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**Pre-School Teachers' Knowledge of Early Childhood
Assessment and Domains of Learning Commonly Assessed in
Ondo West Local Government Area, Ondo State, Nigeria**

By

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Abstract

Children have unique nature and characteristics. Because of this, regular and holistic assessment of their learning and development is necessary. This could be done through observation, administration of standardized and teacher-made assessment instrument and children work. For assessment of pre-school children to be done effectively, teachers at this level of education need to have good knowledge of what early childhood assessment is all about. This study, therefore, examined pre-school teachers' knowledge of early childhood assessment and domains commonly assessed in early childhood education centres in Ondo West Local Government Area of Ondo State. The study adopted descriptive survey design. The sample for the study comprised one hundred pre-primary school teachers selected from both public and private schools through the use of purposive sampling. "Test on Teachers' Knowledge of Early Childhood Assessment" ($r=0.79$) and "Checklist on Domains Commonly Assessed by Pre-school Teachers" ($r=0.80$) were instruments used for the study. Data collected were analysed using percentage, mean and standard deviation. Findings from the study revealed that the pre-primary school teachers' level of knowledge on early childhood

assessment in Ondo West Local Government Area was low ($\bar{x} = 38.71$; $SD = 16.31$). Cognitive domain was the one most commonly assessed by the pre-primary school teachers ($\bar{x} = 3.40$); with less emphasis on the assessment of other developmental domains which are the physical ($\bar{x}=1.58$), social ($\bar{x}=1.60$) and emotional ($\bar{x}=1.46$). The implication is that, since the pre-schoolers are not properly assessed in all the domains of development through the use of appropriate assessment tools, they will not have the advantage of experiencing holistic development. It was, therefore, recommended that Pre-service ECE teacher education programmes should be reviewed such that teachers-in-training can acquire appropriate knowledge and skills in ECE assessment. School heads and owners should also organize in-service training, seminars and workshops on assessment in early childhood education periodically so as to train and expose the pre-primary school teachers to contemporary assessment practices in early childhood education.

Keywords: Pre-school, knowledge, Early Childhood, Assessment, Domains of Learning

Introduction

The early childhood years, especially from three to five years, are a critical period of every child. This period is characterized by rapid physical, emotional, social and cognitive development. Children develop and learn quickly during this period. They, however, learn in different ways and at varying rates as a result of both genetic and environmental influences. They comprehend through doing as well as through listening and often express themselves through physical behaviour and play, rather than verbally (Loggenberg, 2011). Psychologists and child development specialists have grouped related areas of development into broader categories referred to as domains. These different areas of growth and development have been labelled and defined as developmental domains (Estes, 2004; Berk, 2009; Loggenberg, 2011). While physical growth and maturation as well as nervous system development are parts of psychomotor domain, development of memory, reasoning, problem solving and language are classified as cognitive domain. The affective domain includes emotional, social and moral development.

Although exploring each of the developmental domains separately provides an organized method of learning about, observing and understanding the complex process of human development, children learning and development in the actual sense is a holistic and dynamic process. Estes (2004) asserts that a holistic view of children recognizes that the components of development overlap, as they occur simultaneously and reciprocally. Children are holistically involved in playing, interacting and exploring; their naturally-integrated activity serves to support their total development (Estes, 2004; Berk, 2009; Loggenberg, 2011).

Owing to the nature of learning and development in children, assessment practices are essential to ensuring that learning occurs and evolves according to the needs of each learner. Assessment is the process of gathering information about children from several forms of evidence, then organizing and interpreting that information (McAfee, Leong, and Bodrova, 2004). It is the process of collecting information about children's development, learning, health, behaviour, academic progress, need for special services and attainment in order to make decisions (Morrison, 2009; Adebisi, Iroham, Amwe & Rasak, 2014). Assessment occurs primarily through observations, administration of commercial and teacher-made tests and examination of children's products. Assessment, according to National Policy on Education (2013), is to encompass two broad areas, which are assessment of learning and assessment for learning.

Assessment of children from birth through the preschool years is different from assessment of older people. Not only can young children not write or read, but also the young developing child presents different challenges that influence the choice of assessment strategy, or how to measure or assess the child. Assessment methods must be matched with the level of mental, social and physical development at each stage (Drummond, 2003; National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), 2009). Developmental change in young children is rapid, and there is a need to assess whether development is progressing normally or not. If development is not normal, the measurement and evaluation procedures used are important in making decisions regarding appropriate intervention services during infancy and the preschool years. Assessment approaches for children, therefore, should integrate holistic learning and development and identify areas that need extended learning

opportunities, intervention or additional support. The outcome of such assessment can assist both the teacher and the parent to make important educational decisions for a child and should be monitored to help inform planning and decision-making.

The importance of assessment to children, families, early childhood programmes, teachers and the public has been documented in literature. Appropriate assessment practices help in determining, planning and selecting appropriate curriculum to meet children's individual needs. It helps in communicating with parents to provide information about their children's progress and learning (Morrison, 2009, Loggenberg, 2011). Assessment of children helps the teacher to identify children's skills, abilities, interests, learning styles and needs. Through assessment practices, children are screened and referred as appropriate for additional services (Bell and Cowie, 2001; Broadfoot, 2007; Morrison, 2009). Assessment also helps in informing the public regarding children's achievement and providing a basis for public policies and legislations concerning children.

There are some principles that guide assessment of children. Some of these principles are that assessment should bring about benefits for children; should be tailored to a specific purpose and should be reliable, valid and fair for that purpose; should be appropriate both in content and method of data collection; should be linguistically appropriate, recognizing that, to some extent, all assessments are measures of language; and should not be limited to children special educational needs alone (Landsberg, 2005; Morrison, 2009). Parents should also be a valued source of assessment information, as well as an audience for assessment. Because of the fallibility of direct measures of children, assessments should include multiple sources of evidence, especially reports from parents and teachers (Drummond, 2003; NAEYC and NAECS/SDE, 2003; Morrison, 2008).

Despite the obvious importance of assessment to children, teachers, parents and the public, studies have shown that the manner in which assessment is carried out in most pre-school centres fall short of expectations. For instance, cases of overreliance on inappropriate and unreliable standardized tests are common (Alliance for Childhood, 2010). In most cases, these standardized tests are either not

developmentally appropriate or do not fit into the cultural setting of the children being assessed. According to Morrison (2009), many early childhood professionals believe that standardized tests do not measure children's thinking, problem-solving ability, creativity or responsibility for their own learning. Closely related to this is the issue of relying mostly on pen-and-paper assessment of children at this level, a situation which has left a legacy of misconception and misunderstanding of assessment in pre-school education (Kadimba, 2012). A study conducted by Asare (2015) to examine the kindergarten teachers' assessment practices in Ghana revealed that the paper-and-pencil test mode of assessment was used frequently by the teachers. In addition teachers also appeared to be using a particular mode of assessment just to meet the expectations of the parents and educational leaders without meeting the curriculum assessment prescription.

Another issue of concern with the way assessment of children is carried out is the mismatch between the narrow range of proficiencies that get assessed (mostly under cognitive domain) and the breath of proficiencies that children must develop. The fact remains that what is commonly assessed is what will be taught by teachers, as failure to assess these other domains introduces the risk of failure to attend to them during instructional strategies (NAEYC and NAECS/DSE, 2003). The implication of this is that this situation usually leaves domains such as social and emotional development as well as creativity underemphasized during assessment.

Some researchers have examined the factors that may be responsible for poor assessment practices among pre-school teachers. Among these factors are parental orientation and expectation on their children, which make them put pressures on their children's teachers (Cook, 2009; Asare, 2015), large teachers-pupil ratio, which gives rise to a teacher having to handle more than the recommended number of pupils (Obiweluzor, 2015) and inadequate knowledge of early childhood assessment or what could be referred to as mismatch of what is taught to pre-service teachers, in terms of assessment skills and techniques and what in-service teachers actually need in schools (Susuwele-banda, 2005; Loggenberg, 2011). Of particular interest to this study is teacher knowledge of early childhood assessment.

Every pre-school teacher is expected to have adequate knowledge of assessment practices in early childhood. Pre-school teachers need the knowledge and skill to decide how activities can fit together to benefit children's growth and development. They also need to possess necessary knowledge and skills to modify activities so that they are part of a continuum that is responsible to children's development. Many learning experiences require teachers to know about subject content and subject pedagogy in order for children's learning to be extended (Kane, 2005).

Effective assessment approaches help teachers to obtain the necessary knowledge of individual child's strengths, interests and unique profiles. Most opportunities to extend children's learning experiences, skills and knowledge occur when teachers interact with children and respond to their interests and inquiries (Hedges and Cullen, 2005). These interactions can be ineffective if teachers lack the necessary knowledge and skills to identify and extend children learning experiences. Teachers need to be equipped with knowledge of the typical progression of children's growing proficiency and also be sufficiently familiar with their age expectations (Luggenberg, 2011).

As important as adequate knowledge of early childhood assessment is to pre-school teachers, research attention has not been fully directed at the issue in order to ascertain the extent to which preschool teachers in the country have adequate knowledge of assessment practices in early childhood education. A situation where these teachers lack necessary knowledge and skills to properly assess children's learning and development could be counter-productive because taking life-changing decisions about them would be seriously hampered. Besides, there is a dearth of empirical literature in Nigeria, especially in Ondo State, on to pre-school teacher's knowledge of early childhood assessment and the domains commonly-assessed by these teachers. These reasons justify the need to conduct a study of this kind in order to establish the level of teachers' knowledge on the issue of assessment of pre-school children in Ondo State. This study is equally imperative, as there is need to provide more empirical information on issues related to assessment of pre-school learning and development.

Research Questions

The following questions were raised and answered in the study:

1. What is the level of pre-primary school teachers' knowledge on early childhood assessment in Ondo West Local Government Area?
2. What are the developmental domains commonly assessed by the pre-primary school teachers in Ondo West Local Government Area?

Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population of this study comprised all preschool teachers in both public and private schools in Ondo West Local Government Area. The multistage sampling technique was adopted for this study. Ondo West Local Government Area was zoned into five. Selection of schools was done using disproportionate stratified random sampling, whereby all zones were represented. The criteria for selection of schools are that the schools are accessible, have been in existence for at least five years and have been officially registered with the government. From each of the selected schools, all the teachers handling pre-school classes were selected. A total of 100 preschool teachers from twenty schools were used for the study. Two instruments were used "Test on Teachers' Knowledge of Early Childhood Assessment" (TTKECA) and "Checklist on Domains Commonly Assessed by Pre-school Teachers" (CDCAPT).

The TTKECA had two sections. Section A contained items that measured demographic information of the respondents, while section B contained eight free-response and fill-in the gap questions that measured the participants knowledge of assessment in early childhood education. The second instrument was a self-designed checklist titled "Checklist on Domain Commonly Assessed by Pre-school Teachers" (CDCAPT), which contained developmental domains of cognitive, physical, social and emotional. The checklist adopted a 5-point scale of Never (N), Rarely (R), Sometimes (S), Often (O), and Always (A) and rated as 1,2,3,4 and 5, respectively.

To ensure face and content validity of the instruments, they were given to experts in early childhood education in the Department of Early

Childhood Care and Education, Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo, for correction. The instruments were also given to experienced pre-primary school teachers. Twenty copies of each of the instruments were administered to 20 pre-school teachers in another local government area of the state. The reliability coefficient of TTKECA was determined using Kuder Richardson (KR 20) and a reliability coefficient of 0.79 was obtained, while the reliability of CDCAPT was determined using the inter-rater technique through Spearman rank order and a reliability coefficient of 0.80 was obtained. The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency count, percentage, mean and standard deviation. A bar chart was also used.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the level of pre-primary school teachers' knowledge on early childhood assessment in Ondo West Local Government Area?

Table 1: The Level of Knowledge of Pre-primary School Teachers on Early Childhood Assessment

Score	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Std. Deviation
0-19	8	9.52		
20-39	44	52.4		
40-59	24	28.57	38.71	16.31
60-89	8	9.52		
90-100	0	0.00		
Total	84	100.0		

N = 84

Highest Mark Obtainable = 100

Decision Value: Low (\bar{x} = 0-1=39.00), Average (\bar{x} = 40.00-59.00), High (\bar{x} = 60.00-100)

Table 1 above shows the level of knowledge of pre-primary school teachers on early childhood assessment. It shows that 9.52% of the teachers scored 0 to 19 on the knowledge test of childhood assessment; 52.4% of them scored 20 to 39 on the test; 28.57% scored 40 to 59; and the remaining 9.52% scored 60 to 89. None of the pre-primary school teachers scored 90 to 100. The overall mean score of the pre-primary school teachers' knowledge was 38.71, with a standard deviation value of

16.31. Based on this result, it can be inferred that the level of knowledge of pre-primary school teachers on early childhood assessment is low.

Research Question 2: What are the developmental domains that are commonly assessed by the pre-primary school teachers in Ondo West Local Government Area?

Table 2: Commonly Assessed Developmental Domains

S/N	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remark
1	Cognitive	3.40	.50	Commonly assessed
2.	Physical	1.58	.64	Less assessed
3.	Social	1.60	.57	Less assessed
4.	Emotional	1.46	.58	Less assessed

N = 80

Decision Value: Less Assessed= 0.00-2.44, commonly Assessed= 2.45-5.00

Table 2 above captures the domains of development commonly assessed by the pre-school teachers in Ondo West Local Government Area. It could be seen from the table that cognitive domain was the only one most commonly assessed by the pre-primary school teachers ($\bar{x} = 3.40$). The mean values for the assessment of other developmental domains were physical (1.58), social (1.60) and emotional (1.46). This showed that these domains were less assessed by pre-school teachers in the study area. Figure 1 below further presents the result on the table in a bar chart.

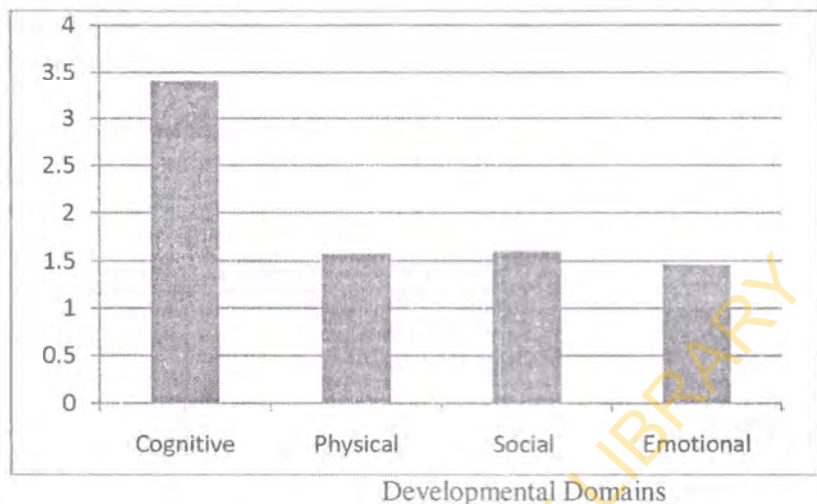


Figure 1: Distribution of Developmental domains based on level of Assessment

Discussion of Findings

Findings from this study revealed that the level of knowledge of the pre-primary school teachers on early childhood assessment in Ondo West Local Government Area was low. This result may be due to the fact most of the pre-primary school teachers used for this study were not professionals in the field of early childhood care and education and, therefore, had not acquired the necessary knowledge and skills of assessment practices in early childhood education. This finding is consistent with the finding of Asare (2015), that kindergarten teachers in Ghana mostly use paper-and-pencil assessment as a result of their lack of proper knowledge and skills of early childhood assessment. Another factor that could be responsible for the findings is that even the professionally qualified among them were not exposed to training that could furnish them with the appropriate knowledge and skills of early childhood assessment, a situation which has made them to be confronted with challenges of assessment different from what they were exposed to in training. This finding is also consistent with the finding of Susuwele-Banda (2005), who posits that there is a mismatch of what is taught to pre-service teachers, in

terms of assessment skills and techniques and what in-service teachers actually need in schools.

The fact that the study also revealed that the pre-school teachers concentrated more on the assessment of the cognitive domain is another serious issue that calls for concern, especially because of the fact that children's development in all the domains needs to be properly monitored. The finding of this study is also consistent with that of Asare (2015), that the kindergarten teachers sampled used a particular mode of assessment just to meet the expectations of the parents and educational leaders without meeting the curriculum assessment prescription. The process of assessment, for the purpose of teaching and learning has an immeasurable impact on children's current and future learning as well as their development. The situation portrayed by these findings is not encouraging going by the view of Drummond (2003) and NAEYC (2009), that assessment procedures for children should take care of the physical, mental and social development at each stage.

Pre-service ECE teacher education, especially with regard to assessment, is very vital. Exposing the teachers to courses on assessment that are different from what they will actually meet on the field will only be counter-productive. It is, therefore, important that they receive adequate education as well as support to ensure competent and reliable assessment practices and effective use of the information gathered.

Conclusion

This study has established that most pre-school teachers do not have adequate knowledge of early childhood assessment and that it is the cognitive domain that is mostly assessed. The implications of these findings for learning and development of children have also been discussed in this paper. It is important to make efforts to address this issue of inadequate knowledge of appropriate assessment techniques by pre-schoolteachers in early childhood education programmes.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it becomes inevitable to make some recommendations that could address the problems identified.

Pre-service ECE teacher education programmes should be reviewed such that teachers in training can acquire appropriate knowledge and skills in ECE assessment. This will enable them to translate the knowledge and skills acquired during training to practice when they get to the field. The school heads and the school owners should endeavour to organize in-service training, seminars and workshops periodically for teachers in their various centres. Lastly pre-primary school teachers who are not professionally qualified should enrol for part-time courses in Early Childhood Education so that they can get acquainted with issues and practices in early childhood assessment.

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