

EXTENT OF AWARENESS AND IMPLEMENTATION OF DEVELOPMENTAL APPROPRIATE PRACTICES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN ANAMBRA STATE.

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Abstract

This study was carried out to determine the extent of awareness and implementation of Developmentally Appropriate Practices in Early Childhood Education in Anambra State. The research design adopted was a descriptive survey. The population of 560 teachers was used for the study. A 46 item structured questionnaire was validated by three experts. The data collected were analyzed using mean to answer the research questions while the null hypotheses were tested using Z-test and ANOVA. The findings revealed that early child awareness of DAP was of low extent and that implementation of DAP early childhood teachers was very low extent. Barriers encountered by early childhood teachers were very high extent. The findings further indicated that there was significant difference in the opinions of early childhood teachers in the implementation of DAP based on school location and there was no significant difference in their opinions based on the academic qualification and year of working experience. It was recommended among others that federal and state government should encourage teachers by regularly organizing workshops and seminars for them in order to learn how to use DAP in their daily practice. Furthermore, curriculum planners should emphasize the implementation of DAP in early childhood education in their policy statement, guideline and standards. Government and school administrators should equip and furnish early childhood centers with developmental appropriate materials in Anambra State.

Keywords: Awareness, Implementation, Practices, Early childhood, Education.

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Early childhood education is also called pre-primary education. Pre-primary education is defined by the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) as education given in an educational setting for children aged 3 through 5 years in preparing their entry into primary school. It includes the crèche, the nursery, and the kindergarten. The field of early childhood education has greatly changed over the years largely due to the introduction of the term Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP). DAP established by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in 1986 to promote excellence in the field by providing a framework for “best practices (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). DAP is an approach to teaching grounded in research on how young children develop and learn, and in what is known about effective early education. Its framework is designed to promote young children’s optimal learning and development (National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), 2009).

DAP involves teachers meeting young children where they are (by stage of development), both as individuals and as part of a group, and helping each child meet challenging and achievable learning goals. Bredekamp (2011), was of the view that DAP are ways of teaching that engage children’s interests, adapt to their age, experience and ability to help meet challenging and achievable learning goals. Furthermore, he stated that the foundations of developmentally appropriate practices are on the premise that teaching young children should be based on what is known about how they develop and learn optimally. This implies that without in-depth knowledge about children’s overall development, age, culture and individuality, there are possibilities of inappropriate practices by educators.

When young children are taught without considering their age, culture or individualities, the resultant effects are what are seen today in the society. Young children come with workloads that are higher than their age, children are not considered as individuals with different learning pace and style, they tend to have low self-esteem and other behavioural problems observed among children. But the reverse is the case when DAP are applied, teachers have sound knowledge of child development and their pupil’s learning processes. Therefore, they should be taught within their developmental level which will result to love in learning in young children. That is what makes them lifelong learners (Morgan, 2010). Furthermore, the author is of the view that in a learning environment where DAP is not implemented, children tend to be stressed, anxious about tests, are not creative thinkers, not better communicators, not safe and secured, have low self-esteem, cannot solve problems themselves or even co-operates, lack respect for adults and peers, not responsive and do not take decision themselves.

According to Bredekamp, (2011), teachers who practice DAP meet learners where they are not necessarily where they should be and take into consideration all the developmental areas of the whole child (physical, emotional, social, and cognitive). They provide learning opportunities that are challenging yet achievable and they recognize learners as individuals, with different needs, backgrounds and stores of experience (Morgan, 2010). Copple, Bredekamp & Gonzalez (2011), are of the view that teachers who are committed to DAP enact the commitment in the decision they make about materials, interactions, curriculum, and instruction. To make good decisions, they must know a lot about how children develop which goals will be challenging and achievable for them and which would be unreasonable stretch. Morgan (2010), opined that non practice of DAP ignores the way children are naturally wired to develop. It replaces in-born motivation and inquisitiveness with mandates. Implementing DAP in classroom instruction means meeting the pupils at the developmental stage they are currently and enabling them to reach goals that are set for them. DAP reduces learning gaps, increases achievement for all children and allow pupils to share and engage in the learning

process while they solve their own problems as they learn new information (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Teachers that implement DAP into their teaching, employ a busy classroom where pupils are self-engaged, interacting physically with objects and people, mentally processing and constructing knowledge that builds on previous learning (Beatty, 2009). The author is also of the view that DAP classroom has direct-hands-on interaction, is full of materials, activities and interaction that lead to different kinds of knowledge that young children should acquire during the early years.

From the foregoing, it is pertinent to note that there might exist differences in implementation of DAP based on school location. Abidogun (2015) asserted that the rural areas have greater challenges concerning educational development than the urban areas due to the peculiar socio-economic and institutional structures in the urban areas. Also, the academic qualifications of early childhood teachers often vary from West African School Certificate Examination (WAEC) to Doctor of Philosophy in education. It is most likely that these various qualifications may affect how teachers implement DAP in ECE or pre-primary schools. Okoye (2019), opined that most rural based schools, especially in Nigeria lacked enough qualified teachers and basic amenities and are poorly equipped which are serious constraints to good academic performance. Sacks and Ruzzi (2016) are of the view that teachers with strong intellects, education and training are effective pre-primary school or preschool teachers. Likewise, the years of teaching experience of early childhood teachers could range from zero to 35 years. Most likely, these varying experiences may also have some effect on the extent teacher's implement DAP in pre-primary schools in Anambra State. Also Copple and Bredekamp (2009), had observed that quality of any education system depends largely on the competence, commitment and motivation of the teachers.

Implementation simply means carrying out the activities described in your work plan. It requires the coordination of a wide range of activities, diverse institutional arrangements and different time frames. For the purpose of this study, implementation means carrying out a specific set of activities designed to put into practice activities in early childhood education centers by teachers. Having considered the place of developmentally appropriate practice and the relevance of its implementation in early childhood education, it is important to note that when young children are not properly guided or given good care and training during early childhood, they may not benefit from early education and other social services. They may become non-productive, unhealthy and will not be law abiding citizens (Ibiam, 2010). In view of the above, it is of great importance to assess the extent to which early childhood teachers are aware and could implement developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood schools in Anambra State.

Statement of the problem

Early childhood teachers may face difficulties when there is total ignorance of developmentally appropriate practice in the early childhood education. Teachers may find it difficult to assess the children. As a result, there will be challenges of what to assess, when to assess, how to assess and the appropriate way of assessing children, because they are not aware of age, individual and cultural appropriate practices. The resultant effect is the situation researcher observe today, where children are given assignments that are too high for their age and inappropriate toys. Most times, parents end up doing some of the home works for their children because the home works are too difficult for them to complete. In early childhood centers in Anambra State, children use seats meant for secondary school students, and some of the facilities in these schools can best be described as inappropriate facilities. Sometimes, children end up being injured, stressed, uncomfortable and some may develop phobia for

school because they find themselves in an environment that is not child friendly and not suitable for their age, culture and individuality.

Most times, teachers in the name of “Double promotion” skyrocket children from nursery to primary school at the age of three and four without understanding the problems they are incurring for the children in future. That is why many children who are doing well in nursery miss the track when they come to primary school because they did not complete the nursery schools curriculum and are developmentally immature to handle primary education. In most early childcare centers in Anambra State, children are taught using rote memorization, lecture method of teaching, the classroom teaching and learning is teacher-centered, children are not allowed to communicate or interact with one another because teachers do not want the children to make noise in the class.

These challenges may be connected to early childhood teachers’ lack of knowledge of developmentally appropriate practices. Therefore it becomes expedient to determine the extent early childhood teachers are aware and could implement developmentally appropriate practices in nursery in Anambra State.

Purpose of the Study

The major purpose of the study is to investigate the extent early childhood teachers are aware and could implement developmentally appropriate practices in Early Childhood Education in Anambra State. Specifically, the study sought to:

- i. Examine the extent early childhood teachers are aware of developmentally appropriate practices in nursery schools in Anambra State.
- ii. Determine the extent early childhood teachers implement developmentally appropriate practices in their daily practice to support pupil’s learning in nursery schools in Anambra State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent are early childhood teachers aware of developmentally appropriate practices in nursery schools in Anambra State?
2. To what extent do early childhood teachers implement developmentally appropriate practices in nursery schools in Anambra State?

Hypotheses

H₀₁ There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of early childhood teachers on the extent of awareness of the developmentally appropriate practices based on school location.

H₀₂ There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of early childhood teachers on the extent they implement developmentally appropriate practices based on their academic qualifications.

Method

Research Design

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. Descriptive research design according to Nworgu (2015) is used on those studies which aim at collecting data on, and describing in a systematic manner the characteristics, features and facts about a given population.

The study was conducted in Anambra state. The study sample consisted of 523 nursery teachers randomly selected. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher titled. Extent of Awareness and implementation of

Developmentally Appropriate Practices Questionnaire (EAIDDPQ) made up of three sections (A&B). The instrument is structured on five point likart scale of:

Very High Extent (VHE) = 5 point

High Extent (HE) = 4 point

Moderated Extent (ME) = 3 points

Low Extent (LE) = 2 points

Very Low Extent (VLE) = 1 point

The copies of the questionnaire were shared to the respondents through the assistance of two briefed research assistants. The responses of the respondents were analyzed using arithmetic mean and standard deviation, while the hypotheses were tested using Z – test at 0.5 level of significance.

Results of the investigation are presented in tables 1,2,3 and 4 in respect of the research questions and hypotheses.

Table 1: Mean rating of the extent to which Early Childhood Teachers are Aware of Developmentally Appropriate Practices in Nursery Schools in Anambra State.

S/N	Items statement	Mean (X)	SD	Remarks
1	Culture is very significant in children's learning.	2.58	1.638	ME
2	Individual differences should be considered while teaching children.	2.50	1.522	LE
3	Considering the age/stage of children is paramount as I teach.	2.153	1.629	LE
4	Evaluating of children's readiness, progress or achievements test is essential.	2.160	1.627	LE
5.	School activities should be structured to be responsive to individual children's interest.	2.164	1.629	LE
6	Each curriculum area should be taught at separate times.	2.78	1.516	LE
7	Teacher-child interactions help to develop children's self-esteem positive feeling towards learning.	2.195	1.530	LE
8.	Children's emotional, social, cognitive and physical needs should be addressed in designing the curriculum.	2.197	1.533	LE
9.	It is essential for teachers to provide opportunities for children to select many of their own activities.	2.172	1.508	LE
10.	It is essential for teachers to provide a variety of learning areas with concrete materials (writing, science, maths, arts, dramatic, reading centres e.t.c)	2.059	1.450	LE
11.	I am aware that a balance of direct/ indirect instruction, should promote the child's learning as needed.	2.038	1.428	LE
12	DAP offers challenges just beyond the level of children's present mastery.	2.541	1.497	LE
13.	It is important that academic activities should be responsive to the cultural diversity of children in my care.	2.182	1.520	LE

14	Developmentally appropriate programmes promote children's active learning experience.	2.052	1.437	LE
15	Play serves as a vehicle for learning.	2.176	1.512	LE
16.	Home-school partnership is important in the academic success of young children.	2.050	1.450	LE
17.	High parental involvement is important in the academic success of young children.	2.050	1.439	LE
18.	More emphasis should be laid on authentic test than standardized test in early childhood education.	2.040	1.426	LE

Table 1 revealed the extent to which early childhood teachers are aware of developmentally appropriate practices in nursery schools in Anambra State. The cluster mean is 2.169 with standard deviation 1.516 which revealed that teachers in nursery schools are aware to a low extent of developmentally practices. The results in Table 1 further revealed that the nursery school teachers in Anambra State are aware of developmentally appropriate practices to a low extent as the decision mean ranges between 3.50 and 4.49.

Research Question Two

To what extent do early childhood teachers implement developmentally appropriate practices in nursery schools in Anambra State?

Table 2: Mean rating of the extent to which Early Childhood Teachers Implement Developmentally Appropriate Practices in their Daily Practices in Nursery Schools in Anambra State.

S/N	Items	Mean (x)	SD	Remarks
19	The environment of a child is safe, health, conducive for children's exploration.	1.415	1.040	VLE
20.	Learning environment that foster children's initiative active exploration of materials are created.	1.472	1.097	VLE
21	I organize children's daily schedule that will allow for periods of alternating quiet and active time, adequate nutrition and nap time.	1.241	0.652	VLE
22	I move among groups and individuals, offering suggestions, asking questions facilitating children's involvement with materials, activities, and peers	1.461	1.086	VLE
23.	Children dictate stories to me to read to them.	1.421	1.046	VLE
24.	Treat, stickers, stars are used to get children to do activities that they don't really want to do	1.386	0.986	VLE
25.	Extended period of time are allocated for children to engage in play and projects.	1.258	0.658	VLE
26.	A structured reading or pre-reading program is provided for all children	1.381	1.003	VLE
27.	Regular punishment reprimand are used when children aren't participating.	1.415	1.040	VLE

28.	An individualized behaviour plan is developed for addressing severe behaviour problems.	1.300	0.893	VLE
29.	I read stories daily to children, individually on a group basis.	1.488	1.108	VLE
30.	Children write by inventing their own spelling.	1.312	0.882	VLE
31.	Children are provided many daily opportunities for developing social skills (i.e cooperating, helping, taking turns with peers in the classroom).	1.482	1.103	VLE
32.	Outdoor times have planned activities.	1.488	1.108	VLE
33.	Less emphasis is placed on teaching children isolated skills by using repetition recitation (e.g reciting ABCs).	1.201	0.750	VLE
Cluster Mean		1.151	0.963	VLE

Table 2. revealed the extent to which early childhood teachers implement developmentally appropriate practices in nursery schools in Anambra State. The cluster mean is 1.151 with standard deviation 0.963 which revealed that teachers in nursery schools implement to a very low extent the developmentally appropriate practices. The result in table 2 further revealed that the nursery school teachers in Anambra State implement the developmentally appropriate practices to a very low extent as their mean decision ranges between 3.50 and 4.49 .

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis one

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of early childhood teachers on the extent they implement developmentally appropriate practices based on rural and urban School Location.

Table 3: Test of difference in the mean ratings of Early Childhood Teachers on the extent they Implement Developmentally Appropriate Practices based on Rural and Urban Location.

Variables	Location	N	Mean	SD	t-cal	Df	Sig.
Implementation of Developmentally Appropriate Practices	Urban	305	1.561	0.882	6.953	521	.000
	Rural	218	1.130	0.288			

The result from table 4 indicated that the test for significance in the difference between the mean ratings of early childhood teachers on the extent they implement developmentally appropriate practices based on their location. The result of the test indicated that there is significant difference between teachers in urban and rural centres in the implementation of

developmentally appropriate practices based on their location with ($Z = 6.953$, $P < 0.05$). Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. It was therefore, concluded that there is significant difference between early childhood teachers in the implementation of developmentally appropriate practices based on their location.

Hypothesis Two:

There is no significant difference in the mean rating of early childhood teachers on the extent they implement developmentally appropriate practices based on their academic qualifications.

Table 4: Test of difference in the mean ratings of early childhood teachers on the extent they implement developmentally appropriate practices based on their academic qualifications.

	Sum of Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between Groups	10.669 20	0.533	.496	0.968
Within groups	539.599 502	1.075		
Total	550.268 522			

The result from Table 4 showed the findings for the mean ratings of early childhood teachers on the extent to which they implement developmentally appropriate practices based on their academic qualifications. The result of the test indicated non-significance of difference between the opinions of the groups ($F(4,384) = 0.496$, $p < 0.05$). Thus, the null hypothesis was not rejected. It was therefore concluded that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of early childhood teachers on the extent to which they implement developmentally appropriate practices based on their academic qualifications.

Summary of Findings

The extent to which early childhood teachers in nursery schools in Anambra State are aware of developmentally appropriate practices is to a low extent.

The extent to which early childhood teacher in nursery schools in Anambra State implement developmentally appropriate practices is to a very low extent.

The extent to which early childhood teachers in nursery schools in Anambra State face barriers in implementing developmentally appropriate practices is to a high extent.

There is difference in early childhood teacher's implementation of developmentally appropriate practices in nursery schools in Anambra State based on their locations.

There is slight or no difference in early childhood teacher's in the implementation of developmentally appropriate practices in nursery schools in Anambra State based on their academic qualifications.

There is difference in early childhood teacher's in the implementation of developmentally appropriate practices in nursery schools in Anambra State based on their years of working experience.

There is significant difference in the mean ratings of early childhood teachers in the implementation of developmentally appropriate practices based on their location.

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of early childhood implementation of developmentally appropriate practices based on their academic qualifications.

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of early childhood teachers implementation of developmentally appropriate practices in based on their years of working experience.

Discussion of Findings

The data in table 1 showed the extent to which early childhood teachers are aware of developmentally appropriate in nursery schools in Anambra State. it was revealed in the data analyzed with regards to the first research questions that the teachers extent of awareness of DAP is to a low extent.

This is in consonance with the view of Gonzalez (2020) that teachers who are committed to developmentally appropriate practices enact the commitment in the decision they make about materials, interactions, curriculum and instruction. To make good decisions, they must know a lot about how children develop which goals will be challenging and achievable for them and which would be unreasonable stretch. Also Bredekamp (2011) opined that teachers who are aware and practice DAP meet learners where they are not necessarily where they should be and take into consideration all the developmental areas of the whole child.

In table 2, the research sought to assess to what extent early childhood teachers implement developmentally appropriate practices in nursery schools in Anambra State. It was revealed that the extent to which early childhood teachers implement DAP in nursery schools in Anambra State is very low extent. Crosser (2010) has noted that the implementation of DAP is important because as children are exposed to a rich sensory world, the number of synapse connections in the brain is increased. It can enable children to build esteem by doing things on their own or for themselves, using materials or making decisions and also use a variety of approaches to care for and meet each child's individual needs and foster children's abilities. Furthermore, Morgan (2010) is of the view that in learning environment where DAP is implemented, children tend to be stressed, anxious about test, are not creative thinkers, but not better communities, not safe and secured, have low self-esteem, cannot solve problems themselves or even cooperates, lack respect for adults and peers, no responsible interaction and do not take decision themselves.

Data in table 3 revealed test of difference in the mean ratings of early childhood teachers on the extent the y implement developmentally appropriate practices based on rural and urban schools the result of the test indicated that there is significant difference between teachers in urban and rural school in the implementation of developmentally appropriate practices base on their location with ($z=6.953, 9<0.05$). Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, it was concluded that there is difference between early childhood teachers in the implementation of developmentally appropriate practices based on their school location. The lend credence to the studies of finding.

Table 4 showed the test of difference in the mean rating of early childhood teachers on the extent the implement DAP based on their academic qualification. The result of the test indicated non-significance of difference between the opinions of the groups ($F_{(4, 38)} = 0.946, p<0.05$). Thus, the null hypothesis was not rejected. It was therefore concluded that there is no significance difference in the mean rating of early childhood teachers on the extent to which they implement developmentally qualification. This means that a teacher with NCE who is aware of DAP can do well in implementing DAP more than a teacher with M.Ed who does not know anything about DAP. So academic qualification does not make any difference in implementation of DAP.

Conclusion

1. The extent to which early childhood teachers in nursery schools in Anambra State are aware of developmentally appropriate practices is to a low extent.
2. The extent to which early childhood teachers in nursery schools in Anambra State implement DAP is to a very low extent.

3. There is difference in early childhood teacher's implementation of DAP in nursery schools in Anambra State based on their school location.
4. There is slight or no difference in early childhood teachers implementation in nursery schools in Anambra State based on their academic qualifications.
5. There is no difference in early childhood teachers implementation of DAP in nursery schools in Anambra State based on their years of working experience.
6. There is significant difference in the opinions of early childhood teacher in the implementation of DAP based on their location.
7. There is no significant difference in the mean rating of early childhood teachers in the implementation of DAP based on their academic qualifications and years of working experience.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been made by the researcher in consonance with the conclusion from the study. They include:

1. The federal and state government should encourage teachers by regular organizing workshops and seminars for teachers in order to educate them on how to use of DAP in nursery schools.
2. Governments and school administrators should equip and furnish early childhood centers developmentally appropriate materials and manipulate that will enhance learning not just in Anambra State, but Nigeria as a whole.
3. Curriculum planners should emphasize the implementation of developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood education in their policy statement, guidelines and standard putting into consideration the age, individually and cultural background of the children while planning the curriculum.
4. Teachers should upgrade themselves through in-service training, attending workshops and seminars and also through the use of internet in attending to improve in their daily practice.

Suggestions

The following suggestions were made for further studies

1. Effect of DAP on the academic achievement of primary school pupils.
2. Challenges of implementing developmentally appropriate practices in nursery schools in Enugu state.
3. Effect of developmentally inappropriate practices on children's academic growth.

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