

Assessment of Training and Perception of Teachers About Early Childhood Education Programme in Adaklu District, Volta-Region, Ghana

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INTRODUCTION

The benefits of Early Childhood Education for individuals as well as for the society have been recognized and documented across a range of academic disciplines (Heckman & Masterov, 2007; Heckman, 2006; Alabi & Ijaiya, 2014). Oduolowu and Olowe (2011) noted that the early years of children are years of extreme vulnerability and tremendous potentials, during which adequate protection, care and stimulation are essential to provide the foundation for well-being and development. In providing this foundation during the early years therefore, Early Childhood Education (ECE) becomes a key factor which cannot be ignored or underplayed.

Stallings and Porter cited in Bartels (2004), contended that children who go through KG education are likely to stay longer in education, climbing higher, getting good jobs and supporting themselves and leading exemplary lives in the society and this they think is possible because they (children) had earlier and better initial behavioral nurturing. Also, Leggett (2017) noted that creativity is an important skill that preschoolers develop during their early year's education. Rolnick cited in Oppong Frimpong (2019) noted that Quality Early Childhood Education (QECE) can play a significant role in children's ability to develop a stronger academic adaptability. These skills are important when children enroll in the primary school level and in later life. Contrary to this, Lemaire, Amoah, Ntsiful, Micah and Bonney (2013) indicated that stakeholders in the Western Region of Ghana have low perception of Early Childhood Education provision and this adversely affects the performance of their roles to ensure effective implementation of early childhood programmes and policies in the region.

Many scholars in Early Childhood Education defined the term "Early Childhood Education" in several ways mostly to suit their philosophical ideologies. For instance, Oppong Frimpong (2017) defined Early Childhood Education as an educational provision aimed at meeting the academic, health, nutritional and psycho-social needs of children between 0 and 8 years old in an interactive environment conducive to their optimal development. UNESCO cited in Jaramillo and Mingat (2008) define the term as educational programs and strategies geared towards children from birth to the age of eight. In this study however, Early Childhood Education is defined as a specially designed and deliberately planned educational program intended to ensure the holistic development of children between the ages of 0 and 8 years within a developmentally appropriate environment, by experts who are well and professionally trained

on how children learn and develop. Developmentally appropriate environment as used in the definition refers to the learning environment that possess or have relevant materials both for indoors and outdoors activities of children, specially trained or professional teachers, safe infrastructural facilities, healthy learning atmosphere and positive perception as well as attitude towards the aim of ECE provision which is to ensure the optimal and holistic development of children.

As indicated in the definition, central to the implementation of quality Early Childhood Education is the teacher. Nnabuo (1996) pointed out that the quality of education depends on the quality of teachers and what they know. In similar vein, Quist (2000) in his submission stated that successful teaching and quality of pupil learning is closely related to the teacher's knowledge and understanding of the subject. In emphasizing the need of qualified teachers in education, Al-hassan (2006) pointed out that the teacher is an important variable in learning situations, and the teacher's skills and personalities are instrumental in creating the conditions for learning. Teachers need to be knowledgeable so that they can make useful decisions regarding what should be taught, to whom, and how the teaching should be done (Eliason & Holmes, 2012).

Research findings demonstrate clearly that among the factors that lead to students' academic performance are qualities of teachers (Harmer cited in Bicaj & Shala, 2018; Mosha, 2014). A specially trained teacher for the delivery of ECE programme will help in many ways to lay the proper foundation of a child's learning process. Teachers' qualification corresponds positively with teaching and learning of children in many studies (Betts, Zau & Rice, 2003; Forrester, 2008). For instance, Betts, Zau and Rice (2003) found that teachers' qualification correlates fairly positive with children's learning. Betts et al submitted that, when teachers have an advanced degree in their teaching subjects or specializations, it has positive impact on the children's learning and achievement. Khurshid (2008) also observed that, if a specially trained teacher teaches a group of learners, the performance of the learners was good and high because, in the process of education, the teacher is very crucial.

Although, training and perception of teachers cannot be ignored as far as the implementation of quality ECE is concerned, little has been known and documented on the training and perception of teachers who deliver Early Childhood Education programme in the Adaklu district and how it influences the delivery of the programme in the district. There has also been enactment of several policies, for instance, provision for Early Childhood Care and Development (Article, 38) in the 1992 constitution of Ghana, inclusion of ECE programme into the main formal education system and the adoption of an Early Childhood Educational policy in 2004 to ensure effective Early Childhood Education programme delivery in Ghana, several studies (Oppong Frimpong, 2019; Abdulai, 2014; UNESCO, 2010) indicated that there are some challenges that hinders smooth and quality delivery of Early Childhood Education programme in country.

The majority of these earlier studies, however, do not investigate nor do they report on the level of training and the perception of teachers as well as the influence these elements have on the smooth delivery of Early Childhood Education programme.

The question then is, do the teachers who deliver Early Childhood Education programme have the needed training and knowledge in the study area? What is the perception of teachers about the provision of Early Childhood Education programme in the study area? Does the level of training of teachers and their perception play a role or influence quality delivery of Early Childhood Education programme in the study area? Answers to these mind-boggling questions are vital in ensuring quality provision of ECE programme, however, these answers are not readily documented in current literature. This study was therefore conducted to assess the training and perception of teachers about Early Childhood Education programme in Adaklu district, Volta-region, Ghana.

Research Objectives

The study sought to:

1. Assess the training of teachers who deliver Early Childhood Education programme in the Adaklu District.
2. Assess the perception of teachers about quality Early Childhood Education programme delivery in the district.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following questions:

1. What is the training of teachers who deliver Early Childhood Education programme in the Adaklu district?
2. What is the perception of teachers about the provision quality Early Childhood Education programme in the district?

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a cross-sectional research design. Measurement of variables of interest occurred at a time and there was no attempt to manipulate any of the variables measured in this study. The study targeted all Basic schools and all the ECE teachers. The accessible population was however made up of 40 Basic Schools from the 8 educational circuits and 200 Early Childhood Education teachers from the selected Basic Schools. Stratified random sampling technique was used to sample the schools and all ECE teachers in a sampled school was used for the study. This implies that the schools were the unit of sampling $[(40 \times 5 = 200)]$. The instrument of data collection was a self-constructed 4-point Likert type scale questionnaire. There were two sections on the questionnaire. Items on section A were used to elicit data on the training teachers and section B elicit response on the perception of teachers about early years' education provision. There were eight (8) items on each section of the questionnaire. The rating format ranges from "strongly agree" (4) to "strong disagree" (1). Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to determine the consistency of the instrument. The result of the reliability alpha coefficient for the instrument was approximately .831 indicating that instrument met the threshold to be used for the study (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to analyze data obtained with respect to each research question. Population t-test or one sample t-test of one sample mean was used to further test the results.

RESULTS

Level of Training of Early Childhood Education Teachers

The first research question “What is the training of teachers who deliver Early Childhood Education in the district?” sought to ascertain the training of teachers who deliver Early Childhood Education programme in the Adaklu district. The professional qualification of the teachers was ascertained as part of the level of training of teachers in the district. The results of the professional qualification were presented in Table 1, analyzed using frequency and percentages and data for research question 1 was analyzed using Mean and Standard deviation and presented in Table 2.

Table 1: Results of Professional Qualification of Teachers

Professional Qualification	Frequency	Percent
Certificate in Early Childhood Education	10	5.0
Diploma in Early Childhood Education	34	17.0
Diploma in Basic Education	112	56.0
Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood)	8	4.0
Bachelor in Basic Education	36	18.0
Total	200	100.0

Filed Data, 2020

From Table 1 which presents the professional qualification of the respondents, 112(56.0%) had Diploma in Basic Education, 36(18.0%) had Bachelor Degree in Basic Education, 10(5.0%) had Certificate in Early Childhood Education, 34(17.0%) had Diploma in Early Childhood Education and 8(4.0%) had Bachelor Degree in Early Childhood Education as their highest professional qualifications. Data contained in the table therefore suggests that, most of the teachers who deliver ECE in the Adaklu district do not have qualification or specialization in Early Childhood Education but rather, most of them were trained or have their qualifications in Basic Education. Data presented in Table 2 shows the mean analysis of teachers' level training of training in the Adaklu district. The teachers agreed that they have been trained on the importance of teaching and learning materials within Early Childhood Education (Mean = 3.35; SD = .825), how to use teaching and learning materials in Early Childhood Education (Mean = 3.44; SD = .767), how children learn during their early years (Mean = 3.52; SD = .634) and the pedagogical strategies/techniques appropriate for educating children (Mean = 3.56; SD = .590).

Table 2: Results on Training of Teachers

Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.
Trained on the importance of teaching and learning materials within Early Childhood Education.	3.35	.825
Trained on how to use teaching and learning materials in Early Childhood Education.	3.44	.767
Trained on how children learn during their early years.	3.52	.634
Trained on the pedagogical strategies/techniques appropriate for educating children.	3.56	.590
Trained on the theories of child development and their implications.	3.58	.544
Trained on the importance of play on children learning	3.56	.581
Trained on how to use play to facilitate teaching and learning of children.	3.51	.593
Trained on the assessment practices appropriate for assessing children during their early years' education.	3.41	.636
Mean of Means and Standard Deviation	3.4919	.49401

Similarly, it is evident in Table 2 that the teachers have been trained on the theories of child development and their implications (Mean = 3.58; SD = .544), importance of play on children learning (Mean = 3.56; SD = .581), how to use play to facilitate teaching and learning of children (Mean = 3.51; SD = .593) and the assessment practices appropriate for assessing children during their early years' education (Mean = 3.41; SD = .636).

Table 3: Results of Population T-Test of Teachers' Training

	Total	Sample	Sample	Std.Reference	t-value	Sig
		Mean	Dev.	Mean		
Total level of training of teachers	200	3.49	.494	2.5	28.395	.000

p < 0.05; df = 199

Population T-test analysis or one sample T-test of one sample mean was further conducted to determine teachers' level of training. The test was conducted at the alpha level of .05 and the result presented in Table 3. Using the population T-test or one sample t-test of one sample mean to determine the level of training of the teachers, the sample mean was compared with a reference mean score or population mean score of 2.5. The reference mean score was obtained by finding the average of the scores attached to the four responses to the items by the number of items. The reference mean score was also confirmed by using mid-point on the test variables (Green et al, 2000). Thus, reference mean is; $\frac{1}{4} (4+3+2+1) = 2.5$ Or $\frac{1}{2} (3+2) = 2.5$.

The result presented in Table 3 shows that the sample mean score for the total population with respect to their level of training (Mean = 3.49; SD = .494) was greater than the reference mean score of (2.5). Similarly, the calculated t-value or absolute value (28.395) was greater than the critical t-value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance with 199 degrees of freedom. The result also shows a significant level of .000 which is less than the alpha level of 0.05. The result as presented in Table 3 therefore means that, the teachers who deliver Early Childhood Education in the Adaklu district have high level of training and possess some level of knowledge on how to educate children during their early years education. Regardless of this result, it is worth establishing that most of the teachers who implement Early Childhood Education programme in the district do not have their professional qualification in Early Childhood Education but rather Basic Education. In other words, teachers used for the study in the district are not professional experts in Early Childhood Education, this is evident in Table 1.

Perception of Teachers about Early Childhood Education Provision

Research question two "What is the perception of teachers about the provision of quality Early Childhood Education programme in the Adaklu district?" sought to ascertain the views of Early Childhood Education teachers about teaching children during their early years. Table 4 presents a summary of the responses from the respondents in relation to their perception.

Table 4: Results of Perception of Teachers about ECE Provision

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.
Early Childhood Education is not only a place where children play and sing without doing any learning	3.65	.654
Early Childhood Education although a convenient place, it is not only for babysitting but for academic purposes	3.67	.595
Early Childhood Education provision is more important and valuable than Primary and Junior High School Education	3.70	.620
Early Childhood Education provides a long-lasting foundation for all round development of the children	3.52	.776
Early Childhood Education provision influence child's behaviour and later academic achievement	3.43	.779
Parents' involvement in Early Childhood Education provision has effects or influence on the child's performance in School.	3.43	.683
Effective teaching at the Early Childhood Education centres can only be done by professional teachers	3.20	.778
There is a need for effective supervision of children' learning during their early years education.	3.50	.737
Mean of Means and Standard Deviation	3.51	.419

Table 4 presents the mean analysis of teachers' perception about the provision of Early Childhood Education in the Adaklu district. The mean of means scores of 3.51 with a corresponding standard deviation of .419 were computed for the eight items (statements) representing the perception of teachers about Early Childhood Education programme provision in the district. Associating the mean of means of 3.51 to the discrete means of the items (statements), it could be observed from Table 4 that the means for the statements "ECE centers are not only places where children play and sing without doing any learning" (Mean = 3.65; SD = .654), "ECE centers although a convenient place, it is not only for babysitting but for academic purposes" (Mean = 3.67; SD = .595), "Early Childhood Education provision is more important and valuable than Primary and Junior High School Education" (Mean = 3.70; SD = .620), "ECE provides a long-lasting foundation for all round development of the children" (Mean = 3.52; SD = .776) and "there is a need for effective supervision of children' learning during their early years education" (Mean = 3.50; SD = .737) respectively were equal and higher than the calculated mean of means of 3.51. These results as provided by the teachers suggest that the teachers strongly agreed and perceived these positive statements about the provision Early Childhood Education to be true. Data presented in Table 4 further indicates that the teachers were in agreement that Early Childhood Education provision influence child's behaviour and later academic achievement (Mean = 3.43; SD = .779), parental involvement in ECE provision influence the child's performance in School (Mean = 3.43; SD = .683) and finally, effective teaching at ECE centres can only be done by professional teachers (Mean = 3.20; SD = .778).

Table 5: Population T-Test Results of Teachers' Perception.

	Total	Sample	Sample	Std.Reference	t-value	Sig
		Mean	Dev.	Mean		
Total Perception of Teachers	200	3.51	.419	2.5	34.144	.000

p < 0.05; df = 199

Population T-test analysis or one sample T-test of one sample mean was further conducted to determine the perception held by teachers about the provision of Early Childhood Education. The test was conducted at the alpha level of .05 and the result presented in Table 5. Using the population T-test, the sample mean was compared with a reference mean score of 2.5.

The result presented in Table 5 indicates that the sample mean score for the total population in relation to the perception of teachers about ECE provision (Mean = 3.51; SD = .419) was greater than the reference mean score of (2.5). Similarly, the calculated t-value or absolute value (34.144) was greater than the critical t-value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance with 199 degrees of freedom. The result also shows a significant level of .000 which is less than the alpha level of 0.05. This therefore means that the perception of teachers who deliver Early Childhood Education programme in the Adaklu district is significantly positive. In other words, the teachers in the district have positive perception about Early Childhood Education provision.

DISCUSSION

Analysis of the first research question indicated that the teachers who deliver Early Childhood Education programme in the Adaklu district had fair/average knowledge on how to educate children during their early years which perhaps suggests that, ECE teachers in the district have some level of training. It was evidenced in the study that, the teachers possess knowledge on how children learn during their early years, the theories that underpins children learning, the appropriate pedagogical strategies to deploy in teaching children, the importance of the use of play in teaching children as well as the developmentally appropriate assessment practices for assessing children during their early years' education. This finding agrees with Khurshid (2008) who also observed that, if a specially trained teacher teaches a group of learners, the performance of the learners is usually good and high because, in the process of education, the teacher is very crucial. Similarly, Forrester, (2008) in his study stated that, teachers' knowledge about the subject to be taught certainly affects their teaching attitude and eventually the performance of the learners. Clark-Stewart (1984) confirmed that an early childhood teachers or administrators who provide high-quality Early Childhood Education programme must possess certain specific training in child development and learning.

Most of the teachers however, do not have their professional qualification or training in Early Childhood Education but rather Basic Education. The professional qualification of the teachers therefore suggests that, there was inadequacy of well trained and specialized Early Childhood Educators in the district. This observation was in line with a report published by Education Management and Information System, EMIS (2018) which indicated that, teachers for Early Childhood Education delivery are not trained as specialists who are able to address the varying needs of learners at this level.

The perception of teachers about the provision of Early Childhood Education programme which research question two sought to find out was significantly positive. The teachers perceived that Early Childhood Education programme provision have impact/influence on the behavior and the academic achievement of children, only professionals can and are supposed to teach children at the early years level, ECE centres are for learning and not for only play and singing and ECE provision is more important than Junior High School provision as it laid the basic foundation for later education. This finding aligns with a submission made by Estes (2004) in which she described early years as a remarkable period of growth and development in the lives of children which needs to be properly handled by professionals to ensure the total development of children. Oduolowu and Olowe (2011) further noted that the early years of children are years of extreme vulnerability and tremendous potentials, during which adequate protection, care and stimulation are essential to provide the foundation for well-being and development of these potentials.

CONCLUSIONS

Evidence drawn for the analysis of the first research question shows that, teachers who deliver ECE in the Adaklu district do not have professional qualification or training in Early Childhood Education although they possess some level of knowledge about how to educate children. There was therefore inadequacy of well-trained and specialized Early Childhood Educators in the district which could affect learning and holistic development of children ultimately. Also, it was evidenced in the study with respect to research question two that, teachers in the Adaklu district hold positive perception about Early Childhood Education programme provision and the need to educate children during the early years. This implies that the teachers understand the benefits children derived from the provision of quality Early Childhood Education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the first findings, it is recommended that the Adaklu district educational directorate through the help of Ghana Education Service (GES) should periodically organize in-service training for ECE teachers in the district. This will help to properly trained them on the needed pedagogies and methodologies appropriate for teaching children at that level. also, the in-service training will help abreast their knowledge on the current trends and theories of child learning and development.

Again, regardless of the fact that the finding from the second research question indicated that the teachers in the district have positive perception about Early Childhood Education programme provision, their attitudes can change towards the delivery of ECE programme in the district depending on the behaviour of the parents and the communities within the district. It is therefore recommended that, parents, communities within the district, the School Management Council (SMC) and the Parent Associations (PAs) should be encouraged to participate in school related activities of their children in the district. This will be a form of intrinsic motivation for the teachers to put in their very best to ensure effective delivery of Early Childhood Education programme in the district.

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