



## Perceived Training Needs of Teachers in Early Childhood Assessment: Pathway to Achieving Target 2 of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in Nigeria

OLOWE Peter K, RASHEED Simideleola T, FALEKULO Olaotan Patience

Department of Early Childhood Care and Education Ondo, Ondo State, Nigeria

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### Abstrak

*The issue of access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education was captured in Target 2 of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) because the early childhood period is critical to children's learning and development. One of the ways by which teachers can provide children with the quality early childhood development and pre-primary education is through effective early childhood assessment. Assessment is extremely important for determining children's learning and developmental progress. In spite of this, teachers do not carry out effective assessment in many pre-primary schools in Nigeria. While previous studies have recommended that the teachers should be trained, research efforts have not been targeted at finding out if the teachers themselves perceive that they need training in early childhood assessment practices. Consequently, this study examined if teachers in Ondo West Local Government Area perceive that they need training in early childhood assessment. The survey research design was adopted. Sample comprised two hundred and eighty eight pre-primary schools teachers from both public and private schools. An instrument titled "Early Childhood Assessment Training Needs Questionnaire (ECATNQ)" was used. Data was analysed using percentage, mean and standard deviation. Pre-primary school teachers perceived that they need training in early childhood assessment. The implications of this finding for the achievement of Target 2 of SDG 4 were discussed. It was recommended among others that Ondo State Universal Basic Board and private school administrators should organise workshop and seminars for pre-primary school teachers on early childhood assessment.*

## INTRODUCTION

The early childhood period is an important period in a child's life because it is the period when development takes place mostly. The early childhood stage lays the foundation for children's future well-being and learning. It is the most critical time for the growth and development of the child. World Health Organisation, WHO (2012) avers that the early childhood years is a time that spans the pre-natal period to eight years of age and it is the most intensive period of brain development throughout the lifespan. Oduolowu and Olowe (2011) note that the early childhood period are years of extreme vulnerability and tremendous potentials, during which adequate stimulation are essential to provide the foundation for well-being and development. In the words of Akinbote, Olowe and John (2017), the years are formational and children experiences during the years have long lasting impacts on their development and learning. In realization of the fact that the early childhood period is the most critical in the children's lives, the issue of access to quality early childhood development and care was captured in one of the 2030 Global Agenda. Specifically, the target 2 of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) which is on education states "by 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education" (United Nations, UN, 2015; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, 2016).

During the early childhood period, children experience learning and development in different domains - cognitive, physical, social and emotional. Cognitive development focuses on child's development in terms of information processing, conceptual resources, perceptual skill, language learning, and other aspects of brain development. Physical development involves developing control over the body, particularly muscles and physical coordination, concentrating on gross and fine motor skills as well as puberty (Thomas, 2017). Kostelink, Whiren, Stein, and Soderman (2006) and Henniger (2009) submit that social development involves learning to relate to a variety of people in many different circumstances while Henniger (2009) states that emotional development in young children consists of a gradual growth in the ability to recognize, label and appropriately respond to their feeling. The experiences children have in each of these domains have a direct effect on the adult they will become. This is why it is highly imperative to pay serious attention to the different areas of their learning and

development.

One of the ways by which serious attention can be paid to the different areas of learning and development of young children is to give them access to quality Early Childhood Education (ECE). This again justifies the reason why the UN (2015) captures the issue of ensuring access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education for all girls and boys by the year 2030. ECE according to Kostelink, Soderman and Whiren (2011) is any group programme that is serving children from birth to 8 years and which is designed to promote children's intellectual, social, language, physical development and learning. Olowe, Kutelu and Majebi (2014) see ECE as a wide range of programmes, activities and experiences which are planned to enhance the cognitive, social, emotional, moral and physical development of children. It should be noted that access to quality early childhood development and pre-primary education can only be guaranteed for all boys and girls by the year 2030 if the programme of ECE that is serving them involves effective early childhood assessment. It has been said that a quality ECE programme is the one that has assessment of children as one of its features (National Council of La Raza, NCLR, 2011; Snow & Van Hemel, 2008).

Assessment, according to Snow and Van Hemel (2008), is a process of gathering information in order to make informed instructional decision. It is the method of finding out what children have gained from learning activities, in term of knowledge, thinking and reasoning, character development and industry; and it takes into account the cognitive, physical, social, emotional and language domains (Snow & Van Hemel, 2008). Slentz, Early and McKenna (2008) submit that assessment involves gathering information on young children's behaviors, skills, competencies, preferences, and interactions. Olowe and Ayoola (2016) agree with Bredekamp (2011) to say that assessment is the ongoing process of gathering evidence of children's learning and development, then organizing and interpreting the information in order to make informed decisions about instructional practice. Oduolowu, Zakariy-ahh and Olowe (2016) see assessment as a process of evaluating the extent to which the child can make inference and assumptions from the learned materials.

Snow and Van Hemel (2008) aver that it is through assessment that the caregivers or teachers can provide the needed quality services for children as it would help them to better understand how individual children are learning

and developing. In the same vein, Oduolowu et al. (2016) point to the fact that helping each learner to develop his or her ability to the fullest can only be made possible through effective assessment. In spite of the importance of carrying out assessment so that young children can be guaranteed quality early childhood development and pre-primary education, studies as well as other literature have revealed that effective assessment is not carried out in most ECE centres or pre-primary schools in Nigeria (Olaleye & Omotayo, 2009; Oduolowu et al., 2016; Olowe & Ayoola, 2016; Amosun & Olatujayan, 2016). Assessment in many ECE centres and pre-primary schools focuses only on a fragment of cognitive domain as book knowledge is the only major area that teachers assess. Oduolowu et al. (2016) submit that the use of oral test, paper and pencil test and interview are the main modes through which children are assessed in pre-primary schools. This situation is worrisome as it would be impossible for teachers to provide needed quality services for children since they would not know whether children are learning and developing normally in each domain.

It is pertinent to reiterate at this juncture that the teacher is a key factor in the business of providing access to quality ECE for children through the conduct of effective assessment. This supports the submission of UNESCO (2016) that teachers are a fundamental condition for guaranteeing quality education. Children are dependent on adults for everything that happens to them and for all the experiences they are involved in. The early childhood or pre-school teacher is therefore the one who determines the appropriate learning experiences for children so that deliberate action can be taken towards assessing them. It is the job of the teacher to select and use the appropriate forms of assessment tools to documents children's learning and development. The teacher does this in order to identify areas of deficiencies in children and to provide quality early childhood experiences for them.

In spite of these key roles of the teacher to providing quality early childhood development and pre-primary education for children through assessment, it is saddening to note that they do not carry out effective assessment of children. The previous studies that were mentioned earlier confirmed this submission (e.g. Olaleye & Omotayo, 2009; Oduolowu et al., 2016; Olowe & Ayoola, 2016). Many of these previous studies recommended that teachers should be trained on early childhood assessment. This could be be-

cause training the pre-service teachers is the only way by which they could come to understand and acquire the relevant skills needed for conducting effective assessment. Training has been described as the process of increasing human efficiency in which people are offered the opportunity to acquire new skills and current knowledge required in carrying out various specialized tasks in their place of work (Oduolowu & Oyesomi, 2012; Olowe & Ayoola, 2016). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRRA) (2011) describe training as series of learning experiences that relate to set of skills or dispositions in specific areas and which is delivered by professionals with subject matter and adult learning knowledge and skills.

Meanwhile, many of the previous studies which recommend that pre-primary school teachers should be trained in early childhood assessment failed to find out if the teachers themselves perceive that they need training in early childhood assessment practices. Demircan and Olgan (2011) have said that teachers' viewpoints, needs, and deficiencies related to assessment and evaluation methods should be considered. Finding out from the teachers if they need training on early childhood assessment could go long way to strengthen the process of achieving the Target 2 of SDG 4 in Nigeria. This is because, if the teachers perceive so, quick decision could be taken by relevant stakeholders to organise relevant training for them so that they can become better prepared to offer quality early childhood development and pre-preprimary education for young children in Nigeria. It is based on the foregoing that the authors of this paper investigated if teachers in pre-primary schools perceive that they need training on early childhood assessment practices.

### Research Questions

1. Do pre-primary School teachers perceive that they need training on early childhood Assessment?
2. What are the reasons given by the pre-primary school teachers for their training need on early childhood assessment?

### METHOD

This study adopted survey research design. Population for the study comprised all pre-primary school teachers/caregivers in Ondo West Local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria. The researchers stratified the Local Government into rural and urban areas. Purposive sampling

technique was then used to select 8 private and 6 public pre-primary schools from the rural areas while 10 public and 22 private pre-primary schools were selected from the rural area. The private schools were selected on the criteria that they had at least 5 teachers in their pre-school section, they were registered with the government, they were ready to participate in the study and they were accessible. As for the public schools, they were selected on the criteria that they were accessible, they were ready to participate in the study and they had at least 3 teachers in their pre-school section. The researchers designed and used an instrument titled “Early Childhood Assessment Training Needs Questionnaire (ECATNQ)” for data collection. The instrument was made up of three sections – A, B and C. Section A sought information on the respondents’ demographic variables such as years of teaching experience and level of education attained. Section B contained 10 items which sought information on training needs of teachers in early childhood assessment. Section C sought information on the reasons provided by the teachers for their training needs in early childhood assessment.

The face and content validity of ECATNQ was established by research and ECE experts in the Department of Educational Foundations and Counseling, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago Iwoye, Ogun State, Nigeria and in the Department of Early Childhood Care and Education, Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo, Ondo State, Nigeria. 20 copies of ECATNQ was administered on pre-primary school teachers in Odigbo Local Government Area of Ondo State. The data collected was subjected to reliability test using Cronbach’s Alpha technique and reliability coefficient of 0.80 was obtained. The researchers selected and trained 10 students who are studying ECCE in Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo as research assistants. They joined the researchers to collect data for a period of four weeks. Before the instrument was administered on the teachers, they were given brief information on what early childhood assessment entails. This became necessary as it was observed that many of the teachers, especially those in private schools, did not know what assessment entails. The descriptive statistics of percentage, mean and standard deviation were used to analyse the data collected.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Research Question 1: Do pre-primary school teachers perceive that they need training on early childhood assessment?

Table 1

Pre-primary School Teachers’ Perception of their Training Need in Early Childhood Assessment

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
Since I know what early childhood assessment is, I will not need any training on it.	1.85	1.19
I do not really understand the purposes for early childhood assessment so I need training on it.	2.60	1.10
I think I can conveniently explain the characteristics of early childhood assessment so I need no training on it.	1.80	.79
Since I have been carrying out early childhood assessment, I do not need to be trained on it again.	1.98	1.03
I am not very knowledgeable about how to involve parents in early childhood assessment so I need training on it. early childhood assessment so I need training on it.	2.79	1.18
I cannot mention all the teacher made tools of assessment so I need to be trained in that area.	3.10	1.08
I know all the formal tools of assessment so I do not require any training in that area.	1.74	.83
As a pre-primary school teacher, I really need training on the skills required to conduct early childhood assessment.	3.59	.87
I know the different areas that assessment should focus upon so I do not need training on it.	1.79	.65
I do not think I know what to do with the information gathered from early childhood assessment so I will need training in that regard.	3.54	1.00
<b>Weighted Average</b>		<b>2.48</b>

N = 288

Key: Positive Items: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree  
Decision Value: 0.00-2.44 = No, 2.45-4.00 = Yes

Table 1 shows teachers' perception of their training need in early childhood assessment. The table shows that the teachers disagreed to the following items: since I know what early childhood assessment is, I will not need any training on it ( 1.85), I think I can conveniently explain the characteristics of early childhood assessment so I need no training on it ( ), since I have been carrying out early childhood assessment in my school, I do not need to be trained on it again ( ), I know all the formal tools of assessment so I do not require any training in that area ( 1.74) and I know the different areas that assessment should focus upon so I do not need training on it ( 1.79). The teachers however agreed to the following items: I do not really understand the purposes for early childhood assessment so I need training on it ( 2.60), I am not very knowledgeable about how to involve parents in early childhood assessment so I need training on it ( 2.79), I cannot mention all the teacher made tools of assessment so I need to be trained in that area ( 3.10), as a pre-primary school teacher, I really need training on the skills required to conduct early childhood assessment ( 3.59) and I do not think I know what to do with the information gathered from early childhood assessment so I will need training in that regard ( 3.54). Meanwhile, based on the value of the weighted average (2.48 out of 4.00 maximum value that can be obtained), which falls within the decision value for Yes, it can be inferred that pre-primary school teachers perceived that they need training on early childhood assessment.

Research Question 2: What are the reasons given by the pre-primary school teachers for their training need on early childhood assessment?

*Reasons given by Pre-primary School Teachers for their Training Needs on Early Childhood Assessment*

Reasons	Frequency
Lack of pre-service training in early childhood education.	192
Lack of in-service training on early childhood assessment.	85
I do not have awareness about what early childhood assessment is.	47
I need to upgrade my knowledge of early childhood assessment.	19

Table 2 shows the reasons given by pre-primary school teachers for their training need on early childhood assessment. The table shows that the teachers give the reasons in the following order: lack of pre-service training in early childhood education (56%, 1st), lack of in-service training on early childhood assessment (24.8%, 2nd), lack of awareness about what early childhood assessment is (13.7%, 3rd) and need for knowledge upgrade on early childhood assessment (5.5%, 4th).

**Discussion of Findings**

Finding showed that pre-primary school teachers perceived that they need training on early childhood assessment. This finding could be as a result of the fact that as the researchers provided information to the teachers on what assessment is before they responded to the questionnaire administered on them. The teachers might have realised the need of being exposed to training on early childhood assessment. This finding substantiates the suggestions raised by some previous researchers that pre-primary school teachers should be trained in early childhood assessment practices (e.g. Olaleye & Omotayo, 2009; Oduolowu et al., 2016). This finding substantiates the submission of Demircan and Olgan (2011) that teachers' viewpoints, needs, and deficiencies related to assessment and evaluation methods should be considered.

Another finding showed the reasons for pre-primary school teachers' training needs in early childhood assessment as lack of pre-service training in early childhood education, lack of in-service training on early childhood assessment, lack of awareness about what early childhood assessment is and need for knowledge upgrade on early childhood assessment. This finding could be linked to the fact the pre-primary school teachers realised their deficiencies and unprofessionalism in the issues related to assessment, hence their truthfulness about the reasons for their training needs in early childhood assessment. In fact, this finding lends credence to the suggestions raised by previous researchers that pre-primary school teachers should be trained in early childhood assessment practices (e.g. Olaleye & Omotayo, 2009; Oduolowu et al., 2016). The finding supports the submission of Bennets (2011) that there is the need to upgrade the personnel in early childhood centres especially when they have low certification and training. This finding also substantiates the view of Demircan and Olgan (2011) that teachers' viewpoints, needs, and deficiencies related to assessment and evaluation

methods should be considered.

Implications of Findings for the Achievement of Target 2 of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in Nigeria

SDG 4 is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals that made up the 2030 Global Agenda. The second of the outcome targets for the SDG 4 (Target 2) is specifically targeted at early childhood care, development and education. The targets states that “by 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education”. It is widely accepted that one of the features of a quality ECE programmes for children is effective early childhood assessment (NCLR, 2011; Snow & Van Hemel, 2008). This implies therefore that ensuring quality early childhood development and pre-primary education for all girls and boys in Nigeria by the year 2030 depends on involving them in ECE programmes that practices effective early childhood assessment. Thus, the finding of this study which indicates that pre-primary school teachers perceived that they need training in early childhood assessment has serious implication for the achievement of Target 2 of SDG 4 in Nigeria. This is because the finding brings to the fore the fact that the teachers do not conduct effective early childhood assessment. The resultant effect of this would amount to denying children access to quality early childhood development and pre-primary education and the achievement of Target 2 of SDG 4 would become a mirage in Nigeria.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study necessitated some provocative conclusions. It was concluded that pre-primary school teachers do not conduct effective early childhood assessment with children. The achievement of Target 2 of SDG 4 would become a mirage in Nigeria by 2030 if nothing is done to equip pre-primary school teachers in Nigeria with relevant knowledge and skills on early childhood assessment. Most pre-primary school teachers in Nigeria did not receive their pre-service training in the field of ECE.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

1. The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) in Nigeria should work collaboratively with and assist the all State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEB) to organise workshop and seminars for pre-primary school teachers in public schools in order equip them with relevant knowledge and skills required for

conducting effective early childhood assessment. Knowledgeable experts in the field of ECE from tertiary institutions should be contacted to conduct the training. Also, the UBEC should mandate all states SUBEB and support them to employ professionally trained ECE teachers to handle pre-primary classrooms since ECE is now an integral part of basic education in public primary schools.

2. Private school owners and administrators should organise trainings and workshops for their teachers in which they can be equipped with relevant knowledge and skills that are required for conducting effective early childhood assessment. The owners and administrators should make effort to contact experts in the field of ECE to handle the training. Apart from this, private school owners should employ professionally qualified ECE teachers to handle their pre-primary school classrooms.

3. ECE professionals and educators in higher institutions should provide an intervention training on early childhood assessment for pre-primary school teachers in public and private schools. This would serve as a complimentary support to the efforts that the government of Nigeria is making towards achieving the Target 2 of SDG 4 by the year 2030.

4. Researchers in the field of ECE should expose pre-primary school teachers in public and private schools to training on early childhood assessment through action and or experimental research. Doing this would provide opportunity for the teachers to acquire relevant knowledge and skills which they require for conducting effective early childhood assessment. It would also contribute to the wholesome efforts that are being targeted at ensuring the achievement of Target 2 of SDG 4 by the year 2030 in Nigeria.

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