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Head Teacher Leadership Skills for Enhancement of Caregiver Job Performance in Early Childhood Education in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja

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Abstract

The paper focus on head teacher leadership skills for enhancement of caregiver job performance in early childhood education in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The researchers used survey research design for the study. The population of the study was 401 early childhood centre and 1,732 caregivers in early childhood development Centre in Federal Capital Territory Area Council, FCT Abuja. The sample was 39 head teachers and 127 caregivers using proportional sampling techniques. The reliability of the study was done by giving ten (10) respondents the instrument to respond. Test-re-test method of reliability was used to obtain the internal consistency. The reliability index of 0.71 was obtained through Combrash alpha Statistics, mean statistics was used to analyse the research questions. The findings of the study showed that leadership skills such as communication, motivation improves caregivers performance such as(paying close attention to each pupil's emotional needs, in Federal Capital Territory.. From the finding of the study, the researcher recommended that head-teachers should continue to use leadership skills such as communication, motivation and strategic planning to address caregivers challenges so as to improve their performance academically.

Keywords: Head-teacher, Leadership, Skills, Caregivers and Performance.

Introduction

Leadership in early childhood education (ECE) settings is a crucial factor in shaping the overall performance of caregivers, who are directly responsible for the developmental outcomes of young learners. The head teacher, as the school leader, plays a central role in setting the tone, culture, and instructional direction of ECE centers. Their leadership skills — including communication, supervision, motivation, and decision-making — significantly impact caregivers' effectiveness, morale, and commitment to quality early learning experiences (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2017).

Leadership skills are distinctive abilities that define a leader's capacity to guide and direct members of the organization in the direction of the organization's objectives. (Abun, et al., 2017) regarded leadership skills as instruments that the leaders employ to carry out their obligations and duties in order to guide their members. Kapur (2020) believed that leadership skills encompass the instruments, conduct and capacities that leaders ought to possess in order to improve the organizations they serve and the welfare of their employees. They are responsible for the direction and motivation of these employees in the performance of their job responsibilities and the attainment of the organization's goals and objectives. Abun, et al., (2017) postulated that it is essential that a leader has a comprehensive understanding of leadership and management in order to influence caregiver performance.

In recent years, there has been increasing recognition of the importance of quality early childhood education in shaping a child's cognitive, emotional, and social development. Caregivers, who interact with children on a daily basis, are vital in this process. However, their performance is heavily influenced by the leadership style and skills of the head teacher (Heikka & Waniganayake, 2021).

Studies have shown that effective school leadership fosters a positive working environment, improves job satisfaction, and enhances staff performance (Leithwood et al., 2014). In the context of ECE, head teachers are expected not only to manage but also to inspire and support caregivers in their pedagogical and caregiving responsibilities. However, many early childhood centers, especially in developing regions, experience challenges such as inadequate leadership training, lack of professional development for caregivers, and unclear leadership roles (Rodd, 2013). These challenges can lead to low caregiver morale and underperformance, ultimately affecting the quality of education offered to young children. It is essential for head-teacher to have the following leadership skill which include:

Strategic Planning Skills: Abun et al. (2017) defined strategic planning skills as the ability of administrators to formulate strategic direction of their schools in terms of vision, mission, objectives, key result areas, performance indicators and action plan or strategies.

Head Teachers' Developing People Skills: In 2017, Abun et al. clarified that the capacity of administrators to assess the issue of subpar performance and identify the requirements for enhancing employees' job related competencies is one of his/her roles. It is

important to note that mere employment does not guarantee that an individual possesses all the requisite skills and knowledge to perform the job.

Head Teachers' Communication skills: In a school system, communication is a vital tool that can be used by head teacher as skill to manage the affairs of the school. An effective communication involves the transmission and accurate replication of ideas with ensured feedback which elicit actions necessary for goals accomplishment. Doyle, (2022)opined that head teacher require effective communication to facilitate their interpersonal, informational and decision roles. Communication is the process of creating, transmitting and interpreting ideas, facts, opinions and feelings. Communication is the heart of the school as the school is characterized by the transference of knowledge. The head teacher must ensure open and clear communication among individuals in the school. Also he or she must establish a communication channel system in the school through which information would be communicated to the teachers, pupils and parents. He or she must also provide feedback channels that are open whenever they need them. Communication is a very sensitive aspect and its ineffectiveness may have adverse effects on the productivity of teachers. Without effective and frequent communication, it will be difficult to tell whether teachers are effective or not. In a school system, communication is a vital tool that can be used by head teacher as skill to manage the affairs of the school. An effective communication involves the transmission and accurate replication of ideas with ensured feedback which elicit actions necessary for goals accomplishment. Head teacher require effective communication to facilitate their interpersonal, informational and decision roles. Communication is the process of creating, transmitting and interpreting ideas, facts, opinions and feelings. Head **Teachers' Motivating Skills:** Doyle, (2022) Motivation skills are actions or strategies that induce an individual to perform the desired action or provide the desired response. These strategies and actions differ according to three primary determinants: the style of the motivator, the target audience, and the personality of the individual the motivator aims to sway.

Caregiver in early childhood education are the most important resource in the educational system and to a very large extent, they determine the success and failure of education programmes. They help pupils acquire knowledge, skills, attitude, ideas and values appreciated by the society which stimulate peaceful coexistence and economic growth. It is therefore important to ensure that the right calibers of personnel are attracted into the team of staff in the early childhood education centres. This is so because we cannot dispute the fact a wrong administrative foundation sets deterioration to administrative progress. Therefore, for Caregivers 'to perform well, school head must consider first the process of recruitment and selection of staff to teach in early childhood centres. In doing this, candidates with the best abilities, skills and knowledge for the required job(s) should be selected to teach or work in these centres. In all, qualifications can matter in terms of which skill sets and what knowledge are recognized as important for working with young children. Elliott (2016), Sheridan (2019) and Sommer, Pramling and Hundeide (2020), identified skills and staff traits as important qualities that facilitate services and outcomes at this level are- Caregivers' good understanding

of child development and learning; ability to develop children's perspectives; ability to praise, comfort, question and be responsive to children; leadership skills, problem solving and development of targeted lesson plans; and good vocabulary and ability to elicit children's ideas.

Caregivers who are taking the responsibility of standing to care for this little children in the place of their parents ought to be rightly motivated through reward mechanism most especially that which is due to them. This so because, a withdrawer of benefits due to them might affect their psychology in discharging their professional duties. If this is the situation, administrators should also see it and take it a justifiable responsibility to give necessary to these Caregivers'' as deserved. Mbomson (2018) stressed that reward packages are workable provisions, standards or structures that are set in a work place that could increase and sustain the quality of job performance with subsequent increase in quality of productivity and performance respectively. These packages may include financial rewards, fringe benefit, welfare services, promotion, job security as social conditions, opportunities for advancement and recognition, and the work itself. It also includes retirement benefits paid as at when due. Oyetunji (2016) state the component of caregiver performance thus:

Responsive Caregiving in ECED: This is a situation whereby a caregivers notice, understand, and respond appropriately and promptly to a child's cues, needs, and interests. It is one of the foundational pillars of nurturing care, which is essential for optimal early childhood development. Responsive caregiving fosters secure attachments between children and caregivers, which are critical for emotional regulation, language development, cognitive growth, and social competence. When caregivers respond consistently and warmly, children feel safe and valued, which promotes confidence and curiosity. Responsive caregiver do recognizing and interpreting the child's signals (e.g., crying, cooing, reaching), react in a timely and suitable manner that meets the child's needs Britto, Lye and Proulx (2017). A caregiver have to be emotionally present, warm, and affectionate, providing reliable and predictable responses to promote trust and should engaging in back-and-forth interactions (e.g., talking, singing, smiling).

Caregiver Performance in Health and Nutrition in ECED: In early childhood development (ECD), caregivers play a central role in promoting children's health and nutrition. Their performance directly affects children's physical growth, cognitive development, and overall well-being. Health and nutrition-focused caregiving involves feeding practices, hygiene routines, disease prevention, growth monitoring, and timely health interventions. Caregiver should ensure appropriate breastfeeding, complementary feeding, and responsive feeding behaviors, hand washing, clean environment maintenance, food hygiene, safe water use, regular weight and height tracking, early identification of malnutrition, prompt use of health services for immunization, illness management, understanding of balanced diet, micronutrient supplementation, and meal planning.

Caregiver Performance in Safety and Protection in ECED: Caregivers in Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres do play an important role in ensuring children's safety and

protection—a foundational element of quality caregiving. Their performance in this area determines not only the children's immediate well-being but also their emotional security, resilience, and development outcomes. Safety and protection encompass physical safety, emotional security, safeguarding against abuse and neglect, and emergency preparedness. The caregiver ensures continuous monitoring to prevent injuries or unsafe behaviors, maintaining hazard-free classrooms, playgrounds, and sleeping areas, following first aid, emergency response, and sanitation procedures, recognizing and reporting signs of abuse or neglect and Creating an emotionally safe, respectful, and nurturing environment. Caregivers' performance in ensuring safety and protection within ECD centres is a critical determinant of quality early childhood care UNESCO. (2016).

Caregiver Performance in Child Wellbeing and Professionalism in ECED: Child wellbeing in Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres refers to the holistic state of a child's physical health, emotional security, mental stimulation, social relationships, and safety. Caregivers are central to nurturing these dimensions, and their performance significantly influences a child's ability to grow, learn, and thrive. A well-performing caregiver supports not just physical needs, but also social, emotional, and psychological aspects of development.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the recognized importance of leadership in educational settings, there remains a gap in understanding how specific leadership skills of head teachers influence caregivers' performance in early childhood education. In many instances, head teachers are appointed based on teaching experience rather than leadership competence, leading to inconsistencies in supervisory and support functions. This can result in poor communication, inadequate mentoring, and lack of motivation among caregivers. Consequently, caregiver performance suffers, compromising the quality of care and instruction provided to learners. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the influence of head teacher leadership skills and caregiver performance in early childhood education in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine head teacher leadership skills for enhancement of caregiver job performance in early childhood education in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The study sought to:

i. examine the extent head teachers use Communication skills in early childhood development Centre in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.
ii. find out the extent head teachers use motivation skills in early childhood development Centre in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.
iii. find out the level of caregiver performance in early childhood development Centre in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Research Questions

The study is guided with the following research question:

i. What extent do extent of head teachers use of communication skills in early childhood development Centre in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja?
ii. What extent do extent head teachers use of motivation skills in early childhood development Centre in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja?
iii. What is level of caregiver performance in early childhood development Centre in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja?

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised 401 early childhood centre and 1,732 caregivers in early childhood development Centre in Federal Capital Territory Area Council, FCT Abuja. The sample for the study was 39 early childhood Centre, 39 head teachers and 127 caregivers. Proportional random sample technique was used to select the respondents. This was done to avoid bias and ensure that each respondent has equal chance of being selected. A four point rating scale was use for the questionnaire. The instrument was a rating scale of High Extent (HE), Moderate Extent (ME), Low Extent (LE) and Very Low Extent (VLE) and High Level (HL), Moderate Level (ML), Low Level (LL) and Very Low level (VLL). The reliability of this instrument was authenticated by carrying out a pilot study of 2 head-teacher and 8 caregivers who were not part of the sample were given the questionnaire to respond to. Afterwards, Test-re-test method of reliability was used to obtain the internal consistency. The reliability index of 0.76 was obtained through Combrash alpha Statistics, mean statistics was used to analyse the research questions. The mean statistics was used to analyze the research questions which was adjudged by the decision rule from 2.50 and above being agreed, below 2.50 being disagreed. Same parameter was used for the sectional mean to determine the acceptance or the rejection of the research questions.

Data Analysis and Results

Research Question One: What extent do extent of head teachers use of communication skills in early childhood development Centre in Federal Capital Territory Area Council, FCT Abuja?

Table 1: Head-teachers use of Communication Skills in Early Childhood Development Centre

N=174

S/N	Item on Head Teachers Use of Communication Skills	HE	ME	LE	VLE	$\bar{x}$	Decision
1	Head teacher communicates well on a one-to-one basis (clearly, positively, humanely and with respect).	**48**	**73**	**33**	**20**	2.86	Moderate Extent
2	Head teacher keeps up-to-date on what is going on with the school and disseminate to the teachers.	**59**	71	29	15	3.00	Moderate Extent

S/N	Item on Head Teachers Use of Communication Skills	HE	ME	LE	VLE	$\bar{x}$	Decision
3	Head teacher keeps his/her teachers well informed on news that affect them and their jobs.	**63**	52	21	38	2.80	Moderate Extent
4	Head teacher has the ability to communicate with people in a professional manner when under stress.	**58**	69	22	25	2.92	Moderate Extent
5	Head teacher takes the time to explain their decisions, opinions and recommendations.	**64**	75	19	16	3.07	Moderate Extent
	Sectional Mean					**2.93**	**Moderate Extent**

Table 1 present analysis on the head teachers use of communication skills in early childhood development Centre in Federal Capital Territory Area Council, FCT Abuja rated by caregiverss. The study finding shows moderate extent with all items. The sectional mean score of 2.93 create basis for the conclusion that head teachers moderately use communication skills in early childhood development Centre in Federal Capital Territory Area Council, FCT Abuja

Research Question Two: What extent do extent head teachers use of motivation skills in early childhood development Centre in Federal Capital Territory Area Council, FCT Abuja?

Table 2: Head-teachers use of Motivation Skills in Early Childhood Development Centre N=174

S/N	Item on Head Teachers Use of Motivation Skills	HE	ME	LE	VLE	$\bar{x}$	Decision
1	Head teacher shows genuine concern for teachers as unique individuals.	**54**	**67**	**27**	**26**	2.86	Moderate Extent
2	Head teacher gives credit and recognition to teachers when they do a good job.	**61**	59	32	22	2.91	Moderate Extent
3	Head teacher generates enthusiasm among teachers by providing the necessary support.	**66**	70	15	23	3.03	Moderate Extent
4	Head teacher understands what motivates teachers to work hard and provides the needed assistance to fulfill those needs.	**62**	72	16	24	2.99	Moderate Extent
5	Head teacher appropriately rewards the highest achievers for their contributions.	**47**	68	27	32	2.75	Moderate Extent
	Sectional Mean					**2.91**	**Moderate Extent**

Table 2 present analysis on the head teachers use of motivation skills in early childhood development Centre in Federal Capital Territory Area Council, FCT Abuja rated by

caregivers. The study finding shows moderate extent with all items. The sectional mean score of 2.91 create basis for the conclusion that head teachers moderately use motivation skills in early childhood development Centre in Federal Capital Territory Area Council, FCT Abuja

Research Question Three: What is level of caregiver performance in early childhood development Centre in Federal Capital Territory Area Council, FCT Abuja?

Table 3: Level of Caregiver Performance in Early Childhood Development Centre N=39

S/N	Item on Level of Caregiver Performance	HL	ML	LL	VLL	$\bar{x}$	Decision
1	Caregiver pay close attention to each pupil's emotional needs	15	16	5	3	3.10	Moderate Level
2	Caregiver do respond promptly when a pupil cries or show distress	14	14	6	5	2.95	Moderate Level
3	Caregiver observe pupils for signs of illness	10	17	6	6	2.79	Moderate Level
4	Caregiver maintain a clean and harzard free environment	18	12	6	3	3.15	Moderate Level
5	Caregiver know the procedures to follow in case of emergency	8	15	5	11	2.51	Moderate Level
6	Caregiver maintain positive attitude while working with pupils	12	12	9	6	2.77	Moderate Level
7	Caregiver work cooperatively with other caregivers and parents	9	18	5	7	2.74	Moderate Level
8	Caregiver reflect on their daily work to identify areas of improvement	12	16	7	4	2.92	Moderate Level
	Sectional Mean					**2.87**	**Moderate Level**

Table 3 present analysis on level of caregiver performance in early childhood development Centre in Federal Capital Territory Area Council, FCT Abuja rated by head-teachers. The study finding shows moderate extent with all items. The sectional mean score of 2.91 create basis for the conclusion that there is moderate level of caregivers performance in early childhood development Centre in Federal Capital Territory Area Council, FCT Abuja.

Discussion of Findings

Based on the result of the analysis of research questions.

The finding of the study revealed that head teachers moderately use communication skills in early childhood development Centre in Federal Capital Territory Area Council, FCT Abuja. The finding is supported by Doyle, (2022)opined that head teacher require effective

communication to facilitate their interpersonal, informational and decision roles. Communication is the process of creating, transmitting and interpreting ideas, facts, opinions and feelings. Communication is the heart of the school as the school is characterized by the transference of knowledge. The head teacher must ensure open and clear communication among individuals in the school. Also he or she must establish a communication channel system in the school through which information would be communicated to the teachers, pupils and parents. He or she must also provide feedback channels that are open whenever they need them. Communication is a very sensitive aspect and its ineffectiveness may have adverse effects on the productivity of teachers.

The finding of the study revealed that head teachers moderately use motivation skills in early childhood development Centre. The finding is supported Doyle, (2022) who opined that motivation skills are actions or strategies that induce an individual to perform the desired action or provide the desired response. These strategies and actions differ according to three primary determinants: the style of the motivator, the target audience, and the personality of the individual the motivator aims to sway.

The finding of the study revealed that there is moderate level of caregiver performance in early childhood development Centre. The study finding is in-line with Mbomson (2018) who stressed that reward packages are workable provisions, standards or structures that are set in a work place that could increase and sustain the quality of job performance with subsequent increase in quality of productivity and performance respectively.

Conclusion

The researcher concluded from the findings of the study that leadership skills such as communication, motivation improves caregivers performance such as(paying close attention to each pupil's emotional needs, in Federal Capital Territory.

Recommendations

Based on the finding, the researcher recommended that head-teachers should continue to use leadership skills such as communication, motivation and strategic planning to address caregivers challenges so as to improve their performance academically.

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