

Teachers' Awareness and Implementation of the Concept of Holistic Child Development in Early Childhood Education Centers in Osun State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated the levels of teachers' awareness and implementation of the concept of holistic child development in early childhood education centers in Osun State, Nigeria. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population comprised 600 teachers in early childhood education centers in Osun State from which a sample of 240 teachers was selected using purposive sampling technique based on the fact that they were teaching at pre-primary classes or early primary classes and have acquired a minimum of two years teaching experience. A researcher-designed instrument was used for data gathering. Data collected were analysed using frequency, percentage and mean scores. The results showed that the level of teachers' awareness of the concept of holistic child development in early childhood education centers was high (61.3%) in Osun State. Results indicated that the extent to which teachers implement the concept of holistic child development in early childhood education centers was high at 60.4% in Osun State. The study concluded that the levels of teachers' awareness and implementation of the concept of holistic child development in early childhood education centers was high in Osun State, Nigeria.

Keywords: Early childhood education centers, Holistic development, Teachers' awareness, Implementation

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Introduction

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is the foundation of education. There is a growing global recognition of the relevance of early childhood care and education. The first objective of Education for All (EFA), as stated in its goals, is to enhance and enhance comprehensive early childhood care and education, with a particular focus on the most susceptible and deprived children (EFA, 2023). The third and fourth goals of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) pertain to the well-being and education of children, provide strong evidence for this claim. In the last twenty years of the 20th century, there has been a growing understanding of the importance of providing early childhood education to infants and young children in order to prepare them for a lifetime of learning (Sacks & Ruzzi, 2005). In the early years of development, a child acquires fundamental knowledge about human behaviour. By the age of three, a child's character and personality have been mostly developed, and many of the social and moral ideals that will shape their future have already been instilled in them. Therefore, it is crucial to pay attention to children during their early years to ensure their entire development.

Children possess inherent psychological, social and physical abilities that enable them to communicate, acquire knowledge, and grow. If these abilities are not acknowledged and facilitated, they will never be cultivated (United Nations General Assembly - UNGA, 2010). Early age intervention can significantly contribute to establishing a conducive atmosphere that guarantees safeguarding and assistance for broader concerns such as children's nutrition, health, cognitive and psycho-social development (National Academic Press, 2015). Typically, this kind of attention is given in formal settings via early childhood care and education (ECCE). The goals of ECCE, as specified in Education for All, encompass the delivery of healthcare services, immunization, adequate nutrition, and assistance for new parents through the exchange of information and parental education. Furthermore, ECCE endeavours to establish a secure setting for young children to participate in recreational activities and interact with their peers, foster their readiness for school and transition to primary education, provide childcare services for working parents and family members, and contribute to the enhancement of communities and social integration (United Nation Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO, 2006; United Nations Children's Emergency Fund - UNICEF, 2020; EFA, 2023)

The advantages of adopting a holistic approach to the ECCE programs are widely acknowledged (Choi, 2002). The Education for All

(EFA) global monitoring report (2007) outlined the advantages of ECCE as follows: improving the overall well-being of young children during their crucial developmental years and beyond; supplementing the care provided by parents at home; and offering comprehensive programs that integrate nutrition, healthcare, nurturing, and education to yield positive effects on cognitive development. Participating in ECCE also encourages enrolment in primary school and improves academic performance in the early years of schooling, particularly for underprivileged children.

Early childhood care and education (ECCE) is a fundamental entitlement and a significant catalyst for the advancement of child development and the alleviation of poverty through education. Although, there is clear evidence of the significant advantages gained from ECCE (Choi, 2002), the situation for young children is demeaning, especially in underdeveloped countries where they lack access to such services. It is crucial that every child is granted access to ECCE in order to achieve comprehensive development. To obtain sustainable knowledge, attitudes and skills that improve human potentials and address poverty and injustice, it is necessary to fulfil certain requirements.

Early intervention is crucial to a child's growth and development. The entire child approach to early childhood care and development (ECCD) is an intervention strategy that prioritizes the comprehensive and integrated development of all aspects of a young individual. Conventional schooling typically sees children as passive recipients of information and rules (EFA, 2007). However, a total child approach acknowledges that for a child to fully develop as an individual, they need to cultivate not only intellectual skills, but also physical, psychological, emotional, interpersonal, moral, and spirited abilities.

Holistic development pertains to the all-encompassing advancement and maturation of an individual, encompassing every facet of their existence. The development is intended to encompass physical, mental, and social growth (Bhise, 2023). Miller delineated four fundamental attributes that typify a comprehensive education aimed at fostering experiential learning. A comprehensive learning environment fosters more discourse, inquiry, experimentation, and active participation. This enhances the significance and applicability of the child's learning experience. Personal ties are regarded with equal importance to intellectual subjects. These educational settings aim to foster a sense of community and inclusivity, as well as promote values such as safety, respect, empathy, and affection. There is apprehension regarding the internal experiences of a child, which encompass their emotions, ambitions, thoughts, and enquiries that they bring to the process of learning.

The comprehensive child-centered approach is undoubtedly an optimal early childhood intervention strategy, owing to its all-encompassing nature. Additionally, it encompasses the acquisition of knowledge through early exposure to stimulating experiences, a range of developmental engagements and opportunities, professional advice, and activities for children in the pre-primary and early primary phases. Childcare and education are interconnected and should be considered together in order to provide high-quality services for young children. This viewpoint is supported by various researchers, including Myers (2000), Choi (2002), and the OECD (2021). Care and education are integral components that are essential for promoting the comprehensive growth, development, and learning of a child.

The teacher is very crucial in influencing the level of education that a child receives inside the school system (Omiyefa, 2020). Teachers at early childhood care facilities must exhibit certain qualities in order to effectively apply the complete child approach and build a strong educational foundation for children. The Early childhood teacher must possess professional competence, encompassing a deep understanding of child development skills, together with exemplary personal attributes such as a warm demeanour and an actual concern for the children's growth and development under their supervision (Farquhar, 2003). Early childhood educators must possess a comprehensive mastery of the concept of an entire child in order to provide a natural learning setting that puts children's whole development first (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Teachers create opportunities for children to investigate, engage in recreational activities, and interact based on their behavior clues. They assess the level of development of children and give materials and experiences that promote good development in all areas of development, using their expertise of child development (BredeKamp & Copple, 1997; Omiyefa, 2020).

It is necessary for them to consistently evaluate and monitor the learning and development of each child, and effectively communicate the child's progress to their family. Teachers should prioritize the well-being of children by taking measures to avoid the transmission of contagious diseases and implementing initiatives that engage families to boost the nutrition and health of children. Teachers have the power to guarantee that children get the nutrition they need for the best possible development. They should prioritize the arrangement of space, activities, and density to ensure optimal conditions for youngsters. They should possess the capacity to identify chances for facilitating children's learning and fostering critical thinking at the playground and throughout their use of

physical play equipment (Farquhar, 2003).

The early childhood educators capable of implementing a comprehensive child-centered approach are those who possess a deep understanding of a child's innate characteristics, the various methods through which children process information, and the capacity to design a learning environment that is appropriate and meets their needs. Instead of limiting children's learning opportunities to their primary learning styles, it is the responsibility of the teachers to form and sustain cooperative connections with each child's family to provide a secure and conducive physical environment for their children.

In order to successfully administer high-quality ECCE programs in their schools, teachers are essential. The instructors have the authority to make decisions and set policies for their school. Teachers are responsible for determining the selection and hiring of teachers, the curriculum to be used, infrastructure, learning environment, learning materials, and establishing connections between the school and the homes of their children. It is crucial for instructors to comprehend the holistic approach to child development in order to effectively use it in their educational institutions. However, it appears that many teachers have not yet implemented the comprehensive child-centered approach in their schools (Farquhar, 2003).

According to UNESCO-ILEP (2001), most education programs do not fully incorporate a comprehensive approach to ECCE that includes care, health, education, and nutrition. O'Hara (2006) further elucidated that our educational techniques are inadequate to address the intricate nature of our environment. Consequently, he advocated for the development of higher levels of awareness and thought patterns that are beyond the mental abilities recognized in the western industrialized society.

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) have been recognized as good for establishing a solid educational basis and promoting overall development in children. However, it has been noted that many schools are not embracing a comprehensive approach to ECCE. Meanwhile, Therefore, studies have not established the extent to which teachers in Osun State are familiar with the concept of holistic child development and the extent to which it is put into practice in schools. When a child is taught using an educational paradigm that does not contain a holistic approach, the child's cognitive growth is prioritized above other important areas including emotional, social, physical, and health development.

It is observed that only a small number of schools implement a

comprehensive approach. Therefore, it is crucial to determine whether instructors, regardless of their location, the level of governmental support they receive, and the classes they teach (pre-primary and early primary) are aware of the concept of holistic child development. Furthermore, it is observed that a significant proportion of these schools employed untrained teachers to teach. This study investigated teachers' awareness and implementation of the concept of holistic child development in early childhood education centers in Osun State, Nigeria.

Two research questions were raised to guide this study:

1. What is the level of teachers' awareness of the concept of holistic child development in early childhood education centers in Osun State, Nigeria?
2. To what extent do teachers implement the concept of holistic child development in early childhood education centers in Osun State, Nigeria?

Literature Review

An important concept for early childhood educators is that of the holistic development of the child. Total child education, according to prominent proponent of holistic education Miller (2008), is an endeavor to foster the development of the full human being. In contrast, the traditional educational model sees a child as a passive recipient of knowledge and regulations, or at most as an information processor akin to a computer. A whole child approach acknowledges that a developing child must fulfill their physical, emotional, psychological, moral, and spirited potential in addition to their academic abilities in order to become a whole person. Miller (2005; 2008) emphasized that the whole child approach encourages people to live more mindfully in both their communities and the environment.

According to the Commission on the Whole Child (2007), a child is cognitively engaged, physically fit, vocally, socially, and academically capable as a whole. He is fair, compassionate, kind, and empathic. He is imaginative, inquisitive, self-disciplined, goal-oriented, liberated, critical thinker, self-assured, and deeply loved. Human development happens in phases and throughout many areas, including moral, social, emotional, physical, and cognitive. Every area grows within the framework of the others and cannot be isolated. Each has a significant impact on the others.

One way to conceptualize development in the many interacting domains is as stages, where advancement in one stage influences or is dependent upon success in a previous stage. Children's growth in other areas is influenced by maturation and experiences, just as their linguistic or mental capacities are.

Every child develops in different ways throughout the many domains, and these variations are influenced by both internal factors (biological predisposition, within-child abilities) and external factors (physical and social environment) (Brett, Smith, Pric, & Huitt, 2003).

Children undergo holistic development. In order to maintain their well-being, individuals require assistance in the form of adequate nourishment, motivation, safeguarding, and education. Childhood is a pivotal stage in an individual's life. The resources and support one receives during this age have a significant influence on their development and their ability to become responsible and effective individuals. Every child possesses unique strengths, individuality, and inherent abilities. Nevertheless, every infant possesses unique requirements for parenting. In order for these young individuals to reach their full potential as adults, it is crucial for parents and schools to have a comprehensive understanding of their unique characteristics and cater to their specific requirements. This will enable the holistic development of their physical, cognitive, and emotional dimensions.

Holistic development during childhood encompasses the comprehensive progress in various domains, namely physical, social, cognitive, emotional, linguistic, spiritual, and moral development, spanning from birth to the age of 8 years. The comprehensive development requires the following elements: physical well-being, proper nourishment, early cognitive stimulation, meaningful emotional exchanges and positive social connections with carers, educational possibilities, and safeguards against violence (Kristina, Veronika & Tahsin 2024).

Holistic development encompasses the comprehensive advancement of an individual across various aspects, including physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual growth of a child (Bhise, 2023). This educational approach emphasizes not only the acquisition of knowledge, but also the practical application of that knowledge. A holistic approach in education refers to the practice of involving and nurturing all aspects of an individual's development via the educational process. A holistic approach facilitates the comprehensive development of learners across all levels. It encompasses the domains of emotional, physical, cognitive, health, and spiritual development (Varun, 2024).

Gardner (1999) posited that holistic development encompasses the cultivation of several intelligences, such as linguistic verbal, intrapersonal, musical, interpersonal, logical-mathematical, visual spatial, corporeal kinesthetic, existential, and naturalistic intelligence. According to Hart

(2001), holistic development encompasses the merging of spiritual, social, moral, physical, emotional, and intellectual growth. Its aim is to foster a feeling of purpose, significance, and guidance in life. Lerner (2002) defined holistic development as a dynamic and iterative process that combines intellectual, physical, emotional, and social development. It acknowledges the interdependence of individual and contextual elements.

Holistic development encompasses the comprehensive progress in several aspects of a young child's growth, including physical, moral, affectionate, cognitive, emotional, social, and health development. It aims to equip them with the necessary skills and abilities to navigate the demands and obstacles of everyday life (Lombard & Du Toit, 2021). Holistic development prioritizes the whole well-being of children, encompassing their physical, social, emotional, and spiritual aspects, recognizing the interconnectedness of these dimensions. Nevertheless, the cognitive and intellectual components of learning are not disregarded and they complement each other.

The holistic approach refers to the consideration of anything as a whole. A holistic approach facilitates the advancement of learners throughout many levels of development. The premise of this concept is that all aspects of human growth are interconnected and progress in tandem across different sectors. Furthermore, children exhibit individual variations. While children of the same age may exhibit different developmental patterns, it is possible for certain types of development to occur earlier in certain children compared to others. The broadview of holistic child development is presented in Figure 2.1



Figure 1: An overview of holistic development of a child

Figure 1 presents the broadview of holistic child development to cover fine motor, physical and gross motor, sensory, emotional, social, self-help, language, cognitive, and spiritual development. However, the focus of this study is social, intellectual, health, physical and emotional development of the child.

Parenta (2024) claimed the components of holistic development and their relationship to children's progress in regular early childhood education.

- i. Physical: The growth of the child's ability to control their own body, including their ability to sit and stand and to control their muscles. Growth, or height, is also included. Both fine and gross motor skills are required. Babies lack the maturity to govern their bodies when they are born. Once they gain confidence and stability, they can begin to walk, climb stairs, run, and learn how to pedal a bicycle.
- ii. Cognitive: Adults influence children's cognitive growth and how they interact with the outside world. Youngsters acquire the ability to identify, comprehend, and reason, which enables them to interpret what they see, touch, and hear.
- iii. Language: The development of self-expression and understanding of others;
- iv. Social: The development of peer relationships and the understanding of oneself in relation to the community and surroundings; it also involves the understanding of other people's communications and actions, including handling conflict;
- v. Spiritual: Letting their true authentic selves flourish organically and their connection to everything around them;
- vi. Moral: The development of respecting and appreciating moral principles like honesty, integrity, and fair play, as well as the consequences they bring, which foster the development of empathy and responsibility.

Salami (2015) conducted a study on the university to community pilot preschool programme, examining its impact on the learning environment, instructors' attitudes, and children's holistic development. A number of preschool divisions within public primary schools in Ibadan, Oyo State were chosen and their requirements for learning resources, teaching staff, and developmentally suitable instructions were addressed. The study's strategy utilized a triangulation approach in mixed methods. After 13 weeks, the results showed a little improvement in the children's overall growth as well as the learning environment. However, there has been no substantial change in the mentality of the teachers. Suggestions are provided for future implementation of the programme.

In another study, Ewe, Ab Rahman and Faragai (2018) examined teachers' awareness of 21st century education and its implementation from

administrators' perspectives. The study examines the level of awareness among school administrators regarding 21st century skills and their integration into teaching and learning practices. This study aims to examine the level of awareness among Malaysian school administrators regarding 21st century skills and determine how these skills are implemented in classroom activities, based on the administrators' perspective. The acquired findings will serve as initial data for the study done on school teachers.

Badjanova, Ilisko, and Drelinga (2014) investigated the implementation of a comprehensive approach to redefine teacher preparation for promoting sustainable education. The study focused on a specific instance from a regional University in Latvia. Teacher training institutions in Latvia are currently facing a new problem, which is being thoroughly studied and analyzed in relation to worldwide challenges in education. An analysis of educational standards and programs for primary school teachers reveals that those who lack an understanding of the profound significance and core principles of sustainability face significant obstacles when attempting to implement the preschool curriculum.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The research design is a type that describes and represents objects and variables under study as they are seen without manipulating anyone in the form of introducing any kind of treatment.

Population, Sample and Sampling Technique

The population of this study comprised 600 teachers in all the early childhood education centers in Osun State. Taro Yemane's sample size formula was used to select 240 teachers as sample from 48 early childhood education centers (ECECs) in Osun State, Nigeria. Multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select the sample for the study. Initially, the simple random sampling technique was employed to choose two senatorial districts out of the three senatorial districts in Osun State. From the each of two selected senatorial district, simple random sampling technique was used to select three local government areas (LGAs) making six LGAs. At the third stage, simple random sampling technique was used to select eight early childhood education centers from each of the selected local government area for adequate representation of the population. From the

selected early childhood education center, five teachers were purposively selected based on the fact that they were teaching at pre-primary classes or early primary classes and have acquired a minimum of two years of teaching experience.

Research Instrument and data collection

One instrument titled 'Teachers' Awareness and Implementation of the Concept of Holistic Child Development Questionnaire' (TAICHCDQ) was designed by the researcher were used to collect data for the study. The TAICHCDQ is divided into three sections. Section A elucidates information on the demographic data of the respondents while section B contains 10 items which elicit information on level of teachers' awareness of the Concept of Holistic Child Development. Section C contains 10 structured items which elicit information on the teachers' implementation of the concept of holistic child development.

The instrument was given to experts in Early Childhood Education and Test and Measurement to ensure face, content and construct validity. The reliability of the instruments were carried out in one early childhood education center outside the scope of the study for field testing. Consequently, reliability coefficient values of 0.73 was obtained.

Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics in form of frequency, percentage, and mean scores.

Results

What is the level of teachers' awareness of the concept of holistic child development in early childhood education centers in Osun State?

Table 1

Descriptive analysis of the level of teachers' awareness of the concept of holistic child development in early childhood education centers in Osun State

S/N	Level Percentage (%)	Range	Frequency (f)
1.	Low	10-19 5.8	14
2.	Moderate	20-27 32.9	79
3.	High	28-40 61.3	147
Total			240
			100.0

N = 240 NB: 60-100% were adjudged to be high; 30-59% were adjudged to be moderate; 0-29% were adjudged to be low.

Results in Table 1 shows the descriptive analysis of the level of teachers' awareness of the concept of holistic child development in early childhood education centers in Osun State. It can be deduced from the table that the level of teachers' awareness of the concept of holistic child development in early childhood education centers was high at 61.3% in Osun State.

Research Question 2:

To what extent do teachers implement the concept of holistic child development in early childhood education centers in Osun State?

Table 2

Descriptive analysis of the extent that teachers implement the concept of holistic child development in early childhood education centers in Osun State

S/N	Extent Percentage (%)	Range	Frequency (f)
1.	Low	10-19 4.6	11
2.	Moderate	20-27 35.0	84
3.	High	28-40 60.4	145

Total	240
	100.0

N = 240 NB: 60-100% were adjudged to be high; 30-59% were adjudged to be moderate; 0-29% were adjudged to be low.

Results in Table 2 shows the descriptive analysis of the extent to which teachers implement the concept of holistic child development in early childhood education centers in Osun State. It can be observed from the table that the extent to which teachers implement the concept of holistic child development in early childhood education centers was high at 60.4% in Osun State.

Discussions

The study revealed that teachers in early childhood education institutions in Osun State had a high level of awareness regarding the idea of holistic child development. The conclusion of this is that the comprehensive approach to child development is deeply ingrained in early childhood education facilities in the research area. The likely cause for this might be attributed to teachers' acknowledgement that holistic development can enhance the growth of children in their early life. The results of this study oppose the findings of Salami (2015), who examined the impact of the university-to-community pilot preschool programme on the learning environment, teachers' attitudes, and the holistic development of children in certain preschool sections in public primary schools in Ibadan, Oyo State.

Furthermore, the findings are consistent with Capinding's (2022) research on teachers' awareness of children' learning circumstances during remote learning, and the potential impact on children' academic achievement. The results is also consistent with the findings of Bhise (2023) that there is high awareness of teachers on children' learning situation, social learning environment and holistic approach. The results corroborate the conclusions reached by Holgersson (2014), Kablan, Akaydin, and Demir (2015), and Ewe, Ab Rahman, and Faragai (2018) that teachers possess knowledge of the 21st-century teaching skills and incorporate them into classroom activities to enhance school effectiveness.

The study findings indicated a high extent of implementation of the holistic child development concept by instructors in early childhood education facilities in Osun State. This suggests that teachers in early childhood education institutions in Osun State prioritise comprehensive child development to a higher degree. This may be due to the recognition that childhood is a crucial stage of immense growth and advancement in terms of

physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and language development, all of which have a substantial impact on a child's formative years.

Furthermore, the outcomes corroborate the discoveries made by Yaswinda (2022) in a study on the use of comprehensive integrated education for young children amidst the Covid-19 pandemic in Ulak Karang village, Indonesia. Their study was driven by the adoption of early childhood integrated holistic education. It was discovered that the development, implementation, and evaluation of an integrative holistic approach aligned with the standards set by current regulations.

Conclusion

The study concluded that the level of teachers' awareness of the concept of holistic child development in early childhood education centers in Osun State, Nigeria was high. The study also concluded that the extent of teachers' implementation of holistic children development in early childhood education centers in Osun State, Nigeria was high. The study provided empirical information on the level of teachers' awareness of the concept of holistic child development in early childhood education centers in Osun State, Nigeria. It advanced knowledge on the extent of teachers' implementation of holistic children development in Osun State.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion of findings of the study, it is hereby recommended that:

1. Workshops, seminars and conferences may be organised by government and school authorities for teachers on the awareness and implementation of the concept of holistic child development in Early Childhood Education to sustain their level of awareness.
2. Stakeholders such as teachers, parents and government may ensure that early childhood education centers are further well maintained to encourage total child development in schools.

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