



## ASSESSING THE QUALITY OF ECE TEACHERS IN GHANA: JUXTAPOSING THEORY TO PRACTICE

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### **Abstract:**

The quality of a preschool is a replica of its teachers. Thus, the specific training teachers have attained in Early Childhood Education plays an important role in their daily practices. Nevertheless, concerns have been raised in Ghana and Sub-Saharan Africa about the quality of ECE teachers. Consequently, convergent design of mixed methods was employed to juxtapose what we know to be the ideal quality of the ECE teacher and the current state of their quality. Using purposive, cluster, simple random and convenience sampling techniques, the study sampled 182 participants from Ga-South and Accra Metro in Ghana. Data in the form of questionnaire, interview and observation were collected. The questionnaire responses were analysed through simple descriptive statistics expressed in percentages and thematic analysis was used for the interview and observation data. Findings from this study confirms the weak training background of the participants. The majority of them had professional training up to diploma level and a reasonable number did not have any qualification at all in ECE training. The participants dominated their teaching and learning process with less learner engagement. In view of the findings, ECE teachers should be specifically trained in ECE methodologies and approaches. They should employ a child-centred mode of instruction and involve their learners in the teaching and learning process in order to promote active involvement and facilitate their learning. Feedback should also be provided to learners.

**Keywords:** assessing, quality, early childhood education, juxtaposing, practice

### **1. Introduction**

Ghana, like most developing countries in Sub-Sahara Africa (SSA), has seen a rapid growth in the early childhood education sector. For Ghana and most of the SSA region, the growth of ECE has been largely driven by policy imperatives arising from the recognition of the importance of 'Educating All Children [EfA] and Universal Primary

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Education [UPE] (UNESCO, 1990). Another policy imperative is the Millennium Development Goals [MDGs] (UNESCO, 2000). It is argued that EfA and UPE and latterly, the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goal [SDG] 4 can best be achieved when all children have a quality educational start in their lives through ECE (UNESCO, 2015; UNESCO, 1990).

Ghana's Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (hereinafter MWCA) in collaboration with the Ministry of Education has made significant investment in this sector. MWCA (2004) reiterated the significance of ECE as it marks the beginning of a child's formal education experience, a stage during which a child's potential can be nurtured. However, the benefits accrued from ECE do not materialise on their own. Factors such as teacher's training in ECE and teaching experience; pupil-teacher ratio; the quality of the school environment (the classroom building, furniture, space in the classroom); availability and accessibility of Teaching and Learning Materials (TLMs); indoor and outdoor space and play items are key quality indicators of ECE provision (Sollars, 2020; Rodríguez-Carrillo, Mérida-Serrano & Alfaya, 2020; Devi, Fler & Li, 2018; Taleb, 2013).

Teachers are vital to the education process at all stages, particularly at the early childhood stage (UNESCO, 2006; Sollars, 2020). Without them, policies aimed at improving education cannot be effective and as such, children cannot benefit from such educational policies (Hopkins and Stern, 1996, cited in Al-Hassan, 2006; Taleb, 2013). The Ghana Education Service ([GES], [2008]) has observed that the standards outlined in the curriculum and policy cannot be reached in a vacuum. To them, training enables teachers to effectively use the ECE syllabus and understand the philosophy and principles which underpin it. UNESCO (2005) positions teachers as the most important factor directly related to children's success, and Knobloch & Whittington (2002) have argued that the quality of a preschool is a replica of its teachers.

In that regard, the specific training teachers have acquired in ECE plays an important role in their daily practices at the ECE centres, including their ability to facilitate learning and influence QECE provision in their schools (Churchward & Willis, 2019; Lerkkanen et al., 2012; Knobloch & Whittington, 2002).

## **2. Literature review**

Early childhood education teachers training enables them to positively function as a guide to facilitate their children's learning and to use TLMs. Thus, Froebel advocates that ECE teachers' training should be practical-based to give them a hands-on opportunity for them to translate their training into classroom situation.

Teachers are supposed to provide their children with hands-on active learning experiences to capture their attention during teaching and learning interaction (Montessori, 1949). The implication from this is that, in Ghana, appropriate materials for the various sensory experiences should be made available and accessible to the learners and the teachers should be able to use them to facilitate their children's learning. Montessori therefore stresses that adults should be appropriately trained to teach at the

ECE level so as to present teaching and learning materials in a sequential manner congruent to the level of each individual child (Mooney, 2000).

Through the professional development of teachers, they are trained in how to create a classroom environment conducive for learning, relating warmly with their learners, and creating opportunities for learners to be involved in the teaching and learning process, and on providing feedback to learners (Shulman, 1999; Ladd & Sorensen, 2017). Teachers who go through the required ECE training are able to employ different teaching strategies to meet the different learning needs of the learners (Hein, 1991). Again, teachers come to appreciate how their learners perform certain tasks (process) rather than the result of the task (product) through their training (Driscoll, 2000). This enables them to provide the suitable interventions for their learners (Churchward, & Willis, 2019). Similarly, the product of learning is as important as the process (and so teachers should be interested in both (Marsh, 1996).

Teachers who have received high-quality professional training are able to provide education that is developmentally appropriate, employ appropriate strategies in arranging and managing the classroom meaningfully, use TLMs in their lessons and to create the necessary environment and opportunities for their children to have access to the TLMs and to manipulate them. All these promote the overall development of their children (Lerikkanen et al., 2012; Hattie, 2009). Children who are taught by teachers with a higher level of professional qualification are able to perform higher-level cognitive tasks, are more sociable, exhibit better language ability and are able to persevere further on tasks (Lobman et al., 2005). Consequently, Buysse and Hollingsworth (2009) have stressed that the quality of the early childhood personnel should be a critical factor in determining whether a particular ECE is of quality or not. On the other hand, teachers who were not trained dominated the teaching and learning process, to the detriment of their children's learning. The professional training of teachers also influenced the strategy they employed to provide feedback to their learners. Rather than providing feedback that encouraged and motivated their learners, untrained teachers were found even teasing their learners who were slow to complete their tasks (Mtahabwa & Rao, 2010).

Equally important as teachers' initial training to the provision of QECE is their Continuous Professional Development (CPD). Both initial training and CPD are known to influence the pedagogical approaches teachers employ (Mockler, 2020; Podolsky, Kini & Darling-Hammond, 2019). UNICEF (2000) acknowledges CPD to be a corrective measure, arguing that it is able to address concepts and issues teachers could not possibly understand during their actual training. They point out that CPD is able to keep teachers abreast of new practices pertaining to their field and thereby contributes to the learners' achievement. Significantly, given the changing nature of the pedagogical world in ECE, specific ECE training and CPD could equip teachers with a broad knowledge base and self-esteem. Ngware et al. (2014) notes that it could help teachers to appreciate the need to learn and discuss effective pedagogical strategies and also work collaboratively with their colleagues in their context.

The discourse above suggests the immeasurable contribution of professional qualification and training of teachers to the provision of QECE. All these

notwithstanding, there is global concern about the quality of ECE provision, the concern for Ghana and other developing countries has been in terms of the facilities and personnel for the ECE provision. UNESCO (2010) reported a shortage of QECE personnel, especially early years' teachers in Ghana and other SSA countries. Lewin & Stuart (2003) also reported a general shortage of primary and ECE teachers in SSA.

In addition, Steyn, Harris & Hartell (2011), MoE-EMIS (2012), Fourie (2013) and Ngware et al. (2014) have identified lack of training and weak training base of ECE teachers in Ghana and in SSA. Akyeampong, Djangmah, Oduro, Seidu & Hunt (2007) noted that under-qualified teachers were engaged to teach in ECE schools in some communities as a result of the shortage of qualified teachers. This appears to be supported by Education Management Information System (EMIS) report that in Ghana, and by 2011, 77% of ECE teachers were found to be untrained (i.e. without professional training in ECE) (MoE-EMIS, 2012). Meanwhile, an ECE is as good as its teachers (Knobloch and Whittington, 2002), implying that there can be no high quality ECE if the teachers in these centres do not have the necessary training. For better quality ECE therefore, teachers should be appropriately qualified to be able to initiate appropriate interactive activities and facilitate children's learning. Consequently, if the training is weak, it may imply that teachers' knowledge and pedagogical skills may be lacking. These contextual challenges may affect the quality of children's learning at the ECE centres.

Moreover, time has elapsed between the time some of the reports about the quality of the ECE teachers and the conditions under which the work took place and now. It is possible that conditions have changed for the better or worse. It is convergent. Anticipatedly, this study would contribute to the evolving understanding of ECE, in recent times, within the Ghanaian context.

Based on the objective of the study, these research questions have been formulated to guide the study.

- 1) What is the situation/state of ECE teachers and their training in the ECE centres in Ghana?
- 2) How are the ECE teachers translating their training into practice?

### **3. Methodology**

Given the individual strength and weaknesses of the positivist and interpretivist paradigms, this study prefers to combine both by adopting a pragmatist paradigm, which is associated with mixed methods research (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner, 2007). The current study employed the convergent design (previously referred to as concurrent triangulation approach [Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011]) to mixed methods. By using this approach, it allowed multiple methods to be used in this single study, permitted varied worldviews, consented to different forms of data collection from diverse data sources and employed different forms of data analysis (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002).

The study was conducted in the Ga-South Municipality and Accra Metro. The sampling techniques this study used to sample participants were purposive, cluster,

simple random and convenience. Purposive sampling was used to select the study site. Using the cluster sampling procedure, the study's site (i.e. Ga-South and Accra Metro areas) was divided into two clusters each. Eight schools were selected from each of the clusters and in each of the selected schools, the nursery and or the kindergarten teachers were purposefully selected to respond to the questionnaire. For the interview, one circuit was randomly selected from each of the four clusters and a school was selected from each of the four circuits. In each of the four schools selected, the head teacher and one ECE teacher were selected. In addition to the two Sub-Metro ECE coordinators, two circuit supervisors were selected randomly from the four circuits. Still in the four schools selected from each of the four circuits, a convenient sampling technique was then used to select a parent from each of them. This was done as and when the parents brought their children to school or when picking them home from school.

In effect, 32 schools were selected with an average of four ECE teachers selected from each of the schools to respond to the questionnaire. A total of 182 respondents were used for the quantitative data. Sixteen participants were also sampled for the qualitative data. This comprised two ECE coordinators, two circuit supervisors, four headteachers, four teachers and four parents. The observation was also done in the four selected schools from each of the circuits.

Research tools in the form of questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and observation were employed to collect differing forms of data in this study. Questionnaire was developed to collect quantitative data from respondents. The use of the questionnaire was appropriate to this study since numerical data were generated and the opinions of a sample of a population were elicited with the intent of generalizing findings (Creswell, 2009, citing Babble, 1990). Numerical data, added precision to the words and narratives that were generated through the interviews and observation (Gay & Airasian, 2000; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

The strategies used to collect qualitative data were face-to-face interviews and direct observation. The face-to-face interview enabled the researcher to deeply probe into ECE provision in order to get an understanding of the quality of the teachers. In addition to the interview, semi-structured observation was utilised to gather data pertaining to the phenomenon under study. The semi-structured observations used an observation schedule to guide what should be looked for and how behaviour and activities should be recorded. Non-participant observation was adopted. Observation provided a flexibility to have access to interactions in a social context and complements the interview and the questionnaire to answer the stated research questions (Simpson & Tuson, 2003).

By employing the convergent design to mixed methods in particular, qualitative and quantitative data were collected at the same time and integrated this information when interpreting the overall results for the purposes of convergence, divergence, or some combination (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). During the data collection, meeting was held with headteachers and teachers in all the selected schools to introduce them to the study and assure them of their confidentiality and anonymity after which the questionnaires were handed to them. The content of the items was explained to the respondents. The interview data were collected in a way that did not interfere with the

participants' normal work schedules (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Participants were asked to suggest convenient dates and times for data collection, which every effort was made to adjust to the participants' schedules. Each interview session was started with an explanation of the purpose of the study. This was followed by a brief description of ethical considerations, related to confidentiality, anonymity, consent for the research and the fact that each interview session was audio-recorded. Each participant and activity were observed for a predetermined period of time (Yin, 2009). To address 'reactive effect' (an instance where people adjust the way they behave to appear "better" before the observer [Bryman 2004]), a rapport was built with the teachers and it was stressed to them that the research was a purely academic exercise which was meant to document a typical routine of activities in an ECE school.

In line with the study's method of inquiry (convergent design of mixed methods research), the qualitative and quantitative data sets were analyzed simultaneously. After this, the findings were discussed together for convergence, divergence, confirmation, validation or a combination of some of them (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The quantitative data generated from the questionnaires were analysed through simple descriptive statistics like frequencies, which were expressed in percentages (Gay & Airasian, 2000). Thematic analysis, which breaks up text to unearth salient themes within it was used for the qualitative data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This allowed for the main ideas to be identified and gathered for the analysis.

#### **4. Presentation of findings**

Data were analysed for the two research questions formulated to guide the study. The situation/state of ECE teachers and their training in the ECE centres in Ghana and how the ECE teachers were translating their training into practice. It is important to be reminded that for the sake of confidentiality and anonymity, the identities of the participants who were interviewed are withheld. Instead, they are given Arabic numerals (1-16) in addition to their status (i.e. whether they were teachers, headteachers, ECE coordinators, circuit supervisors or parents). So, for example, participant 1 who was a coordinator will assume the label P1co. That of a teacher is P10t, etc.

**Research question 1:** What is the situation/state of ECE teachers and their training in the ECE centres in Ghana?

The analysis of research question 1 consists of academic and professional qualification of respondents and their training and CPD.

##### **4.1 Academic qualifications of participants**

This section presents the academic and professional qualifications of participants who responded to the questionnaire. Table 1 indicates that the highest percentage (64.1 [117]) of the participating teachers had academic qualifications up to diploma level and 11.5%(21) had bachelor's degree. Only 2.2(4) had a master's degree. Twelve percent (22)

of the participants had other qualifications in the form of a middle school leaving certificate and the Teacher’s Certificate A.

Table 1 also presents the professional qualifications teachers who participated in this study had in ECE. The table shows that a majority of ECE teachers (40.7%[74]) had a diploma, followed by 39.0%(71) who had certificate qualification, then 14.3%(26) had no qualification at all in ECE. Only 4.9%(9) of teachers had a bachelor's degree and 1.1%(2) had professional qualification in ECE.

**Table 1:** Academic and professional qualifications of participants

Academic qualifications of participants			ECE qualifications of teachers		
Level of Academic Education	Responses		Professional qualification	Responses	
	Freq	(%)		Freq	(%)
SSSCE/WASSCE NVTI	17	9.2	No Qualification	26	14.3
Diploma/ RSA Stage II	117	64.1	Certificate	71	39.0
Bachelor	21	11.5	Diploma	74	40.7
Masters	4	2.2	Bachelor	9	4.9
Others	22	12.0	Masters	2	1.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Field data December 2019.

The analysis suggests that teaching in ECE in the selected school was largely undertaken by individuals who did not have the required level of training in ECE. This could be worrying as teachers without any qualification or only a qualification up to certificate level may have too low a training level to be able to adopt appropriate pedagogical strategies in their teaching. However, as argued in the introduction, the teachers could have the needed training, but their disposition to put their training into practice could equally contribute to the quality of the ECE provision. Also, if the teachers had longer teaching experience but engage in CPD through training and workshops, these could compensate somehow for the training needs of the teachers.

The specific training of ECE teachers, as has been indicated earlier, plays an important role in providing QECE for learners. Although to **P1co** “once you are a kindergarten teacher, you should have some kind of in-service training in ECE methodologies and approaches, what was practically happening in the schools, as she narrated was that, In Ghana, most of the teachers who are handling our children are not professionally trained in ECE methodologies and approaches...”

**P4ci** added with an observation from monitoring that: “we have monitored some selected schools and we realised that the teachers didn’t qualify.”

**P2co** added: “...in the remote areas, most of the caregivers or teachers there are not trained and they teach the children horrible things. For example, in one of my visits, somebody was teaching capital 1, small 1, capital 2, small 2. These are serious.”

**P2co** claim seems to be corroborated by **P8ci** through her assertion: “...our teachers on the field at the ECE centres have been trained generally but then most of them have not be

*trained to teach in early childhood or the kindergarten classes and they are there, so they need to be re-trained. That will give them quality information to be given to the children and how to handle the them."*

**P15ht** admitted that her preschool teachers were not specifically trained in ECE. However, she pointed out in defence that: *"...they are all mothers. They have kids in the house so they know how to interact with children and I will also say that both of them have been teaching for almost four to five years in the pre-school so specialization has also set in."*

As previously argued, specific ECE training helps teachers in employing appropriate pedagogical strategies. Quite clearly, this may be why, from the data, a teacher will be teaching "capital 1, small 1, capital 2, small 2", a numbering system that does not exist. What is heartwarming however is the percentage of those who have Bachelor's and Master's degree in ECE. Although the percentage is insignificant, it still appears to give a signal and a hope that much as there are some of the ECE teachers who are teaching without any qualification, there are some who have the requisite qualification and are teaching in the schools.

#### 4.2 The specific training background of the respondents

Table 2 presents data on the specific training background of CPD of teachers. The table shows that 159 (87.5%) of teachers disagreed with the statement that "specific training in ECE should not be made compulsory for all ECE teachers". Only 23(12.5) agreed to the statement. It could be that the teachers seem to largely agree that specific training should be compulsory for ECE teachers. In spite of this, it can be recalled from **Table 1** that about 14% of the teachers who participated in this study had no qualifications at all in ECE and the majority who did were at the diploma level.

**Table 2:** Specific training and CPD of the teachers

Item	Responses			
	Yes		No	
	Frequency	(%)	Frequency	(%)
Specific training in ECE should not be made compulsory for all ECE teachers	159	87.5	23	12.5
Did you attend any training?	80	43.9	102	56.1
Did you benefit from the training?	45	97.8	1	2.2
Did you attend a second training?	35	19.2	147	80.8
Did you benefit from the second training?	35	100	-	-

**Source:** Field data December 2019.

Equally important to specific training is the CPD of the participants. On CPD, **Table 2** indicates that about 56%(102) of the teachers did not attend any training within the academic year preceding the study. Of the 43.9%(80) participants who attended a first training programme, only 19.2%(35) of them had a second training within the period. Meanwhile, with the exception of one participant, all the participants who took part of the training indicated that it was beneficial. Some of the teachers indicated that through the training, their lessons were now more interesting as they involve the children in their



teaching and they teach through activities like singing, rhymes dancing and group work. Although this study could not do a follow up on why the CPD was not beneficial (as pointed out by a respondent), it could have been helpful to do that for a possible recommendation for subsequent CPDs.

This notwithstanding, their experience will be better exploited if these teachers are specifically trained in ECE and engage in CPD to further acquire knowledge of the teaching and learning process. Arguably, one would have taken a consolation, though still not the best, if the teachers had a higher academic and professional qualifications. But as shown in the data, the opposite was the prevailing situation in the schools. A larger proportion of the teachers were only SHS graduates. About 14% them had no qualification. All these could have negative repercussions on the quality of the ECE provision.

Coincidentally and possibly however, non-attendance to ECE training and CPD for ECE teachers could be a thing of the past, particularly with the introduction of the new curriculum in Ghana. With the introduction of the new curriculum, provision is made for ECE teachers to meet, at least once every week, to refresh their memories and to equip themselves to improve their activities as ECE teachers. This is aside the periodic circuit, zonal and district CPDs that are organised for the practising ECE teachers. What needs to be emphasised however, is the readiness of the teachers to translate the training and CPD skills into practice.

**Research question 2:** How the ECE teachers were translating their training into practice?

Research question 2 analysed data regarding how teachers were translating their supposed skills into practice.

**Table 3:** How teachers were translating their knowledge into practice

Item	Responses							
	Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Total	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
My learners get the opportunity to have a practical experience.	14	7.7	7	3.9	161	88.4	182	100
I adapt my teaching strategies for different individuals in the classroom.	21	11.6	2	1.1	159	87.3	182	100
The same seating arrangements are used for all activities.	124	68.1	11	6.1	47	25.8	182	100
I am interested in the answer my learners get than the process they use.	114	62.6	7	3.8	61	33.6	182	100
Feedback is provided to learners at my own convenience.	158	86.9	-	-	24	13.1	182	100
Emphasis is placed on child-centred pedagogy in my ECE delivery.	8	4.3	16	8.8	158	86.9	182	100

**Source:** Field data December 2019.

Table 3 presents responses relating to how teachers were translating their knowledge into practice. It indicates that majority of teachers responded affirmatively to the items “My learners get the opportunity to have a practical experience” [88.4%] “I adapt my teaching strategies for different individuals in the classroom” [87.5%]; and “Emphasis is placed on child-centred pedagogy in ECE delivery” (86.9%). They however disagreed with the rest of the items in the table. Since individual learners have different learning styles, a teacher who adopts different teaching strategies is more likely to meet the diverse needs of learners. These were however what they indicated according to their responses. The reality through the observation was different, possibly due to some of the factors such as the large class size, and inadequate TLMs.

Through the interview responses, **P11ht** acknowledged that: “...Some of the teachers are more used to the rote learning type; standing in front of children, giving instructions and all that ...because they are not trained very well in kindergarten pedagogy, sometimes they find it very difficult in using the learner-centred and activity method.”

In corroborating what **P11ht** said, **P5ht** observation revealed that his teachers “...still want to go the general way where they stand in front of the children and teach the whole class.” This however seems to disagree with **P8ci**’s claim that “the emphasis has now shifted from whole class and teacher-centred to child-centred and activity instruction.”

The impression from the responses is that the teachers dominate the teaching and learning process with the learners playing recipient roles. In such a teacher-dominated process, as described by the respondents, learners may feel bored with the instruction because they are not taking active part in the process and may become inattentive. The possible outcome from this will be that the children will not be able to retain what is learnt through the rote learning and so the content learnt can easily be forgotten. Although **P15ht** admitted that her teachers were not trained specifically in ECE, she seemed to take consolation in the fact that they are mothers and so handling children takes advantage of knowledge that they have learned at home. In the Ghanaian cultural context, children are held in high esteem and every effort is made to get them socially and morally integrated into the society. Thus, mothers play a key role in nurturing the children. Perhaps, the understanding of some people, as pointed out by a respondent, is that ECE teaching mimics raising children at home so as parents (mothers) are supposed to have care and love for their children, someone with similar character could be an ECE teacher. Could this possibly explain why some of the ECE teachers were not trained in ECE methodologies and approaches? Much as having motherly care could be a very good grounds for ECE teaching, ECE teaching goes beyond showing only love and care. In addition to showing love and care, ECE aims at preparing the individual learner formally and academically for the primary and higher level of education.

Debatably, the comments from participants appear to be the reality as it was manifested in their delivery and daily activities. This included the pedagogical activities they engaged in, how they involved learners in their teaching and learning provided feedback for them and how they used TLMs and play items to facilitate teaching and learning. Concerning how the teachers introduced and went about their teaching, **P9t** shared her experience that: “I involve my learners a lot in my teaching... Teaching at the

*preschool shouldn't be lecture method. Teachers should involve the children to contribute to whatever they are teaching."*

The response suggests that if a teacher adopts a lecture method, he/she will not be able to involve the children for them to be active in the teaching and learning process. It also suggests that if the lesson is dominated by the teacher, interaction will be limited and not much will be learnt by the children as expected. However, the general observation revealed that, the children's involvement in the teaching and learning process by their teachers was basically through question and answer, singing songs, reciting rhymes and giving exercises. The teachers did most of the talking during teaching. There was however an occasion where the learners were assisted to put what they were learning into practice through drama and in another school, the learners expressed themselves by demonstrating certain scenes that were relevant to the lesson being taught. Another instance in another school was when the learners were allowed to go to the chalkboard to show how they have understood the lesson. This happened parsimoniously though.

It was also observed that the general assistance teachers gave to their learners was drew for example, what the learners were to draw for those who couldn't draw and to hold learners' hands when writing. In as much as drawing for the children who couldn't draw could be considered an assistance to the children, it can be argued on the contrary that the teachers will be denying the learners the opportunity to practice in order to be perfect. The ideal thing, arguably, should have been a teacher supporting the children to write for example by holding their hands and or giving the learners more time to practice. Of course, allowing for more time will affect the time for the following lesson. The teachers' feedback to learners was mainly through giving and marking exercises.

What is interesting to note is the seemingly nuances between the various datasets (the questionnaire, interview and observation responses). For example, the quantitative data from Table 3 point out that the learners get the opportunity to have practical experiences of lessons being taught, teachers provide feedback to their learners and they emphasise on child-centred pedagogy. These notwithstanding, the interview responses suggest that the teachers are more interested and comfortable in dominating the teaching and learning process thereby making it a teacher-centred approach. This was equally confirmed through the observation. The only feedback teachers provided to the learners was through the exercises marked but mostly they were only given to the learners without individual learner been engaged on where s/he did wrong or where s/he did it right. The expression was that if you got it right it means you have understood it and if you got it wrong, it means you have not understood it so go and do it again.

Not only were there nuances between the dataset. There also appears to be some corroboration between what the teachers indicated through Table 3 and what was observed. In the case of the teachers' response that the learners get opportunity to have practical experience of lessons being taught, the observation captured instances where learners expressed themselves through drama and demonstration in relation to the lesson being taught. I must be quick to add that these were done sparingly.

## 5. Discussion of findings

The teacher plays a key role in bringing about QECE provision so, if teachers do not have a qualification in ECE, then this is an issue of concern. The training situation, as found in this study, is a cause for concern. The findings show that few teachers were professionally and specifically trained in ECE. Possibly, those teachers who are not trained in ECE may not be able to use appropriate pedagogical strategies that will help learners to fully benefit from the instruction they deliver.

The study found that the highest ECE qualification the teachers had was a Master's degree. The majority of the teachers who took part in this study had a diploma in ECE, and a reasonable number of them had no qualification at all in ECE. Just as Akyeampong et al. (2007) and UNESCO (2006) observed that the services of untrained teachers are likely to be engaged in schools, including ECE due to shortage of trained teachers, finding from this study appears to suggest that unqualified ECE teachers were teaching in some of the selected schools. With respect to CPD, the findings of this study suggest that the majority of the teachers did not attend any training within the academic year preceding the study. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that the training sessions were beneficial for those who attended.

A possible cumulative effect of all these dynamics is lower quality lesson delivery and an inability to foster quality interaction in ECE classrooms and in the schools. The training background of the teachers notwithstanding, it is also important to acknowledge that other factors such as the teacher's readiness to translate training into practice, the prevailing culture of a school and the general environmental condition could militate against a teacher's performance in a school even if the said teacher has gone through the required training (Mtika and Gates, 2010; Ngware et al., 2014). This implies that the training is a necessary factor but obviously not sufficient in itself.

Directly linked to teachers' professional training is their ability to use the appropriate pedagogy and improve quality interaction for their classes and lessons. Arguably, a teacher's professional and specific ECE training could inform how he/she would adopt a developmentally appropriate pedagogy which would improve interaction and enhance children's learning in the early years' setting. However, implicit within matters of pedagogy, provide feedback to them and attending promptly to their individual needs.

With respect to teachers' knowledge of how their pupils learn and its influence on their lesson delivery, it would have been gratifying if what the teachers indicated that: their learners have opportunities for practical experience; they adapt their teaching strategies to suit individual learning styles within a single lesson; and that different seating arrangements are used for different activities, was the prevailing situation in their classrooms.

This is because individual learners have different learning styles, a teacher who employs different teaching strategies could meet the different needs of his/her learners (Hein, 1991). The findings also indicate that teachers were more interested in the process that learners used to arrive at an answer than in the answer itself. This seems to be a good

practice (if this was the case), given the constructivist theoretical position that ECE teachers should be interested in how their children perform certain tasks (process) rather than the result of the task (product) (Driscoll, 2000). Marsh (1996) argues that, when teachers can appreciate the process their children use in arriving at a particular answer, they are in a better position to provide the appropriate intervention for them. Similarly, the product of learning is as important as the process (and so teachers should be interested in both). However, since the process leads to the product, if the process is understood by the child, it may facilitate a better understanding of the content being taught and hence a better product.

Concerning how the teachers were involving learners in their teaching and learning process, the findings presented varying outcome between data from the questionnaire and those from the interview and the observation. While in the questionnaire teachers said they involved their learners, it was observed throughout the data collection that the teachers dominated the teaching and learning process with some intermittent involvement of the learners basically through question and answer and giving the learners exercises or the children reciting rhymes and singing songs. The general observation shows that, the teachers were doing most of the talking in the course of their lesson delivery.

There appears to be a difference between the datasets and what could possibly account for this schism, between the data from the questionnaire and those from the interview and observation, might be that the teachers were aware that they had to make their learners actively involved in their teaching and learning process, but were constrained by other factors like the number of children they were handling and the facilities available to aid their teaching. What this nuance appears to suggest is that participants could say one thing but do another. It would be appropriate, therefore, to have a follow up study to ascertain the possible reason that might have accounted for this difference.

Teachers are supposed to provide feedback to their learners to help them offer support and encouragement to enable the learners to learn more (Moore, 1989). It equally enables learners to know what they are able to do and also motivates them to do more. One ingredient that could facilitate and make certain these activities, however, is the level of the professional training of the teacher and an enabling environment to ensure successful translation of professional training into practice (Domitrovich et al., 2008). Findings from the study suggest that the feedback most of the teachers provided was in the form of marked exercises in the children's exercise books

## 6. Conclusion

The study rather found that few of the participants were professionally and specifically trained in ECE. It was therefore not surprising that the services of untrained teachers were engaged in the schools, including ECE due to shortage of trained teachers. Possibly, those teachers who were not trained in ECE could not employ different teaching strategies to suit individual learning styles within the lessons they delivered to help

learners fully benefit from their instruction. A possible cumulative effect of all these dynamics is lower quality lesson delivery and an inability to foster active learner involvement in their ECE classrooms and in the schools.

### **6.1 Recommendations**

Given that the quality of an ECE centre is a direct reflection of the quality of its teachers, it is therefore suggested that teachers should be specifically trained in ECE methodologies and approaches and also engage in relevant CPD after their initial training. Pedagogically, teachers should employ a child-centred mode of instruction which is delivered through play. Teachers should also use group (ability and mixed ability) to assign task to learners during their lesson delivery. In the classroom, teachers can make it a practice of providing feedback to learners by selecting, for example, the best handwriting, the best exercise, the tidiest work, for the week. Such works could be displayed at vantage points where all learners could see to encourage the one whose work is displayed to keep it up and others could also emulate it for similar opportunity. Education universities and colleges of education should continue to expand their existing programmes to train teachers who do not have any training at all in ECE and teachers who have training in ECE but want to have a higher qualification in the area. The government should extend the best teacher awards to cover the best ECE teacher, the best-behaved ECE teacher and other motivational award schemes to encourage teachers to stay in the profession and to update and upgrade their knowledge in ECE.

### **Conflict of interest statement**

Samuel Oppong Frimpong, the author of the article entitled “Assessing the Quality of Ece Teachers in Ghana: Juxtaposing Theory to Practice” declares no conflict of interest.

### **About the author**

Samuel, Oppong Frimpong is an experienced university teacher with more than a decade teaching experience at a higher institution. He is a researcher interested in child growth and development, observation and assessment of the young child, interaction in Early childhood Education, and creating a developmentally appropriate environment for Early childhood Education provision. Samuel is currently a Senior Lecturer with the Department of Early Childhood Education in the University of Education, Winneba in Ghana. He holds Doctor of Philosophy (In Early Childhood Education) from University of Aberdeen in Scotland, UK. Research interests: quality early childhood education (including teacher quality assessment, pedagogy, environment, and the use of TLMs); interaction at the early childhood education centre; child safety and wellbeing at the early childhood centre; child development; adolescent development.

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