

The Status of Early Childhood Care and Development in Aboadze-Aboazi Township, Ghana

Ekua Tawia Asemanyi & Vinolia Dzadzo Wunku
Dept. of Psychology & Education,
University of Education, Winneba, Ghana

Abstract

This study aimed at finding out the quality of Early Childhood Care and Development in Aboadze/Abuesi Kindergarten Schools in the Shama Ahanta East Metropolis. The instruments used to collect information included questionnaires, interviews, and observation. The results revealed that about 60% of pupils of school going age were not in school, but spent their days along the coast. This is due to poverty and ignorance, the unavailability of facilities to promote quality childhood care, government's and community's poor involvement in preschool education and lack of training of the Kindergarten teachers.

Keywords: Early Childhood Care and Development, Early Childhood Care Education, Pre-School.

Introduction

Early programmers for the care and education of young children started in the middle of the 1940's. Before the first nursery unit was established by the Ministry of Education, Private and Voluntary Organizations, the Department of Social Welfare and Community development were operating most programmes for the care and education of young children.

The General Assembly of the United Nations in 1989 adopted by consensus, the convention on 'The Rights of the Child'. In 1992, Ghana was the first among sixty-one (61) countries which opened her arms to her children. Ghanaian children were one of those whose rights were recognized. Ghanaian children were expected to receive the highest possible priority of their right. The early advocates of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCD) stressed the physical needs of the child as sleeping, eating, playing and toilet training. With time and knowledge of child development and psychology, the advocates became aware of the social, emotional, intellectual and personality needs of the child.

Early Childhood Care has gone through lots of phases and policy formulation. This ranges from traditional up-keep, where relatives and older siblings care for children at home to being taken to workplaces or farms till the establishment of early Kindergartens by the Basel Missionaries.

The Department of Social Welfare and Community Development at Sekondi initiated the first experiment for organized pre-school programmes in Ghana for the market women and working mothers. (Somuah 2002)

In 1951, the Ghana government made an official policy statement on the need to provide Day Care Centers for preschool children. From this policy statement, the government established six (6) day nurseries in 1975 under the auspices of the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development.

The Education Act of 1961 (Act 87) also charged the local Authorities and government to contribute towards the spiritual, moral, mental and physical development of the child. With the inception of the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE), which started from primary one, the Kindergartens seemed to be dying off. Apart from providing and paying teachers, the whole concept was community based, run mostly by the District Assemblies, Churches, NGOs and individuals. The March 1990 conference on Education for All held in Jomtien, Thailand stated that learning begins at birth and as such early childhood care should be started in every community.

Literature Review

The terminology “Early Childhood Care and Development” was first used in Jomtien Framework for Action (1993). It was realized that placing emphasis on care and development may lead some to think that it has little to do with ‘education’ or ‘learning’. But the point is that, educational systems whether recognized or not are systems of care and should be directed towards promoting the integral development of the child and that ‘Learning and Education’ are embedded in care and development. The United Nations (1989) also defined Early Childhood Care as a range of services that promote a child’s total development through care.

UNICEF Conference in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (1999) described Early Childhood Care and Development as the growing realization and acceptance that the very early years in a child’s life are the most important; being the years that will influence the child’s growth, health and future prospects. Research suggests that significant and critical brain development and development of intelligence occurs before the age of seven (7) particularly during the first three (3) years of life.

Thematic Studies

Support for young children does not merely refer to establishing pre-schools or infant classes but it refers to all the activities and interventions that address the needs and rights of young children and help to strengthen the contexts, which include the family, the community, physical, social and economic environment. Brewer (1998) stated that development means the gradual change in a child’s physical, mental and emotional state viewed together as a whole. Development occurs continuously following recognized patterns, although having some

variations according to cultural influences and individual physique. Article 5 of Jomtien declaration affirmed that all young children must be nurtured in safe and caring environment that allow them to learn.

Davis, (UNICEF, 1999) stated that ECCD comprises all the essential supports a young child needs to survive and thrive in life as well as the support a family and community needs to promote children’s health development, nutrition and intellectual stimulation. The Dzobo Committee Report (1974) made provision for Early Childhood Care and Development. The report pointed out that ‘before beginning formal education every child should have between eighteen (18) to twenty-four (24) months of preparation and predisposition from ages four (4) to six (6) years. In order to ensure the effective implementation of this proposal, the Ghana Education Service established a pre-school Education Unit to supervise, provide guidance and regulations as well as professional guidance to the activities of pre-school centers.

The Education Review Committee under the Chairmanship of Professor AnamuahMensah discussing the topic ‘Challenges of Education in the Twenty First Century’, recommended that Kindergarten 1 and 2 should be made part of the formal education system. Every primary school should have a kindergarten attached to it. More teachers are to be trained for the Kindergartens. The kindergartens are to be under the Ministry of Education and be covered by policy formulation for the pre-tertiary education sector. Statistics from the 2000 population census as indicated in Table 1 depicts that there are 1,097,656 children within age 4 - 5 years out of which 672,842 are in pre-schools (both private and public leaving a total of 424,814 representing 38.7% outside the pre-school system.) (Source: GES 1999/2000).

Table 1: Distribution of Kindergarten Enrolment by Regions (Private/Public) 1999/2000

Region	Total Enrolment	Population Age 4 -5 years	Percentage Outside Kindergarten
Western	94,282	115,059	29.4
Volta	58,745	92,586	36.6
Northern	51,950	137,854	63.3
Greater Accra	72,982	122,830	40.6
Eastern	84,566	120,717	29.1
Central	69,871	97,716	28.5
Brong Ahafo	77,820	110,194	29.4
Ashanti	130,983	200,501	34.7
Upper West	10,833	38,625	71.9
Upper East	20,810	61,574	66.2
National	672,842	1,097,656	38.7

Teachers

Taking the 2000 population census figures, there are 6,762 trained pre-school teachers representing 18.5% of the total number of trained teachers required. The Census figures further revealed that there were 19,868 attendants. With this and a maximum class size of 30 pupils per trained teacher and an attendant, an additional 30,226 trained teachers and 16,720 attendants will be required to satisfy the requirement of teachers. Early Childhood Care Education provides opportunities for children's exploration and active learning as well as providing social and emotional care and nurturing child's needs in order to realize his/her human potential and active role in families and later in the communities. (Web [http:// smhp.psych.](http://smhp.psych.))

Research revealed that 50% of the total intellectual development of an individual is attained by age four; Early Childhood Care Education provides an educational situation less formal than the rest of the Basic School in which the child's creative play instincts are well organized constructively.

The need for proper feeding and physical development

Early Childhood Care and Development (2000) assessment proved that while some countries have seen the importance of health and nutritional status of children, many others have concentrated on educational improvements, leaving health and nutrition aside and this has led to high levels of undernourishment and vitamin deficiencies. There is therefore the need to promote the health and nutrition needs of the Early Childhood Care Education Programmes to improve the well being of the child.

There is the need to help the child to use his/her body effectively by the provision of good food, place of sleep and play, good ventilation, personal hygiene and giving regular medical attention. A pre-school classroom temperature must be normal with good ventilation. . The child who is denied adequate amount of fresh air and water is always tense, unadjusted and sick resulting in inability to perform activities effectively.

The Need for Play and Exercise

Play helps the development of manipulative skills, discovery, imaginative art, reasoning and thought of children. Children therefore need plenty opportunity for play and exercise which help them to grow healthier and more intelligent. Children discover and learn many things through play. The pre-school child is at a rapid stage of development; the large muscles develop rapidly and they therefore need exercises. The child is active in running, jumping, climbing, and noise making.

Children easily imitate teachers and parents. Play and learning are intertwined so that one becomes a companion of the other. Materials in forms found in nature such as spheres, cubes, cylinders, squares, triangle and lines which help children to explore nature, are classified by Froebel as 'gifts'. A good pre-school program should therefore offer a variety of exercises for the child.

Birch (1970) in his book 'How Children Begin to learn' draws attention to the fact that anyone who has ever watched a child play has wondered what goes on in his/her mind. This confirms the fact that the best way by which pupils learn is through play.

The Need for Rest and Sleep

School days for the pre-school child should be planned to allow enough rest and sleep as well as movement, as weak and tired children cannot concentrate. Parents and teachers should therefore see to it that children have enough sleep and rest in a quiet decent sleeping environment.

The Need for Elimination of Waste Products

Meisels and Jack, the regular elimination of waste products from the body, for example, toilet and urine are important biological needs. Children, who have irregular habits suffer from constipation and are often irritable, physically ill and dull with their class work. Preschools without the necessary facilities cause children to hold back waste products resulting in serious health hazards.

The Need For Clean Environment

AT The 25th WEDC Conference in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (1999) on the topic sanitation in Early Childhood Care and Development, Colin Davis, UNICEF stated that "The Care in ECCD basically refers to the set of practices and actions that affects a child's development, growth and survival. Good care in the early years will not only protect the child from physical and mental harm but will contribute to social well being. A good environment for the early years of the child include provision of safe drinking water, adequate sanitation and waste disposal system, avoidance of food contamination and strife to be relatively disease free. A good environment protects the child from injury and allows space for exploration and learning.

The Need for Health Care

There is no doubt that sanitation is at the heart of human dignity and is essential. Along with safe water supply and hygiene, good sanitation prevents about one quarter of all preventable deaths among children every year. Access to sanitation in schools, promoting hand washing with soap is to be encouraged in all schools. There is also the need to ensure that children are immunized against the six childhood killer diseases (measles, tetanus, tuberculosis, diphtheria, poliomyelitis and whooping cough). The Anamuah Mensah Committee Report (2002) recommended that admission to pre- schools should be open to all children including the physically challenged. Quality early childhood education can only be ensured if records like health cards and birth certificates are presented before admission.

Quality Early Childhood Care and Development

Bennett (1980) draws attention to the fact that emphasis should be placed on the physical environment of the school and how children interact with it. Some other characteristics are teacher-pupil ratio, adequate group size and the structural quality at Early Childhood Centers

like playing materials, teaching and learning materials, space and competent teachers. The physical organization of space therefore makes a difference.

Transition from Home to School

Parental support and education should help young children not only to survive and grow but also to develop their full potentials. The transition from home to school is almost as difficult for parents as well as children. The closeness and warmth of parents assist children to live in an atmosphere of peace, comfort and psychological safety. Children therefore feel unsecured, lonely, afraid and uncertain when separated from their parents. Kraus (1973) states that, children who were most explosive about entering school, made as good or better adjustment to school at the long run as those who showed no fear or anxiety. This suggests that children who appear to be very upset about beginning preschool may be more anxious than those who appear to be calm. Teachers should therefore note that some children are more ready to express their feeling than others.

School-community Relationship

Musaazi (1982) stated that 'A traditional Community' is a group of people living in the same place with common values and history, bound together by multiple economic, social, religious and kinship ties.

Writing also on the importance of school community relations, Leslie et al (1990 pg 14) sum up the importance of school-community as follows: Members of the community get to know the school at first hand. They are able to raise questions, obtain information, express ideas, consider proposals and take actions on pressing issues. Through this involvement they become part of the decision making process. Involvement of the community members ensures a better understanding of the type of school needed. It helps to bring increased use of community resources in educational programmes; these ensure integration of school and community relations.

Through school committees, Parents Teacher Association (P.T.A) open days, Graduation ceremonies and speech and Prize Giving Days, members of the community interact with pre-school children. The community tells the pupils stories, teach them cultural activities and the children on the other hand exhibit their work and perform some of the school activities to members of the community.

Statement of Problem

Relatively, few children in Ghana have access to quality pre-school education. It has also been established that only 10% of children aged zero to six years enjoy pre-school education. There is also a general agreement that Nursery Education should cater for the needs of the child physically, socially, morally and intellectually but little is known about how the needs of the child is met. According to data from the Ministry of Education dated 1990, it has been established in Ghana that 10% of children aged zero to six years enjoy pre-school. At the regional level there were variations in the enrolment figures.

Ashanti region had the highest figure of 662 followed by Western region while the worst off regions were Northern (91), Upper East (14), and Central (205). A survey on preschool services in Ghana by the National Commission on Children in 1984 found that about 90% of the staff of pre schools did not have proper academic qualification. Other problems include overcrowding, lack of proper health care and lack of playing and teaching facilities. It also suffers administrative supervision. Furthermore most mothers see preschools as places to keep their children as they go to work so the establishment of most of these schools especially the private ones are just for monetary gains while the actual needs of the child are not catered for.

This phenomenon could be attributed to a number of factors some of which include ignorance on the part of parents, lack of qualified teachers, Government policies on education, poor parental attitude towards pre-school education and structural quality of the early childhood centers. The question therefore is, what is the status of Early Childhood Care and Development in the Aboadze/ Abuesi locality.

Research Questions

1. What is the status of Early Childhood Care in the Aboadze/ Abuesi Locality?
2. What is attitude of parents in the Aboadze/ Abuesi locality towards pre-school education?
3. What is the qualification of pre-school teachers in the Aboadze/Abuesi Locality?

Methodology

The study was aimed at finding out the quality of early childhood education at Aboadzi/ Abuesi in the Shama-Ahanta East Metropolis. The researcher employed the descriptive survey type of study. The population consisted of all the Kindergarten schools in Aboadze/ Abuesi locality.

The researcher used pupils in Methodist Kindergarten 1 and 2, three (3) teachers, two (2) attendants, the headmistress and ten (10) parents as the respondents. These were selected using purposive random sampling technique.

Research Instrument and Instrumentation

The researcher used questionnaire in collecting data for the study. The questionnaire was made up of twenty-five (25). Samples of the questionnaire were given to colleagues to complete. This helped the researcher to make the necessary corrections and to validate the items. Observation and interviews were also used as a means of collecting data for the study.

The data collected from the questionnaires, interviews and observations were coded and analyzed using statistical tables and percentages.

Research Findings**Table 2: Why do parents send their children to school? Reasons for not sending: children to Dre-school**

Reasons Given By Parents	Number of Parents	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Need Child's Help To Work	4	4	40
Ignorance	1	1	10
Due To Poverty	5	5	50
Not important	0	0	Nil
Total	10	10	100

Table 2 indicates that four (4) parents, 40% need the assistance of the child to do fishing, five (5) parents representing 50% did not send their children to kindergarten because of poverty, one (1) due to ignorance and nobody sees it as not being important.

Table 3: Why do Teachers teach pupils? Reasons for Teaching: PUDii

Reasons	Number of Teachers	Percentages (%)
Interesting Work	1	16.7
Liking For Teaching	2	33.3
Love To Work With Children	3	50
Salary	Nil	0
Total	6	100

Three (3) teachers representing 50% indicated their love to work with children, 33.3% liked teaching while 16.7% saw it as an interesting work.

Table 4: Is the class size manageable for teachers? Class Size

Class	Number on Roll	Teacher	Attendant
Kindergarten 1a	63	1	1
Kindergarten 1b	62	1	1
Kindergarten 2	60	1	1
Total	185	3	3

There were one hundred and eighty-five (185) children in all the classes; KG 1 was divided into two KG 1A and KG 1B. KG2 is only one class with a teacher and an attendant in each of the classes.

Table 5: What is the adult-child ratio in your school? Adult-Child Ratio

Class	Number of Adults	Number of Children	Ratio
Kindergarten 1 A	2	63	1 : 32
Kindergarten 1 B	2	62	1 : 31
Kindergarten 2	2	60	1 : 30
Total	6	185	1 : 31

The adult-child ratio in KG 1A was 1:32, in KG 1B is 1:31 and that of KG2 was 1:30. This gives an average ratio of 1 :31 for the school, which means each adult takes care of thirty-one (31) children.

Table 6: Does the school have enough equipment for outdoor games? Equipment for outdoor games

Items	Number	Appropriate	Inappropriate
Balls	6		✓
Hoops	0		✓
Car tyres	0		✓
Seed bags	12	✓	
Seesaws	0		✓
Cumbers	0		✓
Merry-o-round	0		✓
Skipping ropes	2		✓

The school had six (6) balls, twelve (12) seed bags and two (2) skipping ropes. They had no car tyres, hoops, seesaws climbers or merry-go-round. These the headteacher said were not available and even if they are, there is no space for the children to use them.

Table 7: Are there enough equipment for indoor games? E u i ment For Indoor Games

Items	Number	Appropriate	Inappropriate
Tops	0		✓
Ji saw Puzzles	4		✓
Bottle tops	300	✓	
Dolls	12	✓	
San tray	0		✓

Table 7 shows that there were four (4) jigsaw puzzles and twelve (12) dolls for the school. There were about three hundred (300) bottle tops, which the KG 2 pupils used during lessons.

Table 8: Are there other facilities in the school? Other facilities

Facilities	Number	Sufficient	Insufficient
Drinking Cups	50	✓	✓
Hand Washing Basin	1		✓
Towels	2		✓
Buckets	3		✓
Mats	2		✓
First Aid Box	0		✓

The school had fifty (50) small cups for drinking water, two (2) plastic containers with lids for storing water. One (1) handwashing basin. Two (2) mats and two (2) towels. On the whole the facilities were insufficient for a school of one hundred and eighty-five children.

Compound

The school had no compound and is sited right in the center of the town with virtually no playing ground as the whole compound is crowded with individual houses and mud ovens for smoking fish.

Classroom

The sizes of the classrooms were inappropriate for the number of children in the classroom, which does not allow easy movement.

Teaching Learning Materials

There were few teaching and learning aids displayed in the classroom. There were few

packets of picture cards, watercolours and crayons. On the whole the classroom environment did not look attractive.

Teacher-Pupil Interaction

The pupil-pupil interaction was very good. Even though there were no materials for play, pupils organized themselves in groups to play. Teacher-pupil interaction was also very good. Pupils consulted teachers anytime they needed help.

Ventilation

Ventilation generally was poor. The smoke from the mud ovens around entered the classrooms and the whole environment was rowdy, noisy and filled with smoke.

School Fees

Pupils paid ~6,000.0 as school fees, out of which an imprest was given to the school by Ghana Education Service.

Medium of Instruction

The medium of instruction was both Fante and English. The Fante was generally used alongside English for simple instructions. Teachers used gestures, songs and rhymes intermittently to break boredom during lessons.

Rest

The school had only two (2) mats, which made it difficult for pupils to observe rest hours though it was stated on the time-table. Pupils sat down and rested their heads on the tables. This was observed to have negative effects on children's health. And is likely to cause pupils to have neck and back pains that could result in bad postures later in life.

Personal Care and Everyday Activities

The researcher found out that there was only one (1) hand-washing basin, which pupils scarcely used. Fifty (50) small cups for drinking water and three (3) plastic containers for storing water were found.

Toilet facilities

There were neither toilets nor urinals. This makes the sanitation condition very dangerous. Pupils urinate around the classroom indiscriminately and go to toilet at the coast as the school is very close to the sea. This the researcher found to be very dangerous.

Conclusion

The findings of the research revealed that most parents refused to send their children to pre-school due to poverty and ignorance. The needed facilities in the pre-schools were either non-available or inadequate. Another factor is that most communities were not involved in the pre-schools. There is also lack of in-service training, incentives and effective supervision in the pre-schools. From the government's white paper on Education reform review, the

decision is that Kindergarten education should progressively become part of the universal free and compulsory basic education structure. Modalities for the realization of this objective by the year 2015 are to be worked out. This includes the co-operation of Government with the private sector' in the provision of Kindergarten Education.

- training of kindergarten teachers; this should start with the untrained teachers in the system.
- teachers should be trained to be able to identify disabilities for early and appropriate intervention. Periodic eye and ear tests should be carried out on pupils.

(Source: White Paper Report On Education Reform Review)

Recommendations

Generally, one can realize that the quality of early childhood centers studied did not satisfy most of the important requirements for a quality center. The government as stated in the white paper should participate fully in the pre-school education as it plays a crucial role in the formative years of the child by financing early childhood care and development especially in the rural settings. Care givers' knowledge of child development is very important and therefore all public and private proprietors of kindergarten/nursery schools should do well to recruit trained teachers to assist the attendants and regular in-service training should be organized for teachers for quality care of these young ones. The Ghana Education Service should intensify supervision in preschools.

In view of the fact that no single government can fully finance quality education in a country, it is important the communities are involved in the planning and implementing educational programmes. Communities should be sensitized to realize the importance of pre-schools and should therefore help to organize and provide the school with the necessary equipments.

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