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September 2009

Guest Editor's Introduction

Edited by Frances O'Connell Rust, the 2007 themed issue of the *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education* featured innovations in teacher education. Articles addressed a variety of topics such as identifying the characteristics of "good" early childhood teachers in teacher certification programs, preparing teachers to support struggling learners, encouraging parent involvement, and improving staff development for early childhood teachers. Building on the success of the 2007 themed issue, this collection of articles adds a more global perspective on innovations and research-based practices in early childhood teacher education.

This international themed issue of *JECTE* was designed to focus specifically on research and research-based practices from authors outside the United States. The *JECTE* editorial board directed me, as guest editor, to search out articles that addressed one or more of the following topics: (a) Early childhood teacher preparation, (b) Political issues affecting the design and implementation of early childhood teacher education, (c) The preparation of early childhood teachers for family and community engagement, (d) Field experiences and early childhood teacher education, (e) The preparation of early childhood teachers to work with diverse populations, (f) The preparation of early childhood teachers to work with children with special needs, (g) Curriculum and assessment in early childhood teacher education, (h) Design of early childhood teacher education programs (including admission and exit criteria), and (i) Learning theories and their role in teaching young children.

I received a high number of submissions for this themed issue from authors representing regions around the globe. All manuscripts were reviewed following procedures established for the *Journal*. For this particular issue, I selected articles that described early childhood teacher education research and practice in nine countries, including Cyprus, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Nigeria, China, Korea, Jordan, Pakistan, and Canada. The following section provides a short summary of each manuscript in the special issue.

The opening article by Eleni Loizou is entitled "In-Service Early Childhood Teachers Reflect on Their Teacher Training Program: Reconceptualizing the Case of Cyprus." The article documents in-service teachers' views regarding their teacher preparation programs. Participants shared both the challenges they perceived regarding their teaching experiences (such as parent involvement, classroom management, and inclusion) and their suggestions for providing better teacher preparation programs.

Maria Gabriela Portugal and Ana Paula Aveleira's work, entitled "Supporting Early Childhood Teachers in Guinea-Bissau," introduces readers to some of the challenges and successes of an effort to improve early childhood practices in a small African nation. Through the authors' efforts to provide training, supervision, innovations, and reflective practices, teachers in Guinea-Bissau were able to create better educational opportunities for young children.

In "Teacher Training for Early Childhood Development and Education in Kenya," Tata Mbugua provides a historical background of early childhood development and education in Kenya, outlines specific government initiatives, teacher recruitment and teacher training practices, and introduces models for promoting cultural competencies in education and development. In addition, specific challenges and successes of early childhood teacher preparation programs were identified.

Monica N. Odinko, Joanne M. Williams, and Gari Donn report a study entitled "Teacher Qualification and Instructional Delivery Modes at the Preschool Level in Nigeria." Through descriptions of the participation of both preschool teachers and young children, readers are able to learn about early childhood teacher preparation and practices in Nigeria.

In "Exploring the Quality of Early Childhood Education in China: Implications for Early Childhood Teacher Education," Bi Ying Hu and I share results of an exploratory study that utilized the Early Childhood Learning Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) in 40 Chinese classrooms. In addition, readers are informed about policies and practices affecting both early childhood and early childhood teacher preparation programs.

The article entitled "Kindergarten Teachers' Professional Training and Their Social Status in Korea" by Guang-Lea Lee, Donald A. Myers, and Kyoung Jin Kim provides historical views of Korean kindergarten teacher training, examines the social status of kindergarten teachers, introduces current/innovative pedagogies and practices, and describes the characteristics of early childhood teacher training.

Abdallah Abu Naba'h, Hamza Al-Omari, Fathi Ihmeideh, and Suad Al-Wa'ily's work, entitled "Teacher Education Programs in Jordan: A Reform Plan," describes the historical background of teacher education along with current practices at Hashemite University. Readers learn about characteristics such as admission policies, curriculum, and student teaching experiences. In addition, a reform plan for teacher preparation is described.

"Teacher Education in Pakistan: Analysis of Planning Issues in Early Childhood Education" was written by Zohra Nisar Hunzai. The author describes teacher education practices in light of Pakistani national educational policy, professional development opportunities, challenges in teacher preparation, and recruitment of quality teachers.

The final article by Kathryn Underwood and Isabel Killoran, entitled "Early Intervention Practice and Research in Ontario, Canada: Listening to the Field," describes early intervention services in the contexts of politics and early childhood teacher preparation. The authors also describe the evolution of a new network of early intervention specialists.

I hope that readers will find this collection of articles on international early childhood teacher education research and research-based practices beneficial. I also hope that this issue will serve as a starting point for long-term international dialogue and collaboration within the field of early childhood teacher education. I would like to extend special thanks to Shelley Westenberg (former *JECTE* editorial assistant) for her dedicated work on this issue. I also want to acknowledge the contribution of all the reviewers who provided outstanding, constructive feedback on the manuscripts. Thanks to them, to fellow Editorial Board members, and to *JECTE* editors, Amos Hatch and Susan Benner, for making this issue possible.

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Special Issue:

International Perspectives on Early Childhood Teacher Education

Guest Editor: Judit Szente

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Teacher Qualification and Instructional Delivery Modes at the Preschool Level in Nigeria

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Through this study researchers sought to evaluate the effects of qualification on instructional delivery modes of practicing preschool teachers in Nigeria. The sample consisted of 93 preschool teachers and 2,859 pupils aged 4 to 5 years. Schools were selected through stratified random sampling to ensure adequate representation of private, public, urban, and rural schools. A questionnaire and two valid and reliable classroom observational instruments were used to record instructional delivery in 216 lessons in 72 preprimary classrooms. Data analysis involved the use of frequency, percentages, t-test, chi-square, and graphical illustrations. The results revealed that none of the teachers observed had preschool education training; teacher whole-class interaction characterized by direct instruction was the prevailing approach; use of play did not feature; whole-class activity occurred more than individual pupil activity monologue, and other distracting behaviors occurred less frequently. The direction of communication was mainly from the teacher to the whole class, whereas the more personal one-to-one communication between teacher and pupil occurred less frequently.

Preschool Education in Nigeria

According to Fafunwa (1974), Osokoya (1989), Ozigi and Ocho (1981), and Ukeje and Aisiku (1982), preschool education in Nigeria as in the Western school system is a recent institution, which developed in the 19th century. Based on their records, this type of child-rearing practice came into existence in Nigeria first through the influence of the colonial masters who came to Nigeria with their families for trade and evangelism (both Christianity and Islam) hence, the establishment of preschools as well as primary institutions for their children. Second, to deal successfully with the 'natives' necessitated the new converts being exposed to the White man's education. Thus, children were sent to preprimary/primary school as well as Koranic schools where they were taught the rudiments of letters and Arabic so as to enable them to read and interpret the Bible as well as the Koran, respectively. Some Nigerians were also sent abroad to further their education in order to make them more useful to the masters. On return, after their exposure to Western education, a good number of them secured administrative jobs that often prevented them from being home. This affected their lifestyles and as a result they emulated their masters in sending their children to preschool institutions.

Added to this is rapid urbanization, which has caused many families to drift to the city and make the responsibility of bringing up children rest entirely on the nuclear family

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unlike the practice in the traditional societies. The increase in industrialization and employment facilities in Nigeria, especially a few years after independence (in 1960), and the oil boom in the 1970s, also caused the standard of living, taste, and cultural value system of many Nigerians to change. People developed interest in sending their children to preschool institutions as a symbol of status. Later, the harsh economic situation, especially after the collapse of the oil boom in late 1970s, placed severe financial stress on families. This resulted in an increase in the number of women whose duties had been that of child upbringing and taking care of the home to go into the labor force to boost the finances of their families.

Another important factor was the liberalization of education by the government through the launching of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) Scheme, which made it possible for every child to go to school without school fees. This made it difficult therefore for the more affluent families to engage school-age children as babysitters and servants to look after their preschoolers when they were away at work. This led to a high demand for preschool services. The Nigerian government's perception over the years of this level of education was that tax payers' money should not be used in the provision of such services. The provision and running of these institutions were therefore left in the hands of private and cooperative bodies. As noted above, this is no longer the case.

Providing Quality Preschool Education

Providing quality preschool education is viewed by world educational bodies and individuals alike as an important measure to ensure a solid foundation for the future learning of children (Bruce, 1997; Meyers, 1993; NAEYC, 2002; Obanya, 2004; UNESCO, 2005, 2007). A variety of factors have been identified as quality indicators that could serve as yardsticks for measuring the extent to which preschool education program providers meet expected standards. Such key indicators include percentage of trained teachers (Obanya, 2004; UNESCO, 2005); providing a stimulating environment which encourages frequent positive child-child and child-adult interactions; play, exploration, and discovery; use of pedagogy methods in which early childhood educators develop teaching and caring relationship with children; and teachers' possession of a basic understanding of pedagogical principles that provide guidelines for practice (Association for Childhood Education International, 2002; Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001; Pigozzi 2004; UNICEF 2000; Villalion, Suzuki, Herrera, & Mathiesen, 2002). These research studies indicate that such variables could serve as contributing factors to differences, which tend to exist among preschool education programs with respect to teaching-learning effectiveness.

In recent times, analysis of type of training received by teachers has become an important measure by which educators understand the process of teaching, evaluate teacher competence, measure teacher quality, and bring about fundamental changes in teaching methods (Clarke-Stewart, Vandell, Burchial, O'Brien, & McCartney, 2002; Early et al., 2006; Piñata et al., 2005). Further, Hooks, Scott-Little, Marshall, and Brown's (2006) study revealed that professional preparation that provides a solid understanding of what and how to teach is essential for teachers to improve and provide quality teaching-learning activities in preschool classrooms. These results conform to Abimbade's (1999) findings on principles and practice of educational technology in Nigeria. The results reveal that when teachers are well trained, they tend to have better improvisational skills and can better utilize teaching aids/materials. It has also been observed that well-trained teachers are more likely to maximize the utilization of resources, as good teaching depends to some

extent on the use of material resources (Udoh, 1999). A survey of the available literature indicates that teachers and educators seem to require training in science (knowledge and understanding of the world); mathematics (and Instructional Technology in particular) (David, 1996); questioning techniques (to engage children in debating why and how things happen); practical problem solving and number operation (for example, the use of symbols); and the association of sounds with patterns, rhymes, syllables, letters, and words (Ofsted, 1998).

These research findings must have prompted some associations throughout the world (e.g., in the U.S., the National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1997; in Australia, the Independent Education Union of Australia, 1997; and in Scotland, the Scottish Executive, 2000), which have recorded some success in their early childhood care and education provisions, to be particular about the type of staff employed to work with young children. In these countries, minimum standards are set for staff in terms of levels of schooling, specialized education, and experience required to qualify one for such classroom positions as preschool teacher, preschool teacher assistant, nursery nurse, or head teacher.

The Nigerian government also acknowledges the need for using qualified teachers and the recommended instructional mode at this level, hence its decision to include them in the nation's National Policy on Education in 1977. According to this document the government has the responsibility to make provisions in "teacher education programs for specialization in early childhood education, ensure that the main method of teaching at this level shall be through play and that the curriculum of teacher education is oriented to achieve this, provide essential teaching aids, as well as ensure that the staff of preprimary institutions are adequately trained to use them" (FRN, 1977, pp. 11–12).

To teach means to cause someone to know, especially by showing, or instructing through the use of rules, examples, or experience. It could also mean to impart knowledge or guide someone through the study of something. The methods one uses to ensure that knowledge is being imparted could depend to a reasonable extent on the age of the learner. Advocates of early childhood education tend to suggest that during the preschool years, children learn through diverse ways, and therefore recommend the use of varying teaching methods. Methods recommended include: teacher-child interaction during which time the child is actively involved (Fu, 2004; UNESCO 2007; Vandeyar & Killen, 2006; Van Oers, 2003); use of play (Aremu, 2000; Bruce, 1997; D'Anna & Rogers, 2005; Froebel, 1782–1852 as cited in Henniger, 2005); and use of exploration, experiment and discovery, learning by doing, inquiry/curiosity and interest, and active hands-on experience (Arnone, 2003; Edwards, 2006; Montessori, 1912; Yoon & Onchwari, 2006).

The proponents of social interaction share the view that young children learn most efficiently when they are engaged in interaction. For instance, Van Oers (2003) stressed that teacher-learner interactions could be promoted more in situations whereby all those involved (particularly children) have no inhibitions from the effects of the instructional approaches. As a result, teachers are expected to structure their teaching and learning environment in such a way as to give equal opportunities to both parties to participate in activity.

Learning through play is also considered by preschool advocates as one of the most effective ways of helping children to learn during the preschool years (Aremu, 2000; Maduewesi, 1999; Montessori, 1912; Froebel in Whitebread, 1972). For instance, Maduewesi and Aremu are also of the view that children work out their internal and interpersonal conflicts, gain a sense of autonomy and effectiveness, become motivated to

mastery, and develop a sense of direction, self trust, self assurance, and self worth through play. Bruce (1997) says play is one of the most important means for the development of child-initiated self-directed activity. To her, play encourages the zone of potential development. She also argues that a child always behaves beyond his average age and above his daily behavior during play activities.

Use of a questioning method during teaching-learning processes has been acknowledged as an important way of encouraging active learner participation (Cotton, 2004; Elkind, 1999). Cotton is of the view that in classroom settings, teachers' questions are defined as instructional cues or stimuli that convey to learners the content elements to be learned and directions of what they are to do and how they are to do it. Elkind, on the other hand, sees early childhood years as a question-asking period and notes that how adults react to these questions could either deter children from asking further questions or accomplish the important goal of encouraging further questioning, while providing a sense of being understood. Researchers are of the opinion that questions could come under different levels: low cognitive questions, high cognitive questions, opinion questions, and redirected questions (Cotton; Okebukola, 1985; Winne, 1979). Brualdi (1998) believes that high-level questions reveal to the teacher whether or not the learner has truly understood the concepts to which they have been exposed, while Ellis (1993) claims that many teachers do rely on low-level cognitive questions in order to avoid slow-paced lessons, keep learners' attention, and maintain control of the classroom. They advise, however, that teachers endeavor to use a combination of both techniques in order to know which sort of balance between the two types of questions needs to be made in order to foster learners understanding and achievement (Brualdi; Saskatoon, 2004).

Nevertheless, other researchers such as Hayes (1999) and Myhill (2002) suggest the use of whole-class, small group, and one-to-one teaching approaches. Delpit (1995) is of the opinion that teacher-directed approaches also yield good results, though learning through storytelling, through prints, rhymes, and songs are even better approaches (Akinbote, Oduolowu, & Lawal, 2001; David & Gouch, 2001; Howes, James, & Ritchie, 2003; NAEYC, 2002).

A critical look at these research studies indicates that early childhood practitioners hold different views on how the child in his early stage of development should best be taught. As a result, no one method could therefore be assumed to be the best way to facilitate learning. For instance, Katz (1987) asserted many years ago that younger children need to be educated with a variety of teaching methods because younger children are less likely to have been socialized into a standard way of responding to their social environment. Thus it would seem that the teaching methods to be employed for children should provide for simplicity, challenge, variety, and fun, while the interactions that arise in the course of the children's activities provide a context for much social and cognitive learning: i.e., knowledge, skills, desirable disposition, and feelings (Katz, 1993).

Design and Method

Through this study, researchers analyzed the characteristics of instructional modes (teaching methods, use of instructional time, class context, and direction of communication) exhibited by practicing Nigerian preschool teachers during instruction; the extent to which Nigerian preschool providers incorporate such factors as level of teacher training while employing those who teach at this level; and the effect of such training on their classroom practices. More specifically the researchers sought to:

1. Identify the qualifications of teachers employed to teach in Nigerian preschool settings;
2. Identify the prevailing instructional modes (in terms of use of instructional time, class context, and direction of communication) during the teaching of literacy, numeracy, and science in preprimary classrooms in Nigeria; and
3. Relate such instructional modes observed to the level of training obtained by the teachers to find out if such factors influence their mode of instructional delivery.

This study, an example of a formative type of educational evaluation, made use of survey and observational data gathering. Formative educational evaluation studies are carried out in ongoing programs or activities with the intentions of using the feedback to alter or improve the quality of such programs (Scriven 1967 as cited in Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Ritchie, 2003). Thus, considering the research questions to which this study hoped to provide answers, observation method (structured) and a survey questionnaire were regarded as the best approaches for generating the needed data.

Population and Sample

The target population comprised of practicing teachers (who have the prescribed qualification by the federal government before one could teach in any school setting in Nigeria—NCE, BEd degrees in preschool education, social sciences, arts, and sciences—as well as those who do not) of children between the ages of 4 and 5 years in settings in Nigeria. The sample consisted of 93 practicing preschool teachers working with a total of 2,859 pupils aged 4 to 5 years from 72 preprimary institutions across the three major old regions (Eastern, Western and Northern regions) in Nigeria. Participants were selected through stratified random sampling to ensure adequate representation of private, public, urban, and rural schools.

Instruments

The Classroom Interaction Sheet (CIS) and the Ten-Minute Interaction Instrument (TMI) were used to record interaction patterns in 72 lessons during the teaching of literacy, numeracy, and science. Each lesson was monitored for 30 minutes using both instruments. During the observation period, the CIS was used in the first 10 minutes, followed by the TMI in the second 10 minutes, and then the CIS again in the last 10 minutes. The CIS, a category system scheme, is an adaptation of the Classroom Activity Sheet (Yoloye, 1978). It consists of 55 subcategories, which were grouped under seven main behavior categories. The observer is expected to tick the most frequently occurring behavior every 10 seconds. The TMI, however, was adapted from Bourke, Hildyard, and Anderson's (1989) Five Minutes Interaction (FMI) used for the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement study (IEA). The TMI consists of four dimensions of interaction with about 45 subcategories, which are coded every 5 seconds. In all, a total of 60 and 208 tallies were coded for the CIS and the TMI respectively during each 30-minute lesson.

Before this study, the instruments have been used in a number of studies that ascertained the extent to which teachers and their pupils interact during instruction at the primary level of education (Bourke et al., 1989; Ogunkola, 1998; Okpala & Onocha, 1988; Yoloye, 1978). Thus, both instruments were modified to suit preprimary classroom activities in Nigeria. The modified versions were also pilot-tested over a period of 8 days using two trained observers who solicited observation information in eight preschool classrooms (four private and four public schools) in rural and urban locations. These schools were not part of the final study sample. The pilot test data showed that the observers did not have

difficulty identifying and recording the behavior categories. In addition, the data produced interrater reliability values of 0.88 and 0.92 for the CIS and the TMI respectively.

Data Collection and Analysis

Participants were observed over a period of 72 days by the investigator. The pilot testing exercise brought us face-to-face with one of the problems of using observation as a method of data collection: How much does our presence affect what is being observed? To overcome this, we used the *habituation* technique, which has to do with our visiting the classroom environment (pupils/teachers) during instruction twice before the proper observation. This enabled the pupils to get used to the video camera. We also assumed that the effect due to the observer presence would diminish over time. Researchers who are experienced at doing observational work with children (Tizard & Hughes, 2002) believe that the effect of observer is usually minimal after an initial acclimatization. Behaviors were recorded using the two structured instruments and a video camera.

The observer ticked the most frequently occurring behavior bearing in mind to make a tally after every 10 seconds in the appropriate row when the prevalent behavior category was demonstrated (CIS) and every 5 seconds for TMI. Data analysis involved the use of frequency, percentage, chi-square, and graphical illustrations, because the data is nominal in nature.

Results

Table 1 shows that none of the teachers observed had early childhood education qualifications. The table also revealed that a majority (49%) of the teachers were not qualified to be employed as teachers in any level of education in Nigeria as prescribed by the nation's policy on education (FRN, 1977). However, a good percentage of the teachers (42%) had the needed education to warrant their taking up teaching jobs in certain levels of education in Nigeria, while a small percentage of the teachers (9%) have higher degrees that were not related to the teaching profession.

Qualification-Group Differences in Prevailing Interaction Patterns Use of Instructional Time

Information from the teachers showed that none of the teachers observed received specialized training to teach at the level. Based on this major finding, the data on differences in

Table 1
Profile of Training Received by the Practicing Preschool Teachers Observed
(Source: Study Fieldwork Data)

| Qualification | Number | % |
|---|--------|-----|
| West African School Certificate/Primary Six Certificate | 46 | 49 |
| National Certificate on Education | 25 | 27 |
| BEd (Early Childhood Education) | 0 | 0 |
| BEd (Arts, Science) | 11 | 12 |
| BA, BS | 3 | 3 |
| Ordinary/Higher National Diploma (OND, HND) | 8 | 9 |
| Total | 93 | 100 |

the interaction patterns (use of instructional time) were grouped between those who have any type of professional qualifications to teach in any level of education in Nigeria (holders of NCE, BEd, BS/BA Ed certificates) and those who are not professionally qualified (holders of Pry; WASC; OND; HND certificates) as presented in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that significant group differences in the use of instructional time (based on independent t-test analysis; $p < .05$) were observed on only 5 of the 57 subcategories (8.8%). Table 2 also indicates that the observed significant differences in the use of instructional time between the two qualification groups tend to be associated with learning and nonlearning, facilitating behaviors of teachers and pupils in the preprimary classrooms. These differences were such that "teacher prompting response," "grading of pupils' work," "whole class observing," and "copying from chalkboard" were more prevalent in classrooms of teachers without professional qualification than in those of teachers with professional qualification. However, teachers with professional qualification tended to "give more directives" than their counterparts who are not professionally qualified.

Class Context (Direction of Communication)

There were two grouping factors for teacher qualification (those with professional teaching qualification and those without), while the direction of communication was also classified into two class-contexts: one-to-one (teacher to pupil/pupil to teacher); and whole class (teacher to group/group to teacher). The results on class-group differences in the direction of communication are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 shows that the prevailing direction of communication in Nigerian preschool classrooms was not sensitive to teacher qualification ($\chi^2=0.01$; $p > .05$, nondirectional test). This implies that all the teachers observed irrespective of level of training exhibited the same behavior with regards to direction of communication flow.

Table 2
Qualification-Group Differences in Use of Instructional Time

| Behavior subcategory | Qualification | Mean | Mean difference | Df. | t-value |
|----------------------------|----------------|-------|-----------------|-----|---------|
| Teacher gives directives | Pry; WASC; OND | 65.12 | 19.1 | 214 | 2.58* |
| | NCE; HND; BEd | 84.22 | | | |
| Teacher prompting response | Pry; WASC; OND | 49.43 | 18.72 | 214 | 3.03* |
| | NCE; HND; BEd | 30.71 | | | |
| Teacher grading | Pry; WASC; OND | 12.81 | 8.61 | 214 | 2.49* |
| | NCE; HND; BEd | 4.20 | | | |
| Whole class observing | Pry; WASC; OND | 18.23 | 8.41 | 214 | 2.09* |
| | NCE; HND; BEd | 9.81 | | | |
| Copying from chalkboard | Pry; WASC; OND | 52.53 | 32.42 | 214 | 2.46* |
| | NCE; HND; BEd | 20.11 | | | |

*Significant at the .05 level (nondirectional test).

Pry = primary education; WASC = West African school certificate; OND = Ordinary National Diploma (teachers who did not pass through any form of teacher training courses to qualify them to teach in any Nigerian school); NCE = National Certificate of Education; HND = Higher National Diploma; BEd = Bachelor of Education (teachers who were exposed to certain degrees of teacher training courses to qualify them to teach in any Nigerian school).

Table 3
Qualification-Group Differences in Direction of Communication

| Direction of communication | Qualification | | Total | χ^2 |
|--|------------------------|------------------------|-------|----------|
| | Pry; WASC; OND; HND | NCE; BEd; BSc /BAEd | | |
| Teacher to pupil/Pupil to teacher (One- to -one) | 30 | 28 | 58 | .01* |
| Teacher to group/Group to teacher (Group/Whole class) | 62 | 64 | 126 | |
| Total | 92 | 92 | 184 | |

*Not significant at the .05 level (non-directional test; $df = 1$).

Pry = primary education; WASC= West African school certification; OND = Ordinary National Diploma; NCE =National Certificate of Education; HND = higher National Diploma; BEd = Bachelor of Education; BSc/BAEd = Bachelor of Science/ Bachelor of Arts Education.

Instructional Approaches

Data in this section provide information on the instructional approaches used by each of the teachers observed in Nigeria during instructional delivery. The behaviors exhibited were recorded as soon as they occurred within the stipulated 10-second interval designated for the coding. The approaches identified include teaches/explains, teaching with material, teaching with nonverbal cues (e.g., writing on the chalkboard), buttressing important points with examples, giving learners cues to help them make meaning of a question, giving learners directives on how to carry out any assignment, prompting responses, and teachers probing learners further for a better explanation to a given question. The instructional approaches that characterize the prevailing interaction patterns in Nigerian preprimary school classrooms are shown in Figure 1.

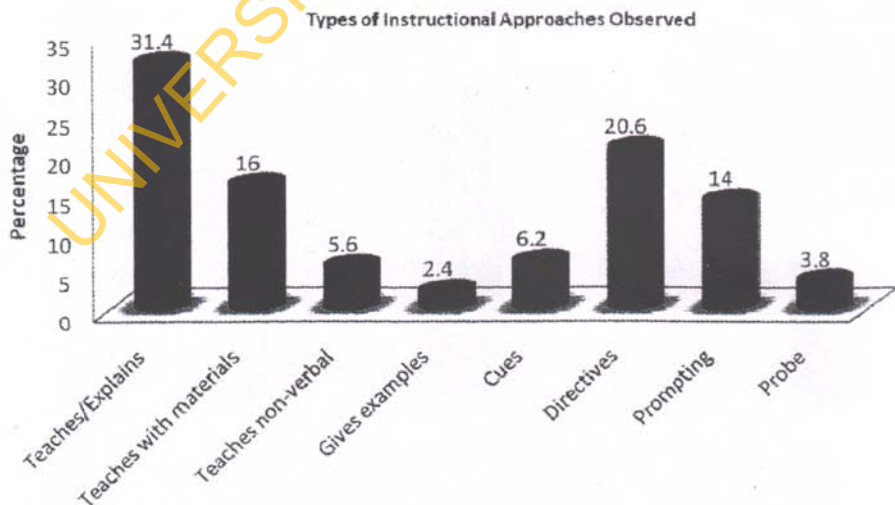


Figure 1. Instructional approaches in observed in Nigeria preschool classrooms (Source: Fieldwork data).

As shown in Figure 1, the dominant instructional approaches tend to be those that focus on "teaches/explains without materials" (31.4%) and giving "directives" (20.6%). Figure 1, however, acknowledges the occurrence, though less frequently, of other instructional approaches such as "teaches with materials" (16.0%), "prompting" (14.0%), "cues" (6.2%), "teaches nonverbal" (5.6%), "probe" (3.8%) and "gives example" (2.4%).

Types of Questions Asked During Instruction

Types of questions asked by the teachers during instructions were coded under four main headings (high level, low level, opinion, and redirect questions). Questions that engaged the children in critical thinking, for instance, subjecting the learners to look for an alternative means to providing a solution to a posed question, were recorded under high level, whereas those that required mere recall of what the teachers had earlier said or done were coded against low level. However, those recorded under opinion questions were the ones asked by teachers when they sought the views of the learners (which are neither right nor wrong) while a question is recorded as redirect whenever the teacher asked the same question to a second or third pupil based on the unsatisfactory response from the first or second child to whom the question was addressed. The types of questions that are associated with the prevailing interaction patterns in Nigerian preprimary classrooms are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 reveals that most of the questions during instruction (62.6%) were of the low-level type. This was followed by redirect (24.8%), high level (11.6%) and opinion (1.0%) types of questions in that order.

Types of Responses During Instruction

The preschoolers' types of responses to their teachers' questions were recorded. These different responses were recorded whenever they occurred within the time frame at the appropriate column. The data on the recorded responses involved calculating the frequencies and percentages of occurrence of each type of response. The types of responses that

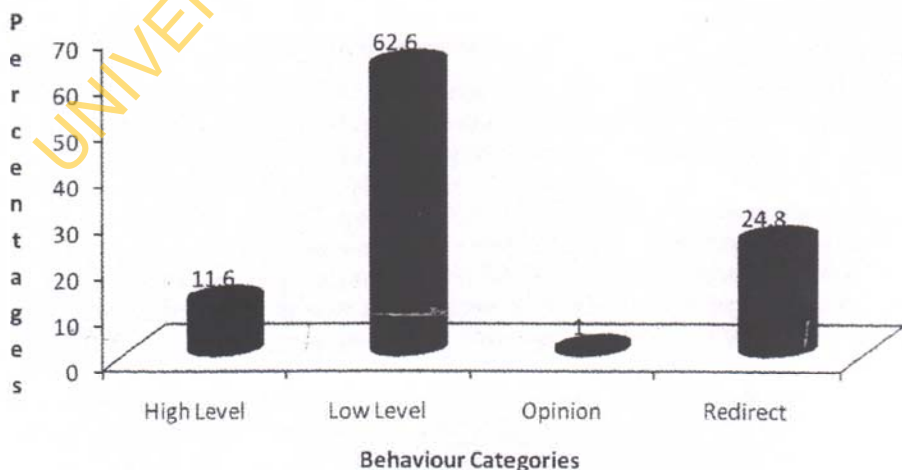


Figure 2. Types of questions asked in Nigerian preschool classrooms (Source: Fieldwork data).

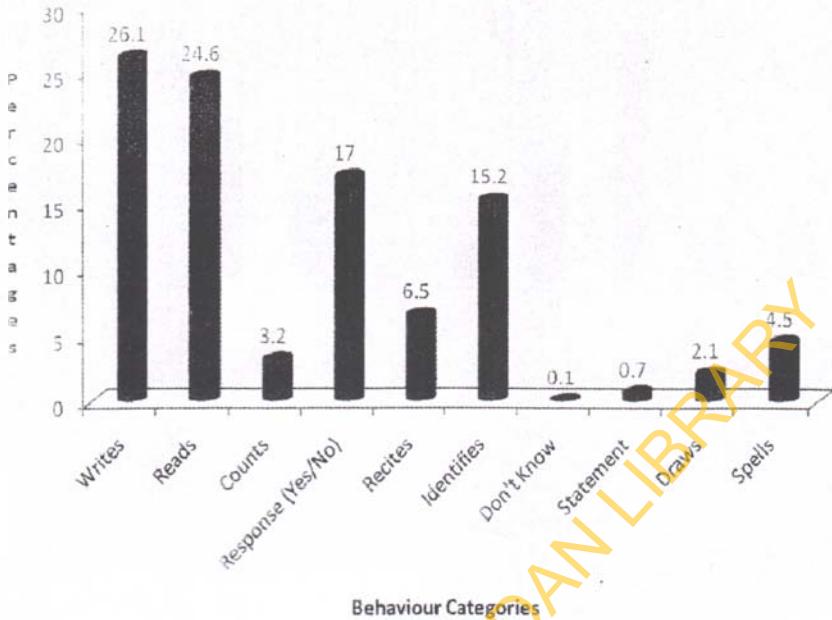


Figure 3. Types of responses observed in Nigerian preschool classrooms (Source: Fieldwork data).

characterize the prevailing instruction delivery modes in Nigerian preprimary classrooms are shown in Figure 3.

As can be seen in Figure 3 the interaction pattern was mainly characterized by children's responses that had to do with writing (26.1%), reading (24.6%), saying "yes" or "no" (17.0%), and identifying (15.2%). Figure 3, however, illustrates the less frequent, other types of responses such as recites (6.5%), spells (4.5%), counts (3.2%), draws (2.1%), makes statement (0.7%), and replies "don't know" (0.1%).

Types of Feedback From Teachers During Instruction

The teachers also provided feedback to the learners' responses. These were recorded under the following behavior subcategories: acknowledgement positive or negative, reinforcement (asking the whole class to clap for the pupil or for themselves whenever a correct response was given); punishment (physical punishment, e.g., flogging a pupil or a group of pupils for incorrect answers); repetition of answers; provision of answers when a pupil is unable to give the correct answer; silence; grading pupil's work; and effective teaching. The behaviors were recorded once they occurred within the 10-second intervals at the appropriate column. The type of feedback that is associated with the prevailing instruction delivery modes in Nigerian preprimary classrooms are shown in Figure 4.

In Figure 4, the interaction pattern was mainly characterized by "provision of grades" (30.4%), "acknowledges positive" (19.6%), and "reinforcement" (14.1%). Other types of feedback that tended to occur, though less frequently, were "effective teaching" (10.6%), followed by "acknowledges wrong" (9.9%), "silence" (6.0%), "punishment" (4.8%), "gives answers" (4.1%), and "repeats answer" (0.5%) in that order.

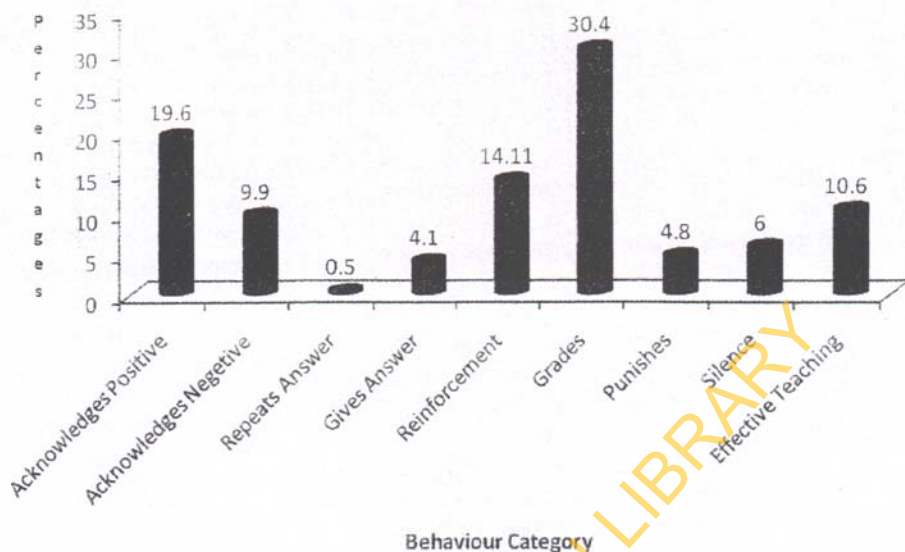


Figure 4. Types of feedback observed in Nigerian preschool classrooms (Source: Fieldwork data).

Discussion

These findings reveal the potential jeopardy to the educational aims set out in Nigeria for the preschool level, based upon the assumption that no contribution is as significant as that of the teacher-toward educational outcomes (UNESCO, 1998, 2007). The benefits of employing qualified teachers at the preschool level in Nigeria is one that Nigeria's preschoolers are largely being denied. For instance, research findings (Abimbade, 1999; Hooks et al., 2006; Howes, 1997; Ndukwu, 2002) have revealed that professional preparation tends to provide practicing teachers a solid understanding of developmental issues, as well as what and how to provide quality instructional materials to aid preschoolers' learning. Further, others have found that higher quality interaction tended to occur more between trained teachers than with untrained teachers (Early et al, 2006; Honig & Hirallal, 1998; Kontos & Wilcox-Herzog, 2002).

Significant group differences in the use of instructional time were observed between teachers who have some kind of teaching qualifications and those who do not. The differences were such that "teacher prompting response," "grading of pupils' work," "whole class observing," and "copying from chalkboard" were more prevalent in classrooms of teachers without professional qualification than in those of teachers with some kind of professional qualification. However, preschool teachers with professional qualification tended to "give more directives" than their counterparts who are not professionally qualified. The result showed that the direction of communication by practicing preschool teachers observed tended to be the same irrespective of type of training.

The results also revealed that, irrespective of the lesson taught, the teachers observed adopted a single pedagogical method: direct instructional activities dominated by reading and writing through drills and practice, whereas use of play, one-to-one, and individual activities occurred minimally. On the other hand, recitation and choral responses characterized the preschoolers' responses in all of the classes observed. This result was unexpected considering the fact that it runs contrary to the Federal Government of Nigeria's

recommendation in section 2(14) of the National Policy on Education 1977, revised 1998, 2004 (FRN, 2004) on the mode of instruction to be used at this level of education. The national policy prescribes the use of play while instructing children at this age level. This common practice is also not in compliance with the recommended practice of use of varying teaching methods during instruction (Anderson, Adlam, Coltman, Daniels, & Linklater, 2003; Coltman & Whitebread, 2003; Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001) by preschool advocates. Based on this premise, it could be assumed that when the kind of teaching approach that seems to be prevalent in Nigerian preschools is used for a diverse group of children, a significant proportion of these children are unlikely to benefit much from the teaching-learning activities.

The direction of communication was such that during instruction, which occurred mostly in the whole-class context, the teachers initiated most of the conversations and decided who should contribute usually through questioning techniques. Pupils never initiated any communication or activities themselves either as a group or at an individual level. The situations were such that even when the teachers initiated activities, pupils were not allowed to carry out the activities on their own. Further, even in the area of questioning, the pupils never ask their teachers questions. All of the questions asked in class emanated from the teachers and were directed to the children, whereas the learners merely responded in unison using monosyllabic words. Such responses from the children included reading the letters/numbers by rote or nonverbally (performing a lot of practice and drill in writing skills), or copying what the teacher wrote on the chalkboard in their exercise books. The talks initiated by the teachers, according to the result, occurred mainly when teachers used questions to find out the children's previous knowledge of the topic to be discussed, offering explanations during the course of the instruction, giving directives to the children on how to carry out class tasks, giving them clues on how to answer a question, as well as prompting the learner to pronounce a word, read letters of the alphabet and numbers, among others. The children mostly responded as a group (whole class) by reciting, counting, reading, identifying, observing, etc. The prevalent instructional delivery mode, which is characterized by teachers initiating every activity, runs contrary to the recommended practices as emphasized in article 29(1) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). This article recommends a child-centered approach to teaching children and that stipulates that the goal of education should be the development of individual child's personality, abilities, and independence.

The results of the present study also indicated that significant differences, based on the core subjects observed, tended to exist in the instructional delivery modes observed across some of the behavior subcategories. The group differences, it would seem, were such that time spent on teacher-centered learning activities (teacher whole-class activity), as opposed to pupil-centered learning activities (group/individual) were mostly for literacy lessons, followed by numeracy lessons and science lessons in that order. The group differences thus tended to be most apparent during literacy lessons. It has, however, been expressed that the pedagogical demands of the three core subjects in the curriculum tend to differ (Ezeokoli, 2003; Jegede, 2004). In his comments on teaching methods across the curriculum, Obanya (2003) observed that the teaching of science and mathematics (numeracy), unlike literacy, is more activity-oriented with some extra requirement of hands-on-experience. However, the preschool teachers in Nigeria by their profile (level of educational and professional training), and institutional and societal structure/supports are not sufficiently equipped to initiate and sustain child-centered, activity-oriented interaction patterns during instructional delivery in classrooms. As the teachers are prone to being at the center

stage of interaction during instruction, they are likely to feel comfortable spending more time on teacher-centered activities during literacy lessons than during science and mathematics lessons. In this regard, the tendency for the prevailing instructional delivery mode in Nigerian preprimary classrooms to be sensitive to the core subjects in the curriculum (literacy skills, numeracy skills, and science) with minimal encouragement of hands-on experience with materials for the preschoolers could be explained.

The types of preparation to which the Nigerian preschool teachers were exposed may have perhaps also contributed to the nature of their classroom practices. Postobservation interviews with the teachers revealed that most of the teachers were deployed from the primary sections to teach at the nursery classes based on their number of years in service. Thus, they were using the teaching methods meant for older children. The low rating of the teaching profession appears to be instrumental in the Nigerian preschool education graduates' lack of interest in taking up teaching as a career. This may have led to the migration of highly trained teachers to other high-paying jobs. Since the early childhood education program is viewed as important for laying a solid foundation for children's future learning, (NAEYC, 1998; UNESCO, 2006, 2007) this level of education therefore requires that the Nigerian government and other stakeholders give it a solid financial backing. This will enable the sector to ensure that the conditions of service of the teachers employed are favorable in terms of guaranteeing good pay packages, providing the necessary materials needed for them to carry out their duties effectively, as well as organizing periodic training workshops for the teachers to update themselves on pedagogical methods.

Significance and Professional Relevance

The present study is considered significant because its results could provide an empirical basis for reviewing and updating the curriculum contents of caregiver preparation and continuing education programs with a view to producing caregivers who can channel lesson time towards productive child-centered activities. It provides an empirical evidence of the need for developing a more effective practical technique to improve teaching and learning methods for preschool children in Nigeria in order to ensure that Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programs in the country are of sufficiently high quality to contribute to the country's future educational development. The results of the study offer important additions to existing literature, considering the paucity of information on the characteristics and quality of instruction and care provided to young children in Nigerian preschool institutions.

Conclusion

These findings will serve as an empirical base for the Nigerian government to know that practicing teachers are far from incorporating the recommended practices into Nigerian preschool settings. The implication of this deviation from the recommended practice by the government is that from the beginning of their schooling, Nigerian children might not be receiving an education that will equip them with the skills of literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving. Further, the program, instead of being a process aimed at laying a solid foundation for lifelong learning and human development on which other types of education and learning are built, might end up inculcating in the children who pass through it a certain dependency as opposed to self-reliance. They may grow into adults who are not creative and resourceful. Based on this sharp deviation, the policy makers should endeavor

through educational monitoring and evaluation departments to ensure that preschool classroom practices are monitored to guarantee quality.

As was emphasized by Klein, Hammrich, Bloom, & Ragins (2000), not all children learn in the same way. Teachers who limit themselves to the use of one teaching method could be preventing some preschoolers from receiving the benefits of appropriate instructional activities. The teachers should therefore be retrained in teaching and learning methods suitable for the early years to enable them to change their current practices and incorporate a variety of methods while working with children. The Nigerian government should provide incentives to attract graduates with preschool education qualifications into Nigerian preschool classrooms. This could help in bringing some changes to the instructional modes at this level, as the teachers would have been exposed to some instructional techniques (especially the principles and techniques of interaction) for this level of education, as well as to child development courses during their training.

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