

Utilizing Class Size and Caregiver Management to Inform the Planning and Organization of Early Childhood Classrooms in Public Childcare Facilities in Delta State

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Abstract: *This study focuses on utilizing class size and caregiver management to inform the planning and organization of early childhood classrooms in public childcare facilities. A survey research design was adopted for the study. Two research questions were posed to guide the study. 300 caregivers from early childhood centers were randomly sampled Delta State for the study. A structured questionnaire with 10 items titled "Utilizing Class Size and Caregiver Management to Inform the Planning and Organization of Early Childhood Classrooms in Public Childcare Facilities (UCSCMPOECCPCF)" was constructed by the researcher, validated and used in eliciting responses from the respondents. The data was analysed using mean and standard deviations. The study revealed that enough government funds should be made available to support early childhood education in order to increase the number of classroom places. Thus, Non-governmental organizations that work with children's education should be informed about the critical need of providing sufficient resources to support and promote early childhood education.*

Introduction

Early childhood academic outcomes are heavily dependent on caregivers' capacity to efficiently design and manage activities in the early childhood classroom (GaneshBhatta et al., 2012). Similarly, how children develop their multiple intellectual skills such as language, verbal, numeracy, and scientific capabilities is dependent on the caregivers' planning and organizational abilities. In order to effectively coordinate the teaching and learning activities in the classroom, which will ultimately result in the preschoolers' actual acquisition of these developmental skills, caregivers must be equipped with the necessary organizational and planning skills. According to GaneshBhatta et al. (2012), a poorly planned and managed classroom environment precludes meaningful learning from occurring.

Early childhood classroom management plan, according to Keller (2018), is the cornerstone of the educational system and consists of a collection of guidelines and protocols implemented to guarantee effective classroom management. According to these writers, an effective and dynamic learning environment will arise from a solid management plan. Consequently, since it is the rule of the educational classroom, a classroom management plan is a requirement that all teachers must follow. The strategy establishes the standards for each preschooler (Keller, 2018). Every preschooler needs to fully comprehend every rule that the caregiver has established in order for management strategy to be successful (Keller, 2018).

The physical environment is the center of early childhood classroom organization. Effective caregivers provide a safe learning environment in the classroom. It entails the caregiver deliberately positioning furniture and objects in learning centers in order to maximize toddlers' learning while minimizing distractions (Stronge et al., 2004). Among other things, the caregiver's organizational duty comprises dividing pupils or preschoolers into subgroups and creating regulations, as well as preparing for plan implementation. As a result, the organizing function demands teachers or caregivers to establish plans and develop an orderly structure to integrate all parts of classroom activities into a coherent whole (GaneshBhatta et al., 2012).

The number of pupils in a specific course or classroom is referred to as class size. It could specifically relate to the amount of preschoolers a caregiver is responsible for during a given period of teaching. It could also include the number of preschoolers who participate in learning events that do not take place in a regular classroom setting. It could also refer to the overall number of preschoolers in a given grade level or class at a school (Boozer and Rouse, 2001). Adeyemi (2008) distinguished two types of class sizes that could exist in the early childhood care centres: large and small class sizes. As a result, the smaller the class size, the more likely a caregiver will spend more time with individual pupil. Large classes, on the other hand, provide more obstacles for classroom planning and organization since caregivers are put under more strain when dealing with this circumstance.

As per Blatchford and Lai (2012), there is frequently a correlation between the number of pupils per caregiver and the size of the class. It's often acknowledged that more effective instruction and fewer organizational and management planning challenges arise in classrooms with smaller pupils populations. In Delta State, class size is usually used to compare with the national educational policy that has been created (FRN, 2004). In Nigeria, the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) proposed a teacher/pupil ratio of 25:1

for pre-primary schools and 40:1 for preschool. A small class size implies that each caregiver must be accountable for a limited number of preschoolers, and it allows for greater relative access to pupils. A lower teacher/pupil ratio indicates smaller classes, which allow caregivers to pay more attention to individual preschoolers, which may result in better classroom planning and organization to achieve their educational growth.

Currently, preschoolers are spending a large number of hours in child care centres. Isbell (2011) observes that some children who begin to attend child care centres in infancy may spend as much as 12,000 hours in this setting. The massive number of hours in child care centres demands that the classroom be carefully designed to create the “best” place possible for young children. Preschool children are active learners. If the procedures for using the classroom are not clearly stated and easily understood, the children will wander in and out of the classrooms with little participation in the activities on board. Organising classroom for preschool children is essential for effective service delivery. Kostelnik, Soderman, and Whiren (2011) state that organisation of classroom is an effective predictor of quality preschool because it affects what children can do, determines the ease with which they carry out their plans and affect the ways in which they use materials.

Montessori, in Wardle (2013), affirms that preschool children require classroom with low shelves, four basic learning areas, and places for children to work and learn independently. Children need private space where they can work alone as individuals fully in charge of their own thoughts and feelings. A study corner with child-size, local leather pews or mat with piles of pillows can serve this need. A small-group space is necessary too for two to six children. This scenario appears to encourage quiet interaction with one another. It helps children develop cooperative and helping behaviours when they are in close personal space of about two feet, especially when the assignment presented to the group is not competitive. When preschoolers classroom are designed for small groups rather than only for large groups, behaviours such as wandering, running, fighting over materials, and repeating the same activity many times can be minimised (Kostelnik, Whiren, Soderman & Gregory, 2009).

Early childhood care centres for a large group can be constructed where many pupils listen to stories, sing, engage in games or other movement activities and share whole-group instruction. A planned care centre with classroom appropriately designed, pupils get pleasure from what is around them. The working environment - the classroom is functional if properly organised and managed. Dean (2003) affirms that functional care centres contribute to the formation of good working habits of pupils. The author avers that practical area needs to have tools and materials laid out, each in its marked place with clear rules about how things are to be used and return in the classroom.

Planning and organising early childhood care centres for preschoolers makes it easier for management. There are good arrangements for retrieving things and returning them. There is a definite place for everything and things and places are appropriately labelled for easy and smooth movement in the care centre. Such a care centre stimulates pupils' interest because some materials designed to capture pupil's thinking and make them ask questions. The way early childhood care centres are organised, planning and managing materials resources available affect the way pupils learn. Kostelnik, Soderman, & Whiren (2011) state that early childhood care centres are responsible for planning organising and effective use of classroom management. The National Minimum Standard (2005) stated that indoor floor spaces should be at 35 square feet per child not counting closets, hallways and immovable storage units. On the outdoor space should be two to three times this number 75 to 105 square feet per child.

Planning, organising and managing early childhood care centres appears to face the challenges of inadequate space in the school compound, inadequate number of school buildings, insufficient funds by stakeholders to provide enough care centre buildings and classrooms, insufficient government grants in funding. These are constraints for planning, organising and management of early childhood care centres. In the same vein, Snow (2002) affirms that the amount of management was inadequate particularly in the area of child mobility and storage. The author further states that newer care centres and smaller class sizes contributed to pupils well-being and effectiveness while poor planning, organising and management were associated with feelings of frustration.

Also, pupils in older poorly managed early childhood care centres seemed to be more destructive and less appreciative. In the same vein, the researcher noted that in the early childhood care centres visited, the classrooms were grossly inadequate. Pupils were packed like sardine in care centres. This is in line with Obiweluozo's (2009) submission that some primary schools do not have enough buildings for accommodation. The author avers that some of the classes stay under trees, some others in church halls. Also, some of the schools have just one building that houses the entire pupils and teachers in their classes as well as head teachers' offices. This condition endangers pupils learning. One wonders how pupils study in such early childhood care centres.

What will be the fate of those pupils if there is no planning, organising and adequate management? It is against this background that the researcher is compelled to look at planning and organization of early childhood classrooms in public childcare centers based on class size and caregivers' management

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is focuses on planning and organization of early childhood classrooms in public childcare centers based on class size and caregivers' management. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Determine class size influence on caregivers' early childhood classroom management planning in public childcare centers.
2. Identifyclass size influence on caregivers' early childhood classroom organization in public childcare centers.

The study will be guided by the following research questions.

1. To what extent does class size influence caregivers' early childhood classroom management planning in public childcare centers?
2. To what extent does class size influence caregivers' early childhood classroom organization in public childcare centers?

Methods

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. It is a survey that examines theUtilizing Class Size and Caregiver Management to Inform the Planning and Organization of Early Childhood Classrooms in Public Childcare Facilities. The study was conducted out in Delta State, Nigeria. The sample for this study consisted of 300 caregivers from early childhood centers.A structured questionnaire with 10 items titled “Utilizing Class Size and Caregiver Management to Inform the Planning and Organization of Early Childhood Classrooms in Public Childcare Facilities (UCSCMPOECCPCF)were utilized to get data from Caregivers'.Three experts face validated the questionnaire, and their carefully considered suggestions were incorporated into the final draft. The instrument featured a four-point response scale with the following numerical values: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The instrument was trial tested, and the internal coefficient of consistency and Cronbach's alpha were used to analyse the results, respectively.

Result

The study's findings are reported in tables 1-2 in accordance with the research questions.

Research Question One

To what extent does class size influence caregivers' early childhood classroom management planning in public childcare centers?

Table 1

Mean rating and standard deviation on class size influence on caregivers' early childhood classroom management planning in public childcare centers.

S/N	Item Statement	<u>Large Class,N=171</u>	<u>SmallClass,N=124</u>	<u>Large Class,N=171</u>	<u>SmallClass,N=124</u>
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1.	The regulations established by classroom planning facilitate early childhood classroom management.	2.92	1.01	3.61	0.67
2.	Planning is the cornerstone of early childhood classroom management.	2.95	0.90	3.60	0.68
3.	Effective management of an early childhood classroom can be achieved through planning.	2.57	1.11	3.18	1.02
4.	A vibrant learning environment will result from an efficient management plan.	2.87	1.01	3.59	0.71

5.	The classroom management plan specifies expectations for preschoolers and caregivers.	2.66	1.12	3.31	0.93.
	Grand Mean	2.79	0.65	3.46	0.56

Criterioncutoff=2.5.

Table 1 shows that the mean and standard deviation on class size influence caregivers' early childhood classroom management planning in public childcare centers were 2.79, SD=0.65 and 3.46, SD=0.56 for large and small class size respectively. The important management planning for large class size was that planning establishes the framework for early childhood classroom management (M=2.95, SD=0.90), whereas classroom planning for small class size establishes rules for caregivers' smooth management of early childhood classroom (M=3.61, SD).

Research Question Two

To what extent does class size influence caregivers' early childhood classroom organization in public childcare centers?

Table 2

Mean rating and standard deviation on class size influence caregivers' early childhood classroom organization in public childcare centers.

S/N	Item Statement	<u>Large Class, N=171</u>	<u>Small Class, N=124</u>	<u>Large Class, N=171</u>	<u>Small Class, N=124</u>
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1.	Classroom organization deals with how the early childhood learning environment is physically set up.	2.92	1.01	3.61	0.67
2.	Preschoolers' safety is safeguarded in a well-organized early childhood classroom.	2.95	0.90	3.60	0.68
3.	A well-organized early childhood classroom reduces distractions to learning.	2.57	1.11	3.18	1.02
4.	Effective communication and learning are encouraged in an organized early childhood classroom.	2.87	1.01	3.59	0.71
5.	The caregiver-preschooler dynamic is improved in a flexible, well-organized classroom.	2.66	1.12	3.31	0.93.
	Grand Mean	2.79	0.65	3.46	0.56

Criterioncutoff=2.5.

Table 2 shows that the mean and standard deviation on class size influence caregivers' early childhood classroom organization in public childcare centers were 2.97, SD = 0.55 and 3.85, SD = 0.19 for large class size was that classroom organization focuses on the physical arrangement of the early childhood learning environment (M=3.13, SD=0.92) whereas that for small class size was a decently organized early childhood classroom reduces learning distractions (M=3.39, SD = 0.29).

Discussion

The items given in Research Question One indicate that class size influence caregivers' early childhood classroom organization in public childcare centers were 2.79, SD = 0.65 and 3.46, SD = 0.56 for large and small class size respectively. The important management planning for large class size was that planning establishes the framework for early childhood classroom management (M=2.95, SD=0.90), whereas classroom planning for small class size establishes rules for caregivers' smooth management of early childhood classroom (M=3.61, SD). This finding is congruent with that of Adeyemi (2008), who discovered that schools with an average class size of 35 or less were better planned and produced better outcomes in a research on the influence of class size on planning and quality of output. Ayeni and Olowe (2016) found that big class size has a detrimental impact on effective planning, teaching, and learning in a study on the consequences of large class size in planning, teaching, and learning. There is a poor association between large class size and successful planning, teaching, and learning. Ruggles (2003) stated that class size reduction programs assisted in teacher preparation, curriculum development, and early childhood education.

Based on the elements provided in Research Question Two, it appears that class size influence caregivers' early childhood classroom organization in public childcare centers were 2.97, SD = 0.55 and 3.85, SD = 0.19 for large class size was that classroom organization focuses on the physical arrangement of the early childhood learning environment (M=3.13, SD=0.92) whereas that for small class size was a decently organized early childhood classroom reduces learning distractions (M=3.39, SD = 0.29). This viewpoint is consistent with the findings of Blatchford and Lai (2012), who conducted a study to examine the impact of class size on classroom engagement, organization, and teacher-pupil interaction and found that classroom engagement and organization decreased in larger classes, but, contrary to expectations, this was especially noticeable for lower attaining pupils. Smaller courses aid low-achieving pupils by providing more individual attention and increasing participation and organization in learning. Kabunga and Kihoro (2016) evaluated the influence of class size on classroom organization and learning outcomes and determined that class size alone has no effect on learner accomplishment. It should be supplemented by classroom organization, excellent teacher preparation, increased individualization, resource provision, and improving the quality of interaction in the classroom. In order to improve classroom organization and learning results by reducing class sizes, the study suggested hiring additional Early Childhood Education teachers. According to Moluayonge and Park (2017), issues related to class size have an impact on a science teacher's instructional strategies and how the classroom is set up.

Recommendations

- To ensure that early childhood schools are not overcrowded, the government should move quickly to establish enough classroom facilities.
- Early childhood classroom management should be started by caregivers with sufficient preparation and structure.
- Caregivers believe that proper placement of architectural elements in the early childhood classroom is essential for optimal administration.
- Enough government funds should be made available to support early childhood education in order to increase the number of classroom places.
- Non-governmental organizations that work with children's education should be informed about the critical need of providing sufficient resources to support and promote early childhood education.

Conclusion

Early childhood pupils are still in their infancy. Children at this age require more nurturing, care, attention, and instruction in order to reach their full potential. A top-notch learning environment is crucial for the education of youngsters. Positive educational environments help pupils develop positive habits. It improves education, academic organization and administration, self-esteem, and children's sense of responsibility.

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