts, and English language acquisition (Dodge, Heroman, Colker, Bickart, 2010).

The importance of this study is to learn about the implications of this curriculum in the Arabic context. Specifically, this specific curriculum was selected to be implemented in Qatar since 2015. To analyze the Creative Curriculum in the Arabic context, it is vital to pay attention to the teachers' viewpoints and experiences of that curriculum day by day in the Arabic context. From the review of the literature, only one research study was undertaken to precisely examine or investigate the Creative Curriculum in early childhood Qatari settings. Specifically, Hamaidi (2020) investigated kindergarten educators' perceptions of the degree of Creative Curriculum existence in the implemented curriculum at Qatari public kindergartens. The findings revealed that public kindergarten teachers thought early childhood educators were doing a good job of integrating the objectives of the Creative Curriculum in the Qatari public kindergarten curriculum. However, it is necessary to investigate the Creative Curriculum from the viewpoints of early childhood educators who have used this specific curriculum in the classroom. As a result, the goal of this research is to learn about the meaning of this practical experience from the teachers who went through it. The role of the early childhood educators is critical to achieve the objectives of any implemented curriculum, so this study aims at understanding eight early childhood teachers' perspectives of The Creative Curriculum for Preschoolers in the Early Childhood Center at Qatar University.

2. The QU-ECC

The first inception of the QU-ECC (Qatar University-Early Childhood Centre) was in 1981. The Center serves children between the ages of 3 and 5 years, and is open to the Qatar University students, staff, and the larger community. The QU-ECC provides a model demonstration and training site for early childhood education with research opportunities to further enhance knowledge of early development, education, and quality care for young children in Qatar (Qatar University, 2020).

The QU-ECC has used the Arabic version of the Creative Curriculum for Preschoolers since

2015 as a foundation for its Early Years Program. The Creative Curriculum has been developed and published by Teaching Strategies Inc., in the United States. This curriculum's materials and resources are presented in both English and Arabic, thus providing consistency for the children to participate in Arabic and English instruction and activities.

The philosophy of The Creative Curriculum stemmed from the knowledge of child development theories and recent research in early childhood education (Teaching Strategies, 2010). The focus of this curriculum is to provide deep knowledge of "what", "how" and "why" to teach particular topics. Gaining such knowledge can help teachers scaffold and support development and learning in children. The other focus of The Creative Curriculum is enhancing partnerships with families and relationships with each child and family (Teaching strategies, 2010). The five fundamental principles of the Creative Curriculum are: 1) child-adult interactions are crucial foundations for learning, 2) enhancing social-emotional skills and competencies is a predictor of school success, 3) play purposefully and constructively is a cornerstone in supporting effective learning, 4) the quality of learning affected by the physical environment, and 5) partnerships between teachers and families support child's development and learning (Teaching Strategies, 2010).

According to Teaching Strategies (2010), the distinguished attribute of the Creative Curriculum is its comprehensive approach that emerged from a strong theoretical framework. The works of many theorists were studied carefully to promote physical, socio-emotional, cognitive, and language development. Promoting such aspects requires careful preparation of the learning environment, selective content, and adequate preparation of teachers to be more aware of their roles and family roles. The content of Creative Curriculum (CC) is presented in several studies. Each study can be applied to many interest areas including Blocks, Dramatic Play, Toys and Games, Art, Library, Discovery, Sand and Water, Music and Movement, Cooking, Computers, and Outdoors (Dodge, Colker, & Heroman, 2002). The concept of creativity is implemented in each study by providing a variety of creative thinking skills, such as observation, classification flexibility, prediction, planning, and fluency.

2.1. Research problem and questions

Enhancing creativity in early childhood has a favorable influence according to Wood (2009). While the CC is considered one of the early childhood curricula implemented in many countries to promote creativity in childhood, the details of its execution in the Arabic educational context are still unexplored. The emphasis of creativity in the early childhood education is crucial because it is part of children's daily life. The interest in creativity should be given to the process (Isbell & Raines, 2007). Many previous studies investigated the importance of enhancing creativity in early childhood stage (Wood, 2009). They explored the relationship between creativity and the overall development of the child and the learning outcomes (Edwards et al., 2014). Although the emphasis on enhancing creativity seems high, there is a lack of motivation to spur children's creativity in early childhood (Eason, Giannangelo, & Franceschini, 2009). Further, according to Hamaidi (2014) early childhood teachers discussed numerous limitations and barriers to children's cognitive development. As a result, there is a need to investigate the curriculum that presents itself as the Creative Curriculum and seek more understanding of teachers' insights.

This research was designed to learn about early childhood educators' experiences with the Creative Curriculum. Specifically, it discussed the Creative Curriculum's implementations from the educators' perspectives. Consequently, the study focused on the insights and experiences of eight early childhood educators who work at the Early Childhood Center at Qatar University. The

central research question in this study was: What are the implications of the Creative Curriculum from the perspectives of early childhood educators at QU-ECC?

Based on Seidman's (2006) insights, the sub-questions that support this inquiry and helped to answer the above main question were:

1. What are the implications for teachers for teaching the CC Domains?
2. What is it like to be an early childhood educator who experiences the CC? Specifically, what does this experience mean to the participants?
3. What are the limitations and the opportunities of such a curriculum from the teachers' perspective?

3.1. Theoretical framework

According to Graue and Walsh (1998), the theory serves as a guide and a road map that help the researchers in their investigations. Consistently, Borgatti (1999) pointed out that the theoretical framework serves as a guide in a research study. It provides the reader with a frame of understanding of the conclusions and recommendations of the research and it limits the researchers' bias. However, scholars should tackle the challenge of employing the theory and not being controlled by its limits (Graue & Walsh, 1998). In this qualitative research, the researcher utilized two main theories to guide the investigation. Specifically, the researcher started from the "improvement science" theory's effects on early childhood education settings in this research. According to Lewis (2015) the "improvement science" theory has achieved many performance improvements in different sectors. One of these sectors is education. This theory draws attention to knowledge-building with educational settings and the strategies gained from variation in practices. Based on the tenets of the improvement science theory, two kinds of knowledge are required: basic knowledge and "a system of profound knowledge" (Langley et al., 2009). Based on this theory, the participants of this research provide the readers with these two types of knowledge.

At the same time, this research benefited from the deconstruction theory that fits the researcher's way of thinking about teaching and learning in early childhood settings. Kincheloe (2005) pointed out that "inquiry and the knowledge it produces are never neutral but are constructed" (p. 35). In this research, the participants construct new knowledge about the implications of the Creative Curriculum in the Arabic context. According to Cannella (1997), the field of early childhood education has many crucial topics that should be "problematized" and discussed thoroughly by early childhood educators. Therefore, this research provides an arena of deep discussion and analysis from the perspectives of educators who have varied experiences with the Creative Curriculum. Presenting their insights can add to the construction of knowledge about the curricula in early childhood education in the Arabic context.

3.2. The importance of the study

The participants of this research mirrored a wide range of experiences. By presenting the participants' insights, the reader can learn more about the actual practices of the Creative Curriculum. This research offers new insights that enhanced knowledge production regarding the applications of early childhood curricula in a new context. Based on their experiences the teachers analyzed the implemented curricula in the Arabic context and provided a criticism of its implementation. Teachers' experiences gave critical insights for early childhood educators in a different context. The perceptions of early childhood educators can help the reader understand this new context.

4. Method

4.1. Participants

In an attempt to present the multiple realities of the participants, the researcher tries to represent these multiple realities adequately through the intentional selection of a diverse sample (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Eight early childhood educators volunteered to participate in this study to share their experiences with the CC. Table 1 describes the varied experiences of the participants.

Table 1: Describing the varied experiences of the participants

No.	Teacher's Name*	Classes taught at ECEC-QU	Experience before ECEC-QU	Academic Qualifications
1	Shaima	Pre-K (2Years) KG1 (2 years) KG2 (1 year)	0 years	BA Elementary Education/Early Childhood
2	Muna	Pre-K (1/2 a year) KG2 (1 year)	5 ½ years	PhD social sciences in health, Master of Public Health (health education concentration), Diploma of Children's Services
3	Elham	KG2 (3 years) KG1 (7 years) Pre-K (4 years)	7 years	BS Science/ Chemistry Early Childhood Diploma
4	Jawahwer	KG2 (2 years) KG1 (5years) Pre-K (6 years)	2 years	BA Education/ Islamic Studies Early Childhood Diploma
5	Yasmeen	KG2 (1 year) KG1 (2 years) Pre-K (2 years)	7 years	BA in Education/ Elementary Education BA in Arts
6	Basma	KG2 (1/2 year) KG1 (1 year) Pre-K (1/2 year)	1 year	BA Elementary Education/ Early childhood
7	Nabeelah	Pre K KG 1 KG 2	12 years	Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Education
8	Nuha	Pre-K (1 year)	15 years	BA Professional studies in Learning and Development

*The teachers' names have been changed and replaced with pseudonyms.

As Table 1 showed, participants had varied experiences in teaching at the QU-ECC and previous experiences in other early childhood centers. This can provide different insights that may increase the readers' understanding of the implications of the Creative Curriculum from different perspectives due to the different teaching experiences.

4.2. Methodology

In this qualitative research, the in-depth interviewing methodology was implemented to respond to the main research question. Specifically, collecting data included: (a) Eight in-depth phenomenological based interviews, (b) follow-up online interviews conducted via e-mail, and (c) a focus group meeting with the teachers.

The researcher followed a modified model of Seidman's (2006) in-depth Interviewing Method. Based on this modified model, the first interview was a face-to-face interview. It lasted 90 minutes and was conducted in the participant's workplace. The purpose of this interview was to reconstruct the biographical events in light of the topic of the study that focuses on the experience with Creative Curriculum and educational experiences before implementing the Creative Curriculum and the beginning of this new experience.

The second interview was conducted via e-mail to allow the participants to reflect on their experiences in their available time. The connection between this interview and Seidman's second interview is highlighting teachers' understanding of their present experience with the Creative Curriculum. The participants responded to 7 open-ended questions about their current experience in implementing the Creative Curriculum. They took one week to respond electronically to the questions.

The third interview was a focus group interview with all of the participants. The focus group was conducted at the participants' workplace. The focus group interview lasted for 2 hours. The researcher believes that using a focus group has an added value in this research because the participants had an opportunity to listen to others' insights and argue them. This was essential in constructing the knowledge that they have about the Creative Curriculum. The purpose of this focus group interview is similar to Seidman's (2006) third interview focus that is the meaning of the participant's experience. Specifically, this interview summarized the meaning of the participants' experiences with the Creative Curriculum.

In-depth Interviewing was appropriate for this research because this method focuses on what meaning the participants make out of their experience with the Creative Curriculum. Due to the nature of this investigation that seeks understanding and meaning-making, the researcher believes that the qualitative research approach was the appropriate approach.

4.3. Definitions

For this research, the following definitions can help the reader understand the researcher's operational definitions for the core concepts in this investigation:

The Creative Curriculum for Preschool is defined as:

A comprehensive, research-based curriculum that features exploration and discovery as a way of learning, enabling children to develop confidence, creativity, and lifelong critical thinking skills. It is designed to help educators at all levels of experience plan and implement a developmentally appropriate, content-rich program for children with diverse backgrounds and skill levels (Teaching Strategies, 2016, p.4).

The Arabic version of the Creative Curriculum for Preschool is defined as:

A collaborative work between Teaching Strategies Corporation and Obekan Education Corporation (Obekan, 2012). Both corporations collaborate to enhance the quality of early childhood education in the Middle East. Obekan Corporation translated the whole components of the Creative Curriculum for Preschool in a way that responds to the Arabic context.

Early Childhood Center:

This is an early childhood setting at Qatar University. This center serves children from 3 to 5 years old. It has implemented the Creative Curriculum since 2015.

Early Childhood Educators:

The preschool teachers who work at the early childhood center at Qatar University. They teach three different levels (Pre-K, KG1, or KG2). Every teacher has a different experience in teaching the Creative Curriculum.

5. Data Analysis

According to Creswell (1998) and Creswell and Creswell (2018), the focus of data analysis is to find the repeated themes and issues to be discussed. In doing so, each interview was transcribed, read and re-read. The same procedures were used in transcribing the focus group meeting. In order to analyze the written transcriptions, the researcher read and highlighted the information that resonates with the research focus. The researcher added some comments by using the comment feature in the Word document. This helped the researcher to highlight and classify the data into specific themes.

The codes used in analyzing the data are components of Creative Curriculum, implementations of Creative Curriculum, attributes of the Creative Curriculum, issues related to implementing Creative Curriculum, and future insights related to implementing the Creative Curriculum.

5.1. Trustworthiness

Enhancing the trustworthiness of qualitative research requires being aware of credibility, conformability, transferability, and dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As a result, the researcher in this research paid careful attention to the collected data. Participants' insights were reviewed many times to be clustered in the related theme. The participants' information and their previous experiences were described in the participants' section to allow the reader to understand the specific context of this research. In this way, the reader can make a decision regarding the findings of this research and the way that they find suitable to benefit from those insights.

6. Findings and discussion

Based on analyzing the first two interviews and the focus group interview, the following are the main themes that arose and were hence shared from the participants' perceptions. According to Daymon and Holloway (2002), providing an interpretation and analysis of the participants' insights help dig beyond the surface and uncover the nature of the experience from the perspectives of the participants themselves.

6.1. Implications for Teachers of the CC Domains

The participants in this research shared their own experiences after implementing the Creative Curriculum domains. According to Kincheloe (2005), knowledge is constructed. Therefore, this section presents how teachers at the Early Childhood Center of Qatar University construct their experience with this curriculum. The Creative Curriculum covers four major domains. The first domain is the socio-emotional development. It consists of three sub-domains: a) self-concept, b) responsibility towards self and others, c) positive social behavior. The second domain is physical development. This domain focuses on enhancing both fine and gross motor skills. The third domain is the cognitive development. It covers: a) learning and problem-solving, b) logical thinking, c) abstract thinking. The fourth domain is linguistic development. It includes: a) listening and speaking, b) reading and writing. When teachers were interviewed, they shared their day-to-day practices that express their understanding of the CC domains.

6.2. Implications of the socio-emotional domain of the CC

Teachers mentioned that the socio-emotional domain was presented strongly in the CC studies. For example, teacher Muna mentioned that the “Beginning of the Year Study” has important insights that enhance the socio-emotional aspect. Teacher Muna commented:

“‘Beginning of the Year Study’ includes discussions on emotions and feelings including feeling sad. Children have the opportunity to express their feelings of being sad for being away from home and talk about the relevant coping strategies. At the beginning of the year, I encourage children to express their feelings of sadness for being away from home and I talk to them on what they are doing to cope with this feeling. They, for example, say that soon they will see their parents and this makes them feel better. They may also say that they understand that when their parents are at work they need to be at school.’

In addition, the teachers mentioned that the CC studies encourage children to feel part of the community. Children are encouraged to come to their teacher if they have a problem at the center. In addition, they are encouraged to identify both their own emotions and the feelings of other children. For example, teacher Yasmeen said: “In the learning centers, a child points to his friend and says, “He is mad at me because I do not want to play with him in the sand area. I want to play in the toys section.”

The participants pointed out that the socio-emotional domain was discussed in an informative way in the foundation book that is one of the main components of the Creative Curriculum. Teachers described how this foundation book encourages teachers to have school rules and discuss them with children. One of the teachers in the focus group commented:

‘In the foundation book, one of the suggested rules is “Help Each Other” and another one is “Be Kind” to each other as well as “Be Safe”. When we discuss these rules, we talk about sharing, and helping each other. We also discuss how waiting for our turns at play is part of being safe. When children face conflicts at play, I remind them of the rules and how they need to support each other, and wait for their turns.’

Children’s independence in choosing activities, as a component of socio-emotional development domain was presented in the CC. Specifically, teachers discussed that The Foundation Book and the Interest Area Book inform the teacher on how to structure different areas in a way that attracts the children’s attention and develops their interests. Further, teacher Nuha emphasizes that

personal choices and independence are valued in the CC studies. She said: "During clothes study the children always choose to be in the drama center to be able to dress in different costumes. I respect their choices." With the same line of thought, teachers in the focus group shared their experiences. One of them commented:

'During free-choice time, I make sure not to overwhelm them with structured activities. I make sure, they have enough time to explore and discover freely. In the study books, only one structured activity is suggested per day for choice time. When a teacher implements this strategy, children are thus provided with ample time to discover and play freely.'

Another example of implications was presented by teacher Jawaher who commented on the CC objectives regarding socio-emotional domain. Specifically, she provides an experience related to the objective: "Children follow guidelines and procedures," Teacher Jawaher said, she adds:

'In clothes study, the child imitates her mother's role in a dramatic learning area; she dresses like her mother, plays with dolls cooperatively with her friend Sara. The child prepares food for her doll and feeds it in the cooking area. Therefore, she informed me that she would move the toys to another learning area and promised me to return them to their original place after finishing feeding.'

When it comes to positive social behavior some teachers described how the directed teaching cards, as another component of the CC, provided them with insights and interesting activities. One of the teachers said:

'I used a directed teaching guide (Empathy 19): Friendship and love cards in recycling reusing, and reducing study. I encourage children to make a moneybox and write a card for their friends and give it to them as a present. In addition, in the buildings study, I used the directed teaching card (empathy 25): What can we build together? For example, I remember the child Kareem and other friends who built a tower from blocks. When they finished they said: "We built a tall and a huge tower."

Teacher Shaima shared an activity from the exciting experiences, as another component of the CC, in clothes study. She said: 'We invited the mother of a newborn child. She came with the child to learn more about the size of infants' clothes. Children were excited and happy.'

6.3. Implications of the physical development domain of the CC

The second domain of the CC is the physical development. The teachers pointed out the role of the suggested materials that were provided by the CC in enhancing fine and gross motor skills of children to achieve the CC objectives in this domain. In their interviews, teachers mentioned the variety of activities in their daily schedule that enable the child to move and be active the whole day. They described that the daily schedule started with the morning circle. Children have an opportunity to move and count other children who attended the class. They move and change the day and date cards. Further, many of the golden minutes' cards, as a component of the CC, encourage children to imitate and act. For example, teacher Basma said: "one of the golden minutes' cards asked children to move their bodies and act like insects or imitate some animals." In addition, the teachers mentioned that children have free indoor playtime where they go to the indoor play area and play freely. Then, children have learning corners time. They move from one of the learning corners to another one. In each learning corner, a variety of learning materials are provided to enhance the use of the fine motor skills and achieve related objectives in the CC. Finally, each day children have physical education time where they go to the play area, achieve the objectives of enhancing balance, and strengthen their muscles.

In addition to the daily schedule that enhances the physical development, teacher Nuha shared one of her experiences with the CC studies that have many opportunities in achieving the objectives of this domain. She said: “During Ball study. Children showed confidence and trust in the Qatar University sports team when we visited them. Children were asking questions and they tried different games and activities.” Other teachers shared their experiences when they added to the CC insights and integrated them with the national activities such as the National Sports Day in Qatar, where children showed great gross motor skills in different activities during that event. As a result, the CC physical domain is highly considered in direct and indirect activities each day based on teachers’ implementations.

6.4. Implications of the cognitive development domain of the CC

The third important domain of the CC is the cognitive development. The participants mentioned that one of the attributes of the CC is the exceptional way of presenting this domain. They pointed out that this curriculum is not traditional in dealing with thinking skills of children. Teacher Yasmeen said:

Enhancing thinking skills starts from the circle time. The CC guides us to start with the activity: “The question of the day.” In this activity, we use open-ended questions. It encourages the child to think out of the box. I encourage children to provide a different answer and not repeat the same previous answers. I ask the question and ask children to think first then to raise their hands.

The teachers discussed the depth of the CC in expressing cognitive concepts and presenting them in appropriate developmental practices. The teachers shared experiences, agreed with the insights of Isbell and Raines (2007) who insist that the interest in creativity should be given not only to the outcome but also to the process. Many examples were shared from the teachers and described how many cognitive and creativity concepts were implemented when they executed the CC. Teacher Shaima described an activity from the trees study. She said: “in trees study, we focused on discovery concept. I gave children magnifying lenses to discover the leaves. When they found insects they asked me to come and see. They were very excited.” In addition, Teacher Nuha stated: “Children are very determined to put their things in the appropriate places. For example when they finish an artwork, they are determined to place it in their boxes and on the table even if it still went with paint.”

According to the teachers, creativity was presented in the CC studies. Teachers believe that enhancing creativity skills should be encouraged in this early age. Their insights were at par with (Wood, 2009) regarding the positive impact of enhancing creativity in early childhood. For example, Teacher Nabeela commented:

‘Creativity is not restricted to a specific component in the CC or to the specific time like circle time. It is anywhere and everywhere. Once, we were having breakfast. One child was eating a sandwich that was wrapped in a foil. Before he put it in the garbage, he took the foil and he crumbled it and made it like a ball. The child said: “see teacher I made a ball from this rubbish.” I said: “yes, you created something new from the foil.” Later, I got a message from the child’s mother that my son asked not to throw anything. I can make something from it. He started to use the cartoon and painting. Therefore, creativity is not restricted.

Abstract thinking and imagination were among the skills that teachers practice frequently with children. In each study, one of the activities was to make a field visit. The teachers asked children to draw the place of the field visit and recall what they liked about it.

Teachers' insights asserted that the CC guided them to deal with the cognitive concepts in a special way. Cognitive concepts, patterns, sorting, comparisons, analysis, and evaluating are important when the child can transfer the new knowledge to their daily practices. For example, sorting concepts was one of the ideas that enhance cognitive development. The concept itself is integrated in the child's daily life. For example, teacher Nuha said:

'During the recycling study, the children were able to sort different materials in the appropriate basket. When they found a tissue, they placed it in the paper box, when they finished their water drink they placed it in the plastic box saying that "they are recycling."'

The CC has an emphasis on enhancing creativity skills and other cognitive skills through mediation (Zanartu, Doerr, & Portman, 2016). The teachers shared that the CC urges them to interact with the child in the learning corners and ask open-ended questions. It provides teachers with suggested questions the teachers can ask in learning centers such as sand area and mathematics center. Teachers' mediation and "horizontal conversation" with children help them to enhance child's thinking skills. Teacher Elham provided the following example:

'During sharing discussion, we have a question. It is based on an experiment that we will implement. I ask the children: what do you predict? The CC guides us to write down the children's predictions and answers. When I list the child's answer next to their names. This encourages brainstorming from other children. Then we implement the experiment. After that, we refer to the previous predictions.'

Another example was presented by teacher Jawaher. She described the experience with the investigation web. She said:

'At the beginning of each study, there is an investigation of the topic. It included what we know? Moreover, what we want to know? We complete the investigation web based on children's interests. By the end of the study, the web covers all of the themes that should be included.'

Although the idea of web investigation seemed attractive and promising in enhancing thinking skills, one of the teachers provided another point of view based on her own experience. Teacher Elham said:

'To be honest, I am not a big fan of this web of investigation. Why? As much as I believe that it's good for the child to see, put ideas, and then explore these ideas. I feel that the fact that I am asking leading questions at the beginning to reach to the studies and investigations that are existed in the CC. I feel myself that I am deceiving the child and I am deceiving myself. For example, what do you want to know about balls? Sometimes, they ask questions that are not related to the study. Then, I start asking leading questions such as: let's see whether all balls are rolled. Then the child says: yes, I want to know if all balls are rolled.'

The above different perspectives show the wide range of experiences among teachers after implementing the components of the CC. Every teacher has her own way of constructing the knowledge that she would like to share. Such insights resonate to the tenets of the Improvement

Science Theory that there are two kinds of required knowledge: the basic knowledge and “a system of profound knowledge” (Langley et al., 2009). As a result, this research presented the viewpoints of the participants and the reader can decide how to benefit from the above insights.

6.5. Implications of the linguistic development domain

Since the CC is a dual language curriculum, the teachers shared the planning process of both English teacher and Arabic teacher. The teachers plan weekly and distribute the activities between them. When it comes to the language skills, the teachers point out that the CC highlight all of the linguistic skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening to achieve the objectives of this domain. The teachers described many daily practices that enhance writing. For example, they talked about the role of shared writing activity in enhancing linguistic skills. Teacher Jawaher said: “In the shared writing the teacher writes, “when the child sees the teacher writing they are encouraged to do the same.” Other teachers reflected on the CC focus of enhancing language skills by guiding teachers to provide papers and pencils in each learning center where the child can draw and write (scribble) throughout the day. In addition, children are invited to listen, read, and write in many activities. In the focus group one of the teachers commented:

‘When you present a song, the CC suggests writing it on a big sheet and you show children how to read from left to right in English and from right to left in Arabic. In the song, they identify rhythm words that ended with the same sound. Children can identify words that start with the same sound and point at a specific letter or a specific word.

When it comes to reading, the CC presents a special way in enhancing reading skills. One of the teachers described the process of reading stories. Teacher Shaima said: ‘We present the same story many times. In the first reading, I read without any interruption from the child. In the second reading, there is an opportunity for children to ask about the events. In the third reading, the child can read the story easily. The teachers point out that in, the third reading the CC expects that the child can start rehearsing sections of the story word by word.’

However, the teachers shared a common concern that curriculum did not stress on teaching language letters. One of the teachers commented:

‘Originally, this curriculum language is a foreign language. It does not stress on teaching letters. Since this curriculum is a bilingual curriculum, children are exposed to two languages: English and Arabic. It is advisable not to change the home language into English because you have to present the two languages simultaneously. I do believe that we have to stress on the letters more than what the curriculum itself is offering.’

In their daily practices, teachers attempted to overcome this concern by adding to the original presented curriculum. Teacher Elham said:

‘I have to add to the CC to teach the letters. I took a word from the study. For example, in the cloth study I taught them the word (cab). From this word, I presented the letters: c, a, and b. I feel that I have to add to the curriculum in order to teach the letters because the letters are not part of the objectives. Therefore, I have to find a way to teach them.’

Although each study of the CC suggests a story for reading, the teachers broaden this option by borrowing stories from the library that has many relevant choices about the same topic.

6.6. The meaning of this experience:

The teachers reflected on the meaning of being an early childhood educator who teaches the Creative Curriculum. Although teachers have varied experiences with teaching the CC, many insights were common among them. They valued the wide range of resources provided by the Creative Curriculum. For example, teacher Elham commented on her experience with the CC in the following quotes:

‘I consider it as a successful, exceptional, and exciting experience. This is because of the variety of resources included in this curriculum. They consist of guided teaching cards that cover all developmental aspects. In addition, it provides of a variety of stories, golden minutes’ cards that help me achieve the curriculum objectives. This is my sixth year of teaching the CC. Until this moment, I feel that this curriculum still has more successful practices to provide for teachers.’

The CC affected all of the teachers regardless of their varied years of teaching. For example, teacher Basma shared that she has the shortest experience. However, she provided the following quote:

‘I did not know what the Creative Curriculum is before I joined the Early Childhood Center at Qatar University. I thought that it is built on play activities only. I was curious to learn more about it and to engage in this new experience, especially the scientific (science and mathematics) track in the independent kindergartens in Qatar. Now, I feel that I am in charge of executing the diverse components of the Creative Curriculum and achieving its comprehensive objectives that enhance Children’s social, emotional, linguistic, mathematics, and physical skills.’

Teachers’ insights asserted that the CC is preferable for them because its focus is on the child’s developmental needs. These insights agree with Dodge, Heroman, Colker, and Bickart (2010) regarding the careful design of the Creative Curriculum for preschoolers to meet the developmentally appropriate practices.

6.7. Challenges and issues in the CC implementation

The field of early childhood education has many topics that should be “problematized” and discussed by early childhood educators (Cannella, 1997). Although interviewed teachers addressed promising aspects of implementing the CC, they conveyed the complexity in executing some components of the Creative Curriculum.

6.8. Assessment process in the CC

Teachers highlighted that the CC provides a detailed assessment process. The first assessment took place in the first month of the kindergarten for every child. This step is crucial from the teachers’ perspectives to know what the child knows and build on that. Every child has a book entitled “Golden Assessment.” It is kept in the Early Childhood Center. The teachers add the assessment data in that book. However, teachers mentioned that the CC assessment is more difficult than the previous assessment where they used to assess children based on general objectives. Now, teachers invest more time and effort into completing the assessment. The CC assessment identifies the developmental aspects of children in different ages and guides the teachers to assess based on those main domains and their objectives. In implementation, they

mentioned that it is difficult. However, in the end, teachers agreed that they have learned a lot. One of the teachers described the hardship they faced in assessment. She said:

‘The problem that I found in this assessment is that it is very long. I need a lot of time to complete its objectives’ indicators that are around 82. To assess all of these items in the first month of the school was a big challenge. Every day I needed to write notes about every child. These helped me to respond to those enquiries in the golden assessment.’

Another teacher commented on this issue. She said:

‘In the first month, we complete the first month’s assessment. At the end of the first semester after three months, we do another assessment to see the progress. At the end of the second semester, we do the assessment. Three readings of assessments of the same objectives and learning outcomes.’

Further, the teachers discussed that the delivery of such assessment to the parents was another issue. The provided assessment is very detailed. However, it is difficult to be discussed with the parents of every child.

To overcome this difficulty some teachers asserted that it was very crucial to be aware of the assessment items ahead of time to know what to observe and what to write in the assessment. Since teachers do not have a summarized assessment report, that can be shared with parents, they generate their own summarized report. In this report, they highlight the main assessment aspects and outcomes with the parents.

Another issue was related to content of the CC studies. Some teachers pointed out that although many studies were of interest to the children, some were not interest-based studies. To solve this issue, the teachers tried to ask leading questions at the beginning to introduce the study to make the child interested throughout. In addition, they communicate with the parents to talk to their children about the topic of the study to enhance the child’s interest and curiosity about the study.

6.9. The objectives of the CC

The teachers discussed the objectives of the linguistic development domain in the CC. The last objective is emergent reading and writing. However, in the Qatari context, the admission test to enter the primary school expects that the child should be able to read and write. This was a challenge for the teachers. Because of that, they add phonics and words to prepare the child for the next educational stage. Teachers feel that they should add to help so the child be accepted.

In addition, the teachers commented on the spiritual and ethical aspects. Although these aspects are covered in the objectives explicitly, they are not mentioned clearly in the CC studies. So, teachers plan together how to overcome this gap in a way that matches the Qatari context.

Some objectives in science, technology, social studies, and arts are not attainable at this age. Specifically, the teachers mentioned that the expressions in some objectives, for example, the geographical concepts, are not simplified to be appropriate for the child’s age. In addition, there are no examples that guide the teachers on how to implement those objectives. Such concepts are not part of the CC studies but they are part of the objectives. To overcome this issue the teachers collaborate and plan together how to introduce these concepts throughout the studies.

7. Conclusion, recommendations, and future implications

The attempt of this research was to share early childhood educators' implementations of the Creative Curriculum that has been implemented at the early childhood center at Qatar University since 2015. Teachers provided their own construct of knowledge (Kincheloe, 2005). Based on the tenets of the Improvement Science Theory, two kinds of knowledge are required: the basic knowledge and "a system of profound knowledge" (Langley et al., 2009). Based on this theory, the participants of this research provided the readers with these two types of knowledge. The CC experience gave the teachers an opportunity to explore the curriculum that has a variety of supporting materials. It asked teachers to integrate all of the curriculum components. Teachers were encouraged to carefully observe the details of the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive developmental aspects of the children and respond to them.

The teachers' insights showed that the socio-emotional domain was prominently featured in the CC studies. Children are encouraged to feel like they are a part of the community through the CC studies. As part of the socio-emotional development area, this curriculum increased children's independence in choosing activities. Further, the richness of the CC components, such as the directed teaching cards, was emphasized by the teachers. The Foundation Book and the Interest Area Book instruct teachers on how to structure various areas in a way that captures the children's attention and develops their interests. The materials recommended by the CC to help children improve their fine and gross motor skills were diverse. As a result, teachers in other early childhood settings are encouraged to use the CC because it has numerous benefits.

Although many benefits were discussed, the teachers pointed out their own critique and interpretations of this implemented curriculum in the Arabic context. It was a window to reflect on the meaning of this experience and daily practices. The teachers expressed the attributes of this curriculum. Further, they dig beyond the surface and shared the obstacles that faced them. Furthermore, they shared with the readers their ways in dealing with such obstacles. These research insights provide new opportunities for early childhood educators who are interested in learning more about the Creative Curriculum as an example of early childhood curricula and its implementation in the Arabic context.

According to the teachers' perspectives in this study, the implemented curriculum has certain problems, including the difficulty of completing the full CC evaluation for each child and the need for a review of the linguistic development domain objectives in the CC to match the Qatari primary schools' objectives. However, teamwork and collaboration among teachers help them overcome those obstacles and find ways to accommodate this Arabic version of the Creative Curriculum to meet the Qatari context. Stakeholders and curriculum developers are invited to examine the CC and analyze its challenges, closing the gap between the CC aims and the requirements of elementary schools. Future research about early childhood educators' experiences from other contexts is highly recommended to learn from the best practices worldwide.

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