

PERCEIVED IMPACT OF TEACHERS' EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION IN FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY (FCT), ABUJA: IMPLICATION FOR GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

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Abstract

Early Childhood Care and Development Education (ECCDE) is an education that focuses on the care, protection, stimulation, and learning of children from age 0-5 years in a creche or nursery. This is to help in the smooth transition from the home to the school, to inculcate social and moral norms and values. This study examined the impact of teachers' educational qualifications on the quality of Early Childhood Development Education in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, and explored the implications for guidance and counselling. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 360 ECCDE teachers selected through multi-stage sampling techniques. A researcher-developed questionnaire with established validity and reliability was employed, and data were analysed using descriptive statistics, t-test, and ANOVA at the 0.05 level of significance. To establish the reliability, the instrument was subjected to a test-retest reliability technique, and a coefficient of 0.88 was obtained using Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation formula. Findings revealed that professional training is relevant in early childhood education, and that the teachers' educational qualifications were found to be significant in the teaching quality, classroom arrangement and management, implementation of the curriculum, and children's learning outcomes. Gender was found to have a significant impact on teachers' educational qualifications in ECCDE as a result of their numbers in the participation in the study, while years of working experience had no significant difference. The study concluded that educational qualification adequately prepares teachers for better teaching, higher degrees in ECCDE help teachers demonstrate better classroom management skills, and professional certification also improves teachers for a better understanding of child development. The study therefore recommended that counselling services be provided in support of teachers' professional development, career advancement and psychosocial support. The study recommends that teachers be enhanced in their educational standards, teachers' professional development, and the implementation of good policies in support of ECCDE and quality child development outcomes in the FCT, Abuja.

Keywords: Impact, Early, Childhood, Development, Guidance, Counselling

Introduction

Early childhood care development education (ECCDE) refers to a range of processes and mechanisms that sustain and support development during the early years of life. It encompasses education, physical, social and emotional care, intellectual stimulation, health care and nutrition. It also includes the support a family and community need to promote children's healthy development (UNICEF, 2012). The early years of human life provide a unique opportunity for social and cognitive investment, but at the same time, this is the most vulnerable period for all forms of stunting in development if holistic development is not well nurtured.

The one-year pre-primary education is concerned with the care and education of children of 5 years old, i.e. just before the age of formal schooling. It is meant to support early development of children and close the gaps in the attainment of developmental goals, which are critical foundations to the organisation of the future learning experiences of children. In line with this, the Federal Government of Nigeria, through the National Policy on Education, stipulates that the one-year pre - primary education should be part of the formal school system, thereby making the national school structure to be 1 year of pre-primary, 6 years of primary, 3 years of junior secondary, 3 years of senior secondary, and 4 years of tertiary education. Consequently, Basic Education is now to run for 10 years instead of 9 years (FRN, 2014).

Early childhood care development education (ECCDE) activities are designed to meet the child's multiple needs, such as health, nutrition and psycho-social stimulation, as well as strengthening the environment in which the children live. The care and the support received by a child in terms of good health, nutrition, psycho-social and protection are very crucial in the formulation and development of intelligence, personality and social behaviour of the child. Many parents grapple with the functional understanding of Early childhood care development education (FRN, 2024).

According to the Tanshankent Declaration (2022), strengthening the education and training systems of ECCEE personnel is of paramount importance. The training of ECCDE personnel should be integrated within a framework of high-quality teacher education and continuous professional development and ensured by standards and qualification frameworks that allow for the certification of ECCDE professionals, including through

alternative pathways like the recognition of prior and experiential learning. Curricula and pedagogies to train ECCDE personnel should incorporate the latest developments in education sciences and evidence-based, inclusive, intercultural, and gender-responsive content. They should be contextually situated and culturally relevant yet responsive to global challenges like climate change, conflicts and crises. The training of ECCDE personnel should support learners to identify and attend to and safeguard victims of cases of abuse, including physical, psychological and sexual violence on children, and educate children, especially girls, about their sexual and reproductive rights.

In line with the above, as a teacher, it is worthwhile to be familiar with the curriculum and the teacher's guide, for pedagogical ingenuity in terms of implementation, and this has to do with how best the teacher is equipped. The curriculum is meant to harmonise knowledge and skills for effective play-based pre-primary education service delivery, and to incorporate the use of play, rhymes, stories, songs and other activity-based methods to enhance the growth and development of young children. The curriculum is designed to ensure uniformity of practice across all states in Nigeria. One of the major objectives of the curriculum is to give opportunities for uniformity in assessing progress on programme implementation. It is designed to enable children to think, speak and imagine other possibilities in what they see, hear and create. It also provides a systematic mix of knowledge-based content aimed at meeting the various developmental needs of the child; i.e. physical development, cognitive development, emotional development, language development, etc. (FRN, 2024). For a better understanding of early childhood education curriculum and full implementation, teachers are very critical in terms of their professionalism and capacity.

To emphasise how critical the education of learners at this level is, Ojeme (2014) opined that this level of education is the most vulnerable stage of the total process of education. She stated further that the cadre of education at this level is aimed at giving children an academic head start as well as preparing them for primary school education. Wordu, Wosowei and Achinihi (2015) asserted that the laying of a sound foundation for young children in the early years would greatly impact the future of the Nigerian society.

Based on the Nigerian Government's recognition of the importance of ECCDE, the purpose of early child care development and education shall be to; effect a smooth

transition for the child from home to school; prepare the child for primary level of education; provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work; inculcate social norms in children; inculcate in the child a spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys etc.; develop a sense of cooperation/team spirit in children; enable children learn good habits, especially, good health habit - hygiene; and teach children the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms etc. through play. ECCDE children who are taught by teachers with specialised training in early child care education are more sociable, exhibit a developed use of language and perform at a higher level on cognitive tasks than children who are cared for by less qualified teachers (Ackerman & Barnett, 2009).

The early years (0-5) are crucial for the development of an individual, and it is a critical foundation for learning, and the foundation of these levels of learners depends on the quality and competence of our teachers, who are the implementers of the school design and curriculum. However, in many contexts, Nigeria, specifically, has had this issue of unqualified teachers in the handling of ECCDE, and it has been a bane in the education sector. Despite the national policy proclamation on the employability of qualified teachers in the handling of ECCDE centres in Nigeria, centres are still handled by teachers with inadequate or non-specialised qualifications. Many practitioners lacked the pedagogical ingenuity in curriculum implementation, assessment, inclusive practice, and child psychology. All these raised a question of the effectiveness of the practice as well as the future of our young ward. In the same vein, the challenge of effective delivery of developmentally appropriate practices for child-centred learning experiences. This mismatch between the required professional teachers in the implementation of ECCDE has been linked to poor classroom management, poor instructional practice, employment of the wrong persons, incessant posting of teachers without replacement, inadequate identification of children with special needs and poor implementation of the curriculum in Nigeria.

A Quality Early Child Education is one of the most cost-effective ways to build human capital, the national economy and sustainable growth (UNICEF,2023). More recently, neuroscience is contributing to a greater understanding of how young children develop and thrive by showing the significant brain development that occurs in the earliest

years of life. Transforming ECCDE requires a stronger partnership between researchers, policymakers, practitioners and families to enable continued innovation and prioritisation in policy formulation and programme development based on research, evidence and local knowledge.

According to the World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education (WCECCE) (2022), held in Uzbekistan had in attendance the United Nations (UN) agencies, development cooperation agencies, civil society organisations, education agents and experts. A document came out from this conference, tagged “Tashkent declaration on early child education”, enumerating the need to strengthen the education and training systems of ECCDE personnel. The training of ECCDE personnel should be integrated within a framework of high-quality teacher education and continuous professional development and ensured by standards and qualification frameworks that allow for the certification of ECCDE professionals, including through alternative pathways like the recognition of prior and experiential learning. Curricula and pedagogies to train ECCDE personnel should incorporate the latest developments of education sciences and be evidence-based, inclusive, intercultural, and gender-responsive (Tashkent Declaration, 2022). In view of the above, there is a need for investigation on the impact of teachers’ educational qualifications in ECCDE in FCT, Abuja. Understanding this will best inform policy decision-making, teacher training programmes and guidance and counselling to improve the quality of early childhood education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceived impact of teachers’ educational qualifications on the quality of Early Childhood Development Education in FCT, Abuja and the implications for guidance and counselling.

Research Question:

Do teachers’ educational qualifications have a perceived impact on the quality of teaching and learning in Early Childhood Development Education in FCT, Abuja?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the perceived impact of teachers' educational qualification in early childhood development education in FCT, Abuja, based on gender
2. There is no significant difference in the perceived impact of teachers' educational qualification in early childhood development education in FCT, Abuja, based on working experience.

Methodology

The research design adopted for this study is the descriptive survey method. A descriptive survey method was used to conduct the study since it enabled the researcher to gather information about the population of the study.

The population for this study comprises all ECCDE teachers in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, while the target population consists of teachers in selected secondary schools from Gwagwalada metropolis. According to Universal Basic Education (UBEC) National Personnel Audit (NPA) (2022), the total number of ECCDE teachers in FCT is 3497, both male and female teachers. For a population size of this magnitude, the Research Advisor (2006) at 95% confidence level and 5.0% margin of error recommended a sample size of 346. However, the researcher increased the sample size by 10% to allow for more participants and cater for possible attrition during administration of the instrument. Therefore, 371 ECCDE teachers participated in the study.

A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to select respondents for the study. At stage one; proportional sampling procedure was used in the ratio of 1:1:1 to choose 3 area councils from the 6 Area councils in FCT; at stage 2, purposive sampling techniques were employed to select 10 primary schools which have densely populated ECCED teachers from each of the area councils. This made a total of 30 primary schools that were selected for the study. At stage 3, a simple random sampling technique was used to select 12 teachers in each of the primary schools. The dip hat method was adopted to give all the teachers a fair choice of participating in the study. This made a total of 360 respondents were selected, which was still above the recommended participants by the research advisor to cover the losses that may arise after the administration of the questionnaire in the study.

The responses were structured using a 4-point Likert-type rating scale with the following grading: Strongly agree (SA) =4 points, Agree (A) =3 points, Disagree (D) = 2 point and Strongly Disagree (SD) =1 point. The mean score is 2.5 (4+3+2+1/4). This implies that for section B of the instrument, any mean score between 2.5 and above will be adjudged as the perceived impact of teachers' educational qualification in Early Childhood Development Education in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. The instrument used for collecting data for this study was titled "Perceived Impact of teachers' educational qualification in Early Childhood Development Education questionnaire" (PITEQECCDEQ).

The questionnaire was developed by the researcher, and the items were derived from the reviewed literature. The instrument has two parts (Section A & B). Section A consists of demographic information, and Section B has 15 items. To ascertain the validity of the instrument, it was given to experts in the Educational Research Centre (ERC), Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), Sheda- Abuja, to vet. The experts made corrections and suggestions, which were taken into consideration. The experts adjudged the instrument valid. To establish the reliability of the instrument, it was administered on a representative sample of 20 respondents twice at an interval of four weeks. The two sets of scores were correlated using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Formula. A correlation coefficient of 0.88 was derived, which shows that the instrument was reliable for the study. Descriptive statistics; percentage and mean score were used to analyse participants' demographic data, research question and t-test hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level of significance.

Result

This section presents the results of the analysis of data obtained from the field. The study investigated the perceived impact of teachers' educational qualification in early childhood development education in FCT, Abuja: Implications for Guidance and Counselling. The demographic data were analysed using frequency counts and percentages.

Section A: Demographic Information

Gender: Male 117 (32%) Female 243 (68%)

Working Experience: 1 -5 years 87 (24%); 6-10 years 126 (35%); 11-15years 147(41%)

Research Question: Do teachers’ educational qualifications have a perceived impact on the quality of teaching and learning in Early Childhood Development Education in FCT, Abuja

Table 1: Mean Scores and Rank Order on the perceived impact of teachers’ educational qualification in early childhood development education in FCT, Abuja.

| Item No | As an ECCDE Teacher: | Mean | Rank |
|----------------|---|-------------|------------------|
| 12 | Professional training is relevant to Early Childhood Development Education | 3.17 | 1 st |
| 10 | My educational qualifications adequately prepare me to teach young children. | 3.15 | 2 nd |
| 13 | Higher qualifications help me demonstrate better classroom management skills | 3.14 | 3 rd |
| 11 | Professional certification improves a better understanding of child development. | 3.13 | 4 th |
| 2 | Effective learning experiences for children and practice have helped me become a qualified teacher to deliver more. | 3.11 | 5 th |
| 1 | Children learn better when taught by professionally trained teachers. | 3.07 | 6 th |
| 4 | Higher qualifications influence curriculum implementation in ECCD classrooms | 3.01 | 7 th |
| 5 | The teaching methods adopted in my school align with best practices in early childhood education. | 3.00 | 8 th |
| 9 | Unqualified teachers negatively affect early childhood education in Nigeria. | 2.99 | 9 th |
| 3 | Continuous professional development is necessary for ECCDE teachers | 2.96 | 10 th |
| 7 | Emotionally supportive classrooms are more common with qualified teachers. | 2.84 | 11 th |
| 8 | Social skills development in children depends on teachers’ professional competence | 2.80 | 12 th |
| 15 | Behavioural challenges are better managed by professionally trained ECCDE teachers. | 2.76 | 13 th |
| 14 | Guidance and counselling services are more effective when ECCDE teachers are well-qualified. | 2.74 | 14 th |
| 6 | policies for enforcement, and minimum qualifications for ECCDE teachers are in the right direction. | 2.63 | 15 th |

Table 1 shows the mean and rank order analysis of responses on the perceived impact of teachers’ educational qualification in early childhood development education in FCT, Abuja. The results in the table revealed that items 12, 10, 13, 11, 2, 1, 4 and 5 ranked as

the top 8 items. Item 12 which states that “professional training is relevant to Early Childhood Development Education” with mean score 3.17 ranked 1st; item 10 which states “educational qualification adequately prepares me to teach young children.” with a mean score of 3.15 ranked 2nd; Item 13 which states “higher qualifications help me demonstrate better classroom management skills “with a mean score of 3.14 ranked 3rd.; item 11 which states “ Professional certification improves better understanding of child development “ with a mean score ranked 4th ; item 2 which states “ effective learning experiences to children and practice has helped me better as a qualified teachers to deliver more “ with a mean score of 3:11 was ranked 5th , item 1 which states “children learn better when taught by professionally trained teachers “ with a mean score of 3.07 ranked 6th , item 4 which states “ higher qualifications influence curriculum implementation in ECCD classrooms “ with a mean score of 3:01 ranked 7th and item 5 which states “ teaching methods used in my school align with best practices in early childhood education “ with a mean score of 3:00 ranked 8th respectively all had a mean score far higher above the benchmark of 2.5. Therefore, it can be concluded from the result that educational qualification had a highly significant perceived impact on early childhood education in FCT, Abuja.

Research Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in the perceived impact of teachers’ educational qualification in early childhood development education in FCT, Abuja, based on gender

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviations and t-value of the perceived impact of teachers’ educational qualification in early childhood development education in FCT, Abuja, based on gender

| Gender | N | Mean | SD | Df | Cal. t-value | Crit. t-value | p-value |
|--------|-----|-------|-------|-----|--------------|---------------|---------|
| Male | 117 | 62.11 | 9.58 | 358 | 6.21* | 1.96 | 0.01 |
| Female | 243 | 60.08 | 13.03 | | | | |

*Significant, $p < 0.05$

Table 6 shows a calculated t-value of 6.21, a critical t-value of 1.96 and a p-value of 0.01. Since the calculated p-value of 0.01 is less than the alpha p-value at 0.05, the hypothesis was accepted. Hence, there was a significant difference in the perceived impact of teachers’ educational qualification in early childhood development education in FCT, Abuja, on the

basis of gender. Since the mean of male ECCDE teachers was less than that of the females, it depicts that the female ECCDE teachers are more educated, educationally well qualified and significantly affect teaching effectiveness in ECCDE, FCT, Abuja.

Research Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in the perceived impact of teachers’ educational qualification in early childhood development education in FCT, Abuja, on the basis of working experience.

Table 2: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of the perceived impact of teachers’ educational qualification in early childhood development education in FCT, Abuja, on the basis of working experience.

| Years of Working Experience | Sum of squares | df | Mean Squares | Cal. value | F- | Crit. F-ratio | P-Value |
|-----------------------------|----------------|-----|--------------|------------|------|---------------|---------|
| Between group | 5232.142 | 2 | 3166.58 | | | | |
| Within group | 21661.652 | 357 | 51.960 | 1.50 | 2.60 | .214 | |
| Total | 26893.848 | 359 | | | | | |

Table 2 shows the data on the Analysis of Variance result showing the difference in response of respondents’ perceived impact of teachers’ educational qualification in early childhood development education in FCT, Abuja, on the basis of working experience. The table shows that the calculated f-value of 1.50 is less than the critical t-value of 2.60 (p-value .214 > 0.05 level of significance). Therefore, the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the perceived impact of teachers’ educational qualification in early childhood development education in FCT, Abuja, on the basis of working experience was accepted. This means that teachers in their different years of working experience do not differ in the perceived impact of teachers’ educational qualification in early childhood development education in FCT, Abuja.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed that there is a perceived impact of teachers’ educational qualification in early childhood development education in FCT, Abuja. Teachers' professional training is seen as very relevant to early childhood development education, and an educational qualification adequately prepares teachers to teach young children with understanding, mastering and demonstrating better classroom management skills. In support of this study, the Tashkent declaration (2022), on early child education, enumerated the need for education and training systems of ECCDE personnel to be

strengthened. The training of integration of the ECCDE personnel within a framework of high-quality teacher education and continuous professional development, and to ensure standards and qualification frameworks that allow for the certification of ECCDE professionals, including through alternative pathways like the recognition of prior and experiential learning. Curricula and pedagogies to train ECCDE personnel incorporated in the latest developments of education, sciences, evidence-based, inclusive, intercultural, and gender-responsive.

Two null hypotheses were generated and tested in the study; one of the null hypotheses was rejected, and one was accepted. Hypothesis one, which stated that there is no significant difference in the perceived impact of teachers' educational qualification in early childhood development education in FCT, Abuja, on the basis of gender, was rejected. The findings of this study corroborate Ossai and Ramsaroop (2022), who carried out a study on the early childhood education workforce as highly feminised, with women dominating the field. Around the world, calls have been made for increasing the participation of men in the profession so that the gender gap can be reduced. Unfortunately, there is still a stigma associated with men teaching young children. In early grades, men and women have experienced long-standing gender disparities in the workforce (Sullivan, Coles, Xu, Perales, & Thorpe, 2020). Research has shown that the teaching profession is becoming more feminised, with male teachers declining drastically, especially in early grades and foundation levels (Xu & Waniganayake, 2017). In the same vein, according to Sahin, Korkmaz and Coban (2018), numerous reports have indicated that the attrition rate of male teachers has been increasing. Women serve in a disproportionately large number of early childhood care and education development (ECCDE) jobs worldwide (Brody, 2015; Heikkilä & Hellman, 2017). It is more common for women to be employed in ECCDE centres than for men (OECD 2014). Dogutas (2021), in his study on gender stereotyping in the eyes of preschool teachers and teacher candidates in Turkey, found that male teachers in early grades faced gender stereotypes more than their female counterparts. In line with the above findings, early childhood care education has been seen as a female-dominated educational sector with essential skills for teaching and caring for the learners. The male ECCDE teachers were less than that of the females in their responses in this study, which depicts that the female ECCDE teachers

are more educated in degree attainment in ECCDE, well qualified and equipped in early childhood care development education in FCT, Abuja.

Hypothesis two, which stated that there is no significant difference in the perceived impact of teachers' educational qualification in early childhood development education in FCT, Abuja, on the basis of working experience, was accepted. This means that teachers in their different years of working experience do not differ in the impact of teachers' educational qualification on early childhood development education in FCT, Abuja. In variance with the findings of this study, Usifo (2023) averred that the implementation of any educational programmes in the school will be fruitless unless they are handled by experienced, competent, trained and effective teachers. For the teaching and learning processes to be of quality, teachers must exhibit excellence in the performance of the teaching tasks. This means that the professional teachers must possess the experiences and qualifications for effective teaching and learning to take place. ECCDE teachers, as the main actors in early childhood development, are required to have high competence both in terms of academic qualifications and teaching experience (Ramdani, 2024). Thus, the quality of ECCDE teachers is one of the main indicators of the success of education programs directed at forming a generation of smart and character (Mubarok, Sari, Wibowo, 2025). Teaching experience, therefore, is a teacher's direct involvement in the learning process, which includes the duration and quality of teaching practice (Christy et al., 2025). Experienced teachers tend to have better adaptability to student needs, skills in managing conflict, and creativity in delivering material (Nurpatimah & Saputra, 2022). Ololube's (2012) findings also negate the findings of this study, as teachers' teaching experience facilitates the teachers' better understanding of the subject to be taught. The highly experienced teachers demonstrate competency in their preparation for classroom teaching, classroom management and control.

They demonstrate willingness for reflection on their commitment to student achievement through seeking an opportunity to share the things they have learnt. Experienced teachers are more likely to prefer to be in control in their classroom than beginning teachers when interacting with students and making decisions. The years of experience of the teacher make for specialisation, gain professional skills and

characteristics with many years of experience. In view of the above, there is no significant difference in the perceived impact of teachers' educational qualification in early childhood development education in FCT, Abuja, on the basis of working experience.

Conclusion

The educational qualification of teachers in Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, on the basis of gender significantly influences the quality of ECCDE while that of learning experiences shows no significant difference. Strengthening teacher preparation not only improves educational delivery but also fosters positive early childhood trajectories, ensuring that children receive nurturing, developmentally appropriate care and learning. Hence, findings of this study show a great significance of the impact of educational qualification of ECCDE teachers in terms of gender, but no significance in working experiences.

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the gender variable has a significant influence, while that of working experience does not have a significant influence on teachers' educational qualification ECCDE, in FCT, Abuja. In contrast, the Teaching Experience variable shows a significant influence on ECCDE Teacher Performance. The more teaching experience teachers have, the better their performance in the aspects of lesson planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Implications for Counselling

The findings of this study have implications for counselling practice:

- professional school counsellors have unique opportunities to assist in the promotion of effective learning of the young children, through increased collaboration, consultation and interventions with those significant people in the lives of children, such as the proprietors/ proprietress, teachers' parents and people in the community.
- Counsellors have an unmatched quality in leveraging relationships between the Early childhood education administrators, teachers, parents, school proprietors, and government officials for optimal productivity.

- Counsellors Plans and support systems are needed for in-service and pre-service male teachers in the early grades schools. By doing so, they may feel more confident about pursuing a career.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- Stakeholders and the school counsellor in particular should fulfil their mandate as put forward in this study to promote effective learning of young learners
- A programme should be organised to sensitise in-service early childhood educators on the importance of eliminating gender stereotypes against males in early childhood education. There is a possibility that this could reduce the stigmatisation of male school teachers.
- There should be a strong need for profound awareness that focuses on reducing stereotypes and stigmatisation of male teachers in early grades to increase the number of males enrolling in early childhood education.
- To prevent allegations of sexual abuse, teachers can also be given an orientation on the ethics and conduct of early childhood teaching.
- Parents should also be given an orientation to change their views about male teachers in early grades because not all male teachers are pedophiles.
- In addition, the government should provide incentives to pre-service teachers to encourage male enrollment in early childhood teacher education programs.

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