

Full Length Research Paper**Teachers Perception of the Rights of the Child: Implication for Early Childhood Education in Nigeria**

Victoria I. Iroegbu

*Institute of Education, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria.***Abstract**

Human experiences during and after the Second World War evoked feelings and concerns that culminated in the convention on Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequently, rights of the child. The enforcement of the rights of the child was to ensure that children's life and welfare are protected and that they grow up in peace, free from fear and want. Although Nigeria subscribed to the Universal Declaration of Human rights, and even embedded the rights of children in the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic, practitioners of early childhood education do not seem to respect the Child's Right Act. The problem of this study therefore was to investigate teachers' perceptions on the rights of the child. The study was a survey with a purposive sample of 80, made up of men and women in equal numbers. The instrument was a 22 item questionnaire of the Likert type, having 4 calibrated options. The validated instrument produced a Cronbach's coefficient of .8. The data analysis revealed that the teachers were positively disposed to the Rights of the child to a level of 68% and negatively disposed to 32% level. The study further revealed that there was a positive correlation ($r_{77} = .614$) between the perception of men and women. The study also showed that when the perceptions were controlled for gender, high significant correlations were obtained between: child right to dignity with right to education ($r_{77} = .708$); Child right to dignity with right to liberty ($r_{77} = .701$); child right to education with right to liberty ($r_{77} = .668$). A significant but low correlation was obtained for children's right to liberty with right to life/health ($r_{77} = .248$). The level of significance for all the rights of children tests was .05 (2 tailed). It was recommended that early childhood education teachers should be given further training on the rights of children.

Key words: Perception, Rights of the child, Education, Early childhood, Teachers

Introduction

Human right is an issue that generates a lot of concern by people all over the world. The Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by the United Nations organization took place in 1948 as consequences of human experiences during and immediately after the Second World War. The UDHR later became the source, inspiration and references point for a number of treaties and convention including the convention on rights of the child (CRC) (Anan, 2000). Before UDHR in 1948, there was nothing that could make the more powerful nations of the world to respect the rights of people in other less powerful nations. Less powerful nations had to form alliance with more powerful ones for the purpose of protection from unprotected exterminations by powerful and aggressive nations. Some relief came to nations after the birth of UDHR in 1948 and with greater relief to peoples with the conventions on the "Rights of the child (CRC) Anan (2000) and Bossenmeyer (2012) have pointed out that 'there is no duty more important than ensuring that children rights are respected, welfare protected, lives free from fear and want and that they are grow in peace.'

Anan (2000) believed that every child should have the best possible start in life, receive good quality basic education, have opportunities to develop his/her full potential and contribute to society in meaningful ways. This statement by Anan (2000) who was the secretary general of the United Nations Educational Scientific and cultural organization (UNESCO) represented the new thinking in the world. A view point that placed premium on the development, protection and empowerment of young children who will grow to become responsible adults in the world in the future.

Children all over the world constitute a very important sector of each nation's population. The convention on the universal declaration of human Rights (UDHR) and the UNO proclaimed that childhood is entitled to special care, assistance and protection. The document had stated that because of the physical and mental immaturity, the child requires special care and protection. This condition applies to all children including those registered at Early Childhood Education centers in Nigeria. Early childhood education (ECE) connotes the type and level of education given to children at day-care/crèche (0-2years of age) play-group (2-3years), Nursery/Kindergarten (3-5years) and lower basic classes of primary 1-3 (6-8years). Childhood years continue until the age of 18years (UDHR).

Handlers of little children at the various establishments are presumed to be trained in handling little children and knowledgeable in the normal development of children as well as the application of rights of children. Early childhood Education teachers and care-givers are therefore recognized by the National Policy on Education (2013) as surrogate parents of these little children. Iroegbu and Kayode-Adeleke (2015) asserted that in some cases, the ECE children were found to be closer to their teachers than to their biological parents. As a consequence some children refuse to accept corrections by their biological parents, for ECE teachers' mistakes.

Claveria (2014) had found that the influence which ECE teachers have on their pupils is very great to the extent that the children believed that their teachers are infallible and will therefore not accept corrections of their teachers by their parents. Every ECE teacher is expected to be dutiful and caring (Nakpodia, 2009). Both Griffiths (2012) and Ireland (2012) agreed that ECE teachers and caregivers must care for children under them and protect them in the same manner that careful mothers do to their children. Ireland (2012) further emphasized that professional ECE teachers and caregivers must display at all times, professional skills and care in handling little children under them. CRC demands that ECE teachers and caregivers must know and apply the requirements of Child Rights Act (CRA) in school setting.

It is important that Nigerian ECE teachers and caregivers be evaluated on their performance with the scale of the CRA. Whether the Nigerian ECE teachers/caregivers have knowledge and apply the provisions of the child rights act remains to be evaluated. Nigeria ratified the convention on the Rights of the child in March, 1991. As a follow-up National Childs Right implementation committee (NCRIC) was set up in 1994 with objectives directed at popularizing the UNO's as well as the organization of African Unity's (OAU) Charter on the Right and Welfare of the child. Further still, the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria recognizes the following Rights that apply to children:

- a) Right to life
- b) Right to dignity of the human person
- c) Rights to personal liberty
- d) Rights to fair hearing
- e) Right to private and family life
- f) Right to freedom of thoughts, conscience and religion
- g) Rights to peaceful assembly and association
- h) Right to freedom from discrimination.

Fully cognizant of the existence of the Child Rights Act, and the expectations of the National Policy on Education (2013) on their enforcement, Early childhood\education centers have proliferated all over the nation especially in urban centers. The need arises for researchers to investigate aspects of compliance of the teachers and caregivers at these centers, with the requirements of the child Rights Acts.

This study investigated early childhood education teachers' perception of Child Rights as well as relationships between the way in which male and female teacher, proprietors and care givers perceive different sectors of the rights of children.

Statement of the problem

Nigerian is an active member of the United Nations Organization (UNO) and had ratified the Child Rights Act since 1991. The Rights of the child were also included in the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigerian, but the teachers of children do not appear to be aware of societal expectations of them on the Rights of children. The problem of this study therefore is to investigate ECE teachers' and caregiver's perception on the Rights of the child and further explore if any relationships exist between the perceptions of male and female ECE teachers on different aspects of children's rights.

Research Questions

Three research questions were raised which guided the development of the study so that appropriate answers might be provided. The research questions were:

1. What is the nature of ECE teachers' perception on the Rights of the Child?
2. Is there any relationship between male and female ECE teachers' perception on the rights of the child?
3. Is there any relationship in ECE teachers' perceptions on the rights of the child to education, dignity, liberty and life/health when gender is controlled?

Methodology

This study adopted survey research design. Questionnaires and interview were used to gather data from both the teachers and children. Questionnaires were used for the teachers and interview method was used to elicit information from the children. All primaries 1, 2 and 3 school teachers in both public and private target schools in one university town in southern Nigeria were used for the study. There were ten public primary schools and ten private primary schools in the town that willingly participated in the study. The schools were purposively selected having authorized the researcher to include them in the study. This was done by approaching the heads of school and obtaining permission for the teachers and pupils to participate in the study. The teachers in the lower arms of the schools (primary 1-3), were used for the study.

The research instruments were administered on the relevant pupils and teachers in participating schools. The sample for the study consisted of 80 teachers who submitted fully completed questionnaires; thirty from public schools and fifty from private schools with a total of 40 male and 40 female teachers. The teachers completed a teachers' perception instrument on the rights of children, while a structured interview approach was used for the pupils. The instruments used in the data collection were constructed and validated by the researcher before use. The questionnaire and the interview guide were first drafted and given to six experts on child's Right

Advocacy, including lecturers from two universities in Nigeria to review. Comments from the reviewers were gathered and corrections made which yielded an improved draft.

The instruments were trial tested in a different state before use. The instrument had four sections: Section 'A' has five questions that deal with right to dignity of human person of the child; Section 'B' has five questions also but that focused on the right to personal liberty and fair hearing of the child; Section 'C' had eight questions that focused on the right to education of the child and section 'D' had four items that focused on the right of life and good health of the child. The items were generated based on the right of the child as stipulated by the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1979). The validated perception test yielded a Cronbach's coefficient alpha of .8 for the entire test.

Results

The results for this investigation had been presented, following the order of the research questions.

Research questions 1:

What is the nature of early childhood education teacher's perception on the rights of the child?

Early childhood education (ECE) teachers' perception was obtained with an instrument with a four-point Likert scale. The four points were calibrated as follows: SA=strongly agree; A=Agree; D=Disagree; and SD=strongly disagree. The scale points were as follows: SA=4, A=3, D=2, SD=1 for positively worded statement, while reverse scoring applied to negatively worded statements. For the analysis of research question1, the scale was collapsed into two, positive and negative. Responses of teachers which were in agreement with a positively worded statement were scored as positive, while responses that disagreed with a positive stem were scored as negative. When the item was stated negatively, the scoring was done in the reverse. A frequency table of positive and negative responses was constructed and the dominant response to each item (N>40) is regarded as the group perception. Thus the group perception is determined for each item.

Table 1: ECE teachers' perception on the rights of the child

No.	Item	+f	%	-f	%	Res
1	Teachers have right to batter children they teach	12	15	68	85	N
2	Children should be protected from danger and abuse	77	96	3	4	P
3	Flogging is an essential school punishment	32	40	48	60	N
4	Children are to be encouraged to help parents hawk articles	6	8	74	92	P
5	Sending children to live with and serve their uncles and aunts should be discouraged	56	70	24	30	P
6	Children should depend on their teachers for their school achievement	36	45	44	55	N
7	Children do not need motivation to improve on their school achievement	75	94	5	6	P
8	Teachers' duty to school children starts and ends with teaching in school	68	85	12	15	P
9	Teachers have right to administer corporal punishment on school children	31	39	49	61	N
10	Children do not need language and thinking skills	78	97	2	3	P
11	It is bad practice to give children freedom to play games of their choice	43	54	37	46	P
12	Children should not be allowed to select the dress they wear for outing with peers	30	37	50	63	N
13	It is wrong for children to express their opinion on issues about their education	72	90	8	10	P
14	Children should keep quiet when adults are deciding on their welfare	41	51	39	49	P
15	Children are to adopt their parents religion	31	39	49	61	N
16	Children should be allowed to move about freely at school	37	46	43	54	N
17	Teachers should encourage children to explore their environment	78	85	2	3	P
18	It is wrong for children to choose their friends	60	75	20	25	P
19	Mothers should take special care of their babies by themselves	76	95	4	5	P
20	It is not advisable to immunize children for it gives the fever	76	95	4	5	P
21	It is bad to give eggs to children together with food	77	96	3	4	P
22	Children need adequate healthcare both at home and in school	75	94	5	6	P

Key: P = positive; N = negative

The result of data analysis as contained in Table 1 shows that the early childhood education teachers and caregivers were positive in their responses to 15 items and negative in their responses to 7 items. This result gives 68% positive perception and 32% negative perception of the rights of children by early childhood education teachers and caregivers. The result may be seen as not too satisfactory as more work is required to be done to move the positive perception of the teachers to the region of 95%. Another more specific interpretation of this result is that many teachers in the sample still have negative perceptions on the rights of children. Such teachers require further training on the rights of children and their responsibilities in protecting these rights

Research question 2:

Is there any relationship between the perceptions of male and female early childhood education teachers/caregivers?

The total score of each of the 80 respondents on the perception instrument was obtained and collated according to gender of respondents. Pearson correlation was computed to determine the level of relationship between the perceptions of male and female respondents. The result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Pearson correlation for male and female perception scores on the rights of children

Variables	N	Mean	Std. dev	r	R ²	Df	P-value
Male perception scores	40	44.26	7.09	.614**	.378	2,78	.001
Female perception scores	40	44.93	8.09				

Key: ** = significant at $P < .01$ (2 tailed)

The result in Table 2 shows that there is a highly significant positive correlation ($r_{2,78} = .614, p = .001$) in the perceptions of the male and female teachers/caregivers. This result tends to show that both male and female ECE teachers/caregivers harbor highly similar views on the rights of children. The correlation accounts for 38% of the variation in the perceptions of the teachers/caregivers. This result means that as much as 38% of the perception of the females could be predicted correctly from the perception of the males.

Research question 3:

What is the relationship among early childhood education teachers'/caregivers' perceptions on the rights of the child to Dignity, Education, Liberty, and Life/ Health, when gender is controlled?

In order to answer this research question, partial correlation analysis was conducted for male and female teachers/caregivers perceptions on:

- I. Right of the child to dignity
- II. Right of the child to education
- III. Right of the child to liberty
- IV. Right of the child to life/health, with gender as a control variable.

The result of the partial correlation is contained in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics for the variables: gender, dignity, education, liberty, and life/health

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Score on child's right to dignity	15.4750	2.74657	80
perception score on child's right to education	15.0125	2.85734	80
Perception score on child's liberty	14.3000	2.96989	80
right to life and health care	14.7375	1.42086	80
gender of respondent	1.5000	.50315	80

Table 4: Partial correlation matrix for right to: dignity, education, liberty and life/health with gender as control variable

Control	Variables	Statistic	Dignity	Education	Liberty	Life/health
Gender	Right to Dignity	Corr.	1.00	.708*	.701*	.248*
		Sig.		.000	.000	.000
		Df.		77	77	77
	Right to Education	Corr.			.668*	.145
		Sig.			.000	.202
		Df.			77	77
	Right to Liberty	Corr.				.158
		Sig.				.165
		Df.				77
	Right to life/health	Corr.				1.00
		Sig.				
		Df.				

Key: * = Significant at $p < .05$ (2 tailed)

The data in Table 4 reveals that when gender is controlled, high and significant correlations exist between dignity and education, ($r_{77} = .708, p < .05$); dignity and liberty, ($r_{77} = .701, p < .05$); education and liberty, ($r_{77} = .668, p < .05$). In addition, a significant but low correlation was obtained for dignity and life/health, ($r_{77} = .248, p < .05$). Further, low no significant correlations were obtained for education and life/health ($r_{77} = .145, p > .05$); liberty and life/health, ($r_{77} = .156, p > .05$).

The conclusion that can be drawn from these results is that there are significant relationships between ECE teachers/caregivers perceptions on children's right to dignity and education; dignity and liberty; dignity and life/health; and education and liberty. The

order of increasing significant correlations is: dignity and life/health ($r_{77} = .248$) < education and liberty ($r_{77} = .668$) < dignity and liberty ($r_{77} = .701$) < liberty and dignity ($r_{77} = .708$).

These results draw special attention to the high numbers of negative perceptions observed among teachers/caregivers scores in three subtests on dignity, education and liberty (refer to Table 1). Both male and female respondents shared similar traits, therefore these results point to the imperative need to reeducate the teachers and caregivers so that they will understand, appreciate and come to terms with the demands of children's rights and do away with the misleading traditional practices that work against the Child Right Act (CRC).

Discussion

On the nature of perception of ECE teachers/caregivers, the data analysis contained in Table1, show that the teachers were positive in 15 items but negative in 7 items of the questionnaire. This result gave a proportion of 68% positive and 32% negative. This negativity implies that the teachers/caregivers perception ran contrary to the expectations of the Childs Rights Act. One of the rights which the teachers and the caregivers were negative to is children's rights to dignity. The teachers were of the view that they have rights to batter the children and inflict corporal punishment on those who err. Unfortunately, this right for the children is often violated by in the Nigerian school system, which ought to protect it. The belief of the teachers is rooted in the traditional way of life in which no external authority has right to question family members on the punishment that they administer on their young ones.

A second right of children that teacher's feel they could not allow is the right of liberty to choose what they the children, wear on outing with friends. This again is not proper. Children are to be allowed small liberties such as choice of clothing for informal occasions. If they fail to make the right choices, then should an intervention occur. They should always be corrected where they go wrong and should be given reasons that make their action unacceptable. Such action will help them to understand and appreciate the right from the wrong as they grow up. It should be understood that both the home and the ECE establishments to which the children belong constitute the 'home' for these young children. Teachers are therefore surrogate parents to the children. Teachers should therefore show good examples.

Another right of the child that the teachers perceive they should deny children is the freedom of choice. Teachers feel that the children should depend on them for their academic progress. The teachers should realize that without personal effort, the children cannot excel and prosper in their learning. Children who depend heavily on their teachers hardly do well in external examinations. Such children and their teachers are often cheats. Teachers are important to guide the pupils to the frontiers of knowledge and let the children do the harvesting in their own way and capacity. They should teach children to learn, reason, apply their knowledge and evaluate the consequences of their knowledge application and then use the results to validate their learning.

On the perceptions of male and female teachers, the data in table2 show that there is a high positive significant relationship in the perceptions of male and female teachers. This implies that, to a great extent, male and female teachers in Nigerian ECE facilities have similar notions on the rights of children. The analysis reveals that 38% of the perception of female teachers can be predicted correctly from the perceptions of the male teachers. This is an indication of high similarity in perceptions by the two groups. This circumstance implies that both male and female teachers require similar treatment to overcome their shortcomings in the management of children's rights. If the male and female ECE teachers should be given appropriate corrective treatment, a higher level of positive correlation will result in the improvement of their perceptions to a level that will approach perfect correlation.

On relationships of ECE teachers' perceptions on right to education, right to dignity, right to liberty and right to life and health; when gender is controlled, it was found that correlations became higher and more significant. When gender is controlled, the right to dignity can predict right to education by 50%, right to liberty by 49%, right to life/health by 6%, while right to education can predict right to liberty by 44%. These correlations are very high and significant except for the correlation between right to dignity and right to life/health.

Nigerian ECE establishments and institutions should take advantage of the findings of researches such as this one in their day to day activities at their various centers in order to produce for the society, well adjusted and knowledgeable children

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study has demonstrated that early childhood education teachers and or caregivers have not all come to understand and appreciate the full meaning and demands of the Child's Right Act. The teacher's responses to questions/items on this subject reveal that the teachers and caregivers need further debriefing, in order to fall in line with the current thinking in cultured societies, on the rights of children. It was therefore recommended that further training coupled with periodic seminars be mounted for practicing teachers and caregivers. In addition children's rights should be emphasized in the curriculum of ECE teacher training programmes. Social studies classes at both primary and secondary schools should include aspects of children's rights such as protection from child abuse, child labor and battering, which many people in this society often flout.

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