

Challenges Pre-School Teachers Face in the Implementation of the Early Childhood Curriculum in the Cape Coast Metropolis

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the challenges that pre-school teachers encounter in the implementation of the early childhood curriculum; exploring teaching methods employed by pre-schools teachers in the Cape Coast Metropolis. The study employed descriptive survey as the research design. A convenient sample of 62 pre-school teachers were selected from a total of 45 pre-schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis. The instruments used to elicit information from the respondents was a structured questionnaires which validity and reliability were obtained through a pilot study that revealed alpha reliability coefficient 0.76 and 0.73 for Section B and C respectively. The key findings of the study revealed that pre-school teachers are faced with a lot of challenges in implementing the early childhood curriculum. A notable one among them are that most pre-school teachers do not understand the early childhood curriculum, pre-school teachers do not have enough teaching and learning materials to help them implement the Early childhood curriculum, parents do not involve themselves in their wards education therefore it makes it difficult for pre-school to do the work alone. It was also revealed that teachers, teaching and learning materials are the main factors that influence the implementation of the early childhood curriculum. The researcher recommended that private proprietors and government authorities overseeing the pre-school program should organise frequent in-service training for both teachers and parents with respect to early childhood education curriculum.

KEYWORDS: Early Childhood Education, Early Childhood Curriculum, Implementation, Ghana

INTRODUCTION

Background to the study

Etymologically, the word curriculum is derived from the Latin word “curere” which is a literal translation of race course (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). This metaphoric description of curriculum is in place since learners in schools or training institutions consider their modules or course programme as series of obstacles or hurdles to be cleared (Adentwi, 2005). Adentwi (2005) further asserted that to a very large extent how we approach the education of young children depends on what we believe children are like and how they act and behave in life. Often, curriculum for pre-schools are structured around some underlying assumptions about the nature of children. For example an idea that children learn actively by exploring their environment would result in a different type of early childhood curriculum than one based on the idea that children learn passively by being taught specific information and skills. In the same vain, a view that children are basically unruly and need strict control so that they will learn appropriately would result in a different guidance approach than the notion that children generally strive toward social acceptance from others by conforming to reasonable expectations (Adentwi, 2005).

According to Langenbach and Neskora (1977), the early childhood curriculum is a product of both long- range and short term planning. Many programme start with a master plan that covers a sizeable period, for instance a year, and is then filled in with details for shorter segments of time. In other words, the curriculum of the young children is a product of the interest of the children. This means that the spontaneity and flexibility are the hallmarks of planning as far as such curriculum. In either case, pre-school curriculum has to be integrally related to several prominent factors: programme philosophy, goals, objectives, and evaluation. Activities are thus evaluated on an ongoing basis, returning to the starting point, goals and objectives are reassessed and adjusted as needed, starting the cycle anew (Lawton, 1988).

Pre-school teachers as key players in young children education have a crucial roles to play in early childhood curriculum implementation. This may include child guidance and discipline, respecting cultural diversity, adopting the appropriate methods of teaching and learning, encouraging self-dependence and many (McDonnell,

1999). Establishing reciprocal relationship with families and other teachers (Lundin, 2000). Creating a caring community of learners, teaching to enhance development and learning in the classroom (NAEYC, 2005). In pre-school curriculum implementation, both personal and environmental factors are effective. As a researcher I agree to the idea of National Association of Education of Young Children that as teachers bring their past experience into classroom settings, their perceptions regarding how these young children learn and develop affect quality of the pre-school curriculum implementation. Kern, Kruse and Roehring (2007) also maintains the ideas that teachers' perception about teaching and learning are strongly influencing the implementation of early childhood curriculum. In other words, once the teachers are defending the ideology of the curriculum being implemented, then the performance of the pre-school teachers in the real classroom setting is affected positively during implementation. Park (2008) also suggested that understanding of the early childhood curriculum by the teachers is crucial for proper implementation of the curriculum to help achieve its goals. This means that once the pre-school teachers do not comprehend what the early childhood curriculum's theoretical and practical framework in details, they will not be able to successfully implement the early childhood curriculum.

That notwithstanding, the Ministry of Education, Ghana under the Division of Curriculum research and Development (2006) maintains the idea that, Ghanaian pre-school curriculum is structured in such a way it recognizes the principles that children at early stage learn by active exploring. This stem from the fact that, the early childhood curriculum should be implemented in such a way it will provide children with expressive activities that demands their maximum cooperation and participation in all learning activities.

Statement of the problem

According to NAEYC (2005), there are standards for serving a good quality of education. Therefore there is the need for teachers to meet those standards especially, when their role is related to curriculum implementation. However, knowledge in early childhood curriculum is more challenging and heavier as greater responsibility creates on the shoulders of the early childhood educators. It appears that despite what is planned and documented in the early childhood curriculum, practices of teachers and events going on in the classroom settings are not being realized.

That notwithstanding the above, the report of Curriculum Research and Development Division (2006) holds the rationale that, early childhood curriculum has been enacted to meet the developmental needs of children at the formative years and also to help children come out with tremendous potentials and experiences covering various area of human experiences. However it appears in their report that the early childhood curriculum is not given the necessary recognition by pre-school teachers.

In this sense, as a researcher identifying the challenges pre-school teachers' face during the implementation of the curriculum is a necessity because once the challenges were detected precisely, it is easier to deal with those challenges by finding ways of managing those challenges. In this light, it is very imperative to conduct an empirical study to ascertain the challenges that pre-school teachers face in the implementation of the early childhood curriculum in some selected pre-schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to explore the challenges that Ghanaian pre-school teachers face in the implementation of the early childhood curriculum. The study also aimed to provide data for policy makers and educational leaders in discovering by analyzing early childhood teachers challenges they face in the classroom.

Research questions

1. What challenges do pre-school teachers face in the implementation of the early childhood curriculum?
2. What factors influence the implementation of the early childhood curriculum?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The concept of early childhood education

The definition of the term early childhood education depends on the angle one views the concept. In terms of child's life, early childhood education is considered as the period from birth to eight years of age (Campbell, 1990). Grotewell and Burton (2008) also shared this definition as they elaborated it accordingly as the time

between the zero and eight years of age. However, by school terms, early childhood education incorporates the group settings for infants through elementary school grade three (Campbell, 1990). In the words of Gonzalez-Mena (2008), early childhood education is a special branch of education serving with children from infancy to elementary grade level of three. As definitions of these authorities imply, I believe that early childhood education brings or exposes children (birth to eight) into the world. Significance of the early childhood education increased tremendously all over the world within the last twenty years. This situation is complementary with research results based on long term effects of early education to later life (Gonzalez-Mena, 2008).

The Importance of Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education within the last few decades considered different fields such as developmental psychology, cultural psychology, childhood studies, cultural anthropology, history and philosophy (Johnson, 2005). According to Clough, Nutbrown, and Selbie (2008), recently, studies are much concentrated on different aspect of children's life because young children are born with the capacity to understand the world around them if the necessary environment and qualified teachers are at their disposal. More so, Breedekamp and Copple (1997) holds the idea that children's brains are ready to learn when all the conditions are met. To them, during the brain process, both the environment and genes take an important role which in turn builds the brain, therefore, this vulnerable children needs to be given the necessary attention and effective teaching in order for them to realise their potentials fully.

Early childhood education also becomes more beneficial especially for the children coming from low socio-economic background (Botta, 2009). He further identified that the benefit of children being exposed to early education coming from low-income families as that their cognitive growth and school readiness is highly influenced. Again, when young children are coming from low socio-economic background, and are given good quality of early childhood education with its proper implementation of the curriculum, it provides them with early reading and mathematics skills, high cognitive, positive self-image and help them to cope with the children from high and middle socio-economic status. Early childhood education cultivates children in terms of socialization rather than only purely academic enhancement such as maths and reading (Webb, 2003). Webb (2003) again, elaborated that children learn cooperation through early education they receive from child care centres and it helps them to acquire the necessary skills in life. These skills help them to obey rules and stay safe in the society.

In the study of Seng (1994), it was revealed that one of the biggest reasons for parents sending their children to early childhood education centres is to get them socialized, active and to acquire some basic skills in life. In a longitudinal study by Kagitcibasi (1991), it was explained that children who received early childhood education becomes emotionally and socially competent adults compared to the ones who did not received early education. Oppenheim and Koren-Karie (2002) established in his study that children who receive early education are less likely to be involved in crime and more likely to complete their high school education and get into college education.

Early Childhood Curriculum Implementation

Early childhood curriculum implementation entails putting into practice the officially prescribed courses of study, syllabus and subjects. The process involves helping the learner acquire knowledge or experience. It is important to note that curriculum implementation cannot take place without the learner. The learner is therefore the central figure in the curriculum implementation process. Implementation takes place as the learner acquires the planned or intended experiences, knowledge, skills, ideas and attitudes that are aimed at enabling the same learner to function effectively in a society (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988).

Challenges faced by pre-school teachers in the implementation of the early childhood curriculum

According to Azzi-Lessing (2009), in education, infrastructure provides bases for the rest. Once the deficiencies related to infrastructure occur, this may trigger other problems as well. In the study of Aktan and Comert (2007), one of the sources problems relating to pre-school curriculum implementation is facilities available in the school. According to the study conducted by Gundogan (2002) in-service trainings that school administrators organised is not enough to abreast pre-school teachers with the current trend of the early childhood curriculum. According to the study, it was revealed that the type of in-service training pre-school teachers receive is not from the field of early childhood education. Thus the in-service training that teachers participated might not be supportive for them in finding answers for their questions on curriculum implementation. Cisneros, Cisneros-Chernour and Moreno (2000) in their study revealed that preschool teachers' had problem in implementing the early childhood curriculum due to the fact that parents superficial believe in early childhood education as a playing ground for

the children not as a learning setting and this attitude of parents resulted in obstacle between the school and home collaboration. According to Reid, Stoolmiller and Webster- Stratoon (2008), teaching experience of pre-school teachers can also be problematic in implementing the early childhood education practically.

Factors that influence early childhood curriculum implementation

The Teacher

Connelly and Clandinin (1988) asserted that teachers view their role in curriculum implementation as an autonomous one. They select and decide what to teach from the prescribed syllabus or curriculum. Since implementation takes place through the interaction of the learner and the planned learning opportunities, the role and influence of the teacher in the process is indisputable. It is evident in the work of (Goodman & Brand, 2009) that as the teachers are social beings and as they are coming from different backgrounds, they bring their past experience into their classroom practice to influence the curriculum. Goodman and Brand (2009) indicated that, teachers who are characterized as motivated, responsible, and organized and are open to new learning opportunities, they were found to be high curriculum implementers compared to teachers described as unmotivated, not open to changes.

The Learners (pupils)

Learners (pupils) are also a critical element in curriculum implementation. While teachers are the arbiters of the classroom practice, the learners hold the key to what is actually transmitted and adopted from the official curriculum. The official curriculum can be quite different from the curriculum that is actually implemented. The learner factor influences teachers in their selection of learning experiences, hence the need to consider the diverse characteristics of learners in curriculum implementation. Learners (pupils) home background and their abilities can determine what is actually achieved in the classroom (Goodman & Brand, 2009).

Resource Materials and Facilities

No meaningful teaching and learning can take place without provision of adequate resource materials. This applies to curriculum implementation as well (Curriculum Research and Development Division, 2006). This means that for the officially designed curriculum to be fully implemented as planned, the Government or Ministry of Education should supply schools with adequate resource materials such as textbooks, teaching aids and stationery in order to enable teachers and learners to play their role satisfactorily in the curriculum implementation process. The Curriculum Research and Development Division maintains that the central government needs to provide physical facilities such as classrooms, laboratories, workshops, libraries and sports fields in order to create an enabling environment in which implementation can take place. The availability and quality of resource material and the availability of appropriate facilities have a great influence on curriculum implementation.

Interest Groups

Fedoravicius, Finn- Stevenson, Desimone, Henrich and Payne (2004) gives evidence in their study that support from the interest groups serves as a key factor for successful early childhood curriculum implementation. In other words, collaborative environment is of immense benefit in curriculum implementation. Findings from their study again shows that collaborative relationship and networking were detected as positive factors increasing the teachers' attitudes and motivation, as well as their teaching. Teberg (1999) supported the necessity of administrative support for a successful curriculum implementation by discussing the fact that teachers need more than just knowledge and skills, they need encouragement and from interest groups to reach the goals defined for their children in the classroom in order to realise their full potentials.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design adopted for the study was the descriptive survey. The descriptive survey design was employed or deemed appropriate because the study sought to collect data from a sample of teachers from various pre-schools regarding the challenges they face in implementing the early childhood curriculum and the factors that influence the implementation through the use of questionnaire.

Sample and sampling procedure

A total of 62 pre-school teachers were conveniently sampled from a total of 125 pre-school teachers in selected schools using simple random method. Structured questionnaires was the main instrument for the study. The research instrument was developed by taking into consideration the research questions. The

questions were mainly open and close ended items. Set of questionnaires were designed for the teachers to respond to individual items on the questionnaire.

Collection of Data

The questionnaire was self-administered at the various schools of abode. Items in the questionnaire were clearly explained to the respondents before they were made to provide any necessary responses to the items. This ensured consistency and accuracy of responses of the pre-school teachers. The questionnaire was administered and collected on the same day. This was to ensure we get accurate and maximum return rate.

All the information gathered from the study using the questionnaires was checked for accuracy, clarity of expression. All the respondents answered the questions completely and expressions were found to be meaningful and understandable. The responses to the questionnaires was organized and analysed with respect to the research questions on which the instruments were design for the study. In essence, the retrieved questionnaires were serially numbered, coded and scored. The Statistical Product and Social Sciences (SPSS version 21.0) was used to analyse the data. Basically, data gathered in the study were analysed descriptively (using tables, graphs, frequencies and percentages). The results of the findings were interpreted appropriately.

DATA ANALYSIS

Demographic Data

Table 1; Personal/Demographic Data

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Males	21	33.9
Females	41	66.1
Total	62	100.0

The table above represents the number of males and females who participated in the study and their corresponding percentages. From the Table, 41 females' respondents representing 66.1% and 21 males' respondents representing 33.9% made responses to the study. The above results of the table show that female teachers are more than male teachers at the pre-school level.

Research question 1

What are the challenges do preschool teachers face in the implementation of the early childhood curriculum?

The reason for this research question was to find out the challenges that pre-school teachers face in the curriculum implementation. This research question sought to find out the difficulties that pre-school teachers encounter during their teaching process. The results are presented below.

Table 2

Research question 1

What challenges do pre-school teachers face in the implementation of the early childhood curriculum?

This question was answered with data from respondent's information on challenges pre-school teachers face in the implementation of the early childhood curriculum. Summary is given in table 2

Statements	SA		A		D		SD		Total Freq.	Total %
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%		
1. I don't understand the ECC curriculum	38	55.8	7	11.2	14	22.5	3	4.8	62	100
2. The school don't have enough teaching and learning materials to help me implement the Early childhood curriculum	47	75.8	9	14.5	4	6.4	2	3.2	62	100
3. My class size is too large for me to go by the Early childhood curriculum	26	41.9	19	30.6	11	17.7	6	9.6	62	100
4. I don't receive any in-service training on the Early childhood curriculum	31	50.0	15	24.1	13	20.9	3	4.8	62	100
5. The pupils do not understand the learning concepts when I go by the Early childhood curriculum	4	6.4	10	16.1	32	51.6	16	25.8	62	100
6. Parents don't involve themselves in the implementation of the early childhood curriculum	37	59.6	22	35.4	1	1.6	2	3.2	62	100
7. The facilities in the school don't facilitate in the implementation of the early childhood curriculum.	40	64.5	15	24.1	4	6.4	3	4.8	62	100
8. The administration of the school don't support in the implementation of the Early childhood curriculum	12	19.3	35	56.4	10	16.1	5	8.0	62	100

In interpreting the table above which shows the challenges pre-school teachers face in implementing the early childhood curriculum, out of the 62 teachers, 45 (67.0%) pre-school teachers agreed that they do not understand the early childhood curriculum whereas 17 (27.3%) teachers disagree that they do not understand the curriculum. Again from the table, 56 (90.3%) teachers agreed the school do not have enough teaching and learning materials to help implement the early childhood curriculum, 6 (9.4 %) teachers disagreed the school do not have enough teaching and learning materials to help implement the early childhood curriculum. Moreover, 45 (72.5%) of the teachers agreed that class size is too large for them to go by the early childhood curriculum whereas 17 (27.3%) teachers disagreed that class size is too large for them to go by the early childhood curriculum. Again, 46 (74.1%) teachers agreed they do not receive any in-service training on the early childhood curriculum whereas 16 (24.9%) teachers they do not receive any in-service training on the early childhood curriculum. 14 (22.5%) agreed that the pupils do not understand the learning concepts when they go by the early childhood curriculum. 48 (77.4%) disagreed the pupils do not understand the learning concepts when they go by the early childhood curriculum. 59 (95.0%) agreed that parents do not involve themselves in the implementation of the early childhood curriculum. 3 (4.8%) disagreed that parents do not involve themselves in the implementation of the early childhood curriculum. 55 (88.6%) of the teachers agreed that the facilities in the school do not facilitate in the implementation of the early childhood curriculum. 7 (11.2%) disagreed that the facilities in the school do not facilitate in the implementation of the early childhood curriculum. 47 (75.7%) agreed that the administration of

the school do not support in the implementation of the early childhood curriculum. 15 (24.1%) disagreed that the administration of the school don't support in the implementation of the early childhood curriculum.

Research question 2

What factors influence the implementation of the early childhood curriculum?

The reason for this research question was to investigate and determine the factors influencing the implementation of the early childhood education curriculum. This was to find out the views of the preschool teachers about which group they think influence curriculum implementation. These groups were structured by the researcher as teachers, learners, TLMs, and interest groups or stakeholders. The views of the preschool teachers are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

What factors influence the implementation of the early childhood education curriculum?

This question was answered with data from respondent's information on the factors that influence the implementation of the early childhood education curriculum. Summary is given in table 3.

ITEMS	S.A		A		D		SD		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
1. Teachers	45	72.5	10	16.1	5	8.0	2	3.2	62	100
2. Learners	11	17.7	18	29.0	19	30.6	14	22.5	62	100
3. Interest group	18	29.0	23	37.0	15	24.1	6	9.6	62	100
4. TLMs	40	64.5	19	30.6	2	3.2	1	1.6	62	100

A critical examination of Table above reveals the factors that affect the implementation of the ECE curriculum. Teachers' views were asked as to whether the four different items in the table can be considered as a factor that can influence ECE curriculum and their response were as follows. Out of the 62 teachers, 55 (88.6%) teachers agreed that teachers are the factor which influences the implementation of early childhood curriculum. 7 (11.2%) teachers disagreed that teachers are the factor that influence early childhood curriculum. 29 (46.7%) teachers agreed that learners influence the implementation of the early childhood curriculum. 33 (53.1%) teachers disagreed learners influence the implementation of the early childhood curriculum. 41 (66.0%) teachers agreed that interest groups influences the implementation of the early childhood curriculum. 21 (39.7%) disagreed that interest groups influences curriculum implementation. Finally, 59 (95.1%) agreed that the availability of teaching and learning materials influences the implementation of the early childhood curriculum and 3 (4.8%) disagreed that teaching and learning materials influences the implementation of the early childhood curriculum.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings from the study indicated that preschool teachers do not have full grasp of the early childhood curriculum, thus they face the problem of content of the curriculum. The finding on the pre-school teacher's knowledge in the curriculum was revealed in the study of Reid, Stoolmiller and Webster- Stratoon (2008) that teaching knowledge and experience in the early curriculum is problematic in the quest of implementing the early childhood education.

The findings again revealed in the study that parents are unconcern about their wards education at the pre-school level. Majority of the preschool teachers complained about the attitudes of parents toward early childhood education. According to the pre-school teachers parents do not understand early childhood education but see it as time wasting when they involve themselves. Some parents' opinions about early childhood centres as a playing ground not a serious place for learning. This situation was also detected in the study conducted by Cisneros, Cisneros- Chernour and Moreno (2000) in their study revealed that preschool teachers' had problem in implementing the early childhood curriculum due to the fact that parents superficial early childhood education as

a playing ground for the children not as a learning and this attitude of parents resulted in obstacle between the school and home collaboration.

The study further gives evident that pre-school teachers do not receive enough in-service training with respect to early childhood curriculum. Most sampled pre-school teachers for the study agreed that their school administrators do not organise frequent in-service training for teachers to be current on the new trends in the early childhood curriculum. This results lends support to study of Gundogan (2002) that in-service trainings that school administrators organised is not enough to abreast pre-school teachers with the current trend of the early childhood curriculum. Facilities in the pre-schools in the cape coast metropolis was confirmed by the pre-school teachers in the study that they do not facilitate in the implementation of the early childhood curriculum. This agreed with the findings of Azzi-Lessing (2009) that infrastructure available at the pre-school centres affects the teaching and learning.

The study finally revealed that teachers, teaching and learning materials are very influential in the implementation of the curriculum. The results of the study again gives evidence to Curriculum Research and Development Division (2006) that curriculum of pre-schoolers cannot be successful without adequate and appropriate teaching and learning materials

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATONS OF THE STUDY

It can be concluded in the study that inadequate teaching and learning materials, lack of inadequate in-service training for pre-school teachers, lack of parental involvement, inadequate pre-school teachers knowledge in the early childhood curriculum serves as impediment for successful implementation of the early childhood curriculum among the pre-schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis. Also teachers and inadequate teaching and learning materials are some of the key factors that influence early curriculum implementation.

The researcher recommended that private proprietors and government authorities overseeing the pre-school program should organise frequent in-service training for both teachers and parents with respect to early childhood education curriculum. This can help to abreast parents and teachers with respect to the importance of early childhood curriculum and its impact on the children education

The implications of this study have the possibility to assist policy makers and educational leaders in discovering by analyzing early childhood teachers' challenges faced regarding curriculum implementation as well as finding out how pre-school teachers can overcome those challenges.

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