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EVALUATING THE RESPONSIVENESS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CENTRES TO SPICE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN IN SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study assessed the children level of developmental appropriateness which covers the Social, Physical, Intellectual, Creative and Emotional (SPICE) developments of children in early childhood centres in Southwestern Nigeria. This was with the ultimate view to determining the responsiveness of early childhood education programme to children developmental needs in Southwestern Nigeria. The study employed descriptive survey research design. The population consisted of children between ages 3 and 5, their parents as well as pre-school teachers in Southwestern Nigeria. A multi-stage sampling procedure and simple random sampling techniques were used in selecting 1,080 pupils, 1,080 parents and 108 pre-school teachers as the sample size for the study. One instrument was used for this study, named Child SPICE Observation Inventory (C-SPICE-01)-DAP. Data collected were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and t-test analysis. Results showed that the assessment of the level of overall SPICE development was appropriate (68%). The study concluded that assessment of the level of SPICE developments are vital variables in developmental appropriateness of children in pre-primary schools in Southwestern Nigeria.

Keywords: Assessment; Development; SPICE; Early Childhood Centres; Children; Responsiveness; Skills; Appropriate; Practice.

Introduction:

Education is a life wire to growth and development of any given nation. When any society therefore is plagued with inability of giving adequate education to their youngsters, such will be backward and development will be stunted. Kingdom and Maeka (2013) postulated that education is the life of a nation, is the life wire of its industries and also the foundation of moral regeneration and revival of its people.

Obiye (2019) opined that education is universally acknowledged as an essential tool in the process of natural development to empower people with the knowledge, skills, value and attitude to improve their quality of life, enhance productivity and capacity to

learn new skills that would enable an individual to participate more fully in the development process. Every developed nation of the world had invested immensely in the lives of their youngsters. That is the reason behind their skills acquisition, outcome of various research for better growth and development. This is revealed in their works and articulation of different projects, proposals and dynamics in accomplishment of lofty goals and objectives in moving their nation forward. Meeting the all-round needs of youngsters is very important to their development which invariably leads to the development of the nation at large. To grow a nation, people of creativity and special talents or skills are needed. Therefore, developmental needs of the youngsters are very needful for the nation building.

Early childhood education is a kind of education given to children of the age zero to eight years. The simple way of catching them young and developing their God-given talent is essential and that their education must start as early as possible when their brain can easily catch up with things on their rudiments of growth and development.

Early childhood education is meant to assist the vulnerable children to get involved in their environment. This invariably will help the youngsters to get along in their environment to conquer every challenge it may pose to them. This could be done through introducing all round developments which covers their Social, Physical, Intellectual, Creativity and Emotional developments with the acronym (SPICE). FGN (2004) refers to early childhood education as the education given in any educational institution to children prior to their entering the primary school. It includes the crèche, the nursery and the kindergarten. Sending of youngsters to early childhood institution shows that child right is cherished and uplifted in accordance to Aduke and Amudalatu (2016) who declared that education is essential to human right.

Early childhood years are the most crucial to their physical, cognitive, social and emotional development. The rapid pace of physical and mental

growth is accompanied with a desire for exploration, play and learning that defined their part of life cycle. It is a fascinating yet critical time for too many of the world's children. It is a neglected and perilous time, if by simple chance a child is born into a community where basic services are out of reach (UNICEF, 2011).

Children are not to be isolated; they are leaders of tomorrow. The core of their leadership strength depends on how each nation prepared them while they are young and tender. This invariably tells on the strength of such nation in the nearest future. Center on child development (2007) posited that the future of any society depends on its ability to foster the health and well-being of the next generation. The youngsters need the assistance of adults to stimulate their mind and activate their potentials in life. This could be achieved through series of provocative educational programme of interest that sensitized their basic educational needs which cover Social, Physical, Intellectual, Creativity and Emotional developments (SPICE). Oduolowu (2011) postulated that adults bring in unique talents and abilities or skills to the classroom when they participate as resource persons or volunteers. National Quality Standard (2016) declared that ECEC centers typically provide indoor and outdoor environment and educators are encouraged to place equal value on their environments as places for children learning and development (NQS, 2016).

The fact remains, if youngsters are left to themselves without training up their minds due to reason that their parents are busy their innate ability and potentials will waste away, they will become liability instead of an asset to their community. NAEYC (2009) through Developmental Appropriate Practice it was concluded that many programme came into being primarily to offer child care for parents who worked from birth a child's relationships and interactions with adults are critical determinants of development and learning. At the same time children are active constructors of their own understanding of the world around them; as such they benefit from initiating and regulating their own learning activities and from interacting with peers. Developmentally appropriate teaching practices provide an optimal balance of adult-guided and child-guided experience. Developmental Appropriate Practice (DAP) involves teachers meeting young children needs based on their stages of development, both as individuals and as part of a group; so that each child can attain his/her potentials. DAP stands as the tool used in early childhood education to unfold

children's potentials through children-teachers' interaction in the early childhood school environment. They have bundles of great opportunities embedded in them which need to be nurtured through the provision of quality education, thus nurturing them to meet their needs is of paramount importance. Though children are tender, they have different areas of needs to be met. These needs unfold naturally as they are in the environment that favours them. Children need to interact with their environment; most especially they need the help of adults who can interact with them to enhance their developmental domains which are social, physical, intellectual, creative and emotional developments (SPICE).

Hence early childhood centres serve as a solid ground on which the basic needs of children are met. Both classroom and outside environment must be touched or equipped to bring out better skills and performances in our youngsters.

Observation has shown that there is a high demand for early childhood care and education by parents due to several factors such as economic exigency, job mobility, single parenting, and parental laxity. The situation gave rise to proliferation of educational institution across the country. However, it has been observed that there were various anti-social behaviours in form of aggression, defiance, destructiveness and the likes being exhibited by most children attending these educational institutions. In view of this observation, the appropriateness of early childhood educational institution in Nigeria is becoming a concern to all the stakeholders. Studies have not focused on how responsive the early childhood educational programme in its entirety is to the developmental needs of children in terms of SPICE-social, physical, intellectual, creative and emotional. In the light of school staffing, family engagement, school facilities, school environment, teachers' knowledge, attitudes, teachers' skill, strategies, curriculum contents and assessment procedure. This is the gap the study aims at filling.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objective of this study is to assess the level of SPICE development of children in early childhood centres in urban, rural, public and private educational institutions of Southwestern Nigeria respectively.

Research Question: What is the level of SPICE development of children in Early Childhood Centres

in Urban, Rural, Public and Private Educational Institution of Southwestern Nigeria?

Hypotheses:

H₀: The level of SPICE development of children has no significant effect on children in early childhood centres in Southwestern Nigeria.

H₁: The level of SPICE development of children has significant effect on children in early

childhood centres in Southwestern

Nigeria.

Result:

Research Question 1: What is the Level of SPICE Development of Children in Early Childhood Centres in Urban, Rural, Public and Private Educational Institutions of Southwestern Nigeria?

Pupils in the selected schools were observed and assessed so as to know their relevance, adequacy and responsiveness on their social development using

Table 1: Social development of children in early childhood in the study area

	N	Mean	SD	Development level (%)	Rank
Makes relevant contribution to ongoing activities	1025	3.28	1.06	65.6	2
Child shares toys with others	1025	2.95	1.07	59.0	5
Child usually comes to the programme or setting	1025	3.06	1.21	61.2	3
Loves attachment with immediate family members	1025	2.88	1.32	57.6	6
Is not excessively dependent on teacher/other adults	1025	2.97	1.06	59.4	4
Child invites others to join a game	1025	3.52	1.17	70.4	1
Overall social development	1025	3.11	0.87	62.2	

The results in table 1 indicated the average level of social development of the pupils in the study area. Expressing the level of development in percentage as shown in the table, the pupils were 62.2% physically developed with average rating of $\bar{x}$ =3.11, 0.87 (SD) in a five-point scale; meanwhile, decomposing the overall level of development into the components used, the children's were 70.4% able to invite others to join a game, makes relevant contribution to ongoing activities (65.6%), come to the programme or setting

(61.2%), remain independent of teacher/other adults (59.4%), share toys with others (59.0%) and love attachment with immediate family members (57.6%).

Pupils in the selected schools were observed and assessed so as to generate data on their relevance, adequacy and responsiveness in the physical development using Child-SPICE-Observation-Inventory. The result is shown in table 2.

Table 2: Physical development of children in early childhood in the study area

	N	Mean	SD	Development level (%)	Rank
Child can hold a pencil	1025	2.87	1.28	57.4	19
Child can hop on a spot	1025	2.88	1.24	57.6	18
Child can walk across a bench of six inches	1025	3.14	1.25	62.8	11
Child can jump into the rings of the same size	1025	3.12	1.24	62.4	14
Child can climb a lever and balance up on his own	1025	3.28	1.30	65.6	7
Child can run on a straight line	1025	3.13	1.29	62.6	12
Child is able to skip	1025	3.67	1.45	73.4	2
Child can cut figure 2 out	1025	3.67	1.41	61.0	17
Child can walk on a block building of 10 feet tower	1025	3.05	1.25	60.2	17
Child is able to hold pencil crayon to colour	1025	3.01	1.16	70.0	5
Child is able to raise hand above his head	1025	3.50	1.06	81.2	1

	N	Mean	SD	Development level (%)	Rank
Child is able to lace his/her shoes	1025	4.06	1.39	64.0	8
Child is able to put shoes on the correct feet	1025	3.58	1.28	71.6	3
Child can dress independently	1025	3.07	1.24	61.4	15
Child is able to use buttons and snaps correctly	1025	3.20	1.25	64.0	8
Child can pour liquid from a small pitcher into a cup	1025	3.13	1.24	62.6	12
Child can spread soft food (butter) with a blunt knife	1025	2.80	1.30	56.0	20
Child can use spoon, fork or chopstick skillfully	1025	3.17	1.29	63.4	10
Child is able to wash hands correctly	1025	3.53	1.45	70.6	4
Child can use toilet independently	1025	3.06	1.41	61.2	16
Child can blow and wipe nose independently	1025	3.34	1.25	66.8	6
Overall physical development	1025	3.23	0.43	64.5	

The results in table 2 indicated the average level of physical development of the pupils in the study area. Expressing the level of development in percentage as shown in the table, the pupils were 64.5% physically developed with average rating of $\bar{X}=3.23$, 0.43 (SD) in a five-point scale; meanwhile, decomposing the overall level of development into the components used, the children were 70.0% or more able to perfectly skip, hold pencil crayon to colour, raise hand above head (81.2%), put shoes on the correct feet and wash hands correctly. They were 60.0% to 67.0% perfect in their ability to walk across a bench of six inches, jump into the rings of the same size, climb a lever and balance up on his own, run on a straight line, cut figure 2 out, walk on a block building of 10 feet

tower, lace shoes, dress independently, use buttons and snaps correctly, pour liquid from a small pitcher into a cup, use spoon, fork or chopstick skillfully, use toilet independently, and blow and wipe nose independently. The children's development was below 60.0% in other physical development components as shown in the table.

Pupils in the selected schools were observed and assessed so as to generate actual in data in favour of their relevance, adequacy and responsiveness in the area of their intellectual development using Child-SPIICE-Observation-Inventory. The result is shown in table 3.

Table 3: Intellectual development of children in early childhood in the study area

	N	Mean	SD	Development level (%)
Child sorts objects by shape and colour	1025	2.92	1.26	58.4
Child finds objects hidden under two/three covers	1025	2.97	1.14	59.4
Child follows simple commands	1025	3.50	1.07	70.0
Child understands simple question	1025	3.40	1.05	68.0
Child imitates the action of adults and playmates	1025	3.19	1.05	63.8
Vocabularies expand from 50-200 spoken words	1025	2.76	1.16	55.2
Child makes connection to real life	1025	3.04	1.14	60.8
Child listens to short stories	1025	3.25	1.11	65.0
Child stores phone numbers off-hand	1025	1.80	1.07	36.0
Child understands passages well	1025	2.52	1.21	50.4
Child asks questions intelligently	1025	2.68	1.17	53.6
Child retells a story vividly	1025	2.71	1.20	54.2
Child pronounces words correctly	1025	2.85	1.32	57.0
Overall physical development	1025	2.89	0.94	57.8

In table 3, the results indicated that, expressing the level of the children's intellectual development in percentage, the pupils were 57.8% developed intellectually with average rating of $\bar{X}=2.89$, 0.94 (SD) on a five-point scale; however, examining the components of intellectual development, the result shows that the children's intellectual ability were able to 70.0% able to follow simple commands, 68.0 able to understand simple question, 65.0% able to listen to short stories, 63.8% able to imitate the action of adults and playmates and 60.8% able to make connection to real life. Their intellectual ability in sorting objects by

shape and colour, finding objects hidden under two/three covers, using 50-200 vocabularies in spoken words, understanding passages well, asking questions intelligently, retelling a story vividly and pronouncing words correctly was below 60.0%. The worst case was in their ability to store phone numbers off-hand (36.0%).

Pupils in the selected schools were observed and assessed in order to generate data on their relevance, adequacy and responsiveness in creative development. The result is shown in table 4.

Table 4: Creativity development of children in early childhood in the study area

	N	Mean	SD	Development level (%)
Child is interested in nature	1025	3.49	1.18	69.8
Child is easily irritated at objects	1025	3.13	1.25	62.6
Child has interest in water play	1025	3.23	0.97	64.6
Child has interest in sand play	1025	3.19	1.00	63.8
Child has ability to draw	1025	2.76	1.19	55.2
Child has interest in painting	1025	2.57	1.34	51.4
Responsive to arranging, dismantling & organizing...	1025	2.92	1.11	58.4
Child Shows interest in divergent reasoning	1025	2.70	1.17	54.0
Is interested in exploration & rational reasoning	1025	2.69	1.16	53.8
Has ability to create things with different objects	1025	2.53	1.24	50.6
Child has work on the school bulletin board	1025	1.45	0.90	29.0
Child has a play in discovery corner	1025	1.64	1.02	32.8
Child has flair for music	1025	1.49	1.06	69.8
Child has flair for poems and rhymes	1025	3.61	1.03	72.2
Overall creative development	1025	2.81	0.71	56.3

The results in table 4 further revealed that the pupils' creative ability in the study area was low, 56.3%; average score of creativity level was $\bar{X}=2.81$, 0.71 (SD) on the five-point scale. Their creativity level is higher in having flair for poems and rhymes (72.2%), flair for music (69.8%), showing interested in nature (69.8%), showing interest in water play (64.6%) and sand play (63.8%), and being easily irritated at objects (62.6%) compared to other creativity indicators. They

least had creative ability to play in discovery corner (32.8%) and work on the school bulletin board (29.0%).

Pupils in the selected schools were observed and assessed in order to know how adequate, relevant and responsive they are in their emotional development. The result is shown in table 5.

Table 5: Emotional development of children in early childhood in the study area

	N	Mean	SD	Development level (%)
Child shows interest in class work	1025	3.48	1.00	69.6
Shows sign of happiness to good things when favourable	1025	3.40	1.00	68.0
Shows disgust & anger when things are unfavourable	1025	3.08	1.27	61.6
Child feels sad when deprived of familiar objects	1025	3.03	1.24	60.6
Child is simply upset when trusted caregiver leaves	1025	2.41	1.17	48.2
Child displays capacity for humour	1025	3.17	1.17	63.4
Child has anxiety when left with a stranger	1025	2.91	1.16	58.2
Child approaches others positively	1025	3.20	1.08	64.0

	N	Mean	SD	Development level (%)
Child is self-confident	1025	3.22	1.07	66.6
Child is usually in positive mood	1025	3.29	1.10	65.8
Overall emotional development	1025	3.13	0.93	62.6

The results further indicated that the pupils in the study area were 62.6% emotionally developed with average score of $\bar{X}=3.13$, 0.93 (SD) on the five-point scale (table 5). In each component comprising the overall emotional development, the result shows that the children's level of development was in the range of 60.6% - 69.6% in their ability to show interest in class work, show sign of happiness to good things when favourable, show disgust & anger when things are unfavourable, feel sad when deprived of familiar objects, display capacity for humour, approach others

positively, be self-confident and be in positive mood. They had lower emotional development in becoming anxious when left with a stranger (58.2%) and being upset when trusted caregiver leaves (48.2%).

Pupils in the selected schools were observed and assessed on social, physical, intellectual, creative and emotional developments using child-SPICE-observation-inventory. The result of the observation in N the four categories of selected schools is as reported in table 6.

Table 6: Description of children's SPICE development by type of school rural/urban residence

	Public n=508			Private n=517			Rural n=485			Public n=540			Overall		
	Mean	SD	%	Mean	SD	%	Mean	SD	%	Mean	SD	%	Mean	SD	%
Social	2.98	0.81	59.6	3.24	0.90	64.8	3.09	0.86	3.13	3.13	0.88	62.6	3.11	0.87	62.2
Physical	2.40	0.32	48	2.49	0.38	49.8	2.43	0.36	2.46	2.46	0.35	29.2	3.23	0.43	64.6
Intellectual	2.67	0.80	53.4	3.11	1.01	62.2	2.82	0.91	56.4	2.96	0.95	59.2	2.89	0.94	57.8
Creative	2.64	0.67	52.8	2.98	0.71	59.6	2.74	0.73	54.8	2.88	0.68	57.6	2.80	0.71	56.2
Emotional	2.99	0.86	59.8	3.27	0.97	65.5	3.09	0.90	61.8	3.17	0.95	63.4	3.13	0.93	62.6
SPICE	2.74	0.62	54.8	3.01	0.73	60.2	2.84	0.68	56.8	2.91	0.70	58.2	3.03	0.78	60.6

From the table, private schools, whether rural or urban, reported higher scores in all child development dimensions- social, physical, intellectual, creative and emotional. Similarly, schools located in urban areas reported higher scores in all dimensions of child's developmental appropriateness. The SPICE level of public, private, rural and urban schools are 2.74, 3.01, 2.84 and 2.91 respectively.

In order to determine whether or not there is significant difference between children's SPICE development in public and private schools, the average level of development of each components of SPICE development were compared between public and private schools using t-test of independent samples as shown in table 7.

Table 7: Differences in children's level of social, physical, intellectual, creative and emotional development by type of school

	Public n=508		Private n=517		Mean difference	t	Df	P
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
Social	2.98	0.81	3.24	0.90	-0.26	-4.773	1014	<0.05
Physical	2.40	0.32	2.49	0.38	-0.09	-4.135	1000	<0.05
Intellectual	2.67	0.80	3.11	1.01	-0.44	-7.803	979	<0.05
Creative	2.64	0.67	2.98	0.71	-0.34	-7.878	1023	<0.05
Emotional	2.99	0.86	3.27	0.97	-0.28	-4.859	1011	<0.05
SPICE	2.74	0.62	3.01	0.73	-0.26	-6.235	1000	<0.05

The result in table 7 showed whether significant difference exists in developmental appropriateness of pupils in public and private early childhood education centers. The result showed that type of school displayed a significant effect on social development ($t=-4.773$, $p<0.05$), physical development ($t=-4.135$, $p<0.05$), intellectual development ($t=-7.803$, $p<0.05$), creative development ($t=-7.878$, $p<0.05$), emotional development ($t=-4.859$, $p<0.05$) and overall SPICE development ($t=-6.235$, $p<0.05$) of children in early childhood.

Table 8 compares the level of development of children in rural and urban areas to determine whether or not any significant difference exists between the two using t-test of independent samples. In addition, efforts were made to determine whether significant difference exist in developmental appropriateness levels of pupils in rural and urban care centres.

Table 8: Differences in children's level of social, physical, intellectual, creative and emotional development by place of residence

	Rural n=485		Rural n=540		Mean Difference	T	Df	P
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
Social	3.09	0.86	3.13	0.88	-0.04	-.686	1023	.493
Physical	2.43	0.36	2.46	0.35	-0.03	-1.337	1023	.182
Intellectual	2.82	0.92	2.96	0.95	-0.13	-2.291	1023	.022
Creative	2.74	0.73	2.88	0.68	-0.13	-3.045	1023	.002
Emotional	3.09	0.90	3.17	0.95	-0.08	-1.437	1019	.151
SPICE	2.84	0.68	2.91	0.70	-0.08	-1.808	1023	.071

Discussions

Level of SPICE Development of Children in Early Childhood Education Centres (Urban-Rural, Public-Private Education Institution)

The finding showed that the level of social, physical, intellectual, creative and emotional developments among children varies which is in favour of private school children over and above those of public schools. This implied that pupils in private schools are exposed to better facilities that aid their SPICE development. This finding is in line with the study of Peisner-Feinberg, et al. (2001) in which they declared that children who attend higher quality child care centres are better prepared in all areas of development. MOES (2005) declared that the demand for private schools is getting increase, based on its quality, rich people are continuously patronizing private school. On the other hand, the quality of public schools still remained very poor.

The result also showed that urban children had higher level of SPICE development compared to their counterparts in the rural areas in terms of social, physical, intellectual, creative and emotional developments. This implies that children in the urban centres are exposed to various social amenities that have influenced their development in one way or the other as compared to children living in the rural settings that may have limited exposures to such amenities and lifestyle. In the urban areas, social

amenities abound and parents' status in urban centres may be higher than the parents in rural areas, with many of them having educative materials for their children's use at home. This finding supports UNESCO (2015) that confirmed rural-urban differences in the achievement of learners' and concluded that students from rural areas mostly receive education that is substandard compared to students in urban areas. It also corroborated Hassaan and Rasiah (2011) that indicated that despite a rising focus by governments to target rural areas for special assistance, rural-urban disparity in academic performance is still an unresolved problem. This claim by Richardson (2008) revealed that students in urban areas perform better than those in rural areas. Abidogun, (2006) claimed that the problem of sub-standard education applies across most Nigerian schools, but it is harsher in the sub-urban and rural schools.

Conclusion:

"An axiom reveals today's children to be the expected leaders of tomorrow". For a nation to be amidst developed nations of the world in the nearest future, the all-round development of her unborn and little children must be taken into consideration. The all-round development is very germane to child's present and future achievement. This revolves round its personal life, environment, nation and planet transformation to better the lots of generality. In order to make a child develop basic skills and sound mind

therefore, there is need to look into the aspects of his social, physical, intellectual, creative and emotional developments which must be channelled towards basic development appropriate practice that will enhance the child all-round developments through a responsive and meaningful early childhood educational centre that could propel, motivate and spur the children to active and useful children both presently and in the nearest future.

Recommendation

There needs to be high quality early childhood programme that cherishes developmental appropriateness in all our pre-schools. Government should immediately embark on and insist on national minimum standard for early child care centre in Nigeria. This includes good health, nutrition, introduction of meaningful adults to stimulate their mind, guiding their learning and play blending with “SPICE” domain of the children. It is further recommended that attention should be shifted from paper work or cognitive domain only to activity-based system of learning that will make every child possess necessary skills needed for self-sustenance.

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