

ASSESSMENT OF THE PEDAGOGICAL SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES AMONG EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS IN NSUKKA URBAN, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the extent of acquisition of pedagogical skills and competencies among early childhood educators in Nigeria's Nsukka municipality. The research utilized a descriptive research approach. A total of 62 educators were randomly selected from 31 grade schools in Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria, using a basic random selection technique. A researcher-made instrument: Teachers' Pedagogical Skills and Competencies Questionnaire (TPSCDQ) was used for data collection. A total of 62 copies of questionnaires were administered, with two copies for each school. This gives a total sample size of 62 participants. ANOVA was used to test hypotheses concerning the influence of teaching experience on the independent variable, while descriptive statistics was deployed in measuring the level of growth of educators' pedagogical skills and competencies. For data screening and analysis, SPSS version 20 was utilized. To test statistical significance, a 0.05 statistical significance criterion was employed. Childhood educators in Nsukka, Nigeria, were found to have a low level of pedagogical skills. In Nsukka, Nigeria, there is also a scarcity of core pedagogical competencies among teachers and educators. According to the findings of the study, teaching experience has no significant impact on pedagogical skills among childhood educators. The data also demonstrated that among childhood educators, teacher experience is not a significant factor of pedagogical competencies growth.

Keywords: Pedagogical skills, Pedagogical Competencies, Childhood Educators

Introduction

Substandard early childhood education and care (ECEC) can adversely affect children's development, resulting in negative social, emotional, educational, health, economic, and behavioural outcomes. Effective pedagogical skills and competencies are key factors in teaching and learning at the early stage of children's lives (Manning et al, 2019). In Nigeria, there is an apparent lack of effective pedagogical skills and competencies among early childhood educators. The importance of education at early childhood education is critical and has led to a rise in the clamour for more effective professional skills among educators (Bellm, 2008). There is a growing understanding that all children must be prepared to participate in an increasingly globalised environment (An 2014; Gaudelli 2009; Osler and Starkey 2005). It is clear from the literature that the knowledge, abilities, and practices of early childhood educators all play significant roles in how much a child learns and how well equipped they are for pre-primary and primary education (Mligo, Mitchell, & Bell, 2016). As part of their responsibility as early educators, early childhood educators must have an in-depth understanding of child development and issues related to early childhood education; to

provide rich educational experiences for all children, including those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged; to engage children of varying abilities and backgrounds; and connect with children from a variety of backgrounds and abilities; all while facing increasing accountability demands and, in some cases, fewer resources (Sherida et al, 2009).

The extent of pupils' learning is greatly determined by their teachers and instructors. As a result, teachers play a significant role in ensuring that young children acquire the necessary skills needed for a hitch-free growth and optimal development (Ramsaroop & Rooyen, 2013). The teachers play a crucial role in the development of children as successful learners, assertive, creative people, and engaged, and enlightened citizens; teachers are among the most valuable resources in any school (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2011). There are several factors that influence the early learning environment, including school culture, teacher experience, relationships, knowledge, beliefs, expectations, and practices. Several studies have been carried out in Nigeria on how teachers' years of experience affects their pedagogical knowledge and skills, but few have examined the impact of teachers' years of experience on their pedagogical knowledge (Amosun & Kolawole, 2015). In Nigeria, it is very common to find school leavers who are employed to teach in early childhood centres. These school leavers lack the basic skills needed to handle children in the formative stage of learning. A teacher with the requisite pedagogical knowledge and skills may assume the role of facilitator, coach, role model, evaluator and care giver who navigates the intricate role of nurturing children in their early years of life. It is, however, important to note that effective pedagogical skills enable teachers to adopt the most suitable practices and approach for an early learning classroom setting. According to Jacob, John and Gwany (2020), a teacher who has an effective pedagogical skill and competencies knows how different pupils learn and grasp information and will ultimately tailor their lessons to achieve these needs. It has been suggested by Amosun and Kolawole (2015) that effective pedagogy helps teachers develop curricula that build on learners' existing knowledge and understanding and move them into higher-level skills, knowledge, concepts, and achievements.

An individual's ability to teach that is developed through years of experience and intensive training is known as pedagogical knowledge. To be effective, teachers must be capable of teaching the material (Hill, Rowan, & Ball, 2005). Pedagogical knowledge and abilities focus on methods and approaches used in instruction that facilitate learning. The importance of instructional knowledge and abilities cannot be overstated. Aside from providing teachers with a better understanding of the different forms of play, the various strategies for grouping students, as well as various types of media and materials, it also assists them in thinking about which methods, strategies, materials, and resources to employ in particular learning situations (Hieu & Nam, 2018). A teacher with pedagogical knowledge and skills can provide facilitation, coaching, role modeling, evaluating, supervising, and advocating for students (Ramos et al, 2022).

According to Gokkurt-Ozdemir et al (2017), pedagogical skills are crucial to achieving the highest level of success in teaching. Julie (2015) argue that teachers should possess three major types of knowledge: content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge. It is imperative that a teacher possess both subject matter or content knowledge and knowledge of how to support the learning

of pupils. According to Sothayapetch, Lavonen, and Juuti (2013), teachers teach students how to learn and help them implement learning models that promote academic, social, and personal development. This is similar to what Williams (2003) states; in order for students to achieve their full potential, teachers must pay more attention to the interaction between the science of teaching pedagogy — and the art of teaching, which serves as the competence-base. Increasing concerns in the education industry regarding teacher quality necessitate a critical examination of what pedagogical skills and competencies are (Jacob, John & Gwany, 2020).

It is generally believed that educators gain pedagogical abilities and competencies through appropriate training and experience, as described by Ishola and Udofia (2017). In addition to their pedagogical abilities and capabilities, teachers' years of experience is another important factor. The number of years of experience refers to the period a teacher has spent in the classroom as well as how often they have attended professional development courses (Bolarinwa et al, 2020). According to Rodriques and Mckay (2010), experienced teachers are those with a long history of teaching (five years or more) and are capable of motivating and holding the attention of their students, as well as managing the classroom effectively. Also, the subject matter of a lesson may change during the lesson. Similarly, Brandenburg, McDonough, Burke, and White (2016) contend that teachers' years of experience are crucial to the improvement of more effective and refined pedagogical skills and competences. As Brandenburg et al (2016) demonstrate in public discourse, the years of experience of teachers directly relate to the quality and efficacy of teaching.

However, recent research has revealed a complex, non-linear, and cynical relationship, with experience being one of many factors influencing teaching quality and level of acquisition of pedagogical skills and competencies (Graham, White, Cologon & Pianta, 2020). Despite this, there have been contradictory research findings regarding the importance of teachers' experience in teaching effectiveness. According to Ladd (2008), the impact of experience is greatest during the first few years of teaching, with marginal gains diminishing after that. Several studies back up conclusions from previous research, indicating that novice teachers are less successful on average than those with some experience (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor 2007). Early career experience has a significant impact on teacher effectiveness, which is greater than the effects of most other observable teacher-related characteristics. Darling-Hammond (2009) found that teachers who have been teaching for more than 10 years are more effective in teaching and possess more effective pedagogical skills and expertise than those with little or no experience, but they are not more proficient than teachers with less than five years of experience.

It is imperative that, to ensure that pupils achieve a wide range of their educational objectives, a variety of teaching methods, experiences, and approaches (Okpala & Ellis, 2005). Although most researchers agree that teachers' pedagogical skills contribute significantly to student achievement, there are still doubts about the extent of acquisition of these skills and competencies among Nigerian early childhood educators. It is still unclear how years of experience of the teachers contribute to the acquisition of these skills and competencies. It is expected that the findings of this study will serve as strong empirical evidence for literature relating to the requirements for pedagogy and competency related issues in early childhood education and care. This

study is expected to provide valuable and useful insights for early childhood educators, schoolteachers and relevant educational authorities who oversee developing and implementing competency framework policies related to enhanced early childhood education.

Research Objectives: the research aims to:

1. Assess the pedagogical skills and competencies among early childhood educators.
2. Assess the pedagogical competencies among early childhood educators.
3. Assess influence of teaching experience on the pedagogical skills among early childhood educators.
4. Assess the influence of teaching experience on the pedagogical competencies and skills among early childhood educators.

Research Questions

1. What are the pedagogical skills and competencies adopted by early childhood educators?
2. What are the pedagogical competencies adopted by early childhood educators?
3. What is the influence of teaching experience on pedagogical skills among early childhood educators?
4. What is the influence of teaching experience on the pedagogical competencies among early childhood educators?

Hypotheses

Ho₁: There is no significant influence of teaching experience on pedagogical skills among early childhood educators

Ho₂: There is no significant influence of teaching experience on the pedagogical competencies among early childhood educators

Research Method

Ethical approval

Before selecting early childhood education teachers for the study, the researchers got authorization from the Chairman of the Enugu State Universal Basic Education Board. Each questionnaire came with an informed consent letter that outlined the study's goals and promised participants that their replies would be kept private. Respondents were given the option of participating (by completing out questionnaires) or declining to participate (by not filling out the questionnaires). The participants were not offered any incentives. However, in order to ensure that the teachers provided accurate responses, the researchers enlisted the support of research assistants to conduct the surveys.

Study design

A descriptive survey research design was used in this study. To assure the objectivity of the researchers in data gathering, the study was conducted using a quantitative paradigm.

Study sample

The research was carried out in Enugu state, Nigeria, in the Nsukka urban region. Because the study's focus was on teachers' pedagogical skills and competencies, particularly those who teach in the early childhood centres, a total of 31 schools were chosen at random. Two early childhood educators were chosen at random from each of the schools. This results in a total sample size of 62. The opinions of these teachers were gathered through a survey. The essential information was correctly filled in the questionnaires and collected on the spot with the assistance of the study assistants. When the questionnaire replies were screened, they were found to be valid. This equates to a response rate of 98 percent. There were 5 (8.3%) males and 57 (91.7%) females in the group. Their experience ranged from seven to nineteen years. In terms of education credentials, 45 educators (72 percent) have a bachelor's degree, while 17 teachers (27.2 percent) have a National Certificate in Education. All of the teachers who were recruited for the study had attended at least two in-service training seminars in the previous year.

Procedure

The researchers hired the school supervisor as a research assistant after randomly picking two teachers from each of the elementary schools in the Urban Area. The research assistants had gone through extensive training. Basic knowledge of the research objectives, random sampling methodologies, and best practices for administering study surveys to achieve high response rates and avoid response bias were covered in the training. Following the training, the research assistants selected early childhood educators in their respective schools using random sampling and administered the questionnaires to them. The questionnaires were distributed over a three-week period. The researchers used questionnaires to extract information from participants regarding their level of acquisition and growth of pedagogical knowledge and competencies in the teaching profession for this study's data collection. Sections A and B make up the Teachers' Pedagogical Skills and Competencies Development Questionnaire-TPS-CDQ. The biographical information about the early childhood educators was elicited in Section A. Early childhood educators were instructed to provide information on their years of teaching experience, qualifications, and the number of workshops and training sessions they have attended while on the job. Teachers' pedagogical abilities and competencies, as well as their broad knowledge of subject, understanding, and attitudes toward the entire teaching and learning process, were needed to be included in Section B. The TPS-CDQ was administered across the schools during a normal briefing by school supervisors. The researchers gathered the questionnaires at the conclusion of this time period for screening and analysis. To avoid analyst bias and to safeguard respondents' identities, several elements of the questionnaire were hidden from the analysts. Questionnaires containing missing or incorrect information were rejected. Descriptive statistics were utilized to estimate the level and efficacy of educators' pedagogical skills and competencies development, while ANOVA was employed to test hypotheses about the influence of teaching experience on the independent variable. SPSS version 20 was used for data screening and

analysis. A 0.05 threshold of statistical significance was used to test statistical significance.

Results

Research Question One: What are the pedagogical skills of early childhood educators in Nsukka Urban, Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean analysis of the pedagogical skills of early childhood educators

Item statement	n	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remark
Knowledge of approaches to teaching and learning	62	2.24	1.33	LE
Knowledge of teaching methodologies and techniques	62	2.35	1.05	LE
Sound knowledge of written and spoken language of instruction	62	2.58	1.31	HE
Ability to interpret syllabus content effectively	62	2.12	1.20	LE
Preparation of scheme of work and daily lesson plans	62	2.64	1.30	HE
Demonstration of high-quality teaching skills for achieving lesson objectives	62	2.33	1.10	LE
Use of ICT to enhance pupils learning	62	2.08	1.24	LE
Effective use of teaching methods	62	2.35	1.07	LE
Giving alternative explanation/ description of difficult concepts/ideas/issues	62	2.19	1.06	LE
Developing appropriate local teaching/ learning materials	62	1.87	1.19	LE
Possession of verbal and non-verbal communication skills.	62	2.19	1.02	LE
Ability to manage large, mixed ability, and multi-level classes effectively	62	2.46	1.31	LE
Monitoring students' progress and providing feedback	62	2.24	1.33	LE
Monitoring and assessing pupils progress and learning outcomes	62	2.40	1.20	LE
Using feedback from assessment to plan and organize remedial work	62	2.46	1.23	LE
Overall Mean	62	34.56	16.89	LE

Table 1 shows that the mean ratings of the early childhood educators on items 1, 2, 4, 6 to 15 with respect to their pedagogical skills on those items are within the mean range of 1.50 to 2.49 indicating a low extent of pedagogical skills. On the other hand, their mean ratings on items 3 and 5 are within the mean range of 2.50 to 3.49 indicating a high extent of pedagogical skills with respect to those items. The overall mean rating of 34.56 with a standard deviation of 16.89 implies that the early childhood educators in Nsukka Urban Nigeria had low level of pedagogical skills.

Research Question Two: What are the pedagogical competencies adopted by early childhood educators in Nsukka Urban, Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean analysis of the pedagogical competencies of early childhood educators

Item statement	n	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remark
Thorough knowledge and understanding of the curriculum	62	1.9032	1.14103	LE
Application of curriculum knowledge across subjects	62	2.0968	1.00343	LE
Modifying language to suit the level of learners	62	2.0645	1.00606	LE
Understanding the responsibilities and obligations of the teaching profession	62	1.7581	1.01925	LE
Knowledge of how pupils develop and learn	62	2.3548	1.17483	LE
Sound knowledge of subject taught	62	2.1129	1.02597	LE
Basic knowledge of child development and psychology	62	1.7742	1.13685	LE
Creating a safe, healthy, supportive, and stimulating learning environment	62	2.2903	1.03047	LE
Communicates effectively where appropriate with community representative	62	2.3065	1.19547	LE
Taking cognizance of the individual differences of pupils	62	2.4677	1.21085	LE
Use of appropriate assessment criteria in making a formative and summative judgment about attainment	62	2.4677	1.21085	LE
Monitoring learners' progress during and after the lesson using quizzes, tests. Etc	62	2.2581	1.10045	LE
Adherence to ethical assessment practices and ensuring confidentiality	62	2.2097	1.34453	LE
Effective use of reinforcements	62	2.1452	1.03776	LE
Effective use of instructional/teaching aids	62	2.0645	1.34129	LE
OverallPC	62	32.2742	14.25778	LE
Valid N (listwise)	62			

Table 2 shows that the mean ratings of the early childhood educators on items 16 to 30 with respect to their pedagogical competencies on all the items are within the mean range of 1.50 to 2.49 indicating a low extent of pedagogical competencies among early childhood educators. On the other hand, there is no item with a mean rating above 2.49 indicating a low extent of pedagogical competencies across all the items. The overall mean rating of 32.27 with a standard deviation of 14.25 implies that the childhood educators in Nsukka Urban Nigeria had low level of pedagogical competencies.

Research Question Three: What is the influence of teaching experience on the pedagogical skills among childhood educators?

Table 3: Mean analysis of the pedagogical skills ratings of the early childhood educators based on years of teaching experience

Years of experience	n	Mean	Std. Deviation
1-5 years	15	34.73	17.34
6-10 years	21	36.33	18.85
11-15 years	12	29.50	14.87
16 years and above	14	36.07	15.83

Table 3 shows that childhood educators who had 1-5 years of teaching experience had mean rating of ($M = 34.73$, $SD = 17.34$), those who had 6-10 years of teaching experience had mean rating of ($M = 36.33$, $SD = 18.85$), those who had 11-15 years of teaching experience had mean rating of ($M = 29.50$, $SD = 14.87$), while those who had 16 years and above of teaching experience had mean rating of ($M = 36.07$, $SD = 15.83$).

Ho₁: There is no significant influence of teaching experience on pedagogical skills among early childhood educators

Table 4: Analysis of variance of the difference in the pedagogical skills mean ratings of early childhood educators

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Decision
Between Groups	405.713	3	135.238	.461	.711	Not Sig.
Within Groups	17015.529	58	293.371			
Total	17421.242	61				

Table 4 revealed that there is no significant influence of teaching experience on the pedagogical skills among childhood educators, $F(3, 61) = .461$, $p = .711$. Thus, the null hypothesis is not rejected ($p > .05$).

Research Question Four: What is the influence of teaching experience on the pedagogical competencies among childhood educators?

Table 5: Mean analysis of the pedagogical competencies' ratings of the early childhood educators based on years of teaching experience

	n	Mean	Std. Deviation
1-5 years	15	32.07	14.77
6-10 years	21	34.24	15.81
11-15 years	12	27.42	11.58
16 years and above	14	33.71	13.80
Total	62	32.27	14.26

Table 5 shows that childhood educators who had 1-5 years of teaching experience had mean rating of ($M = 32.06$, $SD = 14.76$), those who had 6-10 years of teaching

experience had mean rating of ($M = 34.23$, $SD = 15.81$), those who had 11-15 years of teaching experience had mean rating of ($M = 27.41$, $SD = 11.57$), while those who had 16 years and above of teaching experience had mean rating of ($M = 33.71$, $SD = 13.80$).

Ho₂: There is no significant influence of teaching experience on the pedagogical competencies among early childhood educators

Table 6: Analysis of variance of the difference in the pedagogical competencies mean ratings of early childhood educators

OverallIPC

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Decision
Between Groups	393.822	3	131.274	.634	.596	Not Sig.
Within Groups	12006.517	58	207.009			
Total	12400.339	61				

Table 6 revealed that there is no significant influence of teaching experience on the pedagogical competencies among childhood educators, $F(3, 61) = .634$, $p = .596$. Thus, the null hypothesis is not rejected ($p > .05$).

Discussion and educational implications

According to the findings of this study, the early childhood educators in Nsukka, Nigeria, possessed a low level of pedagogical skills. This finding is consistent with the findings of Jacob et al (2020), who discovered a gross lack of pedagogical skills among early childhood educators. Similarly, the results also showed that there is a lack of pedagogical competencies among early childhood educators in Nsukka, Nigeria. This finding contradicts the findings of Gokkurt-Ozdemir, Sahin, Basibuyuk, Erdem, and Soylu (2017), who reported that effective teaching requires pedagogical skills. Teachers and educators must possess the necessary abilities for optimum classroom delivery, according to the authors, for instruction to operate smoothly and create the highest output in terms of intended educational results.

Furthermore, the study's findings suggest that teaching experience has no substantial impact on pedagogical skills among childhood instructors. As a result, the null hypothesis is not ruled out. This study supports Graham et al. (2020) who found a complex, non-linear, and cynical connection between multitudes of parameters, with experience being one of several determinants impacting teaching quality. This demonstrates that teacher experience is not a significant determinant of pedagogical skill growth among childhood educators. As a result, the null hypothesis is not ruled out. This conclusion contradicts the findings of several research, including Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor (2007), which found that beginner teachers are less successful than those with some experience. The need for early childhood educators to be well equipped with trending and effective pedagogical skills and expertise cannot be overemphasized because the quality of early childhood educators reflects directly on the quality of skills, knowledge and entire learning. Research has shown that children under the care of high

quality ECEC settings grow up to be more knowledgeable and productive adults (Siraj et al, 2016). The role of well skilled ECEC teacher significantly determine the level of children's learning. This means that improvements in quality in ECEC settings lead to enhanced cognitive, social and emotional benefits. In line with the finding of this study, it was indicated that educators' years of experience has little impact on the extent of pedagogical skills and competencies. This indicates that modern and effective pedagogical skills and competencies are not actually a product of experience rather a conscious effort towards acquiring functional skills towards nurturing young learners. These findings are particularly important as it has implications for educators, teachers, headteachers and curriculum planners as it will prioritise modern pedagogical approaches and skills. These skills will enhance the productivity and output of the educators in early childhood education centres in Nigeria. It is imperative to note that both novice and experienced teachers in early childhood centres undertake trainings and workshops to boost their skills and expertise in early childhood care and education.

Conclusion

In classroom education, pedagogical skills and competences are critical. It is a word used in education to define various interconnected fields of knowledge that are valuable to teachers in both the classroom and out of the classroom. Subject-specific content knowledge and understanding of the technique employed in teaching a subject are the most essential domains. A pedagogical skills and competences in the teaching and learning process refers to a teacher's ability to impart the subject matter's conceptual approach, relational understanding, and adaptive reasoning. Teachers who lack a thorough understanding of pedagogical abilities and competencies may find it challenging to properly teach the subject.

The growth of pedagogical subject knowledge is crucial for the early childhood educator, according to the study paper. Teachers should be well-versed in the material areas and pedagogy that they are responsible for instructing; otherwise, pupils may struggle to learn. Furthermore, the current study found that enhancing instructors' pedagogical skills and competences might lead to better instructional practices and, as a result, better academic accomplishment for pupils. Also, the number of years a teacher has been in the classroom is not a big influence in evaluating their effectiveness. Finally, the findings demonstrate that teachers with a diverse set of pedagogical skills and competencies are more effective educators.

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