
TRAINEES' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR LEARNING EXPERIENCES IN A 3-DAY WORKSHOP ON CHILD-CENTERED METHODOLOGIES IN EARLY YEARS

By

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Abstract

Early Childhood and Care Education (ECCE) has attracted global focus as governments of members of United Nations (UN) strive to meet target 4.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to ensure that all girls and boys have equal access to quality care and preprimary education by 2030. ECCE specialists and stakeholders in Nigeria are involved in various ways, including the organization of workshops for caregivers and teachers to meet the target. In this paper, we present the perceptions of trainees on their learning experiences in a 3-day workshop organized for caregivers/teachers, focusing on child-centered approaches/methodologies in early years. Using a descriptive survey design, all the trainees rated the extent they learnt the methodologies in a Likert-questionnaire. The results suggested that the trainees' perceptions on the learning of all the methodologies were positive and were neither influenced by their teaching experiences nor their age. Furthermore, their positive perceptions were highest for the following approaches/methodologies.

- *Using circle time.*
- *Developing children's physical domain.*
- *Making children learn through play*
- *Developing children's cognitive domain.*

Moreover, their perceptions were lowest for the following.

- *Developing practical ideas for including communities/parents in the classroom.*
- *Principles of Montessori approach.*
- *Preparing assessment report in early years.*

Based on the result of this study, we concluded that the workshop enhanced the competence and confidence of the trainees to render care and teach in their schools and made recommendations for sustaining the gains.

Keywords: Trainees' Perceptions, ECCE Workshops, Child-centered methodologies, Early Years Learners, Caregivers/Teachers.

Introduction

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is increasingly becoming a priority for international organizations, nations, and their governments as they strive to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals [Goal 4; Target 4.2]. The fourth goal of the seventeen SDGs is to achieve quality education by 2030 while target 4.2 is to ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care, and preprimary education so that they are ready for primary education (United Nations (UN), 2016). Responding to the concern that access to optimum quality early childhood development, education, and care (EDC/ECEC) programs is unequal between and within countries, the G20 declared a profound ECD initiative in 2018 (G20, 2018). One of the statements of the initiative is as follows:

“We therefore launch the G20 initiative for Early Childhood Development, determined to contribute to ensuring that all children – with an emphasis on their first 1000 days – are well nourished and healthy, receive proper care, stimulation and opportunities for early learning and education, and grow up in nurturing and enabling environments, protected from all kinds of violence, abuse, neglect and conflict. This is especially urgent in low-income and developing countries, and in emergency and protracted crisis situations, including forced displacement, where the potential for children’s development could be at risk.” p-1 (G20, 2018).

More recently, and in line with growing global attention to ECCE, Global Partnerships Strategy (GPS) which featured all the five domains of the Nurturing Care Framework (NCF) proposed by UNICEF, WHO and the World Bank was envisioned by UNESCO (2021). Considering that every country in the world faces challenges which limit their progress in providing high quality equitable and culturally appropriate ECCE/ECD services in addition to other problems, UNESCO (2021) identified and stated five strategies for achieving the target 4.2 of SDGs. The third of the strategies is to scale up access, inclusion, equity, and quality of ECCE/ECD services in member countries. According to UNESCO (2021), Early Childhood is defined as the period from birth to eight years old. It is a time of remarkable growth with brain development at its peak. At this stage children are highly influenced by their environment, and the people who have contact with them. ECCE is not only seen as a preparation for primary school, but includes the holistic development of a child’s social, emotional, cognitive, and physical needs to create a solid foundation for lifelong learning and well-being. ECCE is regarded as having the potential for nurture-caring, and adequate preparation of responsible future citizens. Hence, nations and governments are expected to promote their respective human resource development gender equality and social cohesion from the foundation by investing in ECCE. However, Cardini et al (2020) observed that little attention has been paid to the issues of purpose and content of ECCE/ECD in the context of sustainability despite the consensus on its potential. But UN member nations like Nigeria have keyed into the pursuance of the goals of ECCE as a worthy process of developing the holistic human resource for their needs. Hence the Nigerian national policy on education, captures the early childhood care and education (ECCE) in the following description.

The Nigerian national policy on education presents the ECCE as the first part of the Basic Education Unit (FRN, 2013). In the policy, Early Child Care and Development Education (ECCDE) is for children (0-4 years) and Preprimary children (5-6 years). While the first group (0-4 years) are purely in the hands of private sector and social development sector, the second group pre-primary are within government controlled formal education sector. Furthermore, ECCDE is defined as the care, protection, stimulating, and learning promoted in children from age 0-4 years in a creche or nursery (FRN, 2013). The purpose of this stage

includes effecting a smooth transition from home to school; providing adequate care, supervision, and security for children while their parents are at work and teaching them good habits; rudiments of numbers, letters, colors, shapes and forms through play. This is the same purpose for children in the pre-primary (5-6) except that while the previous groups were managed by the private sector, the government funds the later fully. Both groups are monitored by government through the provision of curriculum materials such as policy for Integrated Early Child Care Development (IECD), National Minimum Standards for Establishing ECCDE Centers, IECD implementation guidelines and learning materials.

These provisions enabled the organization of workshop activities which focused on capacity building for the teachers/caregivers who implement the policy for ECCDE in Nigeria.

In compliance with the global drive towards ECCE, the School of Early Childhood Care and Education was established in all Colleges of Education to house two departments: Primary Education and Early Childhood Care and Education (NCCE, 2007). The establishment of ECCE in the Colleges of Education was also aimed to address the challenges which had been observed in the implementation of IECD policy that includes lack of professionally qualified caregivers/teachers in Nigeria (Akinrotimi & Olowe, 2016). Colleges of Education could produce professional caregivers/teachers with the minimum teaching qualification of NCE for ECCDE centers in line with national objectives. The NCE minimum standards for ECCE stipulate that caregivers/teacher should participate actively in professional associations/organizations relevant to ECCE (NCCE, 2012). This undoubtedly includes continuous professional development (CPD) for keeping abreast with changes/innovations in the area. Hence the School of ECCE, College of Education, Agbor, organized a 3-day workshop (12 –14th April 2021) for caregivers/teachers in the private school sector (See Figure 1).

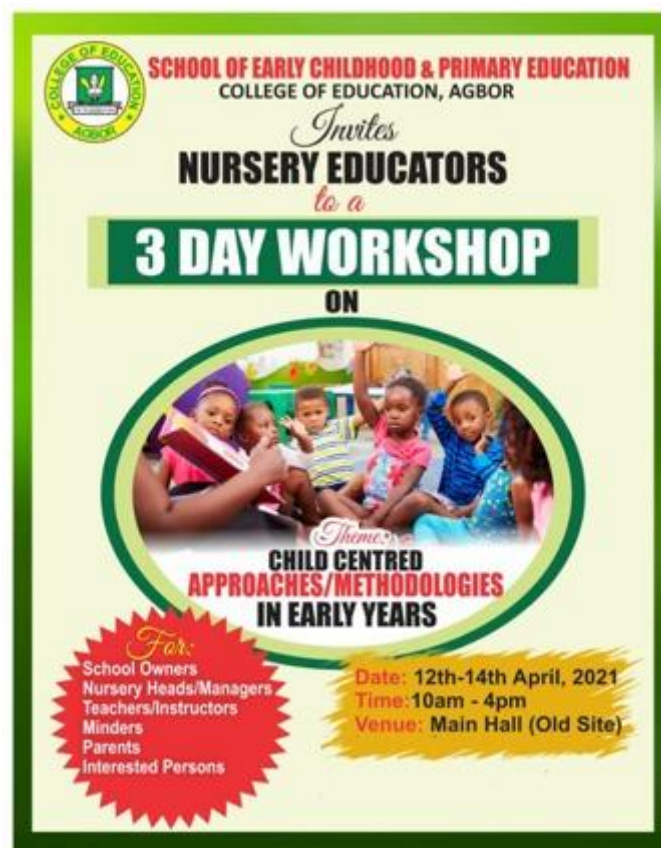


Figure 1: Invitation to the Workshop (Source: School of ECCE, College of Education, Agbor, Delta State, 2021)

It is revealed in literature that ECCE has attracted various terminologies. The Education for All (EFA) uses ECCE (as in this paper); Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) uses Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC); United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) uses Early Childhood Care and Development (ECD) (Kamerman, 2006).

However, these terms describe the care and education given to and received by children who attend Day-care centers, family day care, pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, nursery schools, play groups and similar centers which were captured in the workshop.

Rationale for the Workshop: Tackling the challenge of key teacher issues in ECCE in Nigeria

As stated earlier in this paper, one of the major challenges in the implementation of IECD policy in Nigeria centers on teacher issues. Teacher issues encompass the quality, quantity and their consequent performance and level of service at the ECCDE centers. Specialists in ECCE have described these teacher issues in various ways and have also made recommendations for tackling them. There is a lack of qualified staff in many ECCE institutions as observed by Kolesnik (2017). Sooter (2013) observed earlier that the teacher quality in ECCE institutions is generally low, noting that it is only the few owned by education institutions, private companies and wealthy individuals that can afford to engage and retain graduate and NCE teachers who are competent and committed. Amadi (2013) described the situation as a preponderance of unqualified teachers in ECCE centers. Much earlier, Ajayi (2008) noted that for both the public and private ECCE centers, there were no qualified teachers on ground. Aliyu (2011) described the lack of qualified caregivers/teachers

in ECCE centers as part of the Nigerian experience, in that sector of education. Salami (2016) considering the responsibility of the government in the sustainability of ECCE observed that there was failure to employ enough teachers for the centers. The identified problem of lack of professional teachers to provide appropriate stimulation for young children in ECCE was corroborated by the findings of a country-case-studies on ECCE in selected sub-Saharan African countries (in the case of Nigeria) by UNESCO-IICBA (2010).

The fact that the situation is not improving as the years go by, necessitated the recent recommendation of Ofoego (2018) that ECCE caregivers and teachers should be trained for their job. This is in addition to earlier recommendations which called for on-the-job training of the available caregivers/teachers to enhance their competence (Ajayi, 2008; Aliyu, 2011; Amadi, 2013). Obidike (2012) specifically recommended the exposure of early childhood schoolteachersto workshops, conferences, seminar, and in-service programs in nursery education. Consequently the 3-day workshop organized by the school is a response to the recommendations of specialists in ECCE on tackling the problem of unqualified caregivers/teachers who are currently on the job.

Another critical aspect of teacher issues in the challenges facing ECCE in Nigeria is the methods of teaching the children. Salami (2016) noted that the major strategy used was a teacher-centered direct instruction such as “say-after-me”, songs, and at times, rhymes. Children’s play time were unguided and not planned for, while activities focused on cognitive domain to the neglect of the social, emotional, and physical domains. UNESCO-IICBA (2010) described the methodology used as more of fables/stories as against organized games and role-play. Most specifically, the studies of Nwabuwe, Nwabuwe and Chenube (2016) revealed that children who were taught numeracy in ECCE centers using the Montessori approach performed better than those taught using these traditional approaches observed by stakeholders earlier. Their [Nwabuwe et al, 2016] study, using early learners in Delta State of Nigeria, revealed a profound disadvantage of uninformed caregivers/teachers in the ECCE centers. Therefore, they recommended that caregivers/teachers in ECCE centers in Delta State should be re-trained on the use of hands-on activities to teach numeracy in early years (Nwabuwe et al, 2016). The off-shoot of these recommendations is the set of selected activities for the workshop which presented child-centered approaches/methodologies in early years. Furthermore, it is observed that many private ECCE centers attract more unqualified teachers because of their inability to pay qualified teachers adequately (Kolesnik, 2017) and the government organized workshops mainly for public schools (UNESCO-IICBA, 2010). This 3-day workshop targeted the teachers in the privately owned ECCE centers with the overriding goal of training them on practical activities required in current approaches in early years.

Workshops, the Workshop Activities and Perceptions about Training Workshops

Workshops: Generally, workshops are planned and organized meetings at which groups of people engage in intensive discussions and activities on a particular subject or project in the context of this paper. There are various types of workshops depending on the types of activities planned for the meeting. The workshop considered in this paper is learning workshop where specific skills, application or techniques were taught (Sufi et al., 2018). In such workshops, the expected outcome is increased knowledge, competence or confidence in a specific area or set of techniques, and practical exercises are usually featured. In recent dispensation, programs on professional development of teachers at all levels have been recognized globally as essential activities in school systems. In this vein, professional development of early learning educators is inclusive. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) member countries have embraced continuous

professional development (CDP) of teachers to equip them to keep pace with rapidly developing fields of knowledge and technologies, and to cater for ever increasing range of learners in their classrooms with diverse interests, aptitudes, and abilities (OECD, 2005). Workshops are popular programs for professional development at all levels of education. They include orientation sessions, seminars or forums, consultations, newsletters, or short courses (Al-Musawi, 2008). Workshops target the achievement of specific goals and especially the satisfaction of participants. Sufi et al (2018) identified ten rules for measuring the impact of workshops which include a design for evaluating them formatively or summatively. Al-Musawi (2008) observed that workshops can be challenging with little strategic planning and evaluation. Evaluation focuses on the extent to which participants found it acceptable, useful, and relevant to their job needs. There are various assessment mechanisms which can be employed for learning workshops, such as pre- and post-tests, observation, video-taped practices, written reports/assignments, and self-report questionnaires. In this study the self-report questionnaire was used to assess the perceptions of the workshop trainees to obtain the impact at the reaction level.

Use of self-report questionnaire in assessing workshops is a popular approach and has also been considered to give remarkably frank and unbiased data from teachers (Ingvarson, 2005) especially when administered immediately after learning activities. In this study the questionnaires were given to the teachers immediately after the learning activities on the last (third) day.

The Workshop Activities: The workshop activities were explicitly compiled in a training manual made available to each participant on registration and used as a guide throughout the period. The major themes are as follows.

Day 1

Session 1. Overview of Early Childhood Development

Session 2. The Image of the child

Session 3. Promoting learning through the circle time

Session 4. Enriching learning centers with materials in early years for exploration in the classroom

Day 2

Session 1: Overview of major approaches/methodologies in Early Years

Session 2. Learning through play

Session 3. Literacy in early years

Session 4. Creating engaging learning materials

Day 3

Session 1. Numeracy in Early Years

Session 2. Building synergy with the child's home and community

Session 3. Assessment and report-writing in early years

These activities were presented through variety of methods by specialists and generalists in the school of Early Childhood Care Education of the College of Education, Agbor, as facilitators. The methods of teaching included short lectures, hands-on activities, interactive small group discussions and activities, demonstrations, and improvisation. There was ample time for practice of what is demonstrated so that no activity was hurried up to achieve a good session pace. This informed the 3-day spread of the workshop period. Furthermore, there was a stimulating and relaxing environment which was spacious enough to accommodate the number of participants with more unoccupied spaces left.

There were variety of teaching aids and materials for demonstrating the practical activities and enough working equipment, surplus tables, and chairs for trainees.

Participants' Perceptions about training workshop: Perceptions are mental impressions about something and are influenced by a variety of things such as personal values, needs, hopes, attitudes, beliefs and especially experiences. It is expected that teachers who had experienced sets of learning activities should be able to express real perceptions about their experiences (Ingvarson et al, 2005). The reality of this expectation is deep-rooted in the popular use of the assessment of perceptions for evaluating workshops especially at participants' reaction level (Yates, 2007; Al-Masuwi, 2008). At this level, workshop participants can express their level of learning the skills and knowledge presented to them. In this study, the perceptions of the workshop trainees on their learning experiences based on the activities stated earlier were assessed.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of the workshop trainees on their learning experiences in the following child-centered approaches/methodologies?
 - i) Involving community/family/parents effectively in the classroom activities
 - ii) Using various activities to develop the child's cognitive, physical, emotional/social and language domains
 - iii) Using circle-time approach to enhance the children's learning
 - iv) Using Montessori approach in teaching children
 - v) Creating activities for children to learn through play
 - vi) Creating activities for children to learn literacy and numeracy skills
 - vii) Preparing appropriate assessment report for early years
2. Did they perceive that they acquired better knowledge and skills than they had before attending the workshop?
3. Is there any significant difference in their perceptions because of teaching experience and age?
4. In which of the approaches/methodologies were their perceptions highest or lowest?

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design: This study used descriptive survey design to describe and compare the perceptions of the workshop trainees. This design is appropriate since the level of analysis is descriptive (Wong, 2020).

2.2 Population, Sample and Sampling technique: The 72 registered workshop trainees formed the population of this study. Since this number is relatively small, well-defined, and easily reachable, total population sampling technique is used to include the entire number of registered trainees (Canonizado, 2020).

2.3 Instrument: A 4-point Likert questionnaire, Child-Centered Approaches in Early Years (CCAHEY) was constructed to measure the trainees' perceptions on the knowledge and skills they acquired from their workshop experiences. The questionnaire consisted of two sections A and B. Section A has three (3) items of split variables (teaching experience, status of trainee as school owner or teacher and age range of the trainees). Section B has 14 scale items which required the participants to rate the extent they learnt the key approaches in early years which were taught during the workshop. These items are questions which correspond to the reaction level of the Kirkpatrick's training evaluation model (Deller, 2020). The questionnaire was revised by an expert in ECCE to establish its face validity (Oden, 2021). The internal consistency coefficients of scale items in the questionnaire were computed using SPSS 23 and these were used to eliminate two items which lowered the overall alpha value for the instrument. The Cronbach's reliability coefficient computed was 0.81 and this is judged a desirable value to use the instrument in line with the analysis of Taber (2018).

2.4 Data Collection: As the concluding speech on the workshop was being delivered to the participants, they were given a period to complete the questionnaires and submit after which the speech was continued. In this way, the completed questionnaires were personally retrieved from the participants in the venue. However, 65 participants completed the questionnaires validly enough to be used for analysis. This represents 90% of the total population and is considered acceptable response rate for the sampling technique used in this study (Kuwalska, 2020).

2.5 Data Analysis: To answer the research questions, the ratings of the participants were analyzed using weighted means and standard deviations in addition to non-parametric tests (Kruska-Wallis and Wilcoxon-signed-ranks tests) statistics. These were considered appropriate for the ordinal scale of measurement obtained from rating scales. The weighted means were interpreted using the table presented by Jonald (2019), for the use and interpretation of Likert scale values (see Table 1).

Table 1: Interpretation of Weighted Means in a four-point Likert Scale

Likert Scale Point	Description	Interval	Interpretation
1	Strongly Disagree	1.00 – 1.75	Strong Negative Perception
2	Disagree	1.76 – 2.51	Negative Perception
3	Agree	2.52 – 3.27	Positive Perception
4	Strongly Agree	3.28 – 4.00	Strong Positive Perception

Participants' affirmation or agreement that they learnt the use of the approaches for teaching early years learners, taught during the workshop, implied a positive perception of their experience while disagreement implied a negative perception. Differences in the means due to teaching experiences and approaches were analyzed using the non-parametric tests, as stated earlier. All data analysis were done using SPSS for Windows version 23.0.

The mean ratings of each participant for all the child-centered approaches/methodologies (CCAM) were computed to obtain a composite variable describing their overall perceptions on all of them. This variable was compared with their ratings for each of the CCAM to determine how their perception for each of them relate to their overall perception. Their perception for each of them is expected to be either significantly higher or lower than or equivalent to their overall perceptions. The Wilcoxon-signed-ranks test for paired samples was used to compare these perceptions. This non-parametric test was appropriate because the

study design, the nature of the data (especially the ordinal level of measurement) and the paired sample assumptions were satisfied (Laerd Statistics, 2021).

3.0 Results

3.1 Trainees' learning experience on the child-centered methodologies in early years.

Table 2. Weighted means (M) and Standard deviations for the trainee's perceptions on their learning experience during the workshop

S/N	Methodology/Approach	Weighted Mean	Std. Deviation	Description
1	Involve child's community/family/parents	3.18	0.619	Positive perception
2	Use activities to develop: a. Physical Domain b. Cognitive Domain c. Emotional Domain d. Language Domain	3.84 3.70 3.72 3.50	0.366 0.496 0.484 0.617	Strong Positive Perception
3	Use circle time to enhance children's learning	3.77	0.379	Strong Positive Perception
4	Use Montessori approach	3.12	0.688	Positive perception
5	Make children learn through play	3.73	0.447	Strong Positive Perception
6	Use activities to develop: a. Literacy Skills b. Numeracy Skills	3.54 3.64	0.534 0.484	Strong Positive Perception
7	Preparing assessment report	3.40	0.639	Strong Positive Perception
8	Acquired better knowledge/skill from training	3.66	0.619	Strong Positive Perception
9	Learn better/new image of the child	3.53	0.537	Strong Positive Perception
10	Overall mean	3.58	0.315	Strong Positive Perception

The results in table 1 showed that the trainees had strong positive perceptions that they learnt how to: use activities to develop the child's physical domain ($M = 3.84 > 3.28$), cognitive domain ($M = 3.70 > 3.28$), social/emotional domain ($M = 3.72 > 3.28$) and the language domain ($M = 3.50 > 3.28$); use circle time to enhance children's learning ($M = 3.77 > 3.28$); make children learn through play ($M = 3.73 > 3.28$); use activities to develop the child's literacy skills ($M = 3.54 > 3.28$) and numeracy skills ($M = 3.64 > 3.28$); and prepare assessment reports ($M = 3.40 > 3.28$). They had positive perception that they could involve the child's community/parents/family in classroom activities ($M = 3.18 < 3.28$) and use Montessori approaches in early years ($M = 3.12 < 3.28$). These results show vividly that the use of activities for developing the physical domain ($M = 3.84$) and circle time ($M = 3.77$) attracted top strong positive perceptions among the trainees, while the involvement of child's

parents/family/community in the classroom activities ($M = 3.18$) and practicing the Montessori approaches ($M = 3.12$) attracted least positive perceptions.

3.2 Trainees' Perception on the acquisition of better knowledge/skills than they had prior to their participation in the workshop.

Table 2 also showed that the trainees had strong positive perception ($M = 3.66 > 3.28$) that the workshop experience enabled them to acquire better knowledge and skills than they previously had on approaches for teaching early years- learners. In addition, they strongly perceived ($M = 3.53 > 3.28$) that they learnt a better image of the child.

3.3 The influence of teaching experience and age on Workshop trainees' perceptions of their learning experiences

Table 3: Kruska-Wallis test for the influence of teaching experience on Workshop trainees' Perceptions.

Measures: Teaching Experience	Acquisition of better knowledge/skills	Overall learning experience
Mean: Less than 1 yr. (N = 3)	3.67	3.78
Mean: 1 – 2 yrs. (N = 6)	3.83	3.50
Mean: 3 – 7 yrs. (N = 19)	3.50	3.51
Mean: 8 and above years (N = 18)	3.78	3.56
H-statistics	1.47	1.74
Df	3	3
Sig	0.689	0.629

- Not significant at 0.05 level N = 47

The results in Table 3 showed that there is no significant association between the teaching experience of the trainees and their perceptions on the acquisition of better knowledge/skills and their overall learning experiences ($H(3) = 1.47, p = 0.689$; and $H(3) = 1.74, p = 0.629$). There is no significant influence of teaching experience (in terms of number of years of teaching at ECCE-level) on the trainees' perceptions at 0.05 level of significance.

Table 4: Kruska-Wallis test for the influence of age-range of trainees on their perceptions

Measures: Age range (yrs.)	Acquisition of better knowledge/skill	Overall learning experience
Mean: 24 and below (4)	3.25	3.33
Mean: 25 – 40 (29)	3.72	3.61
Above 40 (13)	3.77	3.68
H-statistics	4.58	2.19
Df	2	2
Sig	0.102	0.335

- Not significant at 0.05 level. N=46

There is no significant influence of the age-range of the trainees on their perceptions of acquisition of better knowledge/skills ($H(2) = 4.58, p = 0.102$) and on their overall learning experience ($H(2) = 2.19, p = 0.335$). Despite their ages, the results showed that they held strong positive perceptions on the learning of the child-centered approaches taught during the workshop.

Table 5: Wilcoxon signed-ranks test results

S/N	Pairs of Variables	Weighted Means	50 th Median (Mdn.)	T(W+)	Z	Sig.
1	Use Montessori approach Overall mean ratings	3.12 3.58	3.00 3.63	680.50	-3.24	* 0.001
2	Involve child's community/family/parents Overall mean ratings	3.18 3.58	3.00 3.63	701.50	-3.51	* 0.000
3	Preparing assessment report Overall mean ratings	3.40 3.58	3.00 3.63	580.00	-1.94	* 0.053
4	Developing child's language domain Overall mean ratings	3.50 3.58	4.00 3.63	573.50	-1.85	* 0.064
5	Developing child's literacy skills Overall mean ratings	3.54 3.58	4.00 3.63	437.00	-0.08	* 0.933
6	Developing child's numeracy skills Overall mean ratings	3.64 3.58	4.00 3.63	315.00	-1.50	* 0.134
7	Acquired better knowledge/skills Overall mean ratings	3.66 3.58	4.00 3.63	293.50	-1.78	* 0.076
8	Developing child's cognitive domain Overall mean ratings	3.70 3.58	4.00 3.63	187.00	-3.16	* 0.002
9	Developing child's social domain Overall mean ratings	3.72 3.58	4.00 3.63	317.00	-1.47	* 0.141
10	Make children learn through play Overall mean ratings	3.73 3.58	4.00 3.63	177.50	-3.28	* 0.001
11	Use circle time to enhance learning Overall mean ratings	3.77 3.58	4.00 3.63	124.00	-3.85	* 0.000
12	Developing child's physical domain Overall mean ratings	3.84 3.58	4.00 3.63	171.50	-3.56	* 0.001

* Significant at 0.05 level of significance. N=65

3.4 The child-centered approaches/methodologies trainees perceived they learnt most or least

Table 5 shows the results of Wilcoxon signed ranks test for comparing the perceptions of trainees on each of the approaches/methodologies with their mean perception for all the approaches. The results indicated that their perceptions on learning the following approaches/methodologies are significantly lower than their overall mean perception (*mdn.* = 3.63).

1. Use of Montessori approach (*mdn.* = 3), $T(W+) = 680$. ($z = -3.24$, $p = 0.001$).
2. Involving community/family/parents of children in classroom activities (*mdn.* = 3), $T(W+) = 701.50$. ($z = 3.51$, $p = 0.000$).
3. Preparing assessment report (*mdn.* = 3), $T(W+) = 580.00$. ($z = -1.94$, $p = 0.053$).

This implies that the trainees had the least perceptions on the learning of these three approaches during the workshop.

The results also indicate that their perceptions on learning the following approaches/methodologies are significantly higher than the mean perception (*mdn.* = 3.63).

1. Developing the child's cognitive domain (*mdn.* = 4), $T(W+) = 187.00$. ($z = -3.16$, $p = 0.002$).
2. Making children learn through play (*mdn.* = 4), $T(W+) = 177.50$. ($z = -3.28$, $p = 0.001$).
3. Using circle time to enhance learning (*mdn.* = 4), $T(W+) = 124.00$. ($z = -3.85$, $p = 0.000$).
4. Developing the child's physical domain (*mdn.* = 4), $T(W+) = 171.50$. ($z = -3.56$, $p = 0.001$).

This implied that the trainees perceived that they learnt these 4 approaches/methodologies most. Although their perceptions on the learning of the approaches/methodologies were in the positive range, the results from the Wilcoxon signed-ranks tests clearly showed the ones where the strength of their perceptions was lowest and highest.

4.0 Discussion

4.1 Trainees perceived that they learned all the child-centered approaches/methodologies (CCAM). This also reflected their satisfaction with their learning experiences in the workshop, as they provided this information immediately after the workshop activities. These perceptions of the early years teachers who attended the workshop in anticipation of increase in their knowledge and skill portrayed reality with respect to the assertion of Ingvarson et al (2005). The results corroborated those obtained from the teacher development program where the teachers' perception of the training offered showed that 79% of them rated it as high/moderate quality (UNESCO-IICBA, 2010). Specifically, the trainees perceived strongly and positively that they learnt better knowledge and skills than they possessed prior to their workshop experience. This result was expected since the key resource persons built into the organization of the workshop, the results, and their recommendations from their earlier studies by providing quality hands-on-activities on the development of the early learners' skills in all domains (Nwabuwe et al., 2016). Hence the objectives of the workshop were achieved as this result suggested.

4.2 There is no significant influence of age and teaching experience on the workshop trainees' perception of their learning experience. This result could be understood in the light of the observations stated earlier that majority of the teachers in the ECCE centers, especially the private-owned ones are not qualified and hence incompetent, irrespective of teaching experience. Age of teachers and their years of teaching experience have some relationship. It is only continuous professional trainings, such as the one offered in this workshop that could enhance the positive effects of teaching experience. If the more experienced teachers have been using wrong methods throughout the period, they have been teaching early learners, then they will be at the same level of knowledge and skills as the less experienced ones as they attend the workshop. Therefore, the influence of teaching experience on their perception of new and better knowledge and skills learnt in the workshop

will be insignificant as obtained in this study. This result satisfied the recommendations of experts in ECCE for in-service trainings of caregivers/teachers in Nigeria, as presented earlier in the introduction.

4.3 Trainees' perceptions showed the least and the most learnt approaches/methodologies. This result is interesting and germane to the use of evaluation of workshops. Every workshop activity is aimed to impact optimal learning of skills and knowledge to participants, but this is not always achieved (Al-Musawi, 2008). Knowing the activities which attracted very high positive perceptions enables organizers to sustain the components of presentation of those activities in subsequent workshops (Sufi et al., 2018). In this study participants rated the learning of how to develop the child's cognitive and physical domains, make them learn through play, and circle-time the highest. As participants in the workshop, we observed that these activities were presented very practically with demonstrations which involved all the participants. In addition, they are also approaches which related more to what the teachers had been doing with the early learners. They were also handled by the ECCE specialists resource persons. However, the participants rated the use of Montessori approach, preparing assessment reports for early years- learners and involving parents in their classroom activities as the ones they learnt least. These are also the approaches (especially Montessori) which they hardly understand and use (Nwabuwe et al., 2016). These results should inform the reforms that could be made in subsequent workshops to continue to develop the ECCE caregivers/teachers more professionally.

5.0 Conclusion

In step with the rules of the organization of workshops (Sufi et al, 2018), this paper presented an assessment of the perceptions of trainees on their learning experiences and the results showed that they were positive for all the child-centered approaches/methodologies taught. The results of this study are considered relevant in this dispensation, when ECCE is a global area of focus for sustainable development (G20, 2018 & UN, 2015).

Their relevance further hinges on the portrayal of the impact workshops could have on trainees' perceptions on their acquisition of more knowledge and skills-on-the-job. In the prevailing situation whereby ECCE sector of education in Nigeria is beset with the problem of lack of qualified caregivers/teachers and a preponderance of unqualified teachers in the schools, (Ofoego, 2018; Salami, 2016; Sooter, 2013, and Amadi, 2013), well-planned workshops, such as this one studied, are needed to fill the gap. Consequently, the results of this study suggest further that inbuilding evaluation into ECCE workshops are strategic in sustaining the gains of continuous professional development of caregivers/teachers in Nigeria

6.0 Recommendations

Organization of effective workshops is an indispensable tool in the implementation of continuous professional development (CPD) of teachers (at all levels) which is currently and globally emphasized in the education industry. Based on the results of this study, workshops for ECCE caregivers/teachers could be used to achieve greatest positive impact on the implementation of the IECD policy in ECCE schools by considering the following:

1. Regular organization of similar workshops should be embarked on by ECCE departments/schools/faculties in tertiary institutions for their respective geographic areas for greater coverage.
2. Workshops should build in the evaluation mechanism to obtain feedback before, during and after the programme and enhance effectiveness and review.

3. Subsequent workshops should focus on the areas that attracted least positive perceptions about knowledge and skills learnt.
4. Continuous formative feedback during workshops should be utilized to achieve the assessment and selection of competent presenters/resource persons and learning activities.

7.0 Limitations and Strengths of this study

The collection of only post-training data and focus on the learning experiences of workshop trainees posed a limitation on the scope of the study. The trainees' perceptions on their presenters, environment, equipment/materials, and time for activities were not surveyed. However, all these indices which were not surveyed contributed to their learning which they perceived positively to be satisfactory. Only trainees' self-rating method of collecting data was used. Other methods such as observation and video records were not planned for in the study.

The major strength of the study is the remarkably frank and unbiased data from all the participants which enhanced the validity of the results of this study. The input from the authors made up of a specialist in evaluation, a specialist in ECCE and a generalist in ECCE guaranteed a fair view of the output of this study.

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