

**FUNDAMENTALS OF  
PRE-SCHOOL AND PRIMARY SCHOOL  
TEACHER PREPARATION  
IN NIGERIA**



**A BOOK OF READINGS  
IN HONOUR OF  
PROFESSOR R.O. AKINBOTE**

*Editors:* Prof. Esther Oduolowu  
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**Publish by:**

The Department of  
Early Childhood and Educational Foundations  
University of Ibadan

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Department of Early Childhood and Educational Foundations

**Printed by:** Gab Educ. Printers:

08076454388

**ISBN:** 978-2860-30-1

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**First Published 2019**

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## CONTENTS

Page

### CHAPTER ONE

Assessing Selected Models of Early Childhood Care  
Development Education: Implication or the 21<sup>st</sup> Century  
Teacher Preparation in Nigerian Education System

**Folasade R. SULAIMAN, PhD**

*Department of Educational Foundations & Instructional  
Technology, Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun, Ogun State*

1-14

### CHAPTER TWO

Meeting Global Expectations: The Imperative of  
Early Childhood Education Professionals

**Opeyemi SHOAGA, Ph.D**

*Department of Educational Foundations and Management,  
Faculty of Education,  
Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye*

15-27

### CHAPTER THREE

Sustainable Teaching Career in Early  
Childhood: Interest and Attitude of  
Pre-Service Teachers

**Hannah O. AJAYI<sup>1</sup>, Ph.D and A. AFOLABI<sup>2</sup>**

*Institute of Education, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile – Ife*

28-42

### CHAPTER FOUR

Towards The Development of Effective Early Year Education  
Teachers in Nigeria and South Africa: The Good and Bad  
Contributions of Professional Practice

**I.A. Salami<sup>1</sup>, Ph.D and N. Duku<sup>2</sup>, Ph.D**

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Educational Foundations, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria*

*<sup>2</sup>Professor, School of General and Continuing Education,  
Faculty of Education, University of Fort Hare, South Africa*

43-63

### CHAPTER FIVE

Often-Silenced Constituencies: Considering Teacher  
Candidates' Voices in Teacher Preparation Programmes

**O.M. Odebiyi**

*The University of Alabama, USA*

64-79

## CHAPTER SIX

The Need for Qualified Pre-School Professionals:  
A Pathway to Global Impact

**Olufunmilayo O. SORETIRE, PhD**

*Early Childhood Care and Education Department,  
Federal College of Education, Osiele, Abeokuta. Ogun State*

80-87

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Strengthening Professional Development of Ecce  
Teachers in Nigeria: Demands of Globalisation

**Anna V. AWOPETU<sup>1</sup>, PhD and Ruth M. ODEWUMI<sup>2</sup>,**

*<sup>1 & 2</sup> Department of Early Childhood Care and Education,  
College of Education, Ikere-Ekiti, Ekiti State*

88-95

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Early Childhood Education Teacher Preparation Programme:  
In-Service Teachers' Perception of Content and  
Pedagogical Areas

**A.O. OLANIYAN**

*Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education,  
Kwara State University, Malete, Nigeria.*

96-108

## CHAPTER NINE

Choose Your Professional Caregiver Right and Learn Well

**S.S. FOWOWE<sup>1</sup> and J.A. MAFIKUYOMI<sup>2</sup>**

*<sup>1</sup> Department of Early Childhood Care and Education,  
Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Ijanikin, Lagos.*

*<sup>2</sup> Department of General Studies, Adeniran Ogunsanya  
College of Education, Ijanikin, Lagos State.*

109-134

## CHAPTER TEN

In-Service Training, Funding and Safety in  
Early Childhood Education in Oyo State

**Olukemi ADEOSUN**

*Oyo State Universal Basic Education Board,  
Agodi Gate, Ibadan, Oyo State*

135-149

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

*Need To Prepare Primary Education Studies Professionals  
For Combating Reading Deficiencies*

**Eniola Olutoyosi AKANDE, PhD**

*Primary Education Department, Adeyemi  
College of Education, Ondo City, Ondo State*

150-168

## CHAPTER TWELVE

*An Appraisal of Professional Status of Early Childhood  
Education Personnel in Ogun State, Nigeria*

**Adefunke Ekine<sup>1</sup>, PhD and Demilade Osokoya<sup>2</sup>**

*Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun, Ijebu Ode, Nigeria*

169-186

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

*Teacher Favouritism and Classroom  
Management: Implication for Teacher  
Preparation in Childhood Education in Nigeria*

**Temitayo OGUNSANWO<sup>1</sup>, PhD and Bala USMAN<sup>2</sup>**

*Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education,  
Kwara State University, Malete.*

187-200

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

*Improving Professional Training in Early Childhood Education  
in Nigeria: Issues and Suggestions for Global Best Practices*

**Victoria IROEGBU, PhD**

*Institute of Education, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife*

201-213

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

*Preparation of Professionals for Early Childhood Education  
towards the Achievement of Sustainable Development Goals:  
A Pathway to Global Impact*

**Felicia M. ODUNTAN, PhD**

*Ajayi Crowther University, Faculty of Education, Oyo,  
Oyo State*

214-229

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Quality Assurance in open and Distance Education in Nigeria

**T.A. Oyesomi<sup>1</sup> and B.O. Lawal<sup>2</sup>, Ph.D**

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Policy of Education

Department of Early Childhood and Educational Foundations,  
Faculty of Education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan

230-247

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Early Childhood Education Curriculum in Nigeria:

Moving from Pedagogical Theory to Practice in Design,  
Development and Implementation

**Hannah O. AJAYI, PhD**

Institute of Education, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife

249-260

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Effective Leadership and Management in  
Childhood Care and Education (CCE) Services

**Olabisi ADEDIGBA, PhD**

Department of Adult and Primary Education,  
University of Ilorin, Ilorin

261-275

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

Early Childhood Educators' Awareness of and Disposition to  
Children's Emotional Well-being for Life-Long Learning  
in Oyo State, Nigeria

**M.D. Amosun, PhD**

Department of Early Childhood and Educational Foundations,  
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

276-288

## CHAPTER TWENTY

Survey of Preschool Teachers' Usage of Early Childhood  
Education Curriculum in Lagos Mainland, Nigeria

**Adefunke T. KOMOLAFE, PhD**

Arts and Social Sciences Education Department,  
Faculty of Education, University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos

289-300

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## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS' AWARENESS OF AND DISPOSITION TO CHILDREN'S EMOTIONAL WELLBEING FOR LIFE-LONG LEARNING IN OYO STATE, NIGERIA

M.D. Amosun, PhD

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#### Abstract

*This study investigated early childhood educators' awareness of and disposition to emotional wellbeing development for children's life-long learning. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population comprised all early childhood educators in Ibadan. The study used simple random sampling to select 10 preschools in each of the five Local Government Areas in Ibadan, making a total of 50 preschools involved in the study. Two early childhood educators were randomly selected in each of the five Local Government Areas, making a total of 20 early childhood educators in each Local Government Area involved and a sum total of 100 early childhood educators who participated in the study. Two research questions were answered in the study. Early Childhood Educators' Awareness Questionnaire of Emotional Wellbeing Development for Children's Life-long Learning ( $r=0.74$ ) and Early Childhood Educators' Disposition to Emotional Wellbeing Development for Children's Lifelong Learning ( $r=0.78$ ) was designed. The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics to answer research questions one and two. The results showed that early childhood educators were moderately aware of emotional wellbeing of the children. The disposition of early childhood educators to the emotional wellbeing development for the children's life-long learning was positive. Based on the findings, appropriate conclusion and recommendations were made.*

**Key Words:** Children's development, Early learning, Child's wellbeing, Educator's care.

#### Introduction

Children's emotional well-being is an important aspect of learning that is associated not only with children's basic needs for safety and security, food and shelter, warmth and affection, but also with how they easily get along with themselves and their surroundings. Emotional development focuses on the development of children's self-esteem, their feelings and their awareness of the feelings of others.

Lack of emotional well-being limits the ability to build relationships and become active participants in life and learning (Porter, 2003). Emotional well-being is important such that it is associated with becoming an effective learner. It is important for children to be provided with opportunity to adopt an open and interested attitude towards their environment and learning, and to develop their confidence and self-esteem. They should feel safe, secure and valued. Children want their contributions to be respected, they like to contribute to their own safety and show that they have a right to say 'no' to anything or anybody when it is necessary.

Moreover, children's relationships with their families and communities have been reported to contribute significantly to their sense of well-being (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations for the Council of Australian Governments, 2009) and that children need to feel valued, respected, empowered, cared for and included, respect themselves, others and their environment. It further reported that children become positive about themselves and their learning when adults value them for who they are. The implication of this is that if the early childhood educator or the professional does not value the children during interaction with them or while facilitating learning, the possibility is that they may not be disposed to learn. However, where educators value the children by being actively responsive and providing for them appropriately to learn, it would help children to become resilient and resourceful and to learn to cope with challenge and change. This is related to the observation made by Odinko (2016) that unless early childhood educators exhibit affectionate teacher-child relationships, some children may find it difficult to adjust in the pre-school setting.

Emotional and physical wellbeings are also related and important for learning and development. This is because physical wellbeing makes children to be actively involved by exploring in order to investigate and challenge themselves in their surroundings. Thus, adult supports both mental and physical wellbeings by helping them to make healthy choices about what they eat, how they keep themselves clean and neat as well as engaging in physical practice like running, jumping, playing football and so on. This is because the emotional well-being is a cornerstone to children's all round growth and development. Emotional stability, positive attitudes and ability to communicate effectively are required as basic foundations for learning and because secure and



happy children are able to fully participate in and engage with the educational challenges confronting them (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2000).

Learners should experience activities which enable them to develop the skills and attributes they will need if they are to achieve and sustain positive destinations beyond school. Demands and employment patterns are changing, so it is particularly important for all young children to develop high levels of skill and also an understanding of the world of work, training and lifelong learning such as responsive, resilient and adaptive skills so that they can embrace opportunities.

It is, therefore, clear that the part that early childhood educators play in setting the tone for every interaction that occurs within their classrooms is invaluable. It follows, then, that he/she should cultivate a warm, caring atmosphere that will allow children to explore and discover their world without fear of punishment or ridicule, listen and respond with warmth and sensitivity to children's feelings, ideas, opinions, choices and use positive language that builds children's self-esteem.

Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (2008) observed that educators' awareness, knowledge and understanding of importance of emotional well-being in the life of children would make them provide a learning environment where young learners value and contribute to their own well-being and to the well-being of others. However, in a study by Paula (2016), intuition and personal experience were regarded as more influential to promoting well-being than any training or theoretical understanding for the participants in the study. Since awareness has been implicated as one of the variables for providing and promoting children's wellbeing, it will be necessary to examine it in the study of this nature where much has not been done.

Previous studies among which is Parcel, Ross, Lavin, Portnoy, Nelson and Winters, (1991) have examined the influence of teacher's qualifications on social, emotional and wellbeing programme. They found no association between teachers' programme implementation and qualification, while Pateman, Grunbaum and Kann (1999) found that teachers advocated strongly for qualified teachers to teach the health curriculum. Also, in Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart, Sylva, Sammonds and Meluish (2008), it was found that staff with higher qualifications offered richer learning environments with sustained beneficial effects on all areas of development, including attainment, social, emotional and

behavioural development. Thus, findings on teachers' qualification and children's emotional wellbeing are inconclusive.

With regards to disposition and attitudes of the early childhood educators, Ford and Nikapota (2000) conducted a qualitative study to gather the views of 25 participants from 11 primary schools using semi-structured interviews and vignettes. Ford and Nikapota (2000) reported that teachers' attitudes towards pupils' emotional needs were perceived to be influenced by their own personal experiences and background, rather than by formal training. National Early Years Access Initiative (2012) reiterated that the dispositions and attitudes of the early childhood educator are crucial, as his/her actions and attitudes send important messages to children on how they should behave. When early childhood educators display curiosity, imagination and respect, they will appreciate and encourage the same attitudes and dispositions in children.

However, it has been observed that while the importance of children's wellbeing is not disputed in relation to learning and development, there are inconclusive views on what wellbeing really is and its awareness among early childhood educators (Odinko, 2016, Mashford-Scott, Church and Tayler, 2012). Therefore, the paper contends that in order to support children's wellbeing in early childhood education setting, it may be important to know the level of awareness of early childhood educators and their disposition to children's wellbeing. Moreover, literatures have shown that child educators' pedagogical knowledge and skills in providing responsive, stimulating and safe learning environment for children is low (Amosun and Kolawole, 2015). Besides, there are few studies that examined children's emotional wellbeing or social inclusion (Cooper and Stewart, 2013), especially in the context where this study was carried out. It is, therefore, necessary to look at early childhood educators' awareness and disposition to emotional wellbeing development for children's lifelong learning in Oyo State, Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Problem**

An increased responsibility for schools and educators in promoting children's emotional wellbeing by assessing and supporting their mental needs in good time is now being emphasised, especially in relation to children's learning and life. Emotional wellbeing influences the way children interact in their environments, provides children with

confidence and optimism which maximise their learning potential as well as encourages capacity to persevere and cope with day-to day stress and challenges leading to opportunity for success and achievement. Conversely, the early childhood education setting where these learning experiences can be provided in order to support wellbeing needs of the children is less responsive and stimulating. Researches have shown that it may be due to pedagogical or personality issues within the educators such as awareness of and disposition of the educators to the children and the learning environment in which they interact with the children as these variables have been found to be potent in teaching-learning environment. The study was, therefore, carried out to examine early childhood educators' awareness and disposition to emotional wellbeing development for children's lifelong learning in Oyo State, Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the level of early childhood educators' awareness of emotional wellbeing development for children's life-long learning?
2. What is the disposition of early childhood educators to emotional wellbeing development for children's life-long learning?

### **Methodology**

This study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population comprised all early childhood educators in Ibadan. The study used simple random sampling to select 10 preschools in each of the five local government areas in Ibadan, making a total of 50 preschools involved in the study. Two early childhood educators were randomly selected in each of the five local government area making a total of 20 early childhood educators in each local government areas involved and a sum total of 100 early childhood educators who participated in the study. Two research questions were raised to guide the study. Two self-designed and validated instruments were used to collect data for the study: Early Childhood Educators' Awareness Questionnaire of Emotional Wellbeing Development for Children's Life-long Learning ( $r = 0.74$ ) and Early Childhood Educators' Disposition to Emotional Wellbeing Development for Children' Life-long Learning Questionnaire ( $r = 0.78$ ). The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency, percentage, mean.

**Research Question 1:** What is the level of early childhood educators' awareness of emotional wellbeing development for children's life-long learning?

**Table 4: Showing the extent of early childhood educators' awareness of emotional wellbeing development for children's life-long learning**

S/N	ITEMS	FA	MA	SA	NA	Mean	SD
1	Emotional wellbeing of children is central to their educational achievements in life.	0 0	0 0	62 62	38 38	1.620	0.488
2	A child without positive emotional wellbeing will learn fast and very well.	0 0	0 0	31 31	69 69	1.690	0.465
3	Taking risks and trying out new things is a good way of developing children's emotional wellbeing.	0 0	55 55	39 39	6 6	2.490	0.611
4	Inculcating the ability to demonstrate care, cooperation and respect for others is not good for children's emotional development.	9 9	8 8	13 13	6 6	1.620	1.170
5	Inculcating the ability to share information with others is a good way of developing children's emotional wellbeing for life-long learning.	92 92	8 8	0 0	0 0	3.920	0.273
6	It is good for a child to be able to express him/herself creatively and imaginatively for life-long learning.	14 14	35 35	6 6	45 45	2.180	1.158
7	Self-confidence, self-esteem, self-identity and belongingness, inner strength and resilience, secure relationships and language for feelings are building blocks for emotional development.	28 28	54 54	18 18	0 0	3.100	0.674
8	Emotional wellbeing of children is a cornerstone for learning and development.	4	13	37	46	1.750	0.833

9	The development of children's self-identity is the understanding of who they are and their place in the wider world.	61 61	3 3	24 24	12 12	3.130	1.152
10	Children's relationship with others is an essential part of their early life and it contributes largely to their overall development.	37 37	20 20	22 22	21 21	2.730	1.171
11	Children, like adults, may feel angry, sad, lonely, guilty depending on the circumstances surrounding them.	63 63	9 9	15 15	13 13	3.220	1.124
12	The feeling of being accepted and valued by adults and peers around them is a component of emotional wellbeing.	90 90	2 2	5 5	3 3	3.790	0.671
13	The feeling of confidence and self-knowledge is not necessary for the development of children's emotional wellbeing.	41 41	21 21	34 34	3 3	2.990	0.987
14	When children are able to name, recognise and talk about their feelings, they are better able to cope in times of stress, react appropriately to difficult situations and interact with their peers.	49 49	43 43	4 4	4 4	3.370	0.747
15	When a child's transition to a new environment is handled with respect and understanding, it broadens his/her sense of self and leads to a positive developmental experience	63 63	2 2	1 1	34 34	2.940	1.420
<b>Weighted Average = 2.7 (67.5%) Moderately aware</b>							

The table above revealed that early childhood educators are moderately aware of emotional wellbeing development for children's life-long learning. The detailed interpretation of the table is as follows: item 1 (Emotional wellbeing of children is central to their educational achievements in life) has the mean (1.620), item 2 (A child without positive emotional wellbeing will learn fast and very well) has the mean (1.690), item 3 (Taking risks and trying out new things is a good way of developing children's emotional wellbeing) has the mean (2.490), item 4 (Inculcating the ability to demonstrate care, cooperation and respect

for others is not good for children's emotional development) has the mean (1.620), item 5 (Inculcating the ability to share information with others is a good way of developing children's emotional wellbeing for life-long learning) has the mean (3.920), item 6 (It is good for a child to be able to express him/herself creatively and imaginatively for life-long learning) has the mean (2.180), item 7 (Self-confidence, self-esteem, self-identity and belonging, inner strength and resilience, secure relationships and language for feelings are building blocks for emotional development) has the mean (3.100), item 8 (Emotional wellbeing of children is a cornerstone for learning and development) has the mean (1.750), item 9 (The development of self-identity is the understanding of who they are and their place in the wider world) has the mean (3.130), item 10 (Children's relationship with others is an essential part of their early life and it contributes largely to their overall development) has the mean (2.730), item 11 (Children, like adults, may feel angry, sad, lonely, guilty depending on the circumstances surrounding them) has the mean (3.220), item 12 (The feeling of being accepted and valued by adults and peers around them is a component of emotional wellbeing) has the mean (3.790), item 13 (The feeling of confidence and self-knowledge is not necessary for the development of children's emotional wellbeing) has the mean (2.990), item 14 (When children are able to name, recognize and talk about their feelings they are better able to cope in times of stress, react appropriately to difficult situations and interact with their peers) has the mean (3.370), while item 15 (when a child's transition to a new environment is handled with respect and understanding, it broadens his/her sense of self and leads to a positive developmental experience) has the mean (2.940).

**Research Question 2:** What is the disposition of early childhood educators to the emotional wellbeing development for children's life-long learning?

**Table 5: Showing the disposition of early childhood educators' to the emotional wellbeing development for children's life-long learning**

S/N	ITEMS	SD	D	A	SA	Mean	SD
1	I can hug the children so as to let them feel comfortable and know that I care about them.	10	33	30	27	2.720	1.016
2	It is not necessary to say goodbye to children when they are going home.	47	8	28	17	2.150	1.190

3	I can encourage the children to try something new by offering them new challenges	13	12	60	26	3.090	0.712
4	It is always good to talk about the feelings of the children.	5	12	35	48	3.260	0.860
5	I allow children to express their feelings.	-	31	63	6	2.750	0.557
6	It is good to support children in making choice by first understanding their interests.	13	3	52	32	3.030	0.937
7	I giggle and snuggle with the children for them to know I enjoy their company.	2	24	55	19	2.910	0.712
8	Children's ability to try something new, explore and learn is greatly inhibited if they lack confidence and motivation or if they are afraid to take risks or make mistakes.	23	1	66	10	2.630	0.950
9	A child who has not developed positive emotional wellbeing such as co-operation or taking responsibility for his/her actions may struggle to gain social acceptance.	10	1	79	10	2.840	0.861
10	A child who has developed successful emotional wellbeing has conquered the most fundamental component of learning for life.	1	3	34	29	2.910	0.830
11	It is not necessary for children to be able to express and manage their feelings.	29	35	33	3	2.100	0.859
12	I always help and encourage children to be able to demonstrate independence.	3	23	54	20	2.890	0.803
13	It is not a necessity to inculcate in children the skill of persevering with challenges and difficulties.	26	22	17	35	2.610	1.214
14	I encourage the curiosity and interest of children through activities involved in.	-	35	38	27	2.920	0.911
15	I inculcate in children the ability to demonstrate caring and respectful attitudes toward others.	5	6	32	57	3.410	0.911
<b>Weighted Average = 2.8 (70%) Positive disposition</b>							

The table above revealed that the disposition of early childhood educators to the emotional wellbeing development for children's life-long learning is positive (**WA=2.8**). The detailed interpretation of the table is as follows: item 1 (I can hug the children so as to let them feel comfortable and know that I care about them) has the mean (2.720), item 2 (It is not necessary to say goodbye to children when they are going home) has the mean (2.150), item 3 (I can encourage children to try something new by offering them new challenges) has the mean (3.090), item 4 (It is always good to talk about the feelings of children) has the mean (3.260), item 5 (I allow children to express their feelings) has the mean (2.750), item 6 (It is good to support children in making choice by first understanding their interests) has the item (3.030), item 7 (I have a giggle and a snuggle with the children for them to know I enjoy their company) has the mean (2.910), item 8 (Children's ability to try something new, explore and learn is greatly inhibited if they lack confidence and motivation or if they are afraid to take risks or make mistakes) has the mean (2.630), item 9 (A child who has not developed positive emotional wellbeing such as co-operation or taking responsibility for his/her actions may struggle to gain social acceptance) has the mean (2.840), item 10 (A child who has developed successful emotional wellbeing has conquered the most fundamental component of learning for life) has the mean (2.890), item 11 (It is not necessary for children to be able to express and manage their feelings) has the mean (2.100), item 12 (I always help and encourage children to be able to demonstrate independence) has the mean (2.890), item 13 (It is not a necessity to inculcate in children the skill of persevering with challenges and difficulties) has the mean (2.610), item 14 (I encourage the curiosity and interest of children through activities involved in) has the mean (2.920), while item 15 (I inculcate in children the ability to demonstrate caring and respectful attitudes towards others) has the mean of (3.410).

## **Discussion of Findings**

### **Level of Early Childhood Educators' Awareness of Emotional Wellbeing Development for Children's Life-long Learning**

The first finding of this study indicated that early childhood educators are moderately aware of emotional wellbeing development for children's life-long learning. This means that the child educators are slightly or averagely responsive to the emotional wellbeing development of children. This finding may be explained in the sense that the early childhood educators may not have sufficient information



on the importance of children's wellbeing before and after they were recruited as child educators. This situation is not good enough for the emotional wellbeing of children. This finding corroborates the result of the study by Kidger, Araya, Donovan and Gunnel (2010) who indicated that some teachers and other school staff feel that their roles are unclear in relation to school-based emotional well-being, and that they are expected to have a wide range of different skills beyond their teaching responsibilities. The study by Rothi, Leavy and Best(2008) also revealed that teachers feel that they have limited understanding and lack of confidence in supporting children with emotional difficulties or mental health needs.

### **Disposition of Early Childhood Educators to Emotional Wellbeing Development for Children's Life-long Learning**

The second finding of this study showed that the disposition of early childhood educators to the emotional wellbeing development for children's life-long learning is positive. This means that the early childhood educators have good attitudes toward development of the child's wellbeing.

The result may be explained in that the moderate awareness of the child educators informed their positive disposition to the wellbeing of the children. The finding the position of Paula (2016) who pointed out that Ford and Nikapota (2000) reported that teachers' attitudes towards pupils' emotional needs though positive, were perceived to be influenced by their own personal experiences and background, rather than by formal training.

### **Conclusion**

It is concluded that early childhood educators' awareness of and positive disposition toward emotional development of children has great potentials for improving wellbeing of children and their development. However, the findings showed that the educators are moderately aware of the children's emotional development.

### **Recommendations**

Based on these findings, it is recommended that periodical training for early childhood educators should be organised around paying attention to educators' emotional well-being as well as identifying and responding to children's mental health needs. Child educators should also establish close relationship with children and their parents and focus on the individual needs of children and their families.

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