

Teachers' Perception of Quality Early Childhood Education as a Predictor of Violence Free Classrooms in Delta State

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Abstract

This study investigated teachers' perception of quality early childhood education as a predictor of violence free classrooms. Two research questions were asked and one hypothesis formulated to guide the study. The study employs a descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised all nursery and primary school teachers. A sample of one hundred and twenty teachers including male and female teaching early childhood classes was drawn using the simple random sampling technique. An instrument titled "Quality Early Childhood Education and Violence Free Classrooms (QECEVFC)". Cronbach alpha which yielded a coefficient index of 0.73 was used for the reliability. The data collected were analyzed using percentage, mean and t-test. From the analysis it was found that schools in Delta State do not provide quality early childhood education. Moreover, there was difference in the perception of male and female teachers as to the provision of early childhood education. Furthermore, most teachers agreed that providing quality early childhood education will make for violent free classrooms.

Keywords: Perception, Quality, Early Childhood, Violence

Introduction

Frued (1856-1939) a famous psychologist, opined that whatever behaviour an individual will put up in life has been laid in the first five years of life. This implies that the early years of a child's life are very crucial and so deserve great attention. Bush (2001) is of the view that the early years are the foundation upon which successful lives are built. According to Rutter, Gillers and Hagell (1998) and

Tremblay (1999) the early years have a long reaching effect for behaviour especially anti social behaviour, delinquency and crime. Ajayi (2008) quoted (Awoniyi, 1991 and US Early Childhood Start Taskforce, 2002) as saying that the influence of the early years experiences may be either positive or negative and has been emphasized across inter-disciplinary researches. The Economic Opportunity Institute (EOI) (2002) stated that high quality early learning and care is one of the most powerful weapons against crime, while poor early childhood education multiplies the risk that children will grow up to be a threat to every family. Peisner-Feinberg, Burchinal, Clifford, Culkin, Howes, Kagan, Yazejian, Byler, Rustici & Zelazo (2000) are of the view that high quality care in the first years of life can greatly reduce the risk that today's babies and toddlers will become tomorrow's violent teens and adults. Studies abound showing the link between quality early childhood education, crime and violence reduction. Reynolds et al 2001 cited by Economic Opportunity Institute (2002) revealed that in government funded child-parent centres tracked 3 and 4 year old enrolled in the programme for 15 year that children who did not participate were 70% more likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age 18.

These evidences are a wake-up call for government to invest in early childhood education. This fact is appreciated globally and so nations are working hard toward providing quality early childhood education. Nigeria made two great moves in 1990 and 2007 by signing the Jomtien Declaration on Education for all and by providing early childhood education policy. The question to ask is "what happened after these moves?"

It is assumed that when children are given quality early childhood education it will make them to be good citizens in the society. This invariably translates into good behaviour which leads to violent free early childhood classes. What is quality early childhood education? According to UNICEF (2000), quality includes some of the following: learners, environments that are healthy, safe, protective and provides adequate resources and facilities, content and child centred teaching approaches. Other indicators are staff, ratio and group sizes, accreditation, education philosophy and quality rating systems.

In Nigeria, violence is widespread and is giving most citizens food for thought. Espelage, Holt and Henkel (2013), Kondrasuk, Greene, Wagoner, Edwards and Nayak-Rhodes (2005) asserted that school violence has remained a national concern for schools and communities across the country. Moreover, Chukwu (2003) is of the opinion that violence is prevalent in the primary schools which are the foundation level of our educational system. Akpochafo (2013) found in her study the following forms as prevalence of violence in the early childhood classes: shouting, fighting, verbal abuse, noise making, tearing of pupils' books, hitting, slapping and beating. Osanyin (2012) investigated sources of violence among preschool children and the findings from the respondents revealed that about 94% indicated shouting and hitting/slapping, beating as the symptoms of violence. In the Guardian 2008, it was reported that a five year old smuggled knife into school intending to attack a teacher so he could move class. Martin (2013) reports of rise of violent primary school pupils and asserts that 40 teachers were attacked everyday more than at secondary schools. He further stated that 8, 030 pupils age 5 to 11 received sanction in 2010/2011.

According to Wikipedia 2013, in the United Kingdom, figures released in July 2012, covering the academic calendar of 2010-2011 teachers and pupils are facing classroom violence on a daily basis as 6, 390 children of primary school age were suspended for verbal abuse and 10, 000 primary aged children were equally suspended for persistent disruption during classes. These examples show that violence exists in early childhood classes and buttresses the need for quality early childhood education and care. There is no doubt that classroom violence affects every student, teacher, staff members and the parents. The school is supposed to serve as an important agent for the promotion of non-violence and not a place for its perpetration.

Given this scenario, it becomes necessary to examine the type of early childhood education that children are exposed to. It also becomes pertinent to find out if provision of quality early childhood education can make for non-violence classrooms. It is against this background that this study was conceived. This study will also look at the variable of gender and teachers' perception.

Specially, this study sets out to investigate teachers' perception of quality early childhood education as a predictor of violence free classrooms and what gender has to do with it.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Two research questions were asked and one hypothesis formulated to guide this study as follows

1. What are teachers' perception of quality early childhood education in their schools?
2. What are teachers' perception about the link between early childhood education and violence-free classrooms?

Hypothesis I

There is no significant difference between male and female teachers' perception of quality early childhood education.

Methodology

This study employs a descriptive survey design to investigate teachers' perception of quality early childhood education as a predictor of violence free classrooms.

The target population for the study comprised all primary school teachers in Delta State. A sample of one hundred and twenty teachers (made up of 32 male and 88 female) was randomly selected from the public primary schools.

The main instrument used was the questionnaire titled "Quality early childhood education and violence free classrooms" made up of two sections, A and B. Section A dealt with biographical data of age, sex, school, location and so on while section B was made up of twenty eight items with twenty seven (27) for indices of quality education and one item that is, item twenty eight (28) was on quality education and violence free classrooms. Items twenty nine (29) and thirty (30) were on number of students in a class and availability of assistants. The items were based mostly on UNICEF 2000 indices of quality early childhood education. The instrument was based

on a four point scale ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD), where SA stands for 4 points and SD stands for 1.

The reliability of the instrument was ascertained by using the Cronbach alpha which yielded a co-efficient index of 0.73. This indicated that the instrument was fit for use. The instrument was also shown to Measurement and Evaluation experts in the Department of Guidance and Counselling, Delta State University, Abraka, who made initial corrections which were taken into consideration and they equally agreed that the instrument was measuring what it is supposed to measure.

Research Question 1:

What are the teachers' perception of quality early childhood education in their schools?

Table 1: Percentage of teachers' perception of quality early childhood education in their schools

S/N	Statement	N = 120			
		Agree		Disagree	
		Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Are you trained in children and early childhood education?	96	80	24	20
2.	Do you have training opportunity?	11	9.17	109	90.83
3.	Do you have professional development opportunity?	39	32.5	81	67.5
4.	Do you go for regular training?	7	5.83	113	94.17
5.	Are classrooms arranged into learning centers where children spend time exploring materials and working with their mates?	12	10	108	90
6.	Are learners healthy?	92	76.67	28	23.33
7.	Are learners well nourished?	56	46.67	64	53.33
8.	Are learners ready to participate?	100	83.33	20	16.67
9.	Is the school environment healthy?	100	83.33	20	16.67
10.	Is the school environment safe?	84	70	36	30
11.	Is the school environment protected?	96	80	24	20

12.	Does the environment provide adequate facilities for games and recreation?	44	36.67	76	63.33
13.	Is the content adequate for provision of basic skills?	104	86.67	16	13.33
14.	Do teachers use child centred teaching approach?	56	46.67	64	53.33
15.	Are classrooms well managed?	104	86.67	16	13.33
16.	Are assessments well carried out?	20	16.67	100	83.33
17.	Is there good relationship between teachers and children?	120	100	-	-
18.	Do teachers organize daily activities around goals that are challenging?	22	18.33	98	81.67
19.	Do teachers encourage play and exploration?	5	1.17	115	95.83
20.	Is curriculum meaningful to young children?	112	93.33	8	6.67
21.	Is there a balanced attention to all aspects of children's development and learning?	64	53.33	56	46.67
22.	Is there adequate observation?	81	67.5	34	32.5
23.	Is there any adequate intervention?	5	4.17	115	95.83
24.	Is there adequate referral?	48	40	72	60
25.	Is there adequate follow up for pupils?	48	40	72	60
26.	Are parents involved in the school?	96	80	24	20
27.	Is the community involved in the school?	40	33.33	80	66.67
28.	Will providing quality early childhood education make for violence free classrooms?	112	93.33	8	6.67

Table 1 shows that teachers' perceived 14 items which are very crucial out of 27 as not being of quality in early childhood education in their schools. These items are 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 12, 14, 16, 18, 19, 23, 24, 25 and 27.

The results obtained in item 29 shows that an average of 48.3% of the respondents agreed that class sizes ranges from 40-90 children in a class while item 30 (asking if they have assistants in their classes) shows that 40 respondents representing 33% agreed that they have assistants while 80 representing 67% disagreed that they do not have assistants.

Hypothesis 1:

There is no significant difference between female and male teachers' perception of quality early childhood education?

Table 2: t-test analysis of female and male teachers' perception of quality early childhood education

Respondents	N	X	SD	DF	t-cal	Sig.	MD	Upper bound	Lower bound
Female	88	71.73	8.28	118	3.969	.000	6.73	10.08	3.37
Male	32	65.00	8.02						

As shown in table 2, the computed t-value of 3.969 was found to be significant at $df = 118, \leq P.05$ level. Therefore the null hypothesis which states that, there is no significant difference between female and male teachers' perception of quality early childhood education was rejected. The conclusion was drawn that female and male teachers have different perception of quality early childhood education.

Furthermore as shown in table 2, the female teachers; $n=88$ with a mean (X) value of 71.73, $SD=8.28$, has a mean difference of 6.73 over their male counterparts that has a mean of 65.00, $SD = 8.02$. The mean difference (MD) of 6.73, $P \leq .05$ alpha level that lies between the upper limits bound and lower limits bound was found to be statistically significant at the 95% confidence interval (CI). The conclusion is drawn that the effect size of 6.73 which was in the favour of the female teachers indicates that female and male teachers have different perception of quality early childhood education.

Research Question 2

What are teachers' perception about provision of quality early childhood education and violence free classrooms?

In table 1, the responses to item 28 shows that 93.33 percentage of teachers agreed that provision of quality early childhood education will make for a violence free classroom while 6.67 percentage disagreed. It therefore implies that provision of good quality early childhood education will make for violence free classrooms.

Discussion of Findings

Results from research question one reveals that some of the components of quality early childhood education are not there. For example teacher-pupil ratio with an assistant as stated in National Policy of Education (FGN, 2004) is lacking. The NPE specifies teacher-pupil ratio of 1:25 for pre-primary and 1:35 for primary and there

should be an assistant. From the findings, no class has a teacher to 25 pupils and some do not even have assistants. Most of the classrooms are overpopulated. This certainly is not in agreement with the National Policy on Education.

The study also reveals that the content is not adequate for the provision of basic skills which is not in line with UNICEF's quality indices. If the content of the programme is questionable, one wonders the type of education that is provided.

Another finding from the study is that the environment cannot provide adequate facilities for games and recreation. This does not show quality. Children at this stage rely on facilities for play, games, recreation and so on.

One finding that also disagrees with UNICEF (2000) indices is that on child-centred teaching approaches which respondents say teachers do not use. This reveals that there is no quality in early childhood education provided. Other indices that this study disagreed with are the area of regular training which teachers do not go for; classrooms not arranged into learning centres where children spend time to explore with their mates; learners not well nourished, when learners are not well nourished it will certainly affect their being hence McCain and Mustard, 1991 opined that healthy development in early childhood especially the first three years of life plays an important role in providing the basis for a healthy life and a successful formal school experience; no adequate referral; no adequate follow-up and no community intervention. These do not make for quality early childhood education. The findings from the hypothesis reveal differences in teachers' perception of quality early childhood education.

The other crucial finding revealed by this study is in research question two which showed that providing quality early childhood education will make for violence free classrooms. This perception of teachers agrees with EOI (2002) statement that high quality early learning and care is one of the powerful weapons against crime. It also agrees with Peisner-Fenberg et al (2000) view that high quality care in the first years of life can greatly reduce the risk that today's babies and toddlers will become tomorrow's violent teens and adults.

Conclusions

Based on the findings, it was concluded that schools in Delta State do not provide quality early childhood education as the crucial indices were not present in the schools. Both male and female teachers differ in their perception of provision of early childhood education.

Furthermore, most teachers agreed that providing quality early childhood education will make for violent free classrooms.

Recommendations

From the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made.

1. Government should provide quality early childhood education in terms of teachers that are well trained and employed in the right proportion to the member of

- children in the class. Assistants should also be provided. At this early stage, the children need good attention if the number is large adequate care will not be there. The government should endeavour to and implement the NPE prescription of ratio 1:25 and an assistant.
2. The state government is building schools and trying to upgrade some but then the schools should be provided with adequate facilities for play, exploration, games, recreation etc with adults playing supervisory roles.
 3. Curriculum planners should come up with adequate programmes that can provide the adequate basic skills required. In this all areas of children development should be taken into consideration.
 4. The family and community should be involved in early childhood education by supporting their children in learning and making sure that they are well fed.
 5. Government should encourage teachers to go for training and organize seminars, conferences, workshop for them so as to improve themselves and get an update in their area of specialization. This certainly will translate into using good methods to teach where children are allowed to explore things for themselves.

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