

STRATEGIES FOR ASSESSING STANDARD OF DAY CARE CENTRES BY PARENTS IN ONDO TOWN

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the strategies for assessing the standard of day care centers by parents in Ondo town. It adopted a survey research design. The population comprised all parents and all child development specialists in Ondo town. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 146 of both parents and child development specialists across the town. Questionnaire was used for data collection. Mean was used for the analysis. Findings reveal security measures to be put in place in childcare centres include; security officers on patrol (3.76), fencing and gate across the building (3.95), prohibiting visitors from having access to the children without the parents' knowledge (3.98) among others. Criteria for measuring the competency of personnel in daycare centres among others were pre-requisite knowledge and qualifications in the area of child development (3.08), tolerance with children (3.89) and ability to elicit children's ideas (3.52). Hygiene maintenance to be put in place among others includes play equipment are to be cleaned and sanitized from time to time (3.73), play areas are to be regularly mopped with antiseptics (3.76) and separate room for a sick child (3.71). It was therefore, recommended that, parents should take time to make their findings of any childcare centre in the area of safety, competency of personnel (owner and workers) and hygiene before patronizing the centre and no visitor should be allowed access to any child without prior notification to the parent.

Keywords: *Parents, daycare centre, entrepreneur, children, competency, hygiene and safety.*

INTRODUCTION

Majority of parents in Ondo town work outside the home, this however makes it a common practice for those who do not have stay at home baby minders to be patronizing daycare centres where their infants and toddlers can be properly taken care of during the working hours. Daycare center which could also be referred to as child care centre or crèche, is a place where children are taken care of during the day by a person other than the child's parents. In most cases, the caregivers are entrepreneurs who might not be a member of the child's immediate family. Daycare centre provide active, playful learning and development for children through preschool years, that is, from 0-3years of age. Child care is a necessity for most working families, as thousands of parents across Ondo town rely on it each day. It is also a means of livelihood for some entrepreneurs.

Most parents in Ondo town, who by nature of their jobs, would not be able to care for their children, especially infants (from birth through the first year) and toddlers (from one year to the third birthday), during working hour, do prefer to take the children to daycare centres during the work hours. Parents leave their children with a child care provider trusting that while they are gone,

maximum safety protections are in place with the assurance that the basic practices are being followed (Schochet, 2017).

The child care centre is supposed to provide the children with adequate security, care, love, protection and maintain high level of hygiene that the children receive at home by well-trained and skilled care-giver which are the surrogate parent at the time. This is to compliment the care giving the children at home and to also give the mothers peace of mind that their children are both in safe hands and place. But sadly Sooter (2013) observed that it is only a few of the nursery schools especially those owned by educational institutions, private companies and wealthy individuals that can afford to engage the services of university graduate teachers and holders of Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) qualifications, competent and committed teachers and are also capable of retaining such teachers. Notwithstanding, there could always be a way out.

It is not a misuse of words to say, the prevalence of unemployment in the country and perhaps, inadequacy of the government to adequately cater for her citizens have forced many hungry entrepreneurs to establish sub-standard daycare centres. This is at times, at the expense of the safety of the children. Many daycares centres are founded with the sole aim of earning a living and in most cases do not meet up with the Africa charter on the rights and welfare of children. No wonder Agiobu-kemmer (2001) noted that many proprietors and pre-school teachers do not have the pre-requisite knowledge and qualifications in the area of early childhood neither do they have the skills for the all-important foundation laying aspect of education. According to Odio (2014), one of the aims of Africa Charter on the right and welfare of a child is to safe guard the child against all forms of hazardous things that interferes with the child's health, physical, social mental and moral development. On this note, it is therefore important for parents and care giver to be well informed on what to look out for in any day care center before dropping their children /wards, hence the research.

One of the three important areas that was considered in this research is safety. It is very important for parents/caregiver in Ondo to see that appropriate level of security is in place before dropping their children/ward in any daycare centre. Aside the fact that, state of insecurity (for instance kidnapping, abduction among others) is prevailing in the society, putting a child in a place without considering his/her safety or wellbeing could be taken to be 'child neglect'. According to Odio (2014), child neglect refers to the failure of a person responsible for a child's care and upbringing to safe guard the child's emotional, physical health and general wellbeing. Safety in child care center should never be handled with levity, this is because, according to Hwang (2018) Security breaches can accidentally allow unauthorized people inside the facility, putting children at risk of kidnapping or injury. Wisconsin Department of Children and Family, WDCF, (n.d) encouraged childcare centre to look at security measures they may employ to keep children safe and also encouraged parents to talk with centers about the security measures in place. Owners of day care center should know they are legally responsible for the safety of the children in their care.

As important as safety, is the personnel working in day care centres. In putting any child in daycare center, it is important for parent/caregiver in Ondo to be mindful of the kind of people whom children will be in their custody for hours every day unsupervised. This is because according to Maxwell (2007) children learn from interactions with their physical environment and from the people in their daily lives. Similarly, Ugwu (2010) opined that the formation of character and the process of socialization of children within the school environment are largely influenced by the teacher.

Competency of the personnel in daycare centre is very important to the life of the children. A competency is a “measurable pattern of knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors, and other characteristics that an individual needs to perform work roles or occupational functions successfully (National Centre on Early Childhood Quality Assurance, NCECQA, 2017). According to Florida Care Competencies for Early Care and Education Directors, FCCECED (2011p.9) critical to program excellence is a qualified and motivated staff, it identified one of the key elements to this as recruitment of personnel who understand children’s unique qualities. Another very important area parents/caregiver in Ondo should also be mindful of is the level of hygiene in daycare centre. Tuchtan (2014) opined that all childcare centres should be able to demonstrate good hygiene standards to minimize the spread of infection, which is an essential factor for families choosing care facilities for their child. However, Koo (2020) observed in a research that, the caregivers at the centers are not always provided with appropriate hygiene training for avoiding the spread of infections. This is a clarion call to all stake holders of daycare centres in Ondo town. There is no replacement to hygiene practices anywhere, daycare centre inclusive. Melariri, Steenkamp, Williams, Mtembu, Ronaasen and Truter (2019) observed that, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG6), lack of safe water and sanitation systems are a leading cause of childhood mortality and morbidity. According to the Career Development Initiative of New York State in Early Childhood and School Age Programs, NYSAEYC. (n.d), one of the points to consider in administering an effective organizational in children’s program is to maintain a healthy and safe facility/program: In like manner, according to FCCECED (2011p.10), keeping children/youth and staff safe is a fundamental requirement of any facility, where one of the key elements is to adhere to health and safety requirements as defined by applicable state and local licensing regulations for children and staff. Australia’s Online Childcare Resource (AOCR) (2010) advised childcare centres of the needs to implementing effective and current food safety and hygiene practices. Of course, mothers in Ondo cannot be advised to quit their jobs so as to look after their children. Loto and Adeyanju (2017) opined that, woman and the rest of the family members need the money from the job. So also, putting embargo to the establishment of day care centers would be a step in the wrong direction for families and the providers alike. More importantly, Acka, Antwi, Soyebó and Ogunsakin (2017), observed that for some time past in Nigeria and currently, the focus has been on the development of entrepreneurs at different levels to aid economic development. If the owners of day care centers realized that all parent/caregiver are aware of the qualities to expect in their centers before patronizing them, they

will have no other choice than to bring improvement to their centers so as to be a successful entrepreneur.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study was to investigate the strategies for assessing the standard of daycare centres by parents in Ondo town. Specifically, the study:

1. Identified the security measures to put in place in daycare centres in Ondo town.
2. Identified the criteria to use in measuring competency of personnel in daycare centres in Ondo town.
3. Examined the hygiene maintenance practices/facilities to be put in place in daycare centres in Ondo town.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study answered the following questions.

1. What are the security measures to put in place in daycare centres in Ondo town?
2. What are the criteria to use in measuring competency of personnel in daycare centres in Ondo town?
3. What are the hygiene maintenance practices/facilities to be put in place in day care centres in Ondo town?

METHODOLOGY

The area of research study was Ondo town in Ondo State of Nigeria. Survey research design was used for the study. The population of the study consists of all parents in Ondo town, 146 respondents were sampled. A 24 item questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire has a modified Likert point scale of Strongly Agreed (4), Agreed (3), Disagreed (2) and Strongly Disagreed (1). The questionnaire was face validated by two (2) lecturers from the Department of Early Childhood and Care and one (1) from the department of Home Economics all in Adeyemi College of Education Ondo. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Chronbach Alpha. It has a coefficient of 0.86 which is high enough for the items used.

Data were analyzed and described using mean scores. The items within the mean rating of 2.50 and above were accepted while otherwise rejected.

RESULT OF FINDINGS

Research Question 1: What are the security measures to put in place in daycare centres in Ondo town?

Table 1: Mean responses of the respondents on the security measures to put in place in daycare centres in Ondo town

S/N	Possible Security measure to put in place in daycare centres	N = 146, C =2.5	
		\bar{X}	Decision
1.	Security officers on patrol.	3.76	Agreed
2.	Access control television	2.82	Agreed
3.	Closed circuit television	3.01	Agreed
4.	Emergency and security alarm system	3.54	Agreed
5.	Fencing and gate.	3.95	Agreed
6.	Electricity conducting wires	2.74	Agreed
7.	Fire safety.	3.79	Agreed
8.	Prohibiting visitors from having access to the pupils without the parents consent.	3.98	Agreed

Key: N – Number of respondents, C – cut-off point, \bar{X} - Mean response of all respondents.

Table 1 revealed that the respondents agreed with all the items as security measures to be put in place in day care centers because they have the mean range of 2.74- 3.98 which is above the cut-off point of 2.50.

Research Question 2: What are the criteria to use in measuring competency of personnel in daycare centres in Ondo town?

Table II: Mean of responses of the respondents on the criteria to measure the competency of personnel in daycare centres

S/N	Possible criteria for measuring the competency of personnel in daycare centres	N = 146, C =2.5	
		\bar{X}	Decision
1.	Pre-requisite knowledge and qualifications in the area of child development.	3.08	Agreed
2.	Tolerance with children.	3.89	Agreed
3.	Ability to develop children's perspectives.	3.82	Agreed
4.	Ability to praise, comfort, question and be responsive to children	3.86	Agreed
5.	Child friendly.	3.84	Agreed
6.	Ability to elicit children's ideas.	3.52	Agreed
7.	Possession of relevant certificate in child development.	3.19	Agreed

Key: N – Number of respondents, C – cut-off point, \bar{X} - Mean response of all respondents.

Table II revealed that the respondents agreed with all the items as measures to be put in place to determine the competency of the personnel in day care centers because they have the mean range of 3.08- 3.89 which is above the cut-off point of 2.50.

Research Question 3: What are the hygiene maintenance practices/facilities to be put in place in day care centres in Ondo own?

Table III: Mean of responses of the respondents on the hygiene maintenance to be put in place in daycare centres in Ondo town

		$N_3 = 146 \quad C = 2.5$	
S/N	Possible hygiene maintenance to be put in place.	\bar{X}	Decision
1.	Play equipment are to be cleaned and sanitized from time to time.	3.73	Agreed
2.	Play areas are to be regularly mopped with antiseptics.	3.76	Agreed
3.	Items of the individual child should only be used for the child	3.57	Agreed
4.	Not sharing toilet with adult	3.65	Agreed
5.	Separate room for a sick child.	3.71	Agreed
6.	Domestic animals like goat, dog and cat should be forbidden in the premises.	3.69	Agreed
7.	Children should be taught personal hygiene at that early stage.	3.08	Agreed
8.	There should be standby washing hand basins with hot and cold water and soap.	3.72	Agreed
9.	There should be separate room for adult to eat.	3.59	Agreed

Key: N – Number of respondents, C – cut-off point, \bar{X} - Mean response of all respondents.

Table III revealed that the respondents agreed with all the items as ways to maintain simple hygiene in day care centers because they have the mean range of 3.08- 3.76 which is above the cut-off point of 2.50.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The safety of any child is entrusted in the hands of owners and workers of daycare centres the moment the child is dropped at the centre. If anything happened to any child at the centre, it does not really matter if the providers are eventually found guiltless, but the costs of defense and costs to the centre's reputation could be enormous. On this note, childcare centres are therefore expected to put adequate security measures in their centres. Parents agreed that the following security facilities and measures should be available in childcare centres in the town: security officers on patrols; access control television; closed circuit television; emergency and security alarm system; fencing and gates; electricity conducting wires; fire safety and prohibiting visitors from having access to pupils without the parents' consents. This security measures, to a very reasonable extent will give the parents assurance that their children are dropped in a secured environment as the children will be able to explore in a secured environment. In line with this finding Fleming (2016) mentioned that security systems, access control systems, closed-circuit television (CCTV) systems, physical security and security officers/patrols were security measures to be put in place in child care centres; Hwang (2018) advised owners of daycare and preschool to use the following security measures: fire alarms; keyless entry; extra lock during off-hour; supply call stations in the entrance; staff front desk; sign-in sheet and intruder alarms. WDCF (n.d) identified security systems that might be found in childcare centre to include: mechanical or electric restricted access

systems; main entrance unlocked and all other doors locked to prevent entrance; bell or alert device attached to an unlocked door and designing the building to prevent direct entry into the classroom.

In addition to adequate security facilities, there is need for competent personnel furnished with the necessary skills and information about children and essential care to enhance their development. Based on the findings, it is expected of owners and workers of child development centres to possess the following qualities: Pre-requisite knowledge and qualifications in the area of child development; tolerance with children; ability to develop children's perspectives; ability to praise, comfort, question and be responsive to children; child friendliness; ability to elicit children's ideas and possession of relevant certificate in child development. In accordance with these, FCCECED (2011p.9) identified that, critical to program excellence is a qualified and motivated staff, it identified one of the key elements to this as recruitment of personnel who understand children's unique qualities: Schochet (2017) Child care providers should have training that reflects the most recent research in safety and child development: Pramling and Samuelsson (2011) mentioned that elements of high staff quality include staff's content (curriculum) knowledge and their ability to create a multi-disciplinary learning environment.

Most infants and toddlers are ignorant of the dangers associated with poor hygiene practices, as a matter of fact; they do not know what hygiene means as whatever they lay their hands on goes into the mouth. As playing and bonding together is part of children's life, there is therefore, high chance of spreading infections. This is especially true among infants and toddlers who are likely to use dirty hands to wipe the noses or rub the eyes and then handle toys or touch other children. It is therefore important for daycare centres to maintain high level of hygiene. From the findings, the following hygiene practices are expected to be observed at day care centres. Play equipment are to be cleaned and sanitized from time to time and play areas are to also be regularly mopped with antiseptics. In line with these, DeBord, Hestenes, Moore, Cosco and McGinnis (2005) remarked that play spaces should be clean, friendly, and inviting: Li, et al, (2014) observed in a research that facilities without written surface cleaning had statistically significantly higher microbial counts on surfaces. According to AOCR (2010) some of the practices center should be using includes, but not limited to: encouraging children to use simple rules of hygiene including hand washing; ensuring equipment and toys are regularly cleaned/washed and well maintained and basic dental care and Keeping facilities such as bathrooms, kitchens, sleep and rest and play areas clean. Childcare centres are also expected to use items of the individual child for the child alone and adult should not share the same toilet with the children while there should be separate room for a sick child. A national poll found that 85 percent of parents think that all "child care providers undergo a background check (Child Care Aware of America, CCAA, 2011).

Other hygienic practices to be observed include; Domestic animals like goat, dog and cat should be forbidden in the premises; Children should be taught personal hygiene at that early stage; There should be standby washing hand basins with hot and cold water and soap and There should be separate room for adult to eat. In line with this finding, Tuchtan (2014) opined that, time spent at child care is also the perfect time to educate children about sound hygiene habits that should

continue on for a lifetime. According to Melariri et al (2019) Toilet and hand washing facilities must be in reach of children over the age of three years. Koo (2020) identified some simple measures that childcare center can implement to keep children infection-free such as: frequent hand washing, clean diapering stations and potties among others. According to AOCR (2010), of the centres which failed the recent accreditation process the areas they most often received an unsatisfactory rating included: Ensure that potentially dangerous products, plants and objects are inaccessible to children, implementing effective and current food safety and hygiene practices.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that parents are not only mindful of the state of security and hygiene level of the daycare centres they want to patronize, but also the competency of the providers and the workers in the area of childcare. This however is a signal to the providers of the existing centres as well as those who are intending to establish any, on the need to acquire relevant knowledge and skills in childcare. They are also expected to make adequate findings on how to improve or provide centres that will be befitting in term of provision of adequate security and hygienic condition as well as other important areas that will not only impress the parent, but also keep the children safe and enhance their growth and development.

Based on the foregoing, it is therefore recommended that:

1. Any owner of daycare centre who has no training in childcare should endeavor to undergo relevant training.
2. No visitor should be allowed access to any child without prior notification to the parent.
3. Parents of children in daycare should form association, where some team will be delegated to monitor the centre from time to time to ascertain the level of compliance with health and safety measure. Immediate action should be taken against any trace of non-compliance.
4. Parents should take time to make their findings of any childcare centre in the area of safety, competency of personnel (both owners and workers) and hygiene before patronizing it.
5. Owners of day care centers should be attending seminars to update themselves on necessary measures to put in place in improving the quality of their centers in term of safety, competency and hygiene

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