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TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF ASSESSMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN OYO STATE

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Abstract

In Early Childhood Education assessment is an issue because of its many roles. To better understand children's overall development and monitor their progress through the curriculum and as well identify children who are at risk of academic failure or who may need special education services, and for us to assess the value or worth of the programme, assessment is essential. All these enormous roles are enough rationale for child educators to have right perception of assessment in early childhood education. This study examined teachers' perception of assessment in early childhood education. Descriptive survey method was adopted. Three research questions were answered and two hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. Two hundred (200) early childhood education teachers from both urban and rural were involved in the study. Teachers' Perception of Assessment Questionnaire (TPAQ) was used to collect data. Data collected were analyzed through tables, frequency counts, percentages and mean rating statistical techniques. Results show that the early childhood teachers do not have right perception of assessment in early childhood education and that the predominant method of assessment among them is paper and pencil. Therefore, the study recommended that teacher preparation programmes should include courses in assessment and child observation, and teachers already in the classroom should be trained in the use of purposeful observation, documentation, and analysis of assessment data.

Keywords: Perception, Assessment, Knowledge,

Introduction

Assessment in Early Childhood Education should focus on the total development of the child. It should entail a variety of strategies to determine the development of individual children. McAfee, Leong, and Bodrova (2004) define assessment as the process of gathering information about children from several forms of evidence, then organizing and interpreting that information. In order to make it meaningful, assessment in Early Childhood Education should be on-going because early childhood is a dynamic period (birth until eight years) during when a child experiences rapid growth. Thus, for those working with children at this age level to have valid and reliable information concerning a child's development, it would require them to cover every aspect of a child's development (physical, social, emotional and intellectual). To achieve this, the teacher is expected to use variety of techniques and tools to generate information on the child kept under his/her care.

Assessment is more than just testing which is a sample of behaviour or knowledge taken at a specific time. Testing is one of several components of assessment that appropriately applies systematic measures of skills. It measures prescribed body of knowledge and stresses level of mastery of a subject matter. It is a sample of behaviour in a particular domain such as literacy and numeracy. In testing, teachers elicit specific responses from children and the children's responses are scored in a numerical fashion. Brewer (2007) submitted that assessment covers a much longer timeframe and attempts to sample a much broader spectrum of knowledge or behaviour.

Assessment is vital to Early Childhood Education because of the various purposes it serves. Recommendation from the field and the professional literature indicate that early care and education programmes should incorporate into their services, coherent systems of assessment organized to address the following purposes:

Diagnostic and Screening: To identify possible developmental problems or potential problems in learning and development so that necessary remediation will be made early in life for positive developmental and academic outcomes.

Instructional: To gather information about a child's performance in order to plan an educational and developmental programmes that meet the child's specific needs to improve the quality of their care and education environment. It allows those working with the child to understand a child's competencies and design learning environment and activities that will help a child to grow to his or her developmental level.

Monitoring: Assessment helps to monitor development of children in the three domains of learning (cognitive, affective and psychomotor) and risks to development for purposes of ensuring adequate progress and rule out health-related challenges to normal development.

Programme Evaluation: Assessing children in their early years helps the providers to evaluate the childhood programmes and provide information and data on programme outcomes for purpose of programme improvement.

For assessment to be relevant or be regarded as a quality one in Early Childhood Education, there are some basic principles it should follow and qualities it should have.

- Assessment should bring about benefits for children. Assessments should be tailored to a specific purpose and should be reliable, valid, and fair for that purpose.
- Assessment policies should be designed recognizing that reliability and validity of assessments increase with children's age.
- Assessments should be age-appropriate in both content and the method of data collection.
- Assessments should be linguistically appropriate, recognizing that to some extent all assessments are measured of language.
- Parents should be a valued source of assessment information, as well as an audience.

Culled from National Education Goals Panel (1998)

The children should also be observed in many different situations and activities. Using only one method may sometimes not give accurate information of the child's level of development. Assessment in Early Education uses various forms of measuring techniques to ascertain how well a child has learned a particular behaviour or has acquired a particular skill. We assess children's behaviours, skills, competencies, preferences, interactions strengths progress and needs in an attempt to better understand them and support learning and development.

Using multiple windows results in better and more complete information about children (NAEYC; and NAEC and CDE 2003) and also increases reliability and representativeness (Cronbach, 1990). Teachers gather information through many 'windows'- combinations of sources (the people or records that provide information about children), methods (how information is elicited or collected) and contexts (setting or situation for appraisal). Different ways of finding out yield distinct pictures or pieces of information. No one source of information tells everything. One method reveals aspects of a child's behaviour that another does not. One content facilitates certain behaviours whereas another does not. (Mcafee and Leong, 2011)

Assessment alone does not improve children or programme-just as measuring a child's height and weight does not make the child grow, only when it has a purpose and goal it aims to serve or achieve. This is well confirmed in the NAEYC, (2003) definition of assessment which 'says assessment is a process of observing, recording, documenting the work children can do and how they do it as basis for educational decisions that affect the child including planning for groups and individual children and communicating with parents. Only when assessment is used to make decisions about individual children, about curriculum and about programmes we can say it is meaningful and purposeful.

Many reasons can be given for why an early childhood educator needs a good knowledge of Assessment. For a teacher or a care-giver to provide appropriate activities and experiences to help the children continue to grow in all areas of development, a good knowledge of assessment is required. It serves as a basis for teachers to evaluate their teaching practices and relationships with children and aid them plan appropriate professional development. It also helps to facilitate communication between parents and teachers so that they can talk about children and programmes in meaningful ways. Assessment empowers teachers with a good understanding of children's performance as well as their own performance and the effectiveness of their programmes which make them feel confident about their ability to guide children's learning. Whether it is required or not required, a good teacher would be involved in assessment, for him to know how well children are doing and how well he is also doing as well as the effectiveness of their programme. This is a major part of good teaching so it becomes imperative for a child educator to have good knowledge of assessment. Assessment allows us to understand a child's competencies and design learning environment that will help a child to grow to his or her developmental potential. Also, Assessment of individual children is essential for planning developmentally Appropriate Programmes.

According to Gullo (2006), for an assessment to be regarded as meaningful or of high quality, the assessment tools must be well designed. The assessment tasks should take the children's linguistic and cultural differences into account. The content and the means of data collection should match

young children's developmental levels. The result should be used to benefit children rather than label them or deprive them of their developmental opportunities. The assessment process must value families and effectively communicate assessment data to children's parents or guardians.

Statement of problem

Assessment of young children's learning and development has not been seen in the right perspective thus it is most of times mistaken to be the same thing as testing which for a number of reasons is not adequate to assess the progress and development of children. For a child educator to have a clear picture of the whole child, he needs records of the child's physical, social and emotional and intellectual development which paper and pencil or formal test may not be able to take care of. With all the important roles assessment plays, can we say the practitioners have the right understanding of what assessment in early childhood education is really about? Do they have adequate knowledge of how to conduct a meaningful assessment? To this end, this paper investigated the perception of early childhood teachers of assessment in early childhood education.

Research Questions

1. What is the child educators' perception of assessment in early childhood?
2. What is the predominant assessment method of child educators in Oyo State?
3. Do child educators accept that paper and pencil is more appropriate for a child's assessment than observation?

Hypotheses

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship in educational qualification of the teachers and their perception of assessment in early childhood education.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship in school location and the teachers' perception of assessment in early childhood education.

Methodology

Design

Descriptive survey design was used for the study. This was seen appropriate because the work of the variables will be manipulated in the course of the study.

Population and Sampling

Practising Nursery and Primary School teachers in both rural and urban in Oyo State. Simple random sampling technique was used to select eighteen nursery and primary schools. Care was taken to ensure that both urban and rural schools were reflected in the study. Thus, to reflect this, three Local Government Areas, Ibarapa central, Akinyele and Ibadan North were purposely selected. Nine rural and nine urban nursery and primary schools were selected giving the total of eighteen schools. In all, 200 teachers, 100 from rural and 100 from urban participated in the study.

Instrumentation

Teachers' Perception of Assessment Questionnaire (TPAQ) was used to generate information for this study. The TPAQ was used to collect information on how pre-school teachers perceive assessment of children in early childhood education. This instrument was developed by the researchers. The items were 20 based on four-point Likert Scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) with scoring of 4, 3, 2, and 1 for positively worded items and 1, 2, 3, and 4 for negatively worded items. The TPAQ was trial tested on a group of 35 teachers who were not part of the study sample but shared the same characteristics with the selected sample. The reliability co-efficient of the instruments was .71 using Cronbach Alpha. Descriptive statistics (frequency and percentages), inferential statistics (t-test and chi-square) were used to analyze the data.

Result

Table 1: Showing the percentage of teachers' perception of assessment in early childhood

S/ N	PERCEPTION	DISAGREE		AGREE		
		N	%	N	%	
1	Making the child to write is the best method to know a child is learning	76	38.0	124	62.0	2
2	Assessment of children should be on-going	86	43.0	114	57.0	4
3	Assessment should be limited to what a child can do in the classroom	79	39.5	121	60.5	3
4	There is no need of confidentiality in children's assessment	73	36.5	127	63.5	1
5	Assessment is to monitor children's development and learning	99	49.5	101	50.5	19
6	Only children benefit from assessment	94	47.0	106	53.0	12
7	Assessment is used to identify children who may need special help	88	44.0	112	56.0	5
8	Teacher/Caregiver should always desire to assess their pupils even when they are not mandated.	95	47.5	105	52.5	15
9	Children should be observed in the natural environment	87	43.5	104	56.5	7
10	Assessment should be based on a single observation or situation.	88	44.0	112	56.0	6
11	Children can be a good source of information in their own assessment.	92	46.0	108	54.0	11
12	A child's use of materials reveals information about several aspects of development	93	46.5	107	53.5	13
13	Parents and other adults can be sources of information in assessment of children.	92	46.0	108	54.0	9
14	Assessment is necessary to evaluate only the child's Intellectual development	88	44.0	112	56.0	8
15	Considering the age of the child does not matter when carrying out assessment	93	47.0	106	53.0	14
16	Assessment report should be kept in school alone.	95	47.5	105	52.5	15
17	Assessment must cover three domains of children development	96	48.0	104	52.0	17
18	Assessment of children should only state the fact and not interpretation or judgment or conclusion	90	45.0	110	55.0	9
19	In assessment, the teacher should make sure the information is accurate, trustworthy, fair and free from bias.	99	49.5	101	50.5	18
20	The assessment situation should be non-threatening and supportive	96	48.0	104	52.0	16

Making the child to write is the best method to know a child is learning 62.0%. Assessment should be limited to what a child can do in the classroom 60.5%. There is no need of confidentiality in children's assessment 63.5%. Only children benefit from assessment 53.0%. Assessment should be based on a single observation or situation. 56.0% Assessment is necessary to evaluate only the child's Intellectual development 56.0%. Considering the age of the child does not matter when carrying out assessment 53.0%. Assessment report should be kept in school alone, 52.5%

The data in Table 1 shows that teachers do not have right perception of assessment in Early Childhood Education. The percentage of teachers that agree to negative statements is high.

Table 2: Table of frequency of predominant assessment method among child educators

Method	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Paper and Pencil/Examination	166	83
Observation and Portfolio	44	17
Total	200	100.0

It is shown in Table 2 that the predominant assessment method among child educators is paper and pencil/examination. It can be deduced that observation and portfolios are not commonly used among child educators as methods of assessment.

Table 3: Do teachers agree that Paper and Pencil is more appropriate for a child's assessment than observation?

Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Agree	124	62
Disagree	76	38
Total	200	100.0

Table 3 reveals that majority of the teachers agree that paper and pencil is more appropriate for a child's assessment than other methods.

Table 4: T-test Analysis showing the significance of location of school on teachers' perception of assessment in early childhood education

School Location	Number	X	S.D	df	t-calculated	t-critical
Rural	100	4.440	1.373	1	1.180460	6.31
Urban	100	4.690	1.612			
Total	200					

*not significant at 0.05

Table 4 shows that the t calculated value of 1.18 is lesser than t critical value of 6.31 hence the null hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the perception of teachers in the urban and teachers in the rural.

Table 5: ANOVA showing the significance of teachers' qualification on their perception of assessment in early childhood education.

Qualification	Number	X	S.D	df	χ^2 calculated	χ^2 critical	F-statistics	p-value
NCE	9	4.67	1.41	3	1.116	7.82	0.266	0.850065
DEGREE	140	4.52	1.49					
MASTERS	49	4.69	1.53					
OTHERS	2	4.00	2.83					
Total	200							

*not significant at 0.05

Table 5 above reveals that the χ^2 calculated value of 1.116 is lesser than the χ^2 critical value of 7.82 at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore the null hypothesis one is accepted. It therefore means that teachers' qualifications do not affect their perception of assessment in early childhood education.

Discussion of Results

The result in Table 1 shows that teachers do not have right perception of assessment in Early Childhood Education. As reflected in the table, the percentage of teachers that agreed to negative statements in each of the item outweighed the number of teachers that agreed to positive statements. Table 2 reveals that predominant assessment method among early childhood education teachers is paper and pencil/examination 166 (83%). It can be deduced that observation and portfolios are not commonly used among child educators as methods of assessment. As observed by Wortham (2008) the reason for this might be because very few teacher preparation programmes offered a course devoted to assessment in early childhood where teachers can be rightly exposed to detail of how meaningful assessment can be conducted to monitor a child's learning and development.

Table 3 also reveals that majority of the teachers agree that paper and pencil that is the traditional way of assessment is more appropriate for a child's assessment than other methods. (F = 124 (62%). This does not agree with the saying of Brewer (2007) that assessment should cover a much longer timeframe and attempts to sample a much broader spectrum of knowledge or behaviour which paper and pencil/examination may not be able to take care.

Table 4 shows that location of school does not influence teachers' perception of assessment. Teachers in the urban did not report better perception of assessment in early childhood education than teachers in the rural areas. This result is not in conformity with the submission of Odinko (2007) where she says that the location of a school whether urban or rural would most likely make the school acquire different characteristics simply due to the variation among care givers and the kind of intellectual developmental opportunities offered in the different environment. Table 5 shows that the

χ^2 calculated value of 1.116 is lesser than the critical value of 7.82 at 0.05 level of significance: therefore the null hypothesis one is accepted. It therefore means that teachers' qualifications do not affect their perception of assessment in early childhood education.

Conclusion

Assessment is continuing to become an integral part to the provision of high-quality early childhood care and education services. Therefore, teachers in this field should be trained in using more than one source of information when assessing children as this provides a more comprehensive picture of how well he/she is functioning in all areas of developmental. When assessment occurs regularly and over time, there can be more depth and breadth to the information obtained, which provides a more complete picture of a child's progress. A practitioner in the field of early childhood education needs to understand and practise practical assessment and know about assessment partnership with families and other professionals.

Recommendations

- Teacher preparation programmes should include courses in assessment and child observation.
- Teachers already in the classroom should be trained in the use of purposeful observation, documentation, and analysis of assessment data.
- Teachers should be encouraged to design an assessment system that will determine children's full range of development and learning.
- Teachers and administrators should involve parents in the assessment process in early childhood schools. They should be kept informed and as well be helped to understand assessment results.
- Teachers should be encouraged to apply child observation and assessment data to planning and structuring developmentally appropriate programme.
- Also, there is need for school administrators and all the other stakeholders to make provision for all that will be needed in carrying out a successful and meaningful assessment of a child.

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