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Welcome to IJE

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TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE OF REFLECTIVE PRACTICES IN CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN KWARA STATE

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Abstract

The study examined the teachers' knowledge of the role of reflective practices and strategies in childhood education in Kwara State. Descriptive survey research was adopted in this study. The population for the study comprised all pre-primary and primary schools' teachers in Ilorin South and Ilorin East Local Government Areas of Kwara State. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 300 teachers from the two randomly selected LGAs. A researchers' self-constructed instrument tagged 'Teachers' Knowledge of the Roles and Strategies of Reflective Practices Questionnaire (TKRSRPQ) with reliability coefficient of 0.78 was used to obtain data from the respondents. Two research questions were raised and answered while four hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Data gathered were analyzed with descriptive statistics of frequency count, percentage and ANOVA statistical analysis. The findings revealed that teachers' knowledge of the roles and strategies of reflective practice in childhood education was low. Based on the findings of this study, recommendations were made that government should constantly organize training programmes for the in-service teachers and courses on reflective practices be included in the curriculum for the training of teachers of early childhood and primary education.

Introduction

In any educational system, teachers are the key actors. They are seen as the crucial principal player in the industry of education who possesses the command of the knowledge and skills to be imparted to the learners. Hence, the quality of teaching and learning outcome is largely dependent on the quality of the teachers. Young children look up to their teachers each day to provide stimulating, engaging and meaningful classrooms. For childhood teachers to meet these expectations and tell they are on the right track there is need for them to take a close look at their own teaching practices, the learning environment and the interactions in the childhood classrooms on a daily basis.

Certainly, it is essential for teachers to engage in reflective instructional dialogue for the purpose of improving instruction and increasing pupils' achievement and also be enriched to respond to the needs of learners and families. Among others, teachers' ability to reflect on their own practices guarantees better improvement on their performance and quality. Without reflection, it is like teaching is in the dark and teaching will not be informed. Reflecting on what and how we teach assists us in becoming more thoughtful, intentional

and effective decision makers with an understanding of how to translate pedagogical knowledge into our own practice and thus come to be effective in our classrooms each day with young children. According to Loughran (2002), reflective practice is like a lens into the world of practice with which a teacher sees his or her own practice through others colleagues' remarks. Katz (2012) sees reflective practice in childhood education as an ongoing process of looking and observing, recording one's own teaching practices and taking action to make improvement in the classroom for young children.

According to Mayr&Ulich (2009), one of the attributes that makes a childhood teacher a professional is his or her ability to be involved in reflective practice. Through reflective practice, professionals gain more understanding of their beliefs and values that advance learning for children. This will enable them to support children from diverse backgrounds and improve their learning (Drury, 2007; Mayr&Ulich, 2009). Reflective practice as a process relies on critical reflection that allows professionals to question their own assumptions about children and their work with them. It offers them opportunity to challenge and change unproductive practice and advanceoutcomes for children with whom they work (MacNaughton, 2003; Raban 2007).

Katz (2012) reemphasized that reflective practice has been so beneficial to the professional development of teachers. Teachers gain enriched understanding of their teaching practices through individual reflection, reflection with partners, reflection in small groups, and school-wide reflection (York-Barr et al., 2001). Through this, teachers are more likely to improve their effectiveness in the classroom and grow professionally. Rudd (2007) concluded that reflective thinking is part of the critical thinking process of evaluating and making conclusions about what has happened which provides an opportunity to reassess and think of the best strategies to achieve our educational and learning goals.

Pollard (2002) identified seven characteristics of reflective practice which can be helpful early childhood and primary education professionals' gain a collective understanding of what reflective practice involves and how it can improve child outcomes. These are paraphrased as having an active focus on goals, how these might be addressed and the potential consequences of these. Also includes, a commitment to a continuous cycle of monitoring practice, evaluating and re-visiting it and a focus on informed judgments about practice, based on evidence. Possessing open-minded, responsive and inclusive attitudes and the capacity to re-frame one's own practice in light of evidence-based reflections and insights based on research. Dialogue with other colleagues, in-house and with external networks and the capacity to mediate and adapt from externally developed frameworks, making informed judgments and defending or challenging existing practice (MacNaughton, 2003; Gahye, 2005; Gruska et al, 2005; Fernsten and Fernsten, 2005).

Pollard (2002) and MacNaughton (2003) believe that reflection can provide both the basis and the motivation for further inquiry which serves as a guide for future behaviour to improve our practice and ultimately the outcomes for children. In childhood education, reflective practice should be a continuous process that would enable professionals to analyze their own practice so as to gain more understanding and identify what impacts or drives their children's learning and development. MacNaughton (2003) states that reflection can provide

childhood professionals with some of the tools required to critique the "big ideas" that shape daily practice. They should be concerned about finding out how things happen and how they can control this. This will help them to reinforce existing understanding and gain new insight.

Reflective practice also brings about a shift in ideologies. For example, a move away from the traditional concept that viewed children as passive recipients of adult intervention who lack the capacity to make their own decisions (Lansdown, Children's Welfare and Children's Rights, 2000) and to the ideology of children as active citizens with their own unique rights. A good knowledge of reflective thinking helps teachers to have a regular assessment of what they do, reasons for doing it and come up with new ideas that can help them to effectively incorporate children's views in their decisions for an improved relationship with children (Amobi, 2005; Broadhead 2006, DEECD, 2009).

Research tells us that educators who have knowledge of the importance of reflective practice regularly reflect on what they do, why they do it and how this new knowledge can be used to improve their practice to achieve the best outcomes for children and families (McNaughton, 2005; Sylva et al, 2004; Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2008; Raban et al, 2007). Reflective practice allows early childhood professionals to develop a critical understanding of their own practice, and continually develop the necessary skills, knowledge and approaches to achieve the best outcomes for children.

As reported by a great deal of international research across a wide range of professional fields, there are multiple methods that can be employed across pre-service and in-service childhood teachers can go about reflection of their (Ovens & Tinning, 2009; Roberts, 2009; Shepherd, 2006). It can be through the keeping of a personal learning journal or diary. These entail an active and conscious process. The teacher does this by asking himself a series of open questions about a particular teaching episode or a critical incident within that episode, and jotting down his observations and conclusions using one of these ways of recording.

Another common way to go on reflective practice is through peer review. This is done by inviting someone, usually a senior colleague into the classroom to view the experiences using another set of eyes. This will thereafter generate professional conversations which enable further analysis to take place. Some investigations might be done through the teacher's talk with expert teachers and so comparing different sorts of evidence of practice. For example, a teacher can make presentation orally to peer group in a small group seminar on a chosen issue or problem. Formal tutorials with a mentor or university tutor are also another way to go on reflection. Here, the key issue is to assist a beginning teacher to develop expertise in engaging in reflective conversations in more structured ways.

Loughran (2006) identified co-teaching as another method childhood educators can go into reflection. Co-teaching provides two teachers, the mentor and beginning teacher with access to possibilities for learning that are not so likely when working alone. Co-teaching revolves around collaboration and teaming in ways that provide professional support for one another which leads to improvements in practice as the sharing with, and learning from, one

another offers meaningful ways of framing and reframing existing practice. This is similar to peer teaching where a group of beginning teachers present while a mentor observes and other members of the group points out areas that need to be improved on. So also, feedback from the learners is a useful and reliable way of reflecting on one's activities in the classroom. Pupils can be asked questions on certain aspects of the teacher's teaching and general dispositions and interaction with them. A review sheet asking them questions on these can also be distributed to them to rate their observations or views of the teacher's performance. Recording can also be made by the teachers and the playback be done to reflect into what have gone in the classroom.

Reflective practice has been recognized by scholars, teacher educators and researchers in the teaching profession worldwide as a vital ingredient of teaching and learning. The importance attached to the development of reflective practice in teachers has been widely recognized by scholars, teacher educators and practicing teachers for several decades. Macdonald and Tinning (2003) saw it as an indispensable part in the preparation of student teachers for the challenges and complexities of working within the classroom environment. Hinde & Reynold (2005) and Russell (2005) who observed that majorities of pre-service and in-service education courses in overseas countries endorse and promote the concept of reflective practice as a learning tool.

Statement of the Problem

It is vital that education keeps pace with the rapid changes taking place in the global economy. The multidimensional, complex and unpredictable environments of childhood classrooms demand that the roles of teachers and teaching strategies be constantly modified to deal with the increasing complex conditions of classrooms and the specific needs of learners. Reflective practices will make this possible and this will eventually result in improvements in teaching and learning. Reflective practice in early childhood and primary education aims to bring about positive change to better respond to the needs of children and families. A child educator should be familiar with the roles of reflective practice and be skillful in the techniques that can be employed in going about reflection in childhood education. There have been studies on reflective practices that have attempted to categorize the diversity of views on the essential nature of reflective practices. A few numbers of empirical studies have also examined the usefulness of reflective teaching or practice in achieving the desired objectives of a particular goal in teaching. Studies on reflective practice have looked into relationship between reflection and teaching performance and teacher-student relationships. Several studies have been conducted on the effectiveness or application of a specific reflective model. Series of studies conducted on reflective practices recognized that it is a vital ingredient of teaching and learning which according to Hinde & Reynold (2005) have prompted the international countries to endorse and promote concept in pre-service and in-service training. However, literature sources of research on reflective practices conducted in Nigeria particularly in Kwara State is few. This calls for empirical studies in the area of reflective teaching which this study intended to fill. First and foremost, there is need to examine the teachers' knowledge of the role and ways of reflective practice

to provide baseline information for further research on this subject. This study therefore, examined the teachers' knowledge of roles and strategies of reflective practices in childhood education Kwara State.

Research Questions

1. What is the teachers' level of knowledge of the roles of reflective practice in childhood Education?
2. What is the teachers' level of knowledge of the strategies of reflective practice in childhood Education?

Hypotheses

H_{01}: There is no significant difference in teachers' knowledge of the role of reflective practices in childhood education based on their years of working experience.

H_{02}: There is no significant difference in teachers' knowledge of the role of reflective practice in childhood education based on their educational qualification.

H_{03}: There is no significant difference in teachers' knowledge of the strategies of reflective practice in childhood education based on their years of working experience.

H_{04}: There is no significant difference in teachers' knowledge of the strategies of reflective practice in childhood education based on their educational qualification.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population comprised all preschool and primary school teachers in Ilorin South and Ilorin East Local Government Areas of Kwara State. A random sampling technique was adopted to select ten schools from each of the two local governments, making a total of twenty schools surveyed in the study. 15 teachers were selected from each school making total of three hundred (300) nursery and primary school teachers used as respondents in the study. A researchers' designed questionnaire titled Teachers' Knowledge of the Roles and Strategies of Reflective Practices Questionnaire (TKRSRPQ) was used to gather information in this study. TKRSRPQ was in essay format and comprised sections A, B and C. Section A collected the demographic data of the respondents. Section B asked respondents to state five roles of reflective practices in childhood education while section C was based on their knowledge of strategies asking them to mention five ways, they can go about reflective practices and marks obtainable in each section was 100 percent. The instrument was given to the lecturers in the Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education, in two universities to check for the face and content validity. Corrections made by the lecturers were affected in the final version of the instrument. The researcher used test-re-test method to test for reliability of the instruments. The reliability coefficient of 0.78 was obtained using Cronbach Alpha. The data collected from the respondents were analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency count, percentage while the hypotheses were tested using t-test and ANOVA statistics

Results

Research Question One: What is the teachers' level of knowledge of the roles of reflective practice in childhood Education?

Table 1: Table showing teachers' level of knowledge of the roles of reflective practice in Childhood Education

Question	Low level (0 – 20 Marks)	Average level (21 – 40 Marks)	High level (41 – 60 Marks)	Mean	S. D
Write 5 roles of reflective practice in childhood education	246 (82.0)	54 (18.0)		1.18	.38

NOTE: The figures in parentheses represent percentages

Table 1 showed the level of teachers' knowledge of the roles of reflective practice in early childhood education. Two hundred and forty-six teachers representing 82% had low level marks of 0 – 20, while fifty-four participant had average level marks of (18.0). The Mean is 1.18 which is a numeric indicator that the participants had low knowledge of the roles of reflective practice in childhood education.

Research Question Two: What is the teachers' level of knowledge of the strategies of reflective practice in childhood education?

Table 2: Table showing teachers' level of knowledge of the strategies of reflective practice in childhood education

Question	Low level (0 – 20 Marks)	Average level (21 – 40 Marks)	High level (41 – 60 Marks)	Mean	S.D
Write 5 ways you can go about reflection as a childhood education teacher	233 (77.7)	67 (22.3)		1.22	.42

Table 2 showed the level of teachers' knowledge of the strategies of reflective practice in early childhood education. Two hundred and thirty-three teachers representing 77.7% had low level marks of 0 – 20, while sixty-seven participants, representing 22.3 %, had average level marks of 21 – 40. The Mean is 1.22 which is a numeric indicator that the participants had low knowledge of the strategies of reflective practice in childhood education

Research Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in teachers' knowledge of the role of reflective practice in childhood education based on their years of working experience.

Table 3: Summary of ANOVA analysis showing the difference in teachers' knowledge of the role of reflective practice in childhood education based on their years of working experience.

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	68.407[a]	2	34.203	.714	.491
Intercept	101130.834	1	101130.834	2110.128	.000
Years of Experience	68.407	2	34.203	.714	.491
Error	14234.140	297	47.926		
Total	118612.000	300			
Corrected Total	14302.547	299			

a. R Squared = .005 (Adjusted R Squared = -.002)

Table 3 showed that there is no significant difference in teachers' knowledge of the role of reflective practice in childhood education based on their years of working experience ($F_{(2, 297)} = .714$; $P > .05$). The hypothesis is therefore not rejected in the light of the result.

Research Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in teachers' knowledge of the role of reflective practice in childhood education based on their educational qualification.

Table 4: Summary of ANOVA analysis showing the difference in teachers' knowledge of the role of reflective practice in childhood education based on their educational qualification

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	262.448[a]	2	131.224	2.776	.064
Intercept	91810.173	1	91810.173	1942.125	.000
Educational Qualification	262.448	2	131.224	2.776	.064
Error	14040.099	297	47.273		
Total	118612.000	300			
Corrected Total	14302.547	299			

a. R Squared = .018 (Adjusted R Squared = .012)

Table 4 showed that there is no significant difference in teachers' knowledge of the role of reflective practice in childhood education based on their educational qualification ($F_{(2, 297)} = .2.776$; $P > .05$). The hypothesis is therefore not rejected in the light of the result.

Research Hypothesis Three: There is no significant difference in teachers' knowledge of the strategies of reflective practice in childhood education based on their years of working experience.

Table 5: Summary of ANOVA analysis showing the difference in teachers' knowledge of the strategies of reflective practice in childhood education based on their years of working experience.

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	73.443[a]	2	36.722	.808	.447
Intercept	98060.648	1	98060.648	2158.941	.000
Years of Experience	73.443	2	36.722	.808	.447
Error	13489.953	297	45.421		
Total	114727.000	300			
Corrected Total	13563.397	299			

a. R Squared = .005 (Adjusted R Squared = -.001)

Table 5 showed that there is no significant difference in teachers' knowledge of the strategies of reflective practice in childhood education based on their years of working experience ($F_{(2, 297)} = .808$; $P > .05$). The hypothesis is therefore accepted.

Hypothesis Four: There is no significant difference in teachers' knowledge of the strategies of reflective practice in childhood education based on their educational qualification.

Table 6: Summary of ANOVA analysis showing the difference in teachers' knowledge of the strategies of reflective practice in childhood education based on their educational qualification.

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	178.440[a]	2	89.220	1.980	.140
Intercept	88457.215	1	88457.215	1962.785	.000
Educational Qualification	178.440	2	89.220	1.980	.140
Error	13384.957	297	45.067		
Total	114727.000	300			
Corrected Total	13563.397	299			

a. R Squared= .013 (Adjusted R Squared = .007)

Table 6 showed that there is no significant difference in teachers' knowledge of the strategies of reflective practice in Early Childhood Education based on their educational qualification ($F_{(2, 297)} = .1.98$; $P > .05$). The hypothesis is therefore not rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The finding of the study revealed a low level of knowledge of the roles and strategies of reflective practice among teachers of childhood education. This is contrary to the assertion of Reynold (2005) that the majorities of preservice and in-service education courses endorse and promote the concept of reflective practice as learning tool. Based on this statement, the expectation is that all pre-service and in-service models have content on reflective practice and so; the teachers, having gone through the training of pre-primary and primary education should have understanding of the important roles of reflective practices and be knowledgeable in the use of the strategies of reflection in childhood education.

This is also not in agreement with Drury (2007); Li, D'Angiulli& Kendall (2007); Mayr&Ulich (2009) who identified that one of the attributes that makes a childhood teacher a professional is his or her ability to be involved in reflective practice. It is recognized that teachers develop deeper awareness and understanding of their own practice and are able to improve on it in order to advance children's learning. Macdonald and Tinning (2003) submitted that the development of reflective practice has been acknowledged as a vitally important component in initial teacher education in order to prepare student teachers for the tasks and intricacies of working with children. This result did not also conform to the report of Siraj- Blatchford, Sammonds, Taggart, Sylva, Melushi and Manni (2008) that teachers who had knowledge of reflective practice can improve their practice and achieve the best outcomes for children and families. The teachers did not indicate that reflective practice could provide them with the tools required to improve their daily practice which clearly revealed their lack of knowledge of the role reflection can play on their effective practice. Once the result showed that the teachers don't have knowledge of reflective practice it should be expected that they could not have knowledge of its strategies. This is confirmed in the submission of Rudd (2007) that reflective practice should give teachers opportunity to think of best strategies touse in going about reflection to achieve better outcomes in their children's learning. The assumption here is that if they have knowledge of the roles of reflective practice, they will be attuned to using the strategies.

Further, the result showed no significant difference in teachers' knowledge of the roles and strategies of reflective practice in childhood education based on their years of working experience. This is against the assertion of Kniper (2008) that newly appointed teachers are likely to have inadequate knowledge in their chosen areas of practice and Harris & Tim (2007) that experience teachers show more competence in teaching and are more effective in their practice. The anticipation was that teachers who have spent longer years in the class would have better knowledge as it is believed most times that the longer one stays in a profession the more experience he or she gains to operate and the competence to perform better. This is confirmed by Abu & Fabunmi (2005) and Akinsolu (2010), who found that teacher teaching experience correlated significantly and positively with students'

academic performance. Teachers' years of teaching experience for a while has been taken to have influence on their attitude or disposition to some educational practices which is reflected in their students' performance.

Likewise, the result showed no significant difference in teachers' knowledge of the roles and strategies of reflective practice in childhood education based on their educational qualifications. This not in support of Akpo (2012) who reported from his studies on the impact of teacher-related variables on students' junior secondary certificate mathematics results in Namibia that teacher educational qualifications are related to students' academic achievement. This is also not agreeing with the submission of Adeyemi & Adu (2012) that teachers with background in education can have better knowledge of teaching strategies and some educational practices. Particularly, teachers with educational qualification in childhood education can have a better understanding of the role and strategies of reflective practices in childhood education.

Conclusion

From this study, it can be concluded that early childhood teachers in Kwara State had low level of knowledge of the roles and strategies of reflective practices and the teachers' educational qualification and the years of teaching experience have no influence on their level of knowledge of the roles and strategies of reflective practice. Teachers are also learners. Literature shows that one of the crucial ways they learn is by engaging in reflective practice. Childhood education teachers will become more effective through critical reflection and a strong culture of professional enquiry. Opportunities for continuing professional development of teachers and reflective practices should therefore be created and exploited to the maximum as this can bring a positive change into Nigeria educational practices

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

- There should be a concerted effort among universities and institutions of higher learning involved in teacher training of childhood educators to incorporate reflective practice into their curriculum in order to develop a reflective culture among the teachers.
- Government can also organize regular training programme like seminar, workshop and conference for in-service teachers of childhood education so as to enlighten them on reflective practices and its importance to their professional development.

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