

# **Impact of Training on Caregivers' Skills in Designing, Usage of Individually and Age Appropriate Assessment Tools for Early Years in Eti-osa Local Government Area, Lagos State, Nigeria**

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## **Abstract**

*This study examined impact of training on caregivers' skills in designing, usage of individually and age appropriate assessment tools for early years in Eti-osa Local government area, Lagos State, Nigeria. The study adopted descriptive survey and non-experimental impact evaluation designs. Study population and sample covered all the 60 ECCDE caregivers in Eti-osa, Local Government Education Authority (LGEA), purposively selected and officially authorised to participate in the training. Research instruments used for the study were Capacity Programmes' Assessment Questionnaire (CPAQ), Pre and Post-training Evaluation Tests (PPTET) and Individual and Age Appropriate Assessment Tools (IAAAT) Manual used for the training. The Internal consistency of research instruments were determined using Cronbach's Alpha which yielded co-efficient of 0.85, 0.81, 0.79 and 0.83 respectively, indicating good internal consistency. Data collected were analysed using simple percentages, interview schedule (IS) and paired sample t-Test. Hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance. The interviews were analysed using the thematic approach. The study found among others that; participants rated the effectiveness of the existing provisions for caregivers' training on designing individual and age appropriate performance-based assessment tools in the study area very low; exposure to IAAAT training manual had a positive significant effect on the skills of the participants in designing and usage of performance-based assessment tools [ $t\text{-Cal}=7.21 > t\text{-Crt}=2.23$ ]. The study concluded that improving caregivers' competencies in designing and usage of individual and age appropriate assessment tools requires adequate exposure to regular training guided by focused training manuals. Based on the findings, the study recommended among others; a comprehensive examination of the effectiveness of the existing provisions for training ECCDE caregivers in the study area; regular exposure of caregivers to training programmes that focus on designing and usage of performance-based assessment tools.*

**Keywords:** Assessment, Age Appropriate, Assessment, Caregivers, Individually appropriate Assessment Tools

## **Introduction**

Each child is an individual; each child brings a different history, a different way of development, a different way of responding to phenomenon, a different style of learning and a different dream for the future. Therefore, for

caregivers to appropriately cater for individual needs and respect every child's uniqueness, he/she required to be skilful in designing diversified assessment tools for measuring all domains of development and learning in early years. Recognizing and respecting each child as a unique individual with his/her strengths, interests, and learning styles is imperative for caregivers. Therefore, regular assessment of children's development to understand their progress, preferences, and areas where they may need additional support is crucial and can be appropriately carried out by trained caregivers skilled in designing, selecting and implementing assessment instruments suitable for measuring across all domains of development. Typically, developmental areas comprise but not limited to academic skills-reading, writing, drawing and number work; arts and creative expressions; cognitive-intellectual development; concept acquisition- concepts of time, colour, size; emotional development- self-confidence, self-esteem; language skills – oral development, reading and vocabulary; motor skills – fine and large muscles; sensory awareness; sensory motor skills- visual and auditory training; social-interpersonal skills – cooperation and obeying rules; verbalizing feeling (Fowowe&Usmann-Abdulqadri, 2019).

Individual appropriate practices in the field of early childhood education are conceptualized as range of strategies and approaches that are tailored to meet the unique needs of each child. Individuality of children in development and learning can never be compromised. Uniqueness of children is denied when assessment of their development and learning progress is done against one another (NRC, 2008). Research findings have revealed that early years' caregivers are ignorant of various assessment tools and procedures appropriate for holistic assessment which has resulted to only traditional paper-pencil assessment method for assessing only the cognitive domain at the expense of other domains (Yusuf &Alabi, 2021). However, the broad goal of early childhood care development and education in Nigeria can be best achieved through individually appropriate assessment carried out by professionally skilled caregivers (Usman-Abdulqadri, 2023). This is why, regular professional development of caregivers in designing age and individually appropriate assessment tools for early years is crucial to equip them to stay current with best practices in performance-based assessment strategies. This is in line with the fact that, current approaches in the field of early childhood education advocate for authentic assessment measures that reflect real-life activities and interactions. There is a shift towards integrating various assessment tools and frameworks to provide a comprehensive evaluation of a child's development (NAEYC, 2023).

Considering the peculiarity of early years across the globe, child assessment needs to expand its scope to adequately equip childcare practitioners to appropriately respond to the emergent paradigms in the field. The National Association for the Education of Young Children, (NAEYC) rightly noted that an early childhood professional, working with young children is a decision-maker that makes many decisions about the children in their programmes daily. Understanding individually Appropriate Practices (IAP) is critical in guiding the decisions practitioners make for young children (NAEYC, 2009). Developing the skills to make good decisions for children relies on building knowledge about individual children and child development principles combined with adequate knowledge of effective collecting and recording observational data using individually appropriate tools Thus, responding appropriately to the changing context of child care development and learning necessitates improving early childhood caregivers' skills in designing age and individually appropriate assessment tools (Ige, 2020; Ige&Usman-Abdulqadri 2022).

But while there have been series of efforts on the part of government and private organizations as well as individuals to improve caregivers' skills through in-service training programmes in the general area of practice (Ige&Omotuyole, 2015), one of the major challenges in this area is the extent to which the training aligns with the dynamism of individually appropriate child assessments in the global contexts. The challenge becomes even more daunting in the light of the large quantum of barely trained, largely unskilled caregivers operating in early childcare institutions across the state (Usman-Abdulqadri, 2023).

Studies that focused on training programmes reported that many early years caregivers in Nigeria receive inadequate training on child assessment techniques. The training programs often lack depth and fail to cover essential aspects of assessment quality comprehensively. The inadequacy in these training of caregivers in assessment is not unconnected with lack of standardized curriculum (Obiweluo&Nwanekezi, 2020). According to Okoro&Osuji, 2020, there is a lack of a standardized curriculum for the training of early years'caregivers, leading to inconsistencies in the quality and content of training programmes across different

areas and institutions. Limited practical experience has also been observed as a gap in the previous training of caregivers. Ajayi and Kuku, (2021) reported that, training programs often emphasize theoretical knowledge over practical skills. Caregivers do not get enough hands-on experience with real-life assessment scenarios, which is crucial for effective child assessment. A systematic review of studies centered on training of caregivers indicated that, continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities for early years' caregivers are limited. This leads to outdated knowledge and practices in child assessment, as caregivers are not regularly updated on new assessment tools and methods. Lack of continuous professional development on designing age and individual appropriate assessment tools pushed caregivers to employ only traditional paper-pencil form of assessment despite all its weaknesses (Pamela, 2013 cited in Hafees, Olumuyiwa & Usman-Abdulqadri, 2022).

However, despite the crucial need for preschoolers to be assessed holistically to inform instructional strategies, learn about each child's readiness, interests and learning preference by professionally skilled caregivers in modern assessment strategies, many studies have observed inadequacies of caregivers' in-service training programmes. Attention has been drawn to the quality and scope of training manuals that were used to train early childhood caregivers. A content review of these manuals reveals that the training manuals tend to use a formal approach that allows little or no participation from participants; present content that focuses mainly on engaging participants in responding to questionnaire items underplaying skills in designing age and individually appropriate assessment tools in contemporary early child care development and education (Ige, Usman-Abdulqadri, Salami, & Ogunleye, 2020).

The apparent deficiency of the existing training programme and specific manuals tailored to age and individual appropriate assessment suggests a disconnection with the modern realities of contemporary child holistic assessment in the study area (Usman-Abdulqadri, 2023). This is a disturbing situation, especially viewed against the background that a sizable number of caregivers working in preschool institutions in the study area are without the requisite professional preparations (Ige and Omotuyole, 2015; Ige, Usman-Abdulqadri, Salami & Ogunleye, 2020), as a result of which they are also mostly deficient in skills in designing age and individual appropriate assessment tools. While there have been efforts by the Lagos State Universal Basic Education Board (LASUBEB) to ameliorate this problem through capacity development programmes organised for teachers in the state, one major area of concern has been how these training programmes have impacted caregivers' skills in the area of designing individual and age appropriate assessment tools for early years' holistic assessment. These categories of caregivers, who were neither specially prepared prior to their entry into the service nor equipped with the requisite skills through effective in-service training programmes, might not be competent enough to design age and individually appropriate assessment tools in order to assess children's developmental and learning progress with suitable techniques and relevant modern assessment tools.

This background of identified inadequacies provides a justification for the development, validation, and subsequent deployment of the individual and age appropriate assessment tool (IAAAT) manual and a focused in-service training on emphasizing the what, and how caregivers can appropriately assess children's developmental and learning progress. This is one premise which justifies research of this nature to examine the impact of training on caregivers' skills in designing age and individually appropriate assessment tools for early years in the study area with a view to determining its effectiveness.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The study aimed at examining impact of training on caregivers' skills in designing usage of individually and age appropriate assessment tools for early years in Eti-osa Local government area, Lagos State, Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives of the study are to:

- investigate how caregivers view effectiveness of antecedent training on assessment in early child care development and learning in Eti-osa Local government area;
- assess how the training on individual and age appropriate assessment impact caregivers' skills in designing and using performance-based assessment tools in preschool settings in the study area.

### **Research Questions**

- How do caregivers assess effectiveness of antecedent training on assessment in early child care development and learning in Eti-osa Local government area?
- How would the training on individual and age appropriate assessment impact caregivers'

skills in designing and using individual and age appropriate assessment tools in preschool settings in the study area?

### *Hypothesis*

This hypothesis was tested in the study:

- Exposure to the training does not significantly improve caregivers' skills in the design and usage of individually and age appropriate assessment tools in Eti-osa LGA.

### **Methodology**

This study adopted a combination of the descriptive survey and non-experimental impact evaluation designs. The rationale for survey design is its efficacy to describe the frequency distribution of certain characteristics of a population as well as eliciting the opinions of respondents in a study. The appropriateness of the non-experimental impact design is justified on the basis that the outcomes for groups of participants are measured before and after an intervention and an assessment of impact is inferred from the differences (Bell, Bell, & Scanlon, 1979, in Ige, 2011). This design is often used to assess whether the knowledge and skills of the group changed after exposure to a classroom curriculum or job training programme. The population and sample for the study comprised all 60 ECCDE caregivers in Eti-osa Local Government Education Authority (LGEA) in Lagos State. Adopting purposive sampling technique. This technique was most appropriate for the officially recommended caregivers by the Local Government Education Authority (LGEA) to participate in the training. Research instruments used for the study were: Capacity Programmes' Assessment Questionnaire (CPAQ), this is a researcher-designed instrument that comprised 5 items which sought the participants' opinions on the training programmes they have participated in, prior to IAAAT training. Pre and Post-training Evaluation Tests (PPTET). This was constructed by the researcher. The pre and post-training tests focused on: caregivers' ability to design and use individual and age appropriate assessment tools. The tests were aimed at finding training needs assessment before participants' exposure to IAAAT training and impact of the training on skills of the participants. Interview Schedule (IS) this instrument consisted of one semi-structured question that assessed participants' opinion on Individual and Age Appropriate Assessment Tool (IAAAT) training programme. Individual and Age Appropriate Assessment Tools (IAAAT) Manual used for the training. This training manual was developed and used to train caregivers towards improving their existing skills, experiences and competency. It comprises samples of assessment tools like: rating scale, anecdotal records, event sample, narrative recording, developmental and behavior checklist. The training manual was adapted from Assessment in Early childhood Education (Wortham, 2008). The reliability values of the instruments were determined using the internal consistency coefficient method. Cronbach Alpha Statistical tool was employed. Good internal consistency Alpha values of 0.85, 0.81, 0.79 and 0.83 were recorded respectively as reliability co-efficient showed that the instruments were reliable. Data collected were analysed using simple percentages, and paired sample t-Test. Hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance. The interviews were analysed using the thematic approach.

### **Results**

#### **Research Question 1:**

How do caregivers perceive effectiveness of antecedent training on assessment in early child care development and learning?



Table 1: Caregivers' perception of antecedent training on assessment in early child care development and learning

	Mode of preparation	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
1	Participation in organised training for the ECCDE caregivers	8 13.3%	6 10%	8 13.3%	38 63.3%
2.	Exposure to knowledge and skill enhancement seminars.	5 8.33%	4 6.67%	6 10%	45 75%
3	Attendance at training on individual differences among children	47 78.33%	13 21.67%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
4.	Participation in workshop on development of individual appropriate assessment tools.	45 75%	15 25%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
5	Exposure to training on usage of appropriate assessment tools.	48 80%	12 20%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%

**Source: Field Survey, 2024**

Analysis of items 1 and 2 shows that majority (63.3%) of the respondents often participated in organised training on ECCDE and 75% have been exposed to knowledge and skill enhancement seminars. Analysis of item 3 suggests that majority (78.33%) of the respondents never attended training on individual differences among children. Item 4 depicts that 75% of the participants never participated in workshop on development of individual appropriate assessment tools. Item 5 indicates that an overwhelming majority (80%) were never trained on usage of appropriate assessment tools.

#### **Research question 2:**

How would the training on individual and age appropriate assessment impact caregivers' skills in designing and using individual and age appropriate assessment tools in preschool settings?

#### **Impact of training on caregivers' skills in designing and usage of individual and age appropriate assessment tools in preschool settings**

The data analysis from caregiver informants (CIs) produced a construct, and a theme and in the framework of analysis as developed for data analysis. The coding of the caregivers' data generated a construct called "Capacity building Programme's Focus". The construct has one theme namely: Skills with Antecedent Professional Preparation. The in-depth discussion on the theme exhibited a comprehensive account of caregivers' perceptions on IAAAT training as it relates to their skills in area of holistic child assessment.

Theme: Designing and using a variety of individual and age appropriate assessment tools

#### **Interview Question: "Has this training improved your skills in designing and using different individual and age appropriate assessment tools in the classroom?"**

Caregiver informants agreed that the capacity building programme has improved their knowledge and skills in designing and using variety of assessment tools and also helped them to recognize the importance of various assessment tools in their interactions with children. Their statements connected to designing and using variety of assessment tools are presented as follows:

"Through this training, I have learnt that assessment isn't limited to mental ability alone children's behaviour can also be assessed".

"I know I have learnt a lot about assessment. Bringing the children into small groups for example would help me in learning various ways in assessing them".

"This training has exposed me to a lot of assessment tools like: anecdotal records, event sampling, portfolios,

checklist and so on which we can use to assess children in our classrooms. Learners can be assessed through reasoning, actions, and so on".

The statements amply reflect caregivers' overwhelming agreement on the impact of the IAAAT training programme on their knowledge and skills in the area of designing appropriate assessment tools. It is clear from the responses that IAAAT training programme made a significant difference in caregivers' knowledge and skills in designing and using variety of assessment tools and also helped them to recognize the importance of various assessment tools in their interactions with children.

**Hypothesis:** Exposure to the IAAAT training manual will not significantly improve caregivers' skills in the design and usage of assessment tools.

#### **IAAAT training and caregivers' skills in design and usage of assessment tools**

t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means

	<i>PRE</i>	<i>POST</i>
Mean	36	61.36
Variance	32.6	67.65
Observations	11	11
Pearson Correlation	-0.38	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Degree of Freedom	10	
	0.05	
t-Calculated	-7.21	
P(T<=t) two -tail	2.89E-05	
t Critical two -tail	2.23	
Remark	Significantly different	
Null Hypothesis result	Rejected	

programmes with precise curriculum and coaching are beneficial. Furthermore, the results corroborated the findings of Franziska, Ruben & Andrea (2018), who found that training, influences both the quality of the teaching process and the growth of children. The study also supported Mustapha-Dokunmu and Morenikeji's (2019) suggestion that in-service caregivers should regularly attend seminars and workshops to be current and prepared to handle the learning demands of children in the twenty-first century.

The strategic role the caregivers play in fostering growth, development and learning, makes it imperative that all those who care for and teach young children should possess a broad synthesis of knowledge and skills that enhance child development and positively influence learning, including assessment. The finding of this study justifies the stand of National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2023), that training caregivers in developmentally appropriate assessment practices is essential. The use of authentic and performance-based assessments is adjudged to capture the holistic development of children. These forms of assessments focus on real-world tasks and children's everyday experiences to provide a more accurate understanding of their development and learning needs.

## Conclusion

The study established that improving caregivers' competencies in designing and usage of individual and age appropriate assessment tools requires adequate exposure to regular training guided by focused training manuals. Furthermore, the training manual: Individual and Age Appropriate Assessment Tools (IAAAT) positively enhanced knowledge and skills of the training participants. It also demonstrated that the training significantly improved participants' skills in designing and utilization of individual and age appropriate assessment tools. The research concludes that improving caregivers' skills to design and utilize appropriate assessment tools in order to assess preschoolers holistically requires adequate exposure to periodic training modalities guided by enriched training manuals that capture a broad range of emergent areas of assessing child development and learning.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- A comprehensive examination of the effectiveness of the existing provisions for training ECCDE caregivers in the study area.
- Caregivers should be constantly exposed to training programmes that focus on holistic assessment of child development and learning.
- There is a need for agencies of governments and other education stakeholders to offer early years' caregivers continuous opportunities for knowledge and skills improvement in development and appropriate usage of variety of assessment tools.
- Head of schools and Proprietors of private schools should also be trained on the need to avoid paper-pencil assessment strategies as the only method of evaluating preschoolers and incorporate performance-based strategies.

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