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Early Childhood Teacher Characteristics and Pupils' Academic Performance in Ilorin South Local Government Area

By

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Abstract

Early childhood education is a starting point for a child's development and the key foundation of the Nigerian educational system. Thus, for a solid foundation to be laid, it is necessary that qualified and experienced teachers are employed to teach and impart knowledge on the young children. This study therefore examined the relationship between early childhood teachers' characteristics (qualification and experience) and pupils' academic performance. The descriptive survey design was used for this study. The sample for this study consisted of 150 nursery pupils selected from five basic schools in Ilorin South Local Government Area. Thirty pupils were randomly selected from each school, which made a total of 150 pupils. Numeracy and Literacy Performance Test (NLPT) as well as a checklist were used as instruments for data collection. The data collected were analysed with the use of Spearman correlation at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of this study revealed that there was a significant relationship between teachers' qualification and pupils' academic performance ($\rho(148) = .530$; $P < 0.05$). There was also a significant relationship between teachers' experience and pupils' academic performance ($\rho(148) = .596$; $P < 0.05$). Based on the findings from this study, it was recommended that qualified teachers (early childhood specialists) should be provided in basic schools and there should be training and retraining for the early childhood education teachers.

Keywords: Teacher qualification and experience, pupils' academic performance, Ilorin South Local Government Area

Introduction

Early childhood education or pre-primary education is defined by the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) as education given in educational settings for children aged 3 to 5 years in preparing their entry into primary school. It includes programmes for infants and toddlers, nursery school, child care and preschool programmes, as well as kindergarten. The majority of the children from ages five to eight years are educated in the kindergarten and primary grades of the public schools. Some are educated in private institutions, while some are taken care of by child care centres (Obiweluzor, 2015).

Child care centres serve the children of parents who cannot be at home full-time to take care of their children. At present, child care is offered in a variety of settings, such as the crèche and day care centres (Situ, Utim & Aliyu, 2009). Young children are cared for in homes, either by relatives or neighbours, or in child care centres. Child care centres offer care and education on a larger scale. They serve three-, four- and five-year-old children as well as infants and toddlers. Often, they also serve school-age children before and after school and when public schools are closed. They open for a long period everyday from 6.00 am to 6.00 pm, depending on the needs of the children's parents. They assume a unique responsibility, supplementing the care of parents who are not available to their children during some part of the day (Obiweluzor, 2015).

Uzoka (2009) states that nursery school education is based on the philosophy of nurturance: a concern for the child's social, physical, emotional and intellectual needs. The nursery school teachers bath children, dress them in clean outfits, provide them with food and rest, make sure that they receive sufficient fresh air and educate them. Also, the children are taught how to care for themselves by washing oneself and taking care of the school environment. Most nursery schools today are concerned primarily with children's education. Most colleges and universities also use the nursery school as a laboratory to prepare early childhood teachers and to conduct research (Situ, Utim & Aliyu 2009). Child care centres differ from nursery schools. The former have longer daily hours and are concerned with caring for and educating children. No one programme or setting can meet all the needs of all young children and their families. Pre-school age is a critical period of rapid physical, cognitive and psychosocial development of the child.

Although appreciable progress has been made in early childhood care and education in the past four years owing to government policy requiring every public school to have a pre-primary school linkage, the proportion of children enrolled in pre-primary early childhood care centres still remains low, at approximately 2.3 million children. This represents about 21 per cent of the population of children in this age group. The caregivers of these centres are generally unqualified: about 85 per cent do not possess basic qualifications and more than half have no formal education (Uzoka, 2009).

Mainstreaming of the early childhood education course into pre-service teacher training is expected to provide strategic solutions to some of the problems encountered by children. The years before a child reaches kindergarten are among the most critical in his or her life to influence learning (ED.gov, 2010); and this becomes a challenge. The commitment of the parents, teachers, community and government is to ensure that these young children receive appropriate training in their early stages of life. Early childhood education programmes are highly recognized and promoted in developed societies to give children the opportunity to acquire a phenomenal amount of experiences at home and surrounding environments. Heward (2009) avers that children grow and develop in orderly ways, learning to move about their world, communicate, and play. As their ability to manipulate their environment increases, so does their level of independence.

Nigeria is currently facing a challenging time in providing her young citizens quality education. Some important issues facing Nigeria's policy makers include ineffective planning and implementation of programmes, accountability, and management of scarce resources, shortage of highly qualified early childhood teachers, undefined curriculum and inclusion. Mindes (2007) asserts that early childhood educators' challenges are enormous and they include parent partnership, respect for cultural diversity, appropriate early intervention assessment, and linking curriculum and assessment practices appropriately.

Ademilola (2002) avers that, at the fore of these challenges facing the educational sector in Nigeria is the poor quality of teachers. Peter Okebukola, former Executive Secretary of National Universities Commission (NUC), in a report by *Daily Sun*, noted that many teachers are exceedingly weak in the subjects they teach. Besides, very little is done to train and retrain teachers in the country and this takes its toll on

the performance of teachers. This training gap creates a vicious cycle that negates the necessary early childhood educational foundations, and inevitably later education (Onu, Obiozor, Agbo, & Ezeanwu 2010).

The importance of teachers and the roles they play in any educational system is significant. Teachers are usually linked to issues related to teaching-learning goals, learning achievement, organization of programmes, and the performance of the educational system, which involves an analysis of the role of teachers, their behaviours, performance, remuneration, incentives, skills and how they are used by the system (Federal Ministry of Education and Youth Development, 1994).

The quality of any education system depends largely on the competence, commitment and motivation of the teachers (Mbanefoh, 2002). The 1993 Summit of the Nine High Population Developing Countries held in New Delhi, India was emphatic about the relevance of quality teacher production in the success of Universal Basic Education. Ede (2003) opines that the success of any system of education depends, to a large extent, on the number of teachers and their quality, their devotion to duty and their effectiveness on the job. Of all the educational problems that beset the African countries today, none is as persistent or as compelling as the one relating to the training of the competent teacher.

As stated in the National Policy on Education (2004), the responsibility of government on pre-primary education shall be to promote the training of qualified pre-primary school teachers in adequate number, and contribute to the development of suitable curriculum, among others. However, Maduewesi (2003) observes that teacher preparation which was promised in the National Policy on Education, is not being implemented. The nursery school curriculum is not actually being planned by qualified the teachers that are adequately trained for that level (early childhood/pre-primary education). This is to say that the characteristics of teachers that are to implement the curriculum is of utmost importance so as to ensure that the right thing is being implemented.

Teacher characteristics refer to attitudes and attributes that teachers bring with them when they enter the classroom, such as expectations for students, collegiality or collaborative nature, race and gender (Ballou & Podgursky, 2000). Wilson (2001) asserts that teacher quality is of important concern to parents and policy makers, but the definition of qualified has come under much scrutiny. Wilson (2001) sees teacher qualifications to be the credentials and knowledge that teachers bring with

them when they enter classroom, some of which include coursework, grades, subject matter education, degrees, test scores, certification and evidence of participation in continued learning, such as internship, induction, supplemental training and professional development. Teacher qualifications help in the regulation of entry into classroom when there are no performance and outcome data for the case of new teachers (Ede, 2003). They are also used as indicators of teacher quality because of the relative ease of and cost effectiveness of data collection, which can be found in public records maintained by states and districts. To some extent, teacher qualifications are effective at identifying teachers who improve the achievement of children (Wilson, 2001). Some teacher qualifications are consistently associated with increased student achievement in particular subject areas.

A study carried out by Darling-Hammond (2001) revealed that major teacher qualification attributes have been shown to produce strong positive effects on student learning. Teachers with stronger knowledge of content matter produce better student achievement compared with less knowledgeable teachers. In the same vein, Goldhaber and Brewer, (2001) found that there was a stronger correlation between the achievement of secondary school students and their teacher's subject area expertise than between the success of younger students and their teacher's subject knowledge.

Another area of interest in this study is teachers' teaching experience. Teaching experience can be perceived as a reliable prediction of a person's ability to handle a certain task. Mbanefoh (2002) avers that successful teaching experience is a valuable asset. Teaching experience can be useful in teaching by ensuring that the teacher selects appropriate models of instruction. It is believed that an experienced teacher is knowledgeable and has gained various skills of teaching by teaching for a long period of time. However, according to Hanushek (2001), this is only applicable in the first five years of teaching. At this period, teachers seem to incrementally contribute to student learning. Experience, especially during the first five years in the classroom, is positively associated with student achievement in mathematics and reading at the elementary and middle school levels.

According to Goe (2007), teacher experience may entail classroom practices that teachers employ. They include the ways in which teachers interact with students and the teaching strategies they use to accomplish

specific teaching tasks. The practices may involve aligning instruction with assessment, communicating clear learning objectives and expectations for student performance, providing intellectual challenges, allowing students to explain what they are learning, using formative assessment to understand what and the degree to which students are actually learning, offering active learning experiences and subscribing to cohesive sets of best teaching practices.

The early childhood age of a child is a very crucial period, as the quality of education given to the child has a long way to determine how he/she will perform in primary school. Although the number of early childhood care centres keeps increasing so as to prepare the child for the primary level of education, the issue of concern is the quality of the teachers that are to impart and care for these young children.

Olaleye (2011) investigated teachers' characteristics as predictor of academic performance of students in secondary schools in Osun State. The study found that teachers who were not qualified lacked the ability to impart the right knowledge in students. Findings of Kesner (2000) and Cadima et al. (2010) indicated that experienced teachers tend to have a positive relationship with their students and this influences.

Despite several works on the problems associated with academic performance, it was discovered that enough emphasis has not been placed on the performance of the early childhood children and the effect of teachers' characteristics on pupils' performance in the Ilorin metropolis. Hence, there is need to carry out research on the influence of teachers characteristics on pupils' performance in the Ilorin metropolis.

Research Hypotheses

The study tested the following hypotheses;

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between teachers' qualification and pupils' academic performance.

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between teachers' experience and pupils' academic performance.

Methodology

The descriptive research design was used for this study. The population for the study consisted of all basic school pupils in Ilorin South Local Government Area. The target population of this study was all lower basic pupils in the study area. The sample for this study comprised 150 nursery

pupils selected from five basic schools in the local government through the use of simple random sampling.

Numeracy and Literacy Performance Test (NLPT) as well as a checklist were used as instruments for data collection. The performance test was administered to the students by the researcher, with the help of research assistants and the early childhood teachers in the sampled schools on the dates approved by the proprietors.

The research questions had corresponding hypotheses and so were not answered. The research hypotheses were tested using Spearman correlation at 0.05 level of significance.

Findings and Discussion

Research Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between teachers' qualification and pupils' academic performance

Table 1: Spearman correlation analysis on the relationship between teachers' qualification and pupils' academic performance

Variables	N	Mean	SD	rho	df	Sig (2 tailed)	Decision
Teachers' Qualification	150	21.6	4.36	0.530	148	.034	Reject
Performance	150	24.8	4.44				

P<0.05

Table 1 shows that Spearman correlation analysis value yielded .530 which was significant with P value .034 < 0.05. This indicated a significant result. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that there is a significant relationship between teachers' qualification and pupils' academic performance ($\rho(148) = .530; P < 0.05$).

This finding is in line with the findings of Darling-Hammond (2001), whose study revealed that major teacher qualification attributes have been shown to produce strong positive effects on student learning. The findings revealed that teachers with stronger knowledge of content matter produced better student achievement compared with less knowledgeable teachers. In the same vein, Goldhaber and Brewer (2001) found that there existed a stronger correlation between the achievement of secondary school students and their teacher's subject area expertise than

between the success of younger students and their teacher's subject knowledge.

Research Hypothesis Two: There is no significant relationship between teachers' experience and pupils' academic performance

Table 2: Spearman correlation analysis on the relationship between teachers' experience and pupils' academic performance

Variables	N	Mean	SD	rho	Df	Sig (2 tailed)	Decision
Teachers' Experience	150	20.2	4.23	0.596	148	.025	Reject
Performance	150	24.8	4.44				

P<0.05

As evident in Table 2, the Spearman correlation analysis value yielded .596, which was significant with P value $.025 < 0.05$. This showed a significant result. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that there is a significant relationship between teachers' experience and pupils' academic performance ($\rho(148) = .596; P < 0.05$).

This result corroborates the assertion of Ballou and Podgursky (2000), that teachers' teaching experience influences students' performance. Experienced teachers tend to teach better than those with no experience. Goe (2007) also states that an experienced teacher is knowledgeable and has gained different skills of teaching by teaching for long period of time. However, according to Hanushek (2001), this is only applicable in the first five years of teaching.

Conclusion

Based on the findings from this study, it was concluded that:

1. There is a significant relationship between teachers' qualification and pupils' academic performance. ($\rho(148) = .530; P < 0.05$).
2. There is significant relationship between teachers' experience and pupils' academic performance ($\rho(148) = .596; P < 0.05$).

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions in this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Qualified teachers (early childhood specialists) should be provided in basic schools
2. There should be training and retraining for the early childhood education teachers so as to equip them with better knowledge and teaching skills and also to enhance better performance.

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