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Early Childhood Education Teachers and Developmentally
Appropriate Practice (DAP): A study of Lagos and Ondo States'
Preschool teachers.

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Abstract

The 21st Century Child requires a versatile teacher who brings each child's home culture into the shared culture of the school, recognises the importance of shared control with children, and recognises the importance of child-initiated activity and play as a vehicle for learning. Developmentally Appropriate Practice concurs with the findings of several decades of research which clearly demonstrate that high quality early childhood programmes produce short and long term effects on children's cognitive and social developments (Barnett-4⁵; -Qttynmr~2Qtt;~13looms~, 1964). To this end, this study set out to assess the qualification and behaviours of ECE teachers as they relate to Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Lagos and Ondo states of Nigeria. The study employed the descriptive survey design. The sample consisted of 245 teachers drawn from 100 private nursery schools in Lagos and Ondo states. Two research instruments - Developmentally Appropriate Observation Schedule (DAPOS) and Behaviour Anchor Rating Scale (BARS) were used to obtain data for the study. Cross tabulation statistics and percentages were used for data analysis. The study found that majority of the teachers either had NCE as their qualification or are experts in unrelated fields and did not have regular access to professional development programmes. It also found that majority of preschool teachers' practices were reflections of

Developmentally Inappropriate Practice (DIP) instead of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP). The study recommended that teacher training institutions should be more focused on the training of ECE experts to provide up to date information to the practising teachers. It was recommended that the qualification level for entry into the teaching profession should be raised to first degree.

Key words: *Developmentally Appropriate Practice, Developmentally Inappropriate Practice, Early Childhood Education, Preschool, School Operators.*

Introduction

The emergence of formal Early Childhood Education in Nigeria could be traced back to the colonial era, towards the middle of 19th century, when the missionaries started western education. Those who were associated with the missionaries enjoyed the patronage of this education. Schools for children less than six years of age were organised by the wives of missionaries for the children of foreign and local dignitaries. The demand for formal preschool education started after the Civil War when there was an upsurge of interest in sending children to nursery schools by parents.

Recognising the importance /and the demand for this level of education, the government not only included in the National Policy on Education but also encouraged private individuals in the provision of Early Childhood Education (ECE). However, in the course of operation of these schools, an academically-oriented trend has made its way down to Early Childhood classrooms: teachers are introducing skills that are more suitable for older children's learning abilities (to four-year-olds) This emphasis on academics has led to memorization of facts rather than allowing children to discover things for themselves (Shepard & Smith, 1988).

Consequently, in the mid 1980's, there were pleas among Early

Childhood experts to move towards a "child-centred developmentally appropriate curriculum" and away from the "back to basic academically oriented curriculum". The rationale behind this move is the belief that school systems are putting undue stress on children by overemphasizing academics (Dun and Kontos, 1997).

One of the most influential professional organizations at this time was the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). In 1987, NAEYC formulated a set of philosophical guidelines defining high-quality programmes for young children. These guidelines were entitled *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8* (Bredekamp, 1997).

The Connect of DAP

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) is neither a curriculum nor a rigid set of standards that dictates practice. It is a framework, a philosophy and an approach to working with young children (Bredekamp and Rosegrant, 1992). In essence, DAP refers to a practice and a programme that is not only comprehensive in nature but also takes into consideration the contributions of the environment, curriculum contents, materials, activities and teachers' methodology in such a way that age specific and individual characteristics of children are addressed and designed to meet the needs of children and their families served. These guidelines encourage early childhood programmes to provide an educational environment that responds to the needs and interests of children.

NAEYC defines DAP as resulting from the process of professionals making decisions about the well-being of children based on at least three important kinds of information or knowledge¹. What is known about child development and learning? 2. What is known about the strengths, interests and needs of each individual child in the group? 3. Knowledge of the social and cultural contexts in which children live.

Developmentally "Inappropriate" Practice (DIP)

Developmentally Inappropriate Practice is based on a behavioural perspective of learning. This theory focuses on the impact that external stimuli can have on an individual's behaviour. It is believed that a desired behaviour can be achieved through the process of repetition and reinforcement. In current educational literature, these "inappropriate practices" are often referred to as "direct-instruction," "teacher-directed instruction," "teacher-centered instruction," or even "the traditional approach" and it is clear that many early childhood educators believe that these practices are clearly unacceptable with young children when used exclusively.

The Five Key Practice Areas of Early Childhood Education

Bredekamp and Copple (1997) state that the guidelines for Developmentally Appropriate Practice addresses decision making in five key practice areas of Early Childhood Education. These are (1) Creating a caring community of learners; (2) Teaching to enhance development and learning; (3) Planning curriculum to achieve important goals; (4) Assessing children's development and learning; and (5) Establishing reciprocal relationships with families.

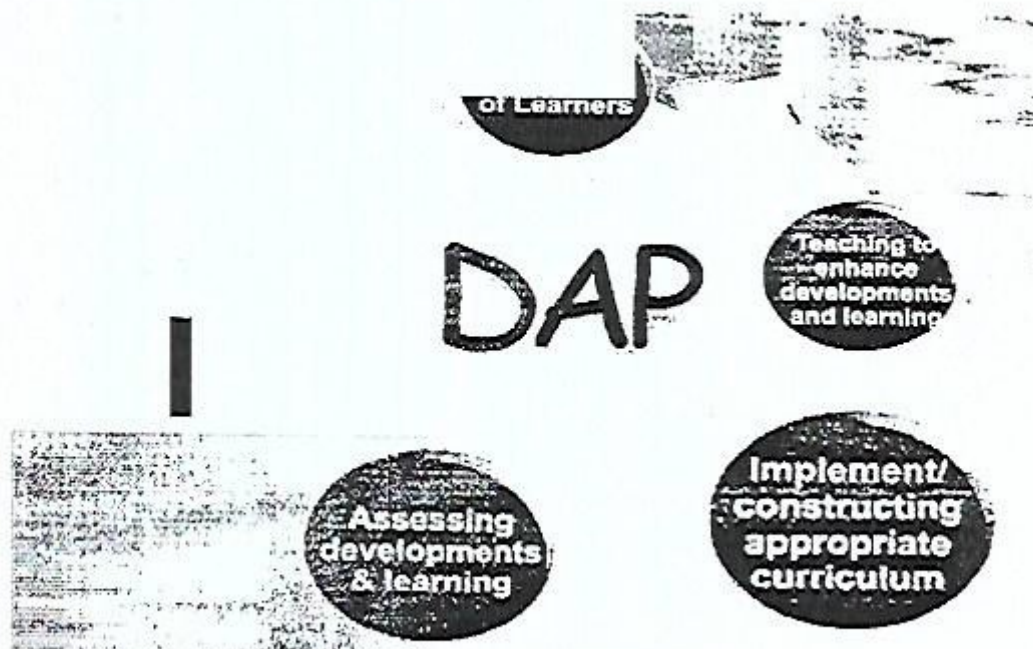


Figure 1: Key practice areas of Early Childhood Education

Creating a Caring Community of Learners

The National Association for the Education of Young Children's guidelines for decisions about Developmentally Appropriate Practice confirms that DAP occurs within a context that supports the development of relationship between adults and children, relationship among children as well as between teachers and families. Such a community reflects what is known as the social construction of knowledge and the importance of establishing a caring inclusive community in which all children develop and learn.

Teaching to Enhance Development and Learning

Bredekamp and Copple (1997) asserted that adults' relationship with children is an important determinant of children's social, emotional, language and intellectual development. The adults must therefore strive to achieve an optimal balance between children's self initiated learning and adult guidance or support.

Constructing and implementing appropriate curriculum

Research clearly demonstrates that children learn more in programmes where there is a well-planned and implemented curriculum. A good curriculum is much more than a collection of activities. It is based on the key outcomes for children, and it should provide teachers with a useful framework for choosing learning experiences and materials and for seeing how those fit together to accomplish the outcomes. Curriculum that is developmentally appropriate is the one that unites all understanding of what is with value statement of what ought to be with methods of achieving these aims. This is referred to as the Children's Comprehensive Curriculum. The developmental domains explored in the above curriculum are aesthetic, emotional, cognitive, language, physical and social domains.

Assessement of Children's Learning and Development

Morrison (as cited in Kostelnik, Soderman, Whiren, 2007) posited that educators need to collect and document information to inform instruction, to identify children who might benefit from special help or additional health services and to report children's progress to their families. All these constitute what is known as assessment which takes place through observation, administration of commercial and teacher-

constructed tools and examination of the products that young children create. Holman and Weihart (2002) describe assessment to include range of tasks adult practitioner undertakes to ensure that observing children, interacting with children and planning for them receive full energy and attention. This is done in High/Scope preschools using the key experiences. Key experiences describe the basic skills that children should achieve in all areas of development and learning.

Establishing reciprocal relationship with families

Developmentally Appropriate Practice derives its knowledge about each child from the relationship formed with the child's family. The younger the child, the more necessary it is for professionals to acquire this knowledge through relationships with child's families. Practice is not developmentally appropriate if the programme limits parents' involvement to scheduled events or if the programme has a strong parents education orientation. Parents do not feel like partners in the relationship when staff members see themselves as having all the knowledge and insight about children and view parents as lacking such knowledge. Such approaches do not adequately convey the complexity of the partnership between teachers and families that is a fundamental element of good practice.

Statement of the Problem

There is no gainsaying that those who are involved in Early Childhood Education should possess the relevant skills and knowledge that properly shape children. At least, two decades of research confirm that teacher qualifications and skills significantly affect the quality of care and education provided for young children. Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes Study Team as cited by Gestwicki (2007) confirms that teacher educational level differentiates poor, mediocre and high quality child care centres. However, Coffman and Lopez (2009) asserted that despite researches linking teacher education and child outcomes, most preschool teachers lack the qualifications, clinical skills and experience needed to provide high quality learning experiences for young children. This is demonstrated in the rigorous academic exercises and teachers' instructions that focus only on isolated skills development which are

common practices in most of our nursery schools. Given this scenario, the questions are what are the academic qualifications of preschool teachers and to what extent do they display behaviours that are compliant with the five key areas of ECE practice?

Conceptual Framework

This study is based on the current conceptualizations of socio-cultural theory which draws heavily on the work of Vygotsky, as well as later theorists like Wertsch. According to Tharp and Gallimore (1988), the socio-cultural perspective has profound implications for teaching, schooling and education. A key feature of this emergent-view of human development is that higher order functions develop out of social interactions. Vygotsky argues that a child's development cannot be understood solely by a study of the individual but we must also examine the external social world in which that individual life has developed. Through participation in activities that require cognitive and communicative functions, children are drawn into the use of these functions in ways that nurture and "scaffold" them. He also described learning as being embedded within social events and occurring as a child interacts with-people, objects and events in the environment.

Considering the contributions of socio-cultural theory to understanding the development of communication, Adamson and Chance (1998) argued that there are two particularly noteworthy aspects to a Vygotskian approach to social interactions. First, it is fundamentally cultural. In that regard, caregivers are agents of culture who set an infant's nascent actions within an intimate setting that is deeply informed by the caregiver's cultural knowledge. Caregivers cannot help but view infants' expressions as meaningful within the human sphere of their own culture. Infants, in complement, are quintessential cultural apprentices who seek the guided participation of their elders (Rogoff, 1990). Second, the notion of a zone of proximal development reveals a pattern of developmental change in which a phase of adult support precedes a phase of independent infant accomplishment. Each cycle begins with a newly displayed behaviour, such as a smile, a visually directed reach or babble. The adult's reaction and interpretations transform the infant's emerging

behaviour into a social act. In essence, the child induces the adult to recruit the act for communication after many experiences of supported expression, the child gradually masters an action that is qualified with cultural meaning. The act has passed through the zone of proximal development during which the adult has educated the child in its use.

Teaching Strategies Based on Vygotsky's Theory for the classroom include use of child's zone of proximal development, teaching to child's upper limit, use of scaffolding when children need help with self-initiated learning activities, helping move to higher level of skill and knowledge, using more skilled peers as teachers, monitoring and encouraging children's use of private speech.

Purpose of the Study

The objectives of the study were to:

1. examine the demographic profiles of the Early Childhood Education teachers in Lagos and Ondo States.
2. investigate the behaviour and practice of the urban and rural Lagos and Ondo ECE teachers.

Research Questions

To achieve the objectives of this study, the following research questions were raised.

1. What are the demographic profiles of the early childhood education teachers in Lagos and Ondo States?
2. What are the observed behaviours and the practice of the urban and rural Lagos and Ondo ECE teachers in the two states?

Method of Study

This study adopted the descriptive survey design. The population consisted of all nursery school teachers in Lagos and Ondo States of Nigeria. The sample for the study comprised two hundred and forty five (245) teachers selected from one hundred (100) schools in the two States. Using the simple random and stratified sampling technique, the researcher selected two states from the south west geo-political zone, ten Local government Areas from each of the two states and five (5) government approved private schools from each Local Government Area used for the study.

Two instruments were used for the study - Developmentally Appropriate Observation Schedule (DAPOS) and Behaviour Anchor Rating Scale (BARS). The major variables of DAPOS were derived from the five key areas early childhood education practice while the NAEYC'S DAP guidelines form the birds' eye view through which the researcher was able to observe and evaluate behaviours of the teachers to see whether they are DAP compliant or not. These guidelines help practitioners to take appropriate decisions in the areas of practice. Behaviour Anchor Rating Scale (BARS) is also an observation schedule and the data supplied by the teachers on DAPOS were used as the biodata for BARS. The alpha coefficient values of the instruments which were high were found using the alpha cron-bach.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected were treated statistically using cross tabulation and descriptive statistics. Cross tabulation statistics was used for research question 1 while descriptive statistics was used for research question 2. The analysis of data is presented in Tables 1-5 below.

Table 1: Cross Tabulation of Study Location and Teachers' Qualifications

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State	Location	WASC or equivalent	NCE	B.Ed/B.A./B.Sc	MEd/MLA/MSc	Total
Lagos	Urban	4(5.4%)	47(63.5%)	18(24.3%)	5(6.8%)	74(100.0%)
	Rural	13(18.1%)	49(68.1%)	7(9.7%)	3(4.2%)	72(100.0%)
	Total	17(11.6%)	96(52.1%)	25(17.1%)	8(5.5%)	146(100.0%)
Ondo	Urban	5(10.0%)	37(74.0%)	8(16.0%)	1(2.0%)	50(100.0%)
	Rural	16(32.7)	29(59.2%)	4(8.2%)	4(100.0%)	49(100.0%)
	States Total	38(15.50%)	162(66.1)	36(14.3%)	9(3.7%)	245(100.0%)

Table 2: Cross tabulation of Study Location and Major Areas of Specialization

State	Location	Early Childhood Education	Elementary Education	Others	Total
Lagos	Urban	24(32.4%)	39(52.7%)	11(14.9)	74(100.0%)
	Rural	19(26.4%)	43(59.7%)	10(13.9)	72(100.0%)
	Total	43(29.5%)	82(56.2%)	21(14.4%)	146(100.0%)
Ondo	Urban	17(34.0%)	25(50%)	8(16%)	50(100.0%)
	Rural	15(30.6%)	26(53.1%)	9(18.4%)	49(100.0%)
	Total	32(32.3%)	51(51.5%)	17(17.2%)	99(100.0%)
State total		75(30.6%)	133(54.3%)	38(15.5%)	245(100.0%)

Table 3: Cross tabulation of Location and Gender

State	Location	Male	Female	Total
Lagos	Urban	5(6.8%)	69(93.2%)	74(100.0%)
	Rural	3(4.2%)	69(95.8%)	72(100.0%)
	Total	8(5.5%)	138(94.5%)	146(100.0%)
Ondo	Urban	7(14.0%)	43(86.0%)	50(100.0%)
	Rural	6(12.2%)	43(87.6%)	49(100.0%)
	Total	13(13.1%)	86(86.9%)	99(100.0%)

Table 4: Cross tabulation of Study Location and Exposure to professional Development Programmes.

State	Location	Always	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Total
Lagos	Urban	24(32.4%)	43(58.1%)	7(9.5%)		74(100.0%)
	Rural	17(22.9)	42(58.3%)	34(47.2%)	2(2.8%)	72(100.0%)
	Total	24(16.4%)	79(54.1%)	41(28.1%)	2(1.4%)	146(100.0%)
Ondo	Urban	17(34.0%)	15(30.0%)	18(36.0%)		50(100.0%)
	Rural		24(49.0%)	23(46.9%)	2(4.1%)	49(100.0%)
	Total	17(17.2%)	39(39.4%)	41(41.4%)	2(2.0%)	99(100.0%)

Table 5: Descriptive data of the Observed behaviours of ECE teachers in Ondo and Lagos

Creating a Caring Community				Teaching to enhance	Constructing/Implementing	Assessing Pupils Learning and Development
State	Location					
Lagos	Urban	Mean	47.68	15.24	30.27	18.22
		N	74	74	74	74
		Std. Deviation	3.74	2.71	4.14	1.89
		Minimum	37.00	11.00	22.00	15.00
		Maximum	55.00	19.00	38.00	22.00
		Max. obtainable	225	60	195	36
				Development and Learning	Appropriate Curriculum	
Rural	Rural	Mean	46.056	15.21	30.42	18.67
		N	72	72	72	72
		Std. Deviation	3.94	2.24	4.48	2.24
		Minimum	33.00	8.00	16.00	10.00
		Maximum	52.00	19.00	38.00	22.00
		Max. obtainable	225	60	195	36
Total	Total	Mean	46.88	15.23	30.34	17.46
		N	146	146	146	146
		Std. Deviation	3.91	2.167	4.31	2.21
		Minimum	33.00	8.00	16.00	22.00
		Maximum	55.00	19.00	38.00	22.00
		Max. obtainable	225	60	195	36
Ondo	Urban	Mean	47.58	15.18	30.20	17.88
		N	50	50	50	50
		Std. Deviation	4.0259	2.13	4.18	2.51
		Minimum	33.00	8.00	16.00	22.00
		Maximum	55.00	19.00	38.00	22.00
		Max. obtainable	225	60	195	36
Rural	Rural	Mean	46.69	15.24	30.33	17.59
		N	49	49	49	49
		Std. Deviation	3.57	2.18	4.31	1.88
		Minimum	37.00	11.00	22.00	12.00

FINDINGS

Research Question 1: What are the demographic profiles of the early childhood education teachers in Lagos and Ondo States?

Table 1 shows that of 74 teachers in urban Lagos, 63.5% of them had NCE, 24.3% were first degree holders while a negligible 6.8% and 5.4% had M.Ed and School Certificates respectively. In Ondo State, out of 50 teachers 74% were holders of NCE, 14% had first degree, 10% were School Certificate holders while the remaining 2% had postgraduate qualifications. In rural Lagos, out of the 72 teachers, 68.1% of them had NCE, 9.7% were first degree holders while only 4.2% had post graduate qualifications and 18.1% were school certificate holders or its equivalents respectively. In the same vein, out of 49 teachers in the rural Ondo, 59.2% were holders of NCE, 8.2% were first degree holders while 32.7% had WASC qualifications and there were no teachers with postgraduate qualification. In summary, NCE holders constitute the largest percentage of teachers with 66.1% in both Lagos and Ondo states. Teachers with WASC ranked second with 15.5% while first degree ranked third and post graduate degree holders ranked fourth.

From table 2, we can deduce that 29.5% of the urban and rural Lagos teachers specialized in early childhood education; 56.2% specialized in elementary education while the 14.4% specialized in other areas. In addition, 32.3% of urban and rural Ondo teachers specialized in early childhood education; 51.5% specialized in elementary education while 17.2% specialized in other areas. Summarily, the early childhood experts represent only 30.6% of the total teacher population in the two states, 54.3% of the teachers are teachers with Elementary education endorsement while the other 15.5% represent those who are not educationists at all. This implies that majority of the early childhood classrooms are manned by teachers who are not experts in the field where the function.

Evidence from table 3 shows that eight teachers in urban and rural Lagos preschools are males while 138 representing 94.5% are females. In addition, 13.1% teachers in urban and rural Ondo are males while majority of the teachers 86.9% are females. Thus the gender distribution of the ECE teachers across Lagos and Ondo as shown in the table reveals

that females dominate early childhood classrooms in the two states.

Table 4 reveals that 16.4% of ECE teachers in urban and rural Lagos State said that they always attend professional development programmes, 54.1% sometimes attend professional development programmes, 28.1% and 1.4% seldomly attend staff development programme while 2(1.4%) said that they never attend professional development programmes. Similarly, 17(17.2%) of ECE teachers in urban and rural Ondo State said that they always attend professional development programmes, 39(39.4%) sometimes attend staff development programmes, 41(41.4%) seldom attend professional development programmes while 2(2.0%) said they never attend development training. Summarily, only 16.7% of the teachers confirmed that they always attend professional development programmes, 48.2% sometimes attend while 33.5% and 1.6% said that they seldom and never attend professional development programmes in the two states. This indicates that majority of the teachers in the two states do not have regular access to professional development programmes.

Research Question 2: What are the observed behaviours and the practice of the urban and rural Lagos and Ondo ECE teachers in the two states?

Table 5 shows that the participants in Lagos State obtained a mean score and standard deviation of 47.68 and 3.47 as against 47.14 and 3.81 of Ondo State teachers in creating a caring community of learners. However, the mean score of Lagos and Ondo ECE teachers in creating a caring community of learners are very low when compared with the obtainable score of 225 in creating a caring community of learners. Similarly, in teaching to enhance development and learning, Lagos State ECE teachers obtained a mean score and standard deviation of 15.23 and 2.16 as against Ondo State ECE teachers' mean score of 15.21 and 2.18. In addition, Lagos ECE teachers' mean score and standard deviation in constructing/implementing appropriate curriculum were 30.34 and 4.31 as against 30.26 and 4.31 obtained by Ondo State ECE teachers.

Lastly, on assessing pupils' learning and development, Lagos ECE teachers obtained a mean score and standard deviation of 17.46 and 2.21 while their Ondo State counterparts mean score and standard deviation were 17.74 and 1.88 respectively. From the findings therefore, the mean

scores and standard deviations that emerged show that the teachers' performance on DAP variables are very low when compared with the maximum obtainable scores in all DAP variables.

Discussion of Findings

The result of research question one revealed that teachers with NCE qualification constituted the largest number with 66.1% of the teachers in early childhood classrooms in the two states. 14% of the sampled teachers were first degree holders, 15.5% of the teachers were School Certificate holders while only a negligible 3.7% had postgraduate qualifications. This finding negates the stipulations of The National Child Care Association (NCCA) (2007) which advocates in one of its principles that high quality early childhood education requires a highly skilled and specialised workforce that is supported by ongoing professional development. National Association for the Education of Young Children (2008) supports the opinion that children benefit most when their teachers have higher levels of formal education and specialized early childhood professional preparation. The study also revealed that majority of the teachers are not experts where they function. In the same vein, this finding contradicts the scholarly research findings of Ingersoll (2001) who attests to the fact that when teachers function in the areas where they have not been trained, they do more harm to themselves and to the students.

The study also found that teachers rarely had access to in-service training and professional development. This finding negates the authoritative claim of the High/Scope Education Research Foundation (2010) that systematic in-service training for early childhood practitioners produces desired quality, improves the quality of early childhood programmes and promotes children's development. Quoting the assertion of Passes (2009), he said that investing in human capital is the key to increasing the quality of achieving educational outcomes. Teachers' failure to improve themselves professionally is also contrary to the teaching ethics as expressed by Taylor in McComick & James (1983) who stated that one of the essential purposes of organizational provision is to establish, maintain and enhance teacher's commitment to his own education; for any teacher who abdicates his personal and

professional growth to the excessive demand of an organisation is ultimately denying the organisation and its students the very knowledge, skills and understanding which are his professional responsibilities to offer. Dove (2010) confirms that professional development helps teachers to stay up to date with new trends and learn new strategies, techniques and methods for classroom challenges.

The result of research question two revealed that the behaviours of the ECE teachers in Ondo and Lagos States are reflections of Developmentally Inappropriate Practice (DIP) rather than Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP). In the observation carried out by the researcher, the general practices of teachers in most of the classrooms were characteristics of Developmentally Inappropriate Practice (DIP) as enumerated by Copple and Bredekamp (1997).

Implications of the findings

These findings have brought into locus a number of implications for Nigerian government that saddled the private individuals with the responsibility of providing early childhood education for her citizenry. Major among them are:

1. The qualifications of the teachers of these young children leave much to be desired. Much may not be expected from teacher population where teachers with WASC qualification ranked second and only a few had first degree qualifications.
2. The fact that only a few early childhood education teachers are found in the nursery section of the schools is an indication that the government may not be living up to its expectation and promise of training qualified pre-primary school teachers in adequate numbers.
3. The National Policy on Education recognises the primary education as the foundation on which the rest of the educational system is built and that it is the key to success or failure of the whole system. This has implication for abandoning the pre-school education to the private sector. Failure to recognise the important role of early year education as the most important aspect of life that determines the success of latter life has great

implication for the priority the Government of this country places on the education of its young ones.

4. Going by the frequency and scope of in-service training programmes and the numbers of teachers that have access to such programme, the school proprietors seemed to lack the knowledge of the benefits that their teachers would derive from in-service training and professional development programmes.

Recommendations

In order to meet the needs of the 21st Century child the competency level of early childhood education teachers in Nigeria must improve. Therefore, the study makes the following recommendations'-

1. There is a need for the use of an intervention package both at Teacher Training Colleges and professional development courses in the training of ECE experts so as to provide up to date information to the practising teachers.
2. Qualification level of entry into the teaching profession should be raised to first degree and that teaching the young children should be made attractive in such a way that it will endear more teachers with higher qualifications into early years classrooms.
- TV Inspectorate Department should make it compulsory for School Operators to hire experts in the preschool sector. School Operators should be enlightened on the need to employ teachers who have relevant specialization areas that will add values to their businesses.
4. There should be awareness campaigns against developmentally Inappropriate Practice among teachers of ECE. When DIP is deemphasized and monitored, teachers would be encouraged to imbibe DAP.

Summary

This study was set out to assess the knowledge and skills of ECE teachers in *Lagos* and *Ondo* States of Nigeria with a view to providing intervention package to improve teachers' competence to work with young children. Evidences yield by the study revealed that DAPED was effective in enhancing teachers' competence in creating a caring community of learners, teaching to enhance development and learning, construction/implementing and assessing children's learning and development.

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