

Teachers' Perspective of Transforming Teacher Education and Teacher Capacity for the 21st Century Pre-Primary Classrooms in Rivers State

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Abstract

The study investigated teachers' perspective of transforming teacher education and teacher capacity for the 21st century pre-primary classrooms in Rivers State. Two research questions were answered by the study which was a descriptive survey design with a population of 100 pre-primary classroom teachers in Etche, Rivers State. A sample size of 50 pre-primary classroom teachers was drawn using the proportionate stratified random sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a 24-item questionnaire which was validated by three experts and it gave a reliability coefficient of 0.77 which was obtained using Cronbach Alpha method. The data collected were analyzed with mean and standard deviation while the hypothesis was tested with z-test. The results showed that there are needs to be met by education stakeholders that would bring about transformation in the 21st pre-primary classrooms and that there is need for regular capacity building programmes for pre-primary classroom teachers. Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made, pre-primary teachers should be willing and ready to learn whenever opportunity is provided for capacity building to boost their competence, other education stakeholders should partner with institutions to support facilities improvement and upgrade in higher education where pre-primary classroom teachers are train for enhanced output, the government should live up to her promise of being in full quality control, training and retraining of teachers for better pre-primary classroom output in the schools in Rivers State etc.

Keywords: *Transforming teacher education, teacher capacity, pre-primary classroom*

Introduction

Teaching could be construed as a process where one person helps another person to learn. This means that the job of the teacher is that of helping people to learn. Thus, a teacher could be perceived as someone with the prerequisite knowledge and skills needed to help others to learn. Nyatuka (2020) describes a teacher as a person who does facilitation of learning process. Teachers are individuals who promote positive relationships and inspire learners to attain set educational goals and achieve maximum potential in life (UoP, 2024). These definitions are pointing to the fact that the teacher takes the place of a moulder or someone who tends, watch over, nurture and ensures that the right atmosphere is provided for the learner to learn, this presents the job of a teacher as an enormous one since such would involve planning and watching over just like what happens in agriculture in case of a seed that has been planted to grow which must be taken care of till it starts bearing fruit; the teacher is responsible for this and even in teacher education there are no exceptions as the age of the learners does not alienate them from enjoying the tendering responsibilities of the teacher considering that transformation process is required at whatever level of education not minding the depth or width of the transformation needed in order to achieve what is desired.

To transform may mean to bring in change into what is already existent. It may convey as to allow definite and observable changes to be effected in the way something happens. Therefore, transforming teacher education could be related to ensuring profound, observable and significant changes to take place. Transforming teacher education may be basically to change the ways in which teachers in training are made ready for their work in the future in terms of the level of knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, norms and perhaps the mindset they would need to pursue their professional practice in the modern world. Transforming teacher education according to (Biesta, Takayama, Kettle & Heimas, 2023) may represent improvement in terms of the intelligence level of the candidates absorbed for admission into the teacher education programme or improving the practice of teacher education. The above therefore, brings two dimensions to the challenge of transforming teacher education but there are more which may include infrastructure, personnel qualification and competence, operational delivery mode within the system and the extent to which theory is balanced with right processes and practices. All of these do have a place to fit in the issue of transforming teacher education into what would stand for teacher capacity.

The above is affirmed by (FRN, 2016; Bodo, 2023) which say that ‘no nation can rise above her teachers’ and that ‘no fundamental change can happen without teachers in any nation’. The idea here presents a teething situation where it is perceivable that those who can bring about progress and identifiable advancement among a people or community can only do that to the extent to which their teachers have been transformed, are being transformed and would be amenable to transformation opportunities in pursuit of their mandates. It was further asserted that, though, there are policies which push for advancement but that such policies only push teachers to be under pressure in the absence of the adequate paraphernalia of competencies which arise from the transforming experience and exposure they have had which is needed to equip them to fit into the prevailing teaching situation. Thus, teachers are expected to be prepared or have the capacity they need for the delivery of basic literacy and numeracy skills as well as to back learners up to manage their socio-emotional and co-troubling circumstances for effective learning to take place.

Teacher capacity comprises of some definite abilities, skills and expert practice that a teacher is expected to exercise while carrying out the assignment of teaching in the classroom. Teacher capacity can be conceived as the competence of a teacher to analyze, synthesize and apply same known knowledge and skills contextually towards helping a learner to learn. Zhang & Stephens

(2016) say that it is a way a teacher exercises his experience to practical problem solving in response to the nagging questions learners have and ensuring its practical application. As for Tones (2024) it is believed that the teacher needs capacity in the areas of apportioning time and effort to instructional delivery. Hence, the effort is required in planning, engaging learners for activities and for assessment which are considered tremendous pursuits which a teacher must give attention to in a classroom situation. Therefore, it becomes very relevant for the teacher to increase capacity especially such that would lead to transforming practice in order to obtain the desired result at all times and a teacher in this 21st century may achieve that through the drive for professional development, collaboration and networking with others, use of technology, meditation, reflection and adaptation in any context, innovative thinking and application in a social milieu etc. Hence, it becomes imperative to equip teachers with the capacity in cognitive, psychological, and socio-emotional skills required to deal with all levels of education, but particularly with pre-primary education where the pupils are tender and still struggle to determine what they need and what they do not need. Much more importantly, because of the contextual situation the present dynamic world finds herself daily; it becomes of essence that pre-primary education teachers receive such a holistic educational preparation which would enable them to be able to stand the different kinds of rigours they may face as they progress in their daily duties (, emotional, physical, academic and otherwise) dimensions of demand that is placed on them.

Pre-primary education is such that is given to pupils before their entry into primary school. It is the education children receive usually before entering the primary school (FRN, 2016). It usually may include: crèche, the nursery and/or the kindergarten. Here, the government holds the responsibilities of training the teachers, development of required environment, curriculum provision, provision of supervisory and quality control measures whether in public or private schools. Some of the goals that this level of education is set out to achieve are:

- i. Effect a smooth transition from the home to the school.
- ii. Prepare the child for the primary level of education.
- iii. Provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work.
- iv. Inculcate social norms.
- v. Inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys etc.
- vi. Develop a sense of cooperation and team spirit.
- vii. Learn good habits, especially, good health habits; and
- viii. Teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms etc through play.

Furthermore, it was added that it shall be ensured that:

- a. Government ensures that the teaching method is play, thus, shall regulate and control the operation of pre-primary education in Nigeria.
- b. Ensure full participation of government, communities and teachers in its running and maintenance of facilities etc.

Though, these objectives look lofty but they are achievable within the capacity of the teacher that is adequately trained. However, the question is does the current teacher education process have the capacity to equip teachers to take up these responsibilities such that the classroom is amenable to achieve the set goals? This is question is yearning for answer in the 21st century.

The 21st century classroom for pre-primary education is such that is expected to make possible for the learners fundamental knowledge and skills for the day to day living. According to Herry (2016) such classroom must embody personal and social development, language development, mathematical activities, sciences and technology, health and physical activities as well as arts

considering the range of children's life. This is so because these children would be required to communicate using basic literacy, addition and subtraction of numbers and to appreciate life from their art view-points (Soyucuk & Balantekin, 2022). Moreso, it has been encouraged that the 21st century classroom environment should foster:

- a. Creativity
- b. Critical thinking skills
- c. Communication skills
- d. Collaboration.

All of the above factors agree with the goals of pre-primary education as declared by the (FRN, 2016). It was also said that flexibility and adaptability skills which when redefined means contextualization skills and utilization of local resources were advocated as this would end in support for all learners, right lesson planning and conducive learning environment. Again, the question still resurfaces in another dimension as: To what extent do the teachers currently working at pre-primary education level have capacity to achieve the stated mandate and has the government been true to its words on regulating and controlling the quality of education received by pupils at this level? And much more importantly, is to asks, what can be done at transforming the operational practice of this level of education? Hence, the study teachers' perspective of transforming teacher education and teacher capacity building for the 21st century pre-primary classrooms in Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to achieve the following objectives:

1. Determine areas teachers perceive need for transforming teacher education for 21st century pre-primary classrooms in Rivers State.
2. Determine specific areas teachers perceive need for capacity building for the 21st century pre-primary classrooms among NCE and B. Ed holder teachers in Rivers State.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the areas teachers perceive need for transforming teacher education for 21st century pre-primary classrooms in Rivers State?
2. What are the specific areas teachers perceive need for capacity building for the 21st century pre-primary classrooms among NCE and B. Ed holder teachers in Rivers State?

The study was guided by this hypothesis ($P=0.05$)

1. There is no significant difference on the specific areas teachers perceive need for capacity building for the 21st century pre-primary classrooms among NCE and B. Ed holder teachers in Rivers State.

Research Method

The study was carried out in pre-primary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria, particularly, in thirty (30) pre-primary classrooms in Etche. The study adopted descriptive survey design. The population for the study was made up of 100 teachers in pre-primary schools in Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State. The sample size for the study was made up of 50 teachers in pre-primary classrooms in Etche which was drawn using the proportionate stratified random sampling technique. The instrument used by the researchers for data collection was a questionnaire titled: 'Questionnaire on Transforming Teacher Education and Teacher Capacity in Pre-Primary Classrooms in Rivers State (QTTEATCIPPCIRS)' which was constructed by the researchers. It consists of 24-items which were arranged in two sections A and B. Section A contains the biodata, while section B consists of two subgroups on: Areas of need for transforming teacher education and specific areas teachers perceive need for capacity building in pre-primary education in the 21st century in Rivers State. The questionnaire was built on a modified four-point Likert Scale, namely:

Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) and the levels of responses were weighted as 4, 3, 2, 1 respectively.

The instrument was face validated by three experts, one from Measurement and Evaluation Unit, another from Curriculum and Instruction Unit of the Department of Educational Foundations of Prince Abubakar Audu University and the third one from the Department of Early Childhood Education, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt, Rivers State with all being from the Faculty of Education in both institutions. The suggestions given were used in producing the final copy of the instrument. Cronbach alpha was used in calculating the reliability to determine the internal consistency which gave an alpha value of 0.77 which was considered high after it had been administered to 10 pre-primary classroom teachers in Ikwerre LGA of Rivers State and this was administered and collected by the researchers on the spot. The data obtained were analyzed using, mean and standard deviation for answering the research questions while the hypothesis was tested using z-test. Hence, $4+3+2+1=10/4=2.5$. Therefore, items whose mean were less than 2.5 were seen as Disagree (D) responses while those whose mean were 2.5 and above were seen as Agree (A) responses. The decision rule on the null hypotheses was to reject the hypothesis with calculated Z-value greater than the critical Z-value but otherwise accept.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the areas teachers perceive need for transforming teacher education for 21st century pre-primary classrooms in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on Areas Teachers Perceive Need for Transforming Teacher Education for the 21st Century Pre-Primary Classroom in Rivers State.

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	N	Remark
1.	Need to provide infrastructure by school owners	3.5	0.55	50	A
2.	Need to hire teachers with high level educational qualification	3.1	0.77	50	A
3.	Need for recruited teachers to possess needed competence	3.3	0.67	50	A
4.	Need for teachers to show capacity in class	2.7	0.48	50	A
5.	Need for teachers to balance	3.3	0.67	50	A

	process and practice in class					
6.	Need for teachers to be able to adopt modern technology in lesson delivery	3.4	0.52	50	A	
7.	Need for teacher to display innovative skills	3.3	0.67	50	A	
8.	Need for teacher to display creativity	2.3	0.48	50	D	
9.	Need for teacher to be able to use internet facilities	3.1	0.77	50	A	
	Grand Mean and SD	3.08	0.62			

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The results on table 1 above indicated that the respondent agreed to all the items as areas were they perceive need for the transforming of teacher education for the 21st century pre-primary classrooms teachers in Rivers State except for item 8 which was disagreed upon with a mean of (2.3). The responses represent a testament to the fact that each of the questionnaire items was needed for transforming of teacher education in the 21st century pre-primary classroom. However, it is vital to note that the affirmation of the results on table 1 for infrastructure is indicative for more to be done by school owners in order to ensure that effective instructional delivery is taking place. While the idea of teacher showing creativity was disagreed on. This may be that the teachers assume they possess the required creativity they need to carry out their responsibilities for now. The grand mean and standard deviation (3.08 and 0.62) showed that more needs to be done in ensuring that teacher education that is tilted towards pre-primary education is built up to compete with those in other parts of the world. The implication is that educational stakeholders beginning with the government, higher institution lecturers, concerned individuals must partner to ensure that the 21st century pre-primary education in Rivers State takes its pride of place.

Research Question 2: What are the specific areas teachers perceive need for capacity building for the 21st century pre-primary classrooms among NCE and B. Ed holder teachers in Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation on Specific Areas Teachers Perceive Need for Capacity Building for the 21st Century Pre-Primary Classroom among NCE and B. Ed Holders Teachers in Rivers State

S/N	Items	NCE Teachers			B. Ed Teachers			N
		Mean	SD	Remark	Mean	SD	Remark	
1.	Capacity building on how to support learners in managing socio-emotional challenges	2.8	1.9	A	2.9	2.21	A	50
2	Capacity building on how to adapt ideas for a contextualized classroom	2.6	1.51	A	3.1	1.7	A	50
3	Capacity building on how to synthesize knowledge based on individual difference	2.6	2.1	A	3.1	2.21	A	50
4	Capacity building on how to apply experiential learning strategy in the class	3.1	1.92	A	2.7	2.92	A	50
5	Capacity building on how to maximize time for teaching bearing their attention span in mind	2.5	2.12	A	2.5	2.12	A	50
6	Capacity building on how to maximize effort adequately in lesson delivery	2.6	1.55	A	2.3	2.03	D	50
7	Capacity building on how to manage flexible classroom environment	2.0	2.45	D	2.7	2.02	D	50
8	Capacity building on how to carry out holistic assessment	3.3	0.67	A	3.2	1.8	A	50
9	Capacity building on how collaborate, network, share knowledge with	2.7	0.48	A	2.6	1.9	A	50

colleagues in other locations					
Grand Mean and Standard Deviation	2.68	1.93		2.78	1.87

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 2 showed the results of the respondents on capacity building questionnaire items for NCE and B. Ed holder teachers in pre-primary education practice in Etche, Rivers State. The results indicated that for NCE teachers, it was agreed that they needed capacity building in all every of the items but one which has to do with capacity building on flexible classroom environment. For the B. Ed holder teachers, there was agreement to the fact that capacity building on how to maximize effort and to build flexible classroom environment were not necessary. Thus, effort should not be wasted in organizing any capacity building training in that area. Nonetheless, NCE holder teacher wants capacity building in these areas in the order stated below: holistic assessment, experiential learning strategy, etc and the last being on how to maximize time bearing the attention span of the learners in mind while the B. Ed holder teachers have greater emphasis on adapting contextualized ideas and synthesis of knowledge to suit the class. From the grand mean result (2.68 and 2.78), it is indicative that that there is a very high level of need for capacity building for the 21st century pre-primary classroom teachers no matter the qualification they hold. The implication is that there is need to do capacity building programme for pre-primary classroom teachers in Etche, Rivers State.

Hypothesis

There is no significant difference on the specific areas teachers perceive need for capacity building for the 21st century pre-primary classrooms among NCE and B. Ed holder teachers in Rivers State.

Table 3: Z-test on the Specific Areas Teachers Perceive Need for Capacity Building for the 21st Century Among NCE and B. Ed Holder Teachers in Rivers State.

Group	Mean	SD	N	df	Z _{calculated}	Z _{critical}	Decision
NCE Teachers	2.68	1.93	23	48	0.36	1.70	Accepted
B. Ed Teachers	2.78	1.87	27				

Source: Field data, 2025.

The result on table 3 showed that Z-calculated of 0.36 is lesser than the Z-critical 1.70 at 0.05 level of significance at 48 degree of freedom indicating that there is no significant difference on perceived need for capacity building for the 21st century pre-primary NCE and B. Ed classroom teachers as both need capacity building for better output. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant difference is accepted.

Discussion of the Findings

The result on table 1 above revealed that there was need to transform teacher education and all the areas identified except one were perceived by the teachers as being an area of need for transformation of the 21st pre-primary classroom teachers in Rivers State. The result showed that there was affirmation for infrastructure improvement which is indicative of need for school owners to bring in more facilities for attaining learning objectives and for effective instructional delivery to take place, need for competence to balance process and practice in the classroom and ability to

use internet followed themselves in that order of output of the analysis. While the idea of teacher showing creativity was disagreed on. This may be because they feel they exercise that ability already in their daily practices but there is need for improvement always. This result was confirmed by the study done by (Wilinski, Nguyem & Landgraf, 2016) who discovered from research that teacher education depends on availability of human and material resources to facilitate and for transforming the implementation of the program otherwise pre-primary education would suffer. Moreso, Hannaway (2021) confirmed in a study that initial professional qualification of the teacher provide adequate opportunities to transform teachers thinking and action to meet contextual needs of the pupils in pre-primary education. Based on these, it must be agreed on that transformation needs are important to effecting the desired change that may be expected in pre-primary education practice. Bourke, Haddara, Loh, Saravanamatto, Bruins and Tucher (2024) affirmed from a study that when teachers are transformed, pre-primary education practice will be transformed. The implication is that all educational stakeholders (government and other partners) must come together to ensure that such needs are met in order for teachers to be transformed and for them to achieve set educational goals.

Next, the result on table 2 indicated that there is need for capacity building for the 21st century pre-primary classroom teachers. The result revealed that for NCE holder teachers, it was responded to that they needed capacity building on every of the items but one which has to do with capacity building on flexible classroom environment. For the B. Ed holder teachers, there was agreement to the fact that capacity building on how to maximize effort and to build flexible classroom environment were not necessary. Hence, effort should not be wasted in organizing any capacity building training in that area. Nonetheless, NCE holder teacher want capacity building in these areas in the order stated below: holistic assessment, experiential learning strategy, ability collaborate, share and network as well as the ability to adapt ideas and the least being on how to maximize time bearing the attention span of the learners in mind while for the B. Ed holder teachers' greater emphasis was on adapting contextualized ideas and synthesis of knowledge to suit the class. However, the hypothesis result affirmed that there is no significant difference between the capacity of NCE and that of B. Ed holder teachers. This result was confirmed by Bourke, Haddara, Loh, Saravanamatto, Bruins and Tucher (2024) who discovered that capacity building is efficacious and brings about transformation in pre-primary education, thus, needed by all teachers. Based on the studies conducted separately by (Ejekwu, 2019; Iwuoha, Mba & Uche, 2024; Etiubon & Apkan, 2017) there was agreement in their findings to indicate that capacity building bring about meaningful efficiency and effectiveness in the work of teachers, leads to transformation in the teachers and the way they practice teaching and that more facilities are needed for the capacity building of teachers in the 21st century pre-primary classrooms in Rivers State.

Conclusion

The conclusion that can be drawn from this study based on the findings is that transformation is possible in teacher education if the resources both human and materials are available and that the available resources should be strengthened with all that is required to represent professional practice. Furthermore, pre-primary classroom teachers in the 21st century should be exposed to regular capacity building as sponsored by the education stakeholders in every respect in order to beef-up their competence and ability to achieve the desired goals of the said level of education.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations supporting this study based on the findings:

1. Pre-primary teachers should be willing and ready to learn whenever opportunity is provided for capacity building to boost their competence.
2. Other education stakeholders should partner with institutions to support facilities improvement and upgrade in higher education where pre-primary classroom teachers are trained for enhanced output.
3. The government should live up to her promise of being in full quality control, training and retraining of teachers for better pre-primary classroom output in the schools in Rivers State.
4. There is need for pre-primary classroom teachers to show creativity in their activities as it would boost the result from the teaching and learning process in the classroom.
5. There is need for teacher educators of B. Ed holder teachers for pre-primary classroom to strengthen what they do with their students in order to make them better teachers.

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