

Level of Awareness of Developmentally Appropriate Practices Among Preschool Teachers and School Owners Odeda Local Government Area of Ogun State

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Abstract

This study was designed to investigate the level of awareness of DAP among pre-school teachers and pre-school owners/head teachers in Odeda Local Government Area of Ogun State. The study adopted a descriptive survey research type. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 20 pre-schools. Also 160 preschool teachers and 20 preschool owners/head teachers were randomly selected from each of the preschools. One validated instrument tagged "Teachers' Awareness of Developmentally Appropriate Practices (TADAP) Questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. The reliability coefficient of 0.81 was obtained for the instrument reliability. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings from the study revealed that the majority of preschool stakeholders are aware of developmentally appropriate practices through variety of learning areas and projects such as dramatic play, construction, art, music and science experiences that can facilitate cognitive, social, physical and emotional development of the preschoolers. Also, findings revealed that teachers' qualification and teaching experience significantly influence their level of awareness of DAP in pre-school. Based on the finding of this study recommendations were made among others that practicing teachers should be adequately trained on the structure, philosophy and strategies of DAP.

Keywords: Level of Awareness, Developmentally Appropriate Practices, Pre-schools teachers

Introduction

Education is the complete mental and physical transformation of a person(s) as a result of the structured mode of training that the person(s) acquire to be more productive in a given society. Education therefore acts as a way to equip the citizenry with the required knowledge, values, skills and attitude to build a united, strong and an egalitarian society as enumerated in educational goals in the National Policy on Education (2014). Education is the foundation of civilizations over space and time. Thus, it is seen by nations whether developing or developed as the main instrument necessary for the achievement of national security. Many nations therefore invest in education with the hope of achieving the needs of the society that is why Iyo and Daagu (2013) rightly stated that "a well laid educational system of any society translates it's aspirations into reality. The value of education in bringing about character and attitudinal change ranks as important as its ability to change and reshape human potentials for desired development. Education, globally as well as in Nigeria is divided into four levels- pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary education.

Early childhood is a period that ranges from birth to entry into primary school. Although there is no agreed age range for this specific period of children development, the most widely accepted view is from birth to eight years. Early childhood education according to is very important and is the organized practice of educating those who are in the early stages of life, early childhood education lays a solid foundation for future living and learning (Aliyu, 2017) and is one of the most vulnerable stage of life. It is unarguable from the foregoing that early childhood is a unique period of development that shapes the personality of the child. Studies in child psychology reveal that the development of intelligence, affectivity and social relations occur very rapidly in the early years of a person's life. The early years of child development are very important not only because they lay the basis for human development, but also because any experiences a child is exposed to during this time, have a lasting influence in adulthood. As such, a person's future potential is better exploited when proper attention, care and support are accorded as early as possible in one's life(Iyo, 2017).

Generally, ECE is aimed at promoting holistic development of children from birth to age eight (8). According to Olowe, Kutelu, & Majebi (2014), ECE is any group programme that is designed to promote children's intellectual development, socio-emotional development, language development, physical development and learning from birth to age 8. It is pertinent to note that all ECE activities and programmes are geared towards giving positive early experiences to children by teachers. Early childhood teachers are unable to provide children with developmentally appropriate practice without guidelines on which applications are best suited for what age.

The primary focus in early childhood classrooms should be; creative play, real-life experiences, experiences out of the classroom, physical movement, and social interactions with technology and media being introduced in conjunction with the other activities (National Association of Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2012). The problem is that many teachers rely on their basic instincts or previous experiences when implementing computer applications. The role of teachers of young children, therefore, in ensuring developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood education curriculum implementation cannot be overemphasized.

The knowledge, skills, and practices of early childhood educators are important factors in determining how much a young child learns and how prepared that child is for entry into school. Early childhood educators are being asked to have deeper understandings of child development and early education issues; provide richer educational experiences for all children, including those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged; engage children of varying abilities and backgrounds; connect with a diverse array of families; and do so with greater demands for accountability and in some cases, fewer resources, than ever before. The importance of understanding the qualities of early childhood educators that contribute to optimal child learning and development has been heightened in recent years with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and its complement in early childhood policy.

The purpose of this paper therefore is to examine the Awareness of Developmentally Appropriate Practices among Preschool Teachers in Odeda Local Government Area. One of the major roles of preschool teachers of children in ensuring developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood education curriculum implementation. In other words this study looks at teachers' knowledge of developmentally appropriate practice of young children in implementing early childhood education curriculum. This will enable the teachers to be aware and have the correct knowledge of and to ensure developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood education, especially in curriculum implementation as this will enhance appropriate learning in children.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice

Developmentally appropriate practices according to NAEYC publication, 2022, is the collection of research-driven approaches to education that can include best practice principles, reflective teaching, and the body of literature and data that is constantly being compiled on the subject. DAP does not seek to water down skills that children can achieve or push them beyond what they are capable of. Rather, DAP says that teaching should address children where they are at in their growth and learning and then push them further to pursue challenging but achievable

goals for where they are developmentally. It says that this is best practice and is at the core of education and teaching.

Developmentally Appropriate Practices as a conceptual model refers to the instruction practices that are considered appropriate for young children's learning, as outlined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, & Hernandez, 1991). The NAEYC has developed guidelines and principles for teachers, establishing DAP for children birth to eight years old (NAEYC, 2009).

There are five categories of guidelines regarding DAP: teaching to promote learning, facilitating a caring community in the classroom, developing curriculum to achieve goals, establishing relationships with families, assessing children's learning and development and the recently added as a sixth guideline by NAEYC, is the professionalism of the educator in implementing this student-centered practice (NAEYC, 2022). DAP are not just supported by the NAEYC, they are based on theoretical approaches from Piaget (Huffman & Speer, 2017).

Current research points to the importance of creating early childhood care and education environment that reflects developmentally appropriate practices (Bredekamp & Copple, 2009). This standard suggests that activities, interactions, materials, and equipment reflect both the developmental skills of the group and the skills, needs, and interests of every child in the group. Typically, developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) are the result of observations and assessments that guide teachers' knowledge of children over time. Integrating DAP with ongoing assessment offers teachers evidence of children's increasing skills in all developmental domains.

There are several other reasons for the lack of implementation of research-based literacy practices in preschool environments. First, many preschool teachers are insufficiently knowledgeable to implement research-based literacy interventions and practices (Greenwood, et al., 2011). Preschool teachers' preparatory training is often limited, with few preschool teachers securing a bachelor's degree (Greenwood, et al., 2011). Second, there is a high rate of turnover in preschool staff, due to the low wages that preschool teachers tend to make (Greenwood, et al., 2011). Third, there is a lack of quality, continuing professional development that is designed to increase the teachers' knowledge of the best practices that should be implemented in the early childhood education curriculum (Hawken, Johnston & McDonnell, 2005). Developmentally appropriate programs are based on what is known about how children develop and learn; such programs promote the development and enhance the learning of each individual child served. Developmentally appropriate practices result from the process of professionals making decisions about the well-being and education of children based on at least three important kinds of information or knowledge:

1. What is known about child development and learning-knowledge of age-related human characteristics that permits general predictions within an age range about what activities, materials, interactions, or experiences will be safe, healthy, interesting, achievable, and also challenging to children;
2. What is known about the strengths, interests, and needs of each individual child in the group to be able to adapt for and be responsive to inevitable individual variation; and
3. Knowledge of the social and cultural contexts in which children live to ensure that learning experiences are meaningful, relevant, and respectful for the participating children and their families.

Furthermore, each of these dimensions of knowledge-human development and learning, individual characteristics and experiences, and social and cultural contexts-is dynamic and changing, requiring that early childhood educators remain learners throughout their careers.

A huge challenge observed in preschools, in some parts of study area, was that academic activities of Developmentally Inappropriate Practices focus on one dimension of education. Also, children are forced to memorize, which is not in line with developmentally appropriate practices. Implicated too is preschool teachers' perception or belief towards Developmentally Appropriate Practices, and this is in relation to whether these perception and beliefs differ according to their personal views and characteristics.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to assess the level of awareness of developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) on preschoolers learning outcomes. Specifically, the study will be carried out to:

- i. Examine the level of awareness of developmentally practices among pre-school teachers and school owners in Odeda Local Government Area.
- ii. Examine relationship between early childhood pre- school teachers' level of awareness about DAP and length of academic status and field experiences.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of awareness of developmentally practices among teachers and school owners in Odeda Local Government Area of Ogun State?
2. To what extent does length of academic status and teaching experience influence pre-school teachers level of awareness of DAP?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research type. The population for the study comprises of teachers and preschool owners /head teachers in Odeda Local Government Area of Ogun State. The simple random sampling technique was used to select 20 preschools. Also 160 preschool teachers and 20 preschool owners/head teachers were randomly selected from each of the preschools, making a total of 180 preschools teachers in all. Attention was paid to both private and public preschools in the area of study from which respondents were randomly drawn. One research instrument tagged "Teachers' Awareness of Developmentally Appropriate Practices (TADAP) Questionnaire was used to gather information for the study. The instrument was developed by the researcher and used to collect information required for the study. The face and construct validity of the instrument were ascertained by specialists in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) department. The reliability coefficient of 0.81 was obtained for the instrument reliability. The instrument was personally administered on the preschools teachers by the researcher in the selected pre-schools. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation).

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of Level of Awareness of Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP)

	Statement	SA	A	D	\bar{x}	SD
1	Teacher prepares stimulating classroom environment to enhance teaching and learning process in line with DAP	89 (49.4%)	90 (50%)	1 (0.6%)	3.49	.512
2	Teacher selects from a variety of learning areas and projects such as dramatic play, construction, art, music and science experiences among others to facilitate learning	75 (41.7%)	98 (54.4%)	7 (3.9%)	3.38	.561
3	Teacher display his/her arts work in the classroom for preschoolers to learn from	89 (49.4%)	84 (46.7%)	7 (3.9%)	3.46	.572
4	Teacher encourages preschoolers to play with games, puzzles, and construction materials such as Tinker Toys, Bristle Blocks among others	73 (40.6%)	99 (55%)	8 (4.4%)	3.36	.566
5	Teacher must sing, listen and move to music with the preschoolers to improve their musical appreciation	103 (57.2%)	77 (42.8%)	-	3.57	.496
6	Teacher usually works in assigned ability - level groups among preschoolers	96 (53.3%)	83 (46.1%)	1 (0.6%)	3.52	.511
7	DAP suggest systematic learning by preschoolers using appropriate teaching, flexible learning materials and equipment that suit individual preschoolers' abilities	6 (3.4%)	18 (10%)	155 (86.1%)	2.14	.449
8	In developing class activities for preschoolers, teacher should include inputs from the preschoolers	98 (54.4%)	71 (39.4%)	11 (6.1%)	3.48	.612
9	Teacher always should expose the preschoolers to socio -cultural activities in order to enhance their socio -cultural responsiveness	72 (40%)	101 (56.1%)	7 (3.9%)	3.36	.557
10	Teacher believes that DAP take into consideration the developmental needs of the children	78 (43.3%)	102 (56.7%)	-	3.43	.496
		Weighted Mean = 3.32				

The table above revealed the level of awareness of DAP among the pre-school teachers. It was observed that 50% of the respondents agreed that teachers in Odeda facilitated a stimulating classroom environment to enhance teaching and learning process in line with DAP, also 54.4% agreed that teacher selects from a variety of learning areas and projects such as dramatic play, construction, art, music and science experiences among others to facilitate learning. In addition to this, 49.4% of the respondents agreed that teacher display his/her arts work in the classroom for preschoolers to learn from. The table also reveals that 55% of the respondents agreed that teacher encourages preschoolers to play with games,

puzzles, and construction materials such as Tinker Toys, Bristle Blocks among others. In the same vein, 57.2% of the respondents agreed that teacher must sing, listen and move to music with the preschoolers to improve their music appreciation in classroom. A further 53.3% of the respondents strongly agreed that teacher usually works in assigned ability-level groups among preschoolers.

Still, 86.1% of the respondents disagreed that DAP suggests systematic learning by preschoolers using appropriate teaching, flexible learning materials and equipment that suit individual preschoolers' abilities. Also, 54.4% of the respondents agreed that in developing class activities for preschoolers, teacher should include inputs from the preschoolers. Lastly, 56.1% of the respondents agreed that teacher should always expose the preschoolers to socio-cultural activities in order to enhance their socio-cultural responsiveness. 56.7% of the respondents agreed that teacher believes that DAP take into consideration the developmental needs of the children.

Considering the information gathered from table above, it can be seen that the means for the level of awareness of Developmentally Appropriate Practices rise above the criterion mean of 2.00 set for level of awareness of developmentally appropriate practice among teachers. Also, the grand mean of 3.32 is greater than the criterion mean of 2.00 which is set for high level of awareness of developmentally appropriate practices among teachers. This implies that preschool teachers in Ogun State Odeda Local Government Area have high level of awareness of developmentally appropriate practices.

Research Question Two: To what extent does length of academic status and teaching experience influence pre-school teachers level of awareness of DAP?

Table 2: Length of academic status and teaching experience influence pre-school teachers' level of awareness of DAP

Multiple R = .201 ^a , R. Square = .042, Adjusted R Square = .065, Standard Error = 2.347						
Analysis of Variance						
Source of Variance	SS	Df	MS	F	Sig.	Remark
Regression	182.418	2	91.209			Sign.
Residual	1940.180	177	10.961	8.321	.001 ^b	(P<0.05
Total	1752.598	179				

Table 2 show the Model Summary of the regression analysis. The "R" column represents the value of R, the Multiple Correlation Coefficient shows that the multiple correlation coefficients (R) of all the combined independent variables with level of teachers' awareness of DAP are 0.201. The adjusted R2, which estimates the

variance accounted for in the combined independent variables to the dependent variable measure is 0.065 which translates to 6.5% variance in level of teachers' awareness of DAP in pre-schools, was accounted for by the two independent variables (teachers' academic qualification and teaching experience). Also, Table shows in the analysis of variance summary that the regression equation is significantly different from zero and that the combination of the independent variables is effective in predicting level of teachers' awareness of DAP in pre-schools in the study area ($F(2, 177) = 8.321, p < 0.05$). This also implied that the independent variables jointly contributed to level of teachers level of awareness of DAP among pre-schools in the study area.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from this study showed that the majority of preschool teachers and school owners in Odeda Local Government Area are aware of developmentally appropriate practices, and this has been done by selecting from a variety of learning areas and projects such as dramatic play, construction, art, music and science experiences that can facilitate cognitive, social, physical and emotional development of the preschoolers. This finding corroborates with that of Kreader, Ferguson & Lawrence (2005), whose research revealed that developmentally appropriate quality care in just over 8% of infant/toddler classrooms, medium quality care in 51% of infant/toddler classrooms, and poor quality care in more than 40% of infant/toddler classrooms. Also, the majority of the preschool teachers in Ogun State also agreed that they usually work in assigned ability-level groups among the preschoolers. This also corroborates the findings of Sylva, et al (2007) hinged on the fact that a high quality learning environment is one in which the educator builds positive and trusting relationships with the children. It is also in line with the finding of Tu (2006) that early care settings may have learning centres (e.g., art, blocks, computers, dramatic play, language, science) designed for planned activities for children during instructional or free play times and the centres allow educators to facilitate and support a child's learning. In addition, finding revealed that teachers' qualification and teaching experience significantly influence their level of awareness of DAP in pre-school. This finding is in commensurate (NAEYC, 2009) who reported that the skills and qualifications required for pre-school teachers influence their knowledge and perception on the use of DAP to ensure the provision of quality services and the effective implementation of DAP.

Conclusion

The study investigated the awareness of DAP among the pre-school teachers and school owners in Odeda Local Government of Abeokuta. Findings from the study revealed majority of preschool teachers are aware of developmentally appropriate

practices, and this has been done by selecting from a variety of learning areas and projects such as dramatic play, construction, art, music and science experiences that can facilitate cognitive, social, physical and emotional development of the preschoolers. Also, the finding shows that qualification and years of teaching experience significantly influence teachers' level of awareness in the pre-school. That most of the preschool teachers are aware of Developmentally Appropriate Practices in Odeda Local Government Area of Ogun State.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made;

- i. Practicing teachers should be adequately trained on the structure, philosophy and strategies of DAP
- ii. Preschoolers should be exposed to folklore and songs that will help to inculcate societal values and norms in order to enhance moral development and cultural responsiveness of preschoolers.
- iii. Government and other stakeholders in preschool education should provide learning and developmental resources for effective implementation of DAP. Resources such as measuring instruments, thermometer, tape measure, Ruler, Calibrated cups, wall measuring charts (height) health scale with studio metre, weighing scale, outdoor play materials and equipment for such as climbing frame, rocking boats, swings, merry-go rounds slides, slides, see-saw, skipping ropes, Balls among others.
- iv. Parents should ensure that their children are exposed to learning and development that are in accordance with their age and maturation.

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