

USES AND CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH ASSESSMENT AMONG EARLY CHILDHOOD PUPILS IN AWKA EDUCATION AUTHORITY

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Abstract

This study examined uses and challenges associated with assessment among early childhood pupils in Awka Education Authority. Descriptive Survey research design was adopted in carrying out the research. The population of the study consist of 3841 pre-primary school teachers in Awka Education Authority. A total of 120 pre-primary school teachers were sampled for the study, through simple random sampling technique. Two research question guided the study. The researchers developed a 20 items structured questionnaire titled “Uses and Challenges of Assessment Questionnaire (UCAQ)” which was used to source information from teachers Reliability test was conducted using Cronbach Alpha to ascertain the internal consistency and a reliability index of 0.77 and 0.78 were obtained for the two clusters. The overall reliability obtained was 0.78. Mean and Standard Deviation were used to analyze the research questions. The findings of the study revealed that uses of assessment in early childhood education include, screening of developmentally delays in children, serves as a tool for enhancing the learning experience of pupils, and helps educators to ascertain whether educational objectives have been achieved. Parts of the findings also identified the challenges of assessing early childhood education pupils in Awka education authority to be, most of teachers and caregivers working in early childhood education are not professionals in early childhood education discipline, teachers do not have sufficient quality tools for assessing pupils, among others. Based on the findings, it was recommended that only qualified professionals of early childhood education discipline should be employed to teach pupils in early childhood education level.

Keywords: Assessment, Early childhood education, Uses, Challenges and Pupils.

Introduction

The aim of every teaching and learning activity, is to attain its stated objectives and goals. Assessment is the tool for testing pupils’ attainment of the educational goals and objectives. Uzosike (2018), concord to this by stating that, Assessment is an essential part of instruction, because it ascertains whether or not the objectives of education have been achieved. Assessment influences decisions about grades, placement, advancement, instructional needs, curriculum, and, even affects funding. Amoah, Dzakadzie and Agbayisah (2022), opined that the assessment is very useful in the education of pupils. Its importance in the pupils’ education cannot be underestimated. Kumar (2024), explained that assessment is used to measure a child’s academic skills and progress in various subjects, helping educators determine appropriate educational goals. Assessment and evaluation in early childhood education serve as indispensable tools for understanding and enhancing the learning experiences of young children. They help educators and policymakers gain insights into children's progress, identify areas of concern, and tailor instructional strategies to meet individual needs effectively (Adewusi, Hammad, Adeleke, Nwankwo and Nwokocha 2023).

Assessment is highly utilized in teaching and learning, not just in early childhood education alone, but also in all other levels of education. Ntuli, Nyarambi and Traore (2014),

are of the opinion that assessment is an integral component of early childhood education teaching and learning. The term assessment can be defined as the process of subjecting children to a test, and critical analysis of the findings made, from the meticulous observation of young children, which will eventually be used for decision making. Ellis in Amoah, Dzakadzie and Agbayisah (2022), explained assessment as a systematic process to measure or evaluate the characteristics or performance of individuals, programs, and entities for the purposes of drawing inferences. Assessment is the process of gathering, recording and using information about a learner response (performance/achievement) to a task because it is intended to cover a wide range of different circumstances (Olaniran, Ikuenomore, Okoroafor, & Adesola 2018). Goodwin (2000) defined assessment as the process of determining through observation or testing, an individual's traits or behaviours, a program characteristic, or the properties of some other entity and then assigning a number, rating, or score to that determination. According to Glossary of Education Reform (GER), (2014), the word assessment includes the instruments or methods that teachers use in evaluating, measuring, and documenting the readiness, learning progress, and all the educational needs of pupils.

Assessment of pupils in early childhood education need to be given a meticulous attention, to ensure that it serves its intended purposes. Early childhood education is the very first level of education a child receives in the world. It is the foundation of education, in which all other levels of education are built upon it. Early childhood education plays a pivotal role in shaping the developmental trajectory of children, serving as the foundation upon which future academic, social, and emotional success is built (Bang, et.al in Adewusi, Hammad, Adeleke, Nwankwo and Nwokocha 2023). This period also known as the formative years is very vital in the life of every growing child. During this formative period, children are most malleable, and the quality of education they receive is integral to fostering their holistic growth and lifelong learning (Cantor, Lerner, Pittman, Chase, & Gomperts, 2021). The National Policy on Education, NPE (2004), states that it is the education given to children prior their entry into primary school. According to national policy on education (2014), it is segmented into ages 0-4 years, situated in daycare or crèches, fully in the hands of the private sector and social development whilst ages 5-6 (preprimary) are within the formal sector.

Assessment of pupils in early childhood education, plays a crucial role of helping teachers in identifying the various areas in which pupils thrives excellently in all ramifications, and the areas in which pupils still need to improve on. In other words, assessment helps in identifying pupils' individual weaknesses and strengths. This is a great medium through which teachers obtain the information they give to parents about the performance of their children; because parents want and need good information on the wellbeing of their children. According to Goal 1 Early Childhood Assessment Resource Group (1998), Parents want to know if their children will be ready for school. Teachers and school administrators want to know if their programs are effective and if they are providing children the right programs and services. Policymakers want to know which program policies and expenditures will help children and their families, and whether they are effective over time. It is only through assessment can the right answers to these be determined. Amoah, Dzakadzie and Agbayisah (2022), listed the following to be among the relevance of assessment in early childhood education; to monitor children's learning and development progress, helps in making decisions about programmes to advance learning and development, helps in identifying children who may benefit from special support or intervention, helps in communicating a child's learning and development with families and other professionals helps in involving families in planning children's learning in a meaningful way and helps in evaluating early childhood programmes' effectiveness.

It is highly imperative for every teacher to know that assessment of early childhood education pupils has some basic principles guiding it. These principles must be followed to

ensure efficient and effective assessment in teaching and learning of pupils. Beaty (2006), enumerated the following as indicators of effective assessment practices;

a). Ethical principles guide assessment practices, b). Assessment instruments are used for the intended purposes, c). Assessments are appropriate for ages and other characteristics of children being assessed, d). Assessment instruments follow professional criteria for quality, e). what is assessed is developmentally and educationally significant, f). Assessment evidence is used to understand and improve learning, g). Assessment evidence is gathered from realistic settings and situations that reflect children's actual performance, h). Assessments use multiple sources of evidence gathered over time, i). Screening is always linked to follow-up, j). Use of individually administered, norm-referenced tests are limited, k). Staff and families are knowledgeable about assessment.

However, teachers of early childhood education pupils, most times do not find it easy in assessing pupils. This is as a result of some challenges which they encounter while executing their job, in regards to their assessment of pupils. Also, lack of trained qualified professionals of early childhood education has been a major challenge encountered in teaching pupils. Inefficient and inappropriate assessment of pupils are part of the challenges which lack of trained professionals of early childhood education constitutes. The availability of qualified and trained teachers is vital in the provision of developmentally appropriate assessment practices in ECCE centres. This is because teachers play very crucial roles in the development and learning of children during their early years (Amoah, Dzakadzie and Agbayisah (2022).

While assessment and evaluation are vital components of early childhood education, they are not without challenges (Adewusi, Hammad, Adeleke, Nwankwo and Nwokocha 2023). The following are some of the challenges they listed:

- a). Bias and Fairness: Ensuring unbiased and fair assessments, particularly for culturally and linguistically diverse populations, can be challenging. Assessment tools and practices must be culturally sensitive and free from bias.
- b). Standardization vs. Personalization: Balancing the need for standardized assessments with the principles of personalized learning can be complex. Educators often grapple with how to reconcile these competing priorities.
- c). Developmentally Appropriate Assessment: Ensuring that assessments are developmentally appropriate for young children is essential. Assessments should align with age-appropriate milestones and developmental stages.
- d). Ethical Considerations: Ethical concerns in assessment include issues of informed consent, confidentiality, and the responsible use of assessment data. Protecting children's rights and privacy is paramount.
- d). Data Interpretation and Use: Collecting assessment data is just one part of the process.

Educators and policymakers must also interpret and use the data effectively to inform instructional decisions and policy changes. Uses and challenges of assessment among early childhood pupils should be given a meticulous attention, as far as early years education has been given official recognition by the federal government of Nigeria. The methods, kinds and rate at which early childhood pupils are assessed need to be properly scrutinized and constantly supervised. This will help to ensure that appropriate measures are considered in the assessment of pupils. Little has been known and documented on the uses and challenges associated with assessment among early childhood pupils in Awka Education Authority of Anambra State.

It is against this backdrop that the researchers embarked on this research to determine the uses and challenges associated with assessment among early childhood pupils in Awka Education Authority.

Statement of the Problem

Early childhood education practices in Nigeria seem not to give attention to the challenges encountered in assessment of young children. It seems that most teachers and caregivers are not aware of the uses of assessment in early childhood education, while some teachers and caregivers seem not to regard the assessment of pupils in early childhood education level, as something worth doing. The numerous challenges encountered in assessing children, such as lack of trained professionals of early childhood education, access to quality early childhood education, among others are not being tackled, nor addressed by the appropriate authorities.

These challenges has resulted to pupils, not being assessed appropriately. Pupils are most times given assessment, that is beyond their developmental level and developmental milestone. Some teachers assess pupils using the wrong assessment tools. The lack of professionalism in skills of teachers working in ECCE centres endangers pupils' learning and development. Teachers seem not to utilize the pupils' assessment records in planning and organizing their teaching and learning activities. Some teachers find it very difficult in interpreting assessment tools, which makes them encounter difficulty in assessing pupils. Some might end up either not assessing pupils, or assessing pupils inappropriately. This has negatively affected the learning and development of pupils in early childhood education.

It is against this backdrop that the researchers embarked on this research to investigate the uses and challenges associated with assessment of early childhood pupils in Awka Education Authority.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was Specifically, to determine the uses and challenges associated with assessment among early childhood pupils in Awka Education Authority. this study intends to;

1. Find out the uses of assessment in early childhood education.
2. Find out the challenges associated with assessment among early childhood pupils in Awka Education Authority.

Research Questions

1. What are the uses of assessment in early childhood education?
2. What are the challenges associated with assessment among early childhood pupils in Awka Education Authority?

Method

The study adopted a descriptive survey design to determine the uses and challenges associated with assessment among early childhood pupils. The study was carried out in Awka Education Authority. Two research questions guided the study. The population of the study consist of all the 3841 public pre-primary school teachers. The sample of the study was made up of 120 public nursery school teachers through a simple random sampling technique. The researchers developed a 20 items structured questionnaire titled "Uses and Challenges of Assessment Questionnaire" (UCAQ) which was used to source information from teachers. The instrument was face validated by three experts, two in the Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education and one in Measurement and Evaluation unit of the Department of Educational Foundations all from Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The corrections and suggestions which they made were carefully made in the final draft of the

questionnaire. Reliability test was conducted using Cronbach Alpha to ascertain the internal consistency and a reliability index of 0.77 and 0.78 were obtained for the two clusters. The overall reliability obtained was 0.78. A four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) weighted 4,3,2, and 1 were used to answer the research questions. Mean and Standard deviation were used to analyze the research questions. Mean response of 2.50 and above were regarded as agree while those below 2.50 were regarded as disagree.

Results

Research Question 1

What are the uses of assessment in early childhood education?

Table

Mean score of respondents on the uses of assessment in early childhood education.

S/N	Uses of Assessment in Early Childhood education include:	\bar{x}	SD	Decision
1.	Screening of developmental delays in children	3.4	0.78	Agree
2.	Assessment is used for monitoring of pupils' progress	3.2	0.74	Agree
3.	Assessment helps to inform instruction	3.1	0.72	Agree
4.	Teachers rely on assessment for information on program evaluation.	2.9	0.68	Agree
5.	Assessment assists teachers as regards to the accountability of pupils.	3.3	0.76	Agree
6	Assessment serves as a tool for enhancing the learning experience of pupils.	2.5	0.61	Agree
7	Assessment assists teachers to tailor instructional strategies to meet individual needs effectively.	2.7	0.66	Agree
8	Assessment helps educators to ascertain whether the educational objectives have been achieved.	2.6	0.64	Agree
9.	Assessment influences decisions about the curriculum	3.1	0.72	Agree
10.	Assessment helps school authorities to attract funds from the government.	3.3	0.76	Disagree
Cluster Mean		3.01	0.71	

Table 1 showed that all mean scores of teachers are above 2.50; indicating that they agreed the following to be the uses of assessment in early childhood education; screening of developmental delays in children, monitoring of pupils' progress, informs instruction, teachers rely on assessment for information on program evaluation, enhancing learning experience of pupils, assists teachers to tailor instructional strategies to needs effectively, helps educators to ascertain whether the educational objectives have been achieved, and helps school authorities to attract funds from the government.

Research Question 2

What are the challenges associated with assessment among early childhood pupils in Awka Education Authority?

Table 2

Mean ratings and standard deviations of challenges associated with assessment among early childhood pupils in Awka Education Authority?

S/N	Challenges associated with assessment among early childhood pupils include:	\bar{x}	SD	Decision
11.	Most of teachers and caregivers working in early childhood education are not professionals in early childhood education discipline.	3.4	0.78	Agree
12.	Young children can be easily distracted during testing situations.	3.0	0.70	Agree
13.	Teachers do not have sufficient quality tools for assessing pupils.	3.2	0.74	Agree
14.	Teachers might be biased while assessing children.	2.9	0.68	Agree
15.	Some teachers are very poor in safe keeping of their assessment records.	2.5	0.61	Agree
16.	Schools lack adequate infrastructures that will assist in storage of pupils' assessed records.	3.3	0.76	Agree
17.	Pupils are assessed with developmentally inappropriate assessment tools.	3.1	0.72	Agree
18.	Teachers do not observe ethical considerations while assessing pupils.	2.7	0.66	Agree
19.	Language barriers affects assessment especially in schools that either the pupils or teachers are not locals of the community where the school is situated.	2.6	0.64	Agree
20.	Wrong interpretation of data by teacher poses a great challenge to the assessment of pupils.	3.3	0.76	Agree
Cluster Mean		3.0	0.71	

Table 2 revealed that teachers agreed that all the listed items are the challenges associated with assessment among early childhood pupils in Awka education authority. All the item statements with the exception of item number 14, scored up to the acceptable mean of 2.50 or above. These items include; Most of the teachers and caregivers working in early childhood education are not professionals in early childhood education discipline, young children can be easily distracted during testing situations, teachers do not have sufficient quality tools for assessing pupils, Teachers might be biased while assessing children, Some teachers are very poor in safe keeping of their assessment records, schools lack adequate infrastructures that will assist in storage of pupils' assessed records, pupils are assessed with developmentally inappropriate assessment tools, teachers do not observe ethical considerations while assessing pupils, language barriers affects assessment especially in schools that either the pupils or teachers are not locals of the community where the school is situated, and Wrong interpretation of data by teacher poses a great challenge to the assessment of pupils.

Discussion

The findings in this study identified the uses of assessment in early childhood education to be; screening of developmental delays in children, monitoring of pupils' progress, informs instruction, teachers rely on assessment for information on program evaluation, enhancing learning experience of pupils, assists teachers to tailor instructional strategies to needs effectively, helps educators to ascertain whether the educational objectives have been achieved, among others. This finding is in consonance with Uzosike (2018), who concord to this by stating that, assessment is an essential part of instruction, because it ascertains whether or not

the objectives of education have been achieved. Amoah, Dzakadzie and Agbayisah (2022), also supported this notion by stating that assessment and evaluation in early childhood education serve as indispensable tools for understanding and enhancing the learning experiences of young children.

Moreso, Ntuli, Nyarambi and Traore 2014, in support of this view strongly noted that; assessment in early childhood education serves different purposes. The most valued purposes of assessment in early childhood education include the following: to monitor child development and learning, to guide curriculum planning and decision making, to identify children who may have special needs and to report and communicate with others (e.g., parents, interventionists, and other stakeholders). Effective utilization of assessment in early childhood education, eliminates difficulty that will be encountered or hinder the planning of a successful learning programmes that meet individual children's needs within the different developmental domains.

Findings further showed the challenges associated with assessment among early childhood pupils in Awka Education Authority to be; most of teachers and caregivers working in early childhood education are not professionals in early childhood education discipline, young children can be easily distracted during testing situations, teachers do not have sufficient quality tools for assessing pupils, Teachers might be biased while assessing children, Some teachers are very poor in safe keeping of their assessment records, schools lack adequate infrastructures that will assist in storage of pupils' assessed records, pupils are assessed with developmentally inappropriate assessment tools, teachers do not observe ethical considerations while assessing pupils, language barriers affects assessment especially in schools that either the pupils or teachers are not locals of the community, among others. The findings of Adewusi, Hammad, Adeleke, Nwankwo and Nwokocha (2023), gave support to this finding by enumerating bias and fairness as part of the major challenges of assessment among early childhood pupils.

Furthermore, in concurrence to this finding, Norazly, Muhammad, and Afina (2021), stated that Limited knowledge and skills in the field of early childhood education among educators of early childhood pupils stand as a big challenge in the assessment of early childhood pupils. They further explained by stating that; to assess, the educator must understand the concept of child development, fathom the milestones of children, and master the appropriate and significant practice to correspond to the development and needs of pupils. The essence of this is to ensure that the assessment process is executed accordingly, and the findings are reliable. Looking at what is obtainable in the Nigerian practice of early childhood education, most of the caregivers working in early childhood education centers are not professionals. They lack the prerequisite training and skills needed in training and educating pupils. This is where the unprofessionalism in assessment of pupils emanates from. Similarly, to this finding, Melaku and Tadesse (2019), observed that teachers do not follow the ethical principles and the national ECCE curriculum principles governing childhood assessment practices in line with developmentally appropriate practices. Consequently, this has resulted in misappropriation of assessment on pupils and as such its effect resulted in poor curriculum implementation and alignment in the education of early childhood pupils.

Conclusion

Assessment is an integral component of education. It is an inseparable phenomenon as far as, teaching and learning is concerned. Assessment of early childhood education pupils, should be made a top priority in the administration of schools, ensuring that it follows the ethical principles, guidelines, and age-appropriate for the pupils. It is only effective and appropriate assessment that can help teachers, policy makers, curriculum planners and headteachers to make proper decision as regards the development and learning of pupils. If a wrong assessment information is used to make decision for pupils' learning and development, it will result to a negative effect in the lives of growing children.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made;

1. Only qualified professionals of early childhood education discipline should be employed to teach pupils in early childhood education level.
2. Pupils should be assessed with developmentally appropriate assessment tools.
3. Teachers should be encouraged to observe ethical principles in the conduct of assessing pupils in early childhood education.
4. Government should erect adequate infrastructures to enable teachers store and easily retrieve assessment records.
5. Government should provide adequate funding that will help in making assessment tools available for teachers.

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