

The result from table 2 indicates that a literacy-rich environment had no significant relationship with children's writing skills. Hypothesis 2 was hereby not rejected.

Discussion

According to the findings of this study, there was a significant relationship between prewriting materials availability and the writing skills of preschool children which was statistically significant ($r = -.204^*$, $n = 100$, $p = .042$). This implies that the prewriting materials availability of children contributes to preschool children's writing skills. The study agrees with the opinion of Chukwbikem (2013), who opined that the quality and quantity of resources available for any educational programme would determine the capacity of the school system for the execution of the type of educational programme.

This means that resources are critical to the successful development of children's writing skills. Also, there was a significant relationship between a literacy-rich environment and preschool children's writing skills.

The result negates the view of Dennis and Votteler (2013), who saw a literacy-rich environment as a kind of environment that arouses preschool children to partake in language in their daily lives.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In this study, it was established that a literacy-rich environment is not a determinant of the acquisition of preschool children's writing skills. This means that a literacy-rich environment does not have an effect on children's legibility in writing. The study establishes that the availability of preschool children's activities determines children's writing skills. Based on the findings of this study, it is therefore recommended that the stakeholders make prewriting activities and materials available for preschool children.

Also, the caregivers and preschool teachers should ensure that preschool children's activity materials are available in their classrooms and introduce children to the materials at an early stage to aid their writing skills.

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ASSESSMENT OF APPROPRIATENESS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES IN SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study assessed the appropriateness of early childhood centres in southwestern Nigeria. This is with the ultimate view to determining the responsiveness of early childhood education programme to children developmental needs in southwestern Nigeria. The study employed survey research design. The population consisted of children between the 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 namely school Developmentally Appropriate Practices Environmental Rating Scale S-DAP-ER. Data collected were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and Pearson product moment correlation. Result showed that early childhood centres were not found to be developmentally appropriate based on staffing, as 99.9% of early childhood education teachers had no early childhood education training whatsoever. School environment and school facilities were only 47.8% and 40.0% developmentally appropriate respectively. The study concluded that assessment of Appropriateness of early childhood centres is vital to the life of the youngsters and all-round development in early childhood centres in Southwestern Nigeria.

Key Words: Appropriateness, Assessment, Early Childhood Proliferation, Early Life

Introduction

Early life is very crucial to the formation of intelligence, personality and social behavior. The early childhood education is a hallmark kind of education given to children from 0-8. This age range provides the opportunity for the scholars to reinforce the view of the development as a continuum. Gladys (2004) opined that old thinking linked brain development to genes. New research says that brain development hinges on interplay between genes and experiences. Old thinking reflected that experience before age three had limited impact on development in later life. While new research notes that nature and extent of adult capacities are decisively impacted by the earliest experiences. Old thinking linked positive experiences with primary caregivers as an aid to early development and learning. The new research

emphasizes that early interaction directly affects brain development. To give youngsters better early education and impressive developments, the children are to be introduced to different developmental domains skills early in life which enhance physical, social, intellectual, creative and emotional developments. Their environment must be ordered to improve all-round development early in life. There should be interaction between meaningful adults and children so as for the children to gain certain skills useful for their growth and development.

FRN (2004) states that pre-primary education is the education given in an educational institution to children prior to their entering the primary school. This period is very important to the youngsters, the family, homes and society at large. Any mal-treatment or wrong information on the children at this ages may mar their present and future development. In the light of this, early childhood managers should rise up in early childhood centres to dutifully and painstakingly, in all their selection (interview), programme and policy, carefully select trained caregivers. They must emphasize links with individual family, home, culture and home language; meaning, caregivers must carefully care for each child using developmentally appropriate practice.

Actualization of the needed nuggets for growth and development makes a child responsive, active and outgoing in life. This means every child could be easily helped to actualize their God-given talent, starting with them early in life with rightful and appropriate educative developmental materials and in a conducive environment that enhance them for proper growth and development.

The Purpose for The Establishment of Early Childhood Centres

In Nigeria, the purpose of establishment of the early childhood care centres hinges on the government's inability to provide early childhood education to children of ages 0-8 years. Before the current Nigeria revised National Policy on Education (2004), this level of education was declared open for the community and private owners who have interest in establishing the centres. Parents have different reasons for sending their children to the nursery schools. Akingbote (2006) revealed that some send

their children to school on the fact that their husband's other children attend nursery schools; some because they want their children to speak English; some, due to the fact that they want respite and find enough time to do other things at home. Akingbote (2006) revealed that in modern society, married women are now taking up paid employment to augment family economy. This implies that they are not full-time housewives whose main duty is to take care of the family. The African extended family had changed considerably to the old time when there are always people at home to assist mothers in caring and upbringing of children. Currently, house-helpers, where available, are too expensive, apart from the fact that house-helpers have become security risks. Hence, many people do not want to have them nowadays. Due to the interest of parents in the early childhood education, there are now proliferations of pre-primary centres in the country. The sad thing is that many of the early care centres are not worth their names.

Minimum Standard for Early Child Care Centres in Nigeria

The word standard means quality or attainment. It is something used as a measure for comparative evaluation. World Education Forum (2000) declared it to be universally accepted variable to determine quality. Obanya (2000) referred to them as a tripartite model of quality dimension. Ajayi (2008) posited that it is the yardstick to measure whether the service provided is adequate or below standard. Obanya (2000) expanded the inherent variables as follows: inputs incorporate responsive curriculum, the teacher factor, teaching- learning materials, infrastructure, pedagogical space and funds; process, according to Obanya include school level management, effective teacher-learner interaction, professional teacher support, monitoring and evaluation and emphasis on learner's success not only the mastery of subject matter. The education should go beyond certificate. It should revolve round what a child can do with the knowledge gathered. A graduating student should be able to defend the certificate acquired, the education is not necessarily having a certificate.

The School Environment

The school environment of early childhood is where learning takes place. Due to this fact, it must be well arranged and ordered for smooth academic work. There is need for landscaping of the physical environment to attract flower beds, recreational centres, field and others. This will make the school to be inviting to all and sundry. The gate house is the first sight to behold in every school and so the gate must look attractive to the passers-by or visitors. The classroom must be compartmentalized in a way to

favour different kinds of learning corners such as art corner, shopping corner, science corner, discovery corner, reading corner and others. There is need for playground and different playing instruments for the children such as slipper, ladder, see-saw, merry-go-round as to take care of their physical outfits.

UNICEF (2001) asserted that early childhood experience should take place within the context of learning through living environment stimulated by interactions with other children, adults and manipulative materials. The early childhood must be able to take care of the children educational domains which are cognitive, affective and psychomotor; due to this, there should be educational didactic materials which will serve as means to an end in instructing children in all areas of teaching and learning programme.

The education that some early childhood centres are giving to youngsters are so shallow, inadequate and below standard. The environment in which some so called early childhood centre are located are damned too low for the children's academic progress. Oduntan (2017) postulated that environment must be a priority because the ultimate consequences of poor quality of the environment put young children at risk. Good environment speaks volume in educating everyone that comes in contact with it. It motivates and spurs youngsters' interest on their teaching-learning activities. The stakeholders in the field of early childhood education should have interest of the children at heart at all time and make sure they follow government's regulation on minimum standard for early childhood care centres in Nigeria. This will change the children's orientation as regards life and will positively assist on their developmental domains which are physical, social, intellectual, creative and emotional developments. Oduolowu (2004) remarked that physical environment cares for the need for independence of children, provides space where children freely move and interact and the need of growth motor ability is met.

It is obvious in Nigeria that almost every street attracts early childhood educational centre. The worst thing of this happening is that the structure the pupils are using are called for investigation such as abandoned houses, compound halls, dilapidated structures, uncompleted building, water-logged areas and a lot more are being used for early childhood centres. In view of this observation, the appropriateness of the early institutions in Nigeria is becoming a concern to all the stakeholders. Studies have not focused on the appropriateness of school environment in the light of school facilities. Ordering of the school, minimum

standard stipulation for any would be early childhood centres and the importance of early life to every child. This is the gap the study aims at filling.

Objective of the Study

The specific objectives of this study are to:

- examine the developmental appropriateness of early childhood centres in terms of staffing.
- assesses the developmental appropriateness of early childhood centres in terms of environment and facilities.

Research Questions

- How developmentally appropriate is Early Childhood Centres in terms of staffing.
- How developmentally appropriate is Early Childhood Centres in terms of environment and facilities?

Methodology

Descriptive survey design was used for the purpose of the study. The study population consisted of children between ages 3 and 5, their parents as well as pre-school teachers in Southwestern Nigeria. Multi-stage sampling technique was used to select the sample for the study. This includes three states, namely: Lagos, Ogun and Ekiti. To select the eligible schools, stratified random sampling was used as the selected local government areas were divided into urban and rural place of residence based on the presence of absence of social amenities/ infrastructures to give a total nine urban and nine rural areas. From each of the nine selected urban areas, two schools each were randomly selected (one public and one private) and the same process was followed in rural area, making a total of four schools in each local government area. In all, a total of thirty-six schools were randomly selected

from the area. From the selected schools, three classes were purposively selected based on age of the pupils. Data were also collected from the parents of the pupils using appropriate questionnaire so as to capture the effect of the parental characteristics and family engagement on the development of the pupils. An instrument was used to carry out this study: School DAP Environmental Rating Scale (S-DAP-ERS). Data collected were analyzed using Descriptive and Inferential Statistics.

Results

To determine the developmental appropriateness of Early Childhood Centres based on staffing, school records containing teachers' bio-data and pupils' enrolments with teachers' DAP practice scale were examined. The result is as stated in table 1.

In table 1, information on the number of pupils per teacher (pupils-teacher ratio), professional qualification and trained in early childhood education were used to determine the school staffing of the early childhood education centres. In terms of appropriateness, schools with lower number of pupils per teacher in a class were scored higher relative to the ones with higher number of pupils in the class on 5-point scale; teachers who had a qualification in education such as Teacher's Grade II, NCE, B.Ed or PGDE or M.Ed (regarded as professionals) and the ones who trained in early childhood education were scored higher compared to the others who did not have a qualification in education (regarded as non-professionals) and those who did not have training in early childhood care and educational development respectively.

Table 1: Staffing Developmental Appropriateness in Early Childhood Centre

	Frequency	Percentage
Teacher's attributes	N=104	
Sex		
Female	7	6.7
Male	97	93.3
Qualification		
SSCE	16	15.4
Grade II	4	3.8
NCE	58	55.8
OND	7	6.7
HND	2	1.9
B.Sc./B.A	8	7.7
B.Ed/PHDE/M.Ed	9	8.7

Teacher's attributes	Frequency N=104	Percentage
Pupils - Teacher ratio (Pupils per teacher)		
=25	66	63.1
26 - 30	17	16.4
31 - 35	9	8.9
36 - 40	3	2.9
> 40	9	8.7
	72	
Professional teachers		
Professional	72	69.4
Non-professional	32	30.6
Early childhood education specialist		
No	103	99.9
Yes	1	0.1

The result in the table indicated that more than two-third (69.4%) of the teachers were professionals in education with Grade II or NCE or high degrees in education. Non-professionals were 30.6%. However, only 0.1% of the entire teachers had qualification in early childhood education. 63.1% of the schools met the 1:25 teachers/pupils ratio. It is concluded therefore that majority of teachers engaging in the teaching of early childhood education are not developmentally appropriate for the work. Early childhood education centres are not developmentally appropriate. Based on staffing, almost all the teachers have no qualifications on early childhood education.

To determine the developmental appropriateness of early childhood centres based on school environment, observation was made on the school environment and school-DAP environmental rating scale which has likert format was used to elicit data.

In table 2, the environmental features of early childhood education centres were measured using 5-point likert scale and the means of the items addressing the learning environment of early childhood centres were presented in the table. As shown in the table, the mean with standard deviation (SD) of each item was derived by dividing the total rating of each school environmental item by the number of schools responding to the question; this gives the average score on each item of the environment out of maximum possible score of five (5). The overall mean of the school environment was obtained by adding the means of all items involved and dividing by the total number of items addressing the school environment. The mean score of each item was expressed in percentages as mean score obtained divided by the maximum possible score multiplied by hundred.

Table 2: Level of appropriateness of school environment for children's SPICE development

	N	Mean	SD	Appropriate (%)
Adequacy of classroom space/ventilation	1025	2.98		1 . 0 3
59.6				
Different learning corners	1025	1.19	0.62	23.8
Availability of good water supply	1025	3.11		1 . 1 8
62.2				
Condition of the school building/structure	1025	3.21	0.88	64.2
Availability of outdoor environment	1025	2.88	0.95	57.5
School properly fenced	1025	2.83	1.33	56.6
Block building (Construction and dismantling of didactic block materials or availability of manipulative centre	1025	1.61	0.98	32.3
Availability of wide variety of natural materials	1025	2.03	0.98	40.5

In table 2, the result revealed that school environment was 47.8% appropriate for children's development in early childhood education centres. The school environment appropriateness was high with respect to condition of the school building/structure (64.2%), availability of good water supply (62.2%), adequacy of classroom space/ventilation (59.6%), availability of outdoor environment (57.5%), and proper fencing of the school (56.6%). To determine the developmental appropriateness of early childhood centres based on school facilities, observation was made on the school facilities and rating scale which has likert format was used to elicit data. In table 3, available facilities of early childhood education centres were measured using 5-point likert scale and

the means of the items addressing the available facility of early childhood centres were presented in the table. As shown in the table, the mean with standard deviation (SD) of each item was derived by dividing the total rating of each school facility by the number of schools responding to the question; this gives the average score on each item of the school facility out of maximum possible score of five (5). The overall mean of the school facility was obtained by adding the means of all items involved and dividing by the total number of items addressing the school facility. The mean score of each item was expressed in percentages as mean score obtained divided by the maximum possible score multiplied by hundred.

Table 3: Level of appropriateness of school facilities for children's SPICE development

	N	Mean	SD	Appropriateness (%)
Availability of games materials	36	1.93	1.07	38.7
Adequacy of games materials	36	1.78	0.95	35.6
Portable chairs/tables	36	2.80	1.05	56.1
Availability of mini-computer, computer games	36	1.62	0.80	32.4
Availability of television sets	36	1.68	0.93	33.6
Availability of magic board	36	1.25	0.55	24.9
Adequacy of magic board	36	1.30	0.57	26.1
Teacher-pupils ratio	36	2.36	1.14	47.2
Musical instruments	36	1.91	0.82	38.2
Availability of music-playing instruments	36	1.77	0.84	35.4
Outdoor activities (Merry-Go-Round, Slipper, Ladder, Hide and Seek, etc	36	1.65	0.94	33.0
Washing	36	2.57	0.98	51.7
Excursion	36	2.33	1.10	46.6
Poem/Rhymes	36	2.93	0.74	58.7
Painting	36	2.59	0.96	51.7
Story Telling	36	2.71	0.92	54.2
Availability of projector	36	1.36	0.68	27.3
Availability of sand and water table	36	1.65	0.80	32.9
Availability of variety of science equipment, such as microscopes, magnifiers, magnets and thermometers	36	1.70	0.98	34.0
Availability of small beds, changing tables, mats, carpets	36	2.00	1.05	40.0
Availability of strollers and buggies	36	1.28	0.57	25.6
Overall school facilities	36	2.01	0.46	40.0

In table 3, the result revealed that school facilities was 40.0% appropriate for children's development in early childhood education centres. In the early childhood development centres, appropriateness of all facilities was extremely low (below 40.0%) except for poems/rhymes (58.7%), availability of portable chairs/tables (56.1%), storytelling (54.2%), painting (51.7%), washing (51.4%), teachers-pupils ratio (47.2%), excursion (46.6%), and availability of small beds, changing tables, mats, carpets (40.0%). This revealed that school facilities were highly low and

therefore inappropriate for children's development in early childhood centres.

Discussion of the Findings

The early childhood education staff in the sampled areas are largely females while a limited number of the male counterparts was found in the studied Early Childhood Education centres. This finding is in agreement with Education International (ECE) Task Force (2010). The findings showed that majority of staff in Nigeria is largely female. Centre for the Child

Care Workforce (2002) studies have revealed that even at international level, it is a major concern, hence, there is always advocacy for men's participation in early childhood education centres, (Centre for the Child Care Workforce (2000); Sanders (2003); ADM (2003) and Cunningham and Dorsey (2004).

The finding showed that all kinds of certificates constituted the profile of the teaching staff of the study areas. This implies that there are unqualified teachers teaching in early childhood education centres. There are a few teaching staff in the study areas that are professionals in the field of education. Though they are professionals in education, they lack early childhood training that will give them necessary skills and strategies. This is in line with OECD (2015, 2016) findings that most of the teachers in Early Childhood Care Centres are not prepared in the pedagogy of early childhood care and education. The implication is that the teachers handling the children might lack the skills, knowledge, attitude and strategies required of children within the age cohort of 0 – 8 years. This is supported by Alexandra (2004) who opined that teachers' knowledge on the subject matter is important to students' achievement. OECD (2006) further declared that governments often choose not to invest in raising quality or funding staff trainings.

The finding showed that school environment has a very low appropriateness. This implies that low conducive school environment could inhibit early childhood children SPICE development. The finding is not in support of the finding of Estes (2004) who observed that early childhood classrooms are not static environments that, once formed remain developmentally appropriate forever. Quality setting for young children must be rigid and flexible to meet the ever-changing needs of their participants. Isbell and Exelby (2001) remarked that early childhood classrooms are truly multipurpose rooms and the movable features of the classrooms allow children and teachers flexibility in the use of space. Essa (1999) revealed that a classroom is arranged into conventional interest areas such as music, reading, science and dramatic play; these help in touching areas of child development.

The finding further showed that school facilities were very low in appropriateness. It implies that the efforts of children in coming to the school could fail to yield necessary reward, since children need to lay their hands-on different gadgets to function with; some facilities enhance thinking, reasoning and experimenting skills for children. Absence of this

gadget could make child to be ineffective, dormant, unable to manipulate simple machine meant for his age appropriateness. The finding is in agreement with the study by Wanjohi (2014) which reflected that in most of the schools, especially in the developing countries, there were no adequate educational facilities. It is also in consonance with Olayiwola, Salawu, Oyenuga (2011) which stated that the available educational resources are positively related to the academic performance since the better the resources, the better the result of the studies. This implies that availability of school facilities will aid proper development of children in all developmental milestones.

Conclusion

Since the importance of early childhood education cannot be overemphasized, the government should make sure all early childhood institutions employed qualified educationists who have their knowledge rooted in early childhood educational training. The school environment of early childhood centres from their gate house must look charming, inviting and serene for children to learn without any hinderance. The facilities possessed by every early childhood centre has a long way to go in preparing pupils ready for learning, therefore both internal and external facilities which are in the school must be supported by school curriculum and equip children's developmental appropriate practice.

Recommendations

Since there is proliferation of early child care centre almost in every street, the government should insist on national minimum standard for early childhood centres in Nigeria.

The government should not shy away from their responsibility of making provision of standardized early childhood structures in all public primary schools. This will serve as model for all private school owners.

Early childhood centre must be made attractive, hence there should structural layout for each school. The indoor and outdoor environments must be inviting. There should be planting of wind-breaker trees, shrubs, flowerbeds and a provision of road network in the school centres.

There should be provision of playing instruments such as merry-go-round, swings, slippers, ladders, special ladder with nets for climbers and rings for different colours, portable manual vehicles, rocking horse, bicycles and tricycles and other physical playing instruments.

Teachers should be trained in the usage of different types of assessment gadgets such as grading system (assigning of grades), portfolio system (keeping pupils' day-to-day work), anecdotal record (writing personal information about pupils) and many others.

Government should establish special quality control unit (SQCUI) that will stand as watchdog for government over ministry of education (MOE) officials who are feeding fat on the mushroom school providers by collecting white or brown envelopes from them.

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