

# Preschool Teachers' Qualification, Awareness of and Disposition to Children's Emotional Wellbeing in Ibadan Metropolis, Nigeria

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## Abstract

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*This study was carried out to investigate preschool teachers' qualification, awareness of and disposition to children's emotional wellbeing in Ibadan metropolis. All early childhood educators in Ibadan metropolis formed the population. The participants were 100 early childhood educators from 50 preschools in five Local Government Areas in Ibadan. Two research questions were answered in the study. Early Childhood Educators' Awareness Questionnaire of Emotional Wellbeing Development for Children's Life-long Learning ( $r=0.74$ ) and Early Childhood Educators' Disposition to Emotional Wellbeing Development for Children' Lifelong Learning ( $r=0.78$ ) were used to collect data. The data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The results showed that early childhood educators' qualifications significantly influenced their awareness of the emotional wellbeing development for children lifelong learning ( $F_{(2, 97)} = 25.70$ ;  $P < 0.05$ ), while early childhood educators' qualification did not significantly influence disposition to emotional wellbeing development for children's lifelong learning. It is recommended, among others, that early childhood education work force should solely comprise those who are certified professional teachers.*

**Key Words:** Children's learning, educators' alertness and disposition, Children's safety

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## Introduction

Early childhood educators' understanding of children's development processes is important, as well as physical contact and teachers' ability to understand and fulfill children's curiosity about themselves and what they are able to do. An emotional, cordial and responsive relationship that is continuously established will keep the children growing and developing in their own paces. Thus emotional wellbeing of a child focuses on the development of children's self-esteem, their feelings and their awareness of the feelings of others. Expressing healthy emotions and regulating them, and understanding emotions of self and other, all work together to facilitate learning and other school experiences (Denham et al. 2010, Amosun, 2019)

Emotion regulation includes abilities to: (1) handle emotions in productive ways: being aware of feelings, monitoring them, and modifying them, when necessary, so that they aid rather than impede coping in varying situations; and (2) expressing emotions appropriately. Children who have difficulties in this area may not have resources to focus on

learning, whereas those who can maintain positive emotions may be able to better engage with classroom tasks. Emotion regulation, as well as observed positivity of emotion, is associated with preschoolers' social effectiveness (Blair et al. 2004). The quality of emotional learning that takes place in early relationship between early childhood educators and the children is capable of enhancing or worsening their social-emotional as well as their cognitive development (Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, 2008, Olarogba, Amosun, and Olalowo, 2023). The consciousness of preschool teachers to provide responsive and emotional relationship is a pathway to quality and effective service delivery.

The need for preschools to provide high quality services, which has always proven to give a positive effect on children's development outcomes, cannot be over-emphasised. The reason is that to provide such high quality services, it requires a good number of factors on the part of caregivers and teachers which include specialised knowledge and a qualification gained through lengthy study, maintaining a

good relationship with children and their families, community awareness through involvement in professional associations and linked with a professional work ethic, and commitment to personal growth ((Ishimine & Tayler, 2014, Castle, 2009). The reason why a specific qualification was considered necessary is because teachers are expected to possess certain awareness, disposition, competencies and skills to be able to interact with children, stimulate and make them achieve. While these basic requirements are important, especially sharing the same idea about qualification, it has been argued that qualification may not necessarily be a condition of entry to the early childhood sector (Cameron, 2006).

In a study by Hakim (2014) it was argued that being a qualified teacher is not equal to having good teaching practice in the classroom. It was reported that participants had experienced newly graduated teachers in the classroom and proposed that teaching experience is more important than qualification. They opined that experience is gained through years of working in the field supplemented by professional development. They argued that qualification alone cannot guarantee the competence and skill of a teacher and therefore that a high school certificate and additional training would be sufficient for teachers to gain the necessary base knowledge. They observed that teacher's entry requirements to the field are all related to personal traits, such as patience and enthusiasm.

Parcel, Ross, Lavin, Portnoy, Nelson and Winters, (1991) examined the influence of teacher's qualifications on social, emotional and wellbeing programme. They found no association between teachers' programme implementation and qualification while Pateman, Grunbaum and Kann (1999) found that teachers advocated strongly for qualified teachers to teach the health curriculum. Also in Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart, Sylva, Sammonds and Meluish (2008), it was found that staff with higher qualifications offered richer learning environments with sustained beneficial effects on all areas of development including

attainment, social, emotional and behavioural development. Thus findings on teachers' qualification and children's emotional wellbeing are inconclusive. This implies that the idea of required qualification is not necessarily held by all people. It may be important therefore to find out whether child educators' qualification can impact their awareness of and disposition to children's wellbeing.

It has been observed that some early childhood educators are moderately aware of emotional wellbeing development for children's life-long learning while some, not all, are naturally aware of how important their own and children's emotions are to learning and wellbeing, and pay attention to these issues in their classrooms (Amosun, 2019, Zembylas 2007). Based on this level of awareness, there have been call to early childhood educators to help young children to understand and regulate emotions, as they model genuine, appropriate emotions and responses to emotions, teach about emotions, and use positive emotions to support learning (Hyson, 2002) Moreover, literature have shown that child educators' pedagogical knowledge and skills in providing responsive, stimulating and safe learning environment for children was low (Amosun and Kolawole, 2015).

With regards to disposition and attitudes of the early childhood educators, Ford and Nikapota (2000) conducted a qualitative study to gather the views of 25 participants from 11 primary schools using semi-structured interviews and vignettes. Ford and Nikapota (2000) reported that teachers' attitudes towards pupils' emotional needs were perceived to be influenced by their own personal experiences and background, rather than by formal training. National Early Years Access Initiative (2012) reiterated that that the dispositions and attitudes of the early childhood educator are crucial, as his/her actions and attitudes send important messages to children on how they should behave. When early childhood educator displays curiosity, imagination and respect, they will appreciate and encourage the same attitudes and dispositions in children.

**Statement of the Problem**

Emotional wellbeing of children conveys crucial information that can guide interaction between child educators and children. Inability to interpret emotions can make the classroom a confusing place. Preschoolers who can apply emotional knowledge in emotionally charged situations have an advantage in peer interactions: they are more prosocially responsive to their peers, and rated as more likeable by peers, and more socially skilled and less aggressive by teachers. Children who have difficulties in this area may not have resources to focus on learning, whereas those who can maintain positive emotions may be able to better engage with classroom tasks. In one hand, literature has showed that the preschool teacher's qualification may be a potential factor in determining the quality of emotional wellbeing of the children. On the other hand, researches have revealed that preschool teachers' work is influenced by various factors, not only their qualification and educational background. It is necessary therefore to examine the preschool teachers' awareness of and disposition to children's emotional wellbeing for lifelong learning in Ibadan metropolis.

**Research Questions**

1. Does qualification significantly influence Early Childhood Educators awareness of emotional wellbeing development for children's life-long learning?

2. Does qualification significantly influence Early Childhood Educators' disposition to emotional wellbeing development for children's life-long learning?

**Methodology**

The survey research design was adopted in the study. *The participants were 100 early childhood educators from 50 preschools in five Local Government Areas in Ibadan.* Two research questions were raised to guide the study. Two self-designed and validated instruments with demographic profile of the early childhood educators were used to collect data for the study: Early Childhood Educators' Awareness Questionnaire of Emotional Wellbeing Development for Children's Life-long Learning (ECEAQEWDCLL = 0.74) and Early Childhood Educators' Disposition to Emotional Wellbeing Development for Children' Life-Long Learning Questionnaire (ECEDEWDCLLQ = 0.78). The data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics of Analysis of variance to answer the research questions.

**Research Question 1:** Does qualification significantly influence Early Childhood Educators' awareness of emotional wellbeing development for children's life-long learning?

**Table 1:** ANOVA Table showing the Influence of Educational Qualifications on Early Childhood Educators' Awareness of Emotional Wellbeing Development for Children

Educational Qualification	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Df	F	Sig	Remark
ECE	12	37.12	5.36	2,97	25.70	0.00	Significant
PES	32	37.74	3.64				
OTHERS	56	42.22	3.74				
Total	100	42.22	4.81				

Table 1 shows that early childhood educators' qualifications significantly influence their awareness of the emotional wellbeing development for children lifelong learning ( $F_{(2, 97)} = 25.70$ ;  $P < 0.05$ ).

**Research Question 2:** Does qualification significantly influence Early Childhood Educators' disposition to emotional wellbeing development for children's life-long learning?

**Table 2:** ANOVA table showing the Influence of Educational Qualification on Early Childhood Teachers Disposition of Emotional Wellbeing Development for Children

Educational Qualification	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Df	F	Sig	Remark
ECE	12	40.33	2.57	2,97	0.87	0.424	Not significant
PES	32	41.03	2.40				
OTHERS	56	40.30	2.65				
Total	100	40.54	2.56				

Table 2 shows that early childhood educators' qualification does not significantly influence their disposition of the emotional wellbeing development for children's lifelong learning ( $F_{(2, 97)} = 0.87$ ;  $P > 0.05$ ).

### Discussion of Findings

The first finding to research question one revealed that early childhood educators' qualifications significantly influenced their awareness of the emotional wellbeing development for children lifelong learning. This means that qualification enhanced the educators' ability to be responsive and alert to the wellbeing development of the children. The explanation for this finding may be that the early childhood educators' professional qualification helps them to perceive the need to provide environment that encourages the development of wellbeing of the children. This result is consistent with (Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart, Sylva, Sammons and Meluish, 2008) who found that staff with higher qualifications offered richer learning environment with sustained beneficial effect on all areas of development including attainment, social, emotional and behavioural development

The finding to research question two showed that early childhood educators' qualification did not significantly influence their disposition to the emotional wellbeing /development of children's lifelong learning. This means that the educators' qualification did not affect their attitude towards the children's wellbeing. The reason for this may be that there may be other important variables that might have accounted for this finding such as emotional development of the early childhood

educators. This finding also supports that of Ford and Nikapota (2000) who reported that teachers' attitudes or dispositions toward children's emotional needs were perceived to be influenced by their own personal experiences and background, rather than by formal training.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Qualification of preschool teachers is essential to their awareness of emotional wellbeing of the children. Based on this, it is recommended that teachers with educational qualification in early childhood and primary education studies should be employed both in public and private schools, the non-significance influence of qualification on teachers' disposition towards the emotional wellbeing development of children notwithstanding.

In-service training for preschool teachers from time to time should be organised to develop their capacity in the area of emotional knowledge and its application in the classroom practices for optimal wellbeing of children.

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