

Assessment and Classroom Innovation: A Must for Children Development in Early Childhood Center

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ABSTRACT

The early childhood represents a foundational stage in which cognitive, linguistic, emotional, and social competencies begin to develop rapidly. Within this formative period, effective assessment practices and innovative classroom strategies are critical for identifying developmental needs and fostering meaningful learning experiences. Adopting a qualitative research approach, the study utilizes interpretive analysis of classroom practices, teacher interactions, and learning activities within the centre. Data are drawn from observational insights, pedagogical documentation, and relevant scholarly literature on early childhood education and developmental learning processes. The analysis reveals that continuous assessment practices such as observation, anecdotal records, developmental checklists, and learner portfolios provide educators with valuable insight into individual learning patterns and developmental progress. These assessment tools enable teachers to design responsive instructional strategies that address the diverse abilities and needs of young learners. Furthermore, the findings suggest that classroom innovation through play-based learning, creative instructional materials, interactive storytelling, collaborative activities, and technology-supported learning is associated with increased children's engagement, curiosity, and opportunities for problem-solving. The integration of innovative pedagogical approaches with systematic assessment practices creates a supportive learning environment that nurtures both academic readiness and socio-emotional development. The study concluded that the effective combination of assessment and classroom innovation is essential for achieving quality early childhood education. Strengthening teacher capacity in assessment literacy and innovative pedagogy is therefore crucial for sustaining developmental outcomes in early childhood centres. The study examines the role of assessment and classroom innovation in promoting children's development within early childhood education settings, with particular reference to the Early Childhood Centre of Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo, Nigeria.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Classroom Innovation, Child Development, Assessment

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education occupies a critical position in the architecture of lifelong learning, as it establishes the cognitive, linguistic, social, and emotional foundations upon which subsequent educational experiences are constructed (UNESCO, 2022; World Bank, 2023). Contemporary discourse in early childhood pedagogy increasingly recognizes that development during this stage is neither incidental nor automatic but is significantly shaped by the quality of instructional practices and the responsiveness of the learning environment (Fleer, 2021). Within this context, assessment and classroom innovation have emerged as important components in the delivery of effective early childhood education. Assessment in early childhood

settings has evolved from traditional summative approaches, which often rely on standardized testing, to more formative, continuous, and child centered practices. These contemporary approaches emphasize observation, documentation, and interpretation of children's learning processes within naturalistic classroom environments (Olaniran, et al 2018, Birbili, 2023). Such practices not only provide insight into individual developmental progress but also enable educators to design responsive instructional strategies that accommodate diverse learning needs.

Simultaneously, classroom innovation has become increasingly significant in addressing the dynamic and multifaceted nature of early childhood learning. Innovation in this sense extends beyond the introduction of new materials or technologies; it encompasses pedagogical creativity, flexibility, and the intentional design of engaging learning experiences. (Okoroafor et al., 2019, Edwards et al., 2022). Approaches such as play based learning, inquiry driven activities, collaborative tasks, and interactive storytelling have been widely recognized for their capacity to stimulate curiosity, enhance problem solving abilities, and promote active participation among young learners (Hirsh Pasek et al., 2020). In recent years, the integration of digital tools and multimedia resources has further expanded the possibilities for innovative teaching, although their application requires careful alignment with developmental appropriateness. (Neumann, 2022).

Despite the acknowledged importance of both assessment and classroom innovation, there remains a significant gap between theoretical frameworks and actual classroom practice, particularly within developing contexts. In many early childhood centres, assessment is still treated as a procedural requirement rather than an integral component of the teaching and learning process (Ogunyemi & Ragpot, 2023). Similarly, classroom practices often remain teacher centered, with limited opportunities for creativity, exploration, and learner autonomy. These challenges are frequently compounded by factors such as inadequate teacher training, limited instructional resources, and insufficient institutional support (World Bank, 2023).

In the Nigerian context, efforts to improve early childhood education have been reflected in policy initiatives and curriculum reforms aimed at promoting child centered pedagogy and assessment (UNESCO, 2022). However, the extent to which these policies are effectively implemented at the classroom level remains uneven. Empirical evidence suggests that while educators are aware of the principles of innovative teaching and formative assessment, their practical application is often constrained by contextual realities (Opeyemi & Ragpot, 2023).

The Early Childhood Centre of Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo, provides a relevant setting for such an investigation. As a model institution for teacher training and educational practice, the centre offers a unique opportunity to examine the integration of assessment and classroom innovation within a structured educational environment. Understanding how these elements interact in practice can provide valuable insights into effective strategies for enhancing child development outcomes.

This study therefore seeks to explore the role of assessment and classroom innovation as essential mechanisms for promoting holistic development in early childhood education. By adopting a qualitative approach grounded in classroom observation and interpretive analysis, the study aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice, offering evidence based insights that can inform teaching, policy, and future research. The focus on both assessment and innovation as interconnected processes reflects a shift toward a more integrated understanding of early childhood pedagogy, where teaching is continuously informed by evidence and learning is actively constructed through meaningful engagement (Fleer, 2021).

Research Objectives

The general objective of this study is to examine the role of assessment and classroom innovation in promoting holistic development among children in early childhood education settings. The specific objectives are to:

1. Exploring the assessment practices of teachers within the Early Childhood Centre at Adeyemi Federal University of Education.
2. Understanding the impact of continuous assessment strategies on children's developmental outcomes in early childhood education.

3. Identifying the forms of classroom innovation implemented in the teaching and learning process at the center.
4. Investigating how assessment practices inform and influence innovative classroom strategies.
5. Examining the challenges teachers encounter in merging assessment with classroom innovation in early childhood environments.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What assessment methods do teachers at the Early Childhood Centre of Adeyemi Federal University of Education employ?
2. How do ongoing assessment strategies affect the developmental progress of young children in early childhood education?
3. What creative approaches to teaching and learning are being used in the center's classrooms?
4. In what ways do assessment findings guide and shape new teaching methods in the classroom?
5. What difficulties do teachers face when trying to blend assessment with new classroom ideas in early childhood settings?

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in an interpretive paradigm. The design is appropriate for examining classroom processes, teacher practices, and child engagement within naturalistic settings. (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study was conducted at the Early Childhood Centre of Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo, which serves as both a learning environment for children and a demonstration site for teacher training.

The population of the study comprised early childhood educators and learners within the centre. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select classrooms and teachers that actively engage in structured early learning activities. This ensured that the data collected were information rich and directly relevant to the research objectives.

Scope of the study

This study focuses on the examination of assessment practices and classroom innovation within early childhood education, with specific reference to the Early Childhood Centre of Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo, Nigeria. The study is limited to classroom based interactions involving early learners and their teachers, with particular attention to formative assessment strategies such as observation, anecdotal records, developmental checklists, and learner portfolios (Olaniran et al., 2018; McLachlan, 2022; Birbili, 2023).

The investigation also covers innovative pedagogical approaches adopted within the centre, including play based learning, interactive storytelling, collaborative activities, and the use of instructional materials to enhance engagement and developmental outcomes (Hirsh Pasek et al., 2020). Emphasis is placed on how these practices influence children's cognitive, linguistic, social, and emotional development within the classroom environment.

Participants

The participants in this study comprised early childhood educators and learners at the Early Childhood Centre of Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo. A purposive sampling approach was employed to select participants who were directly involved in classroom teaching and learning processes relevant to the focus of the study.

The study involved a small number of teachers responsible for delivering instruction across selected early

childhood classrooms within the centre. These educators were chosen based on their active engagement in classroom activities, use of assessment practices, and involvement in implementing instructional strategies. Their participation provided critical insight into pedagogical approaches, assessment techniques, and classroom innovation.

In addition, a group of children within the selected classrooms formed part of the observational participants. The children were not engaged through direct questioning but were observed within their natural learning environment to understand patterns of interaction, engagement, and developmental responses to instructional practices. Their inclusion was essential for capturing authentic classroom dynamics and developmental outcomes. Participation in the study was non-intrusive, with observations conducted in a manner that did not disrupt normal classroom routines. Ethical considerations were observed by ensuring confidentiality and anonymity of both teachers and learners, and by restricting data use strictly to academic purposes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that assessment practices within the centre are predominantly formative and continuous in nature. Teachers regularly employ observation, anecdotal documentation, and developmental checklists to monitor children's progress. These practices are embedded within daily classroom activities, allowing for real time evaluation of learning. This aligns with contemporary scholarship which emphasizes assessment as an integral component of instruction rather than a separate evaluative process (McLachlan, 2022; Fleeer, 2021). Learner portfolios emerged as a significant tool for documenting developmental trajectories. They provided comprehensive evidence of children's growth across cognitive, linguistic, and socio emotional domains. The use of portfolios also facilitated communication between teachers and parents, thereby extending the learning process beyond the classroom environment. This supports findings in recent literature that highlight the role of documentation in strengthening home school connections and promoting reflective teaching practices (Birbili, 2023). Classroom innovation was observed to be strongly rooted in play based and activity oriented learning. Teachers utilized interactive storytelling, collaborative group tasks, and creative instructional materials to stimulate engagement (Okoroafor & Ikuenomore, 2019). These strategies enhanced children's participation and encouraged exploratory learning. The findings corroborate existing research that identifies play based pedagogy as central to early childhood development, particularly in fostering problem solving skills and intrinsic motivation (Hirsh Pasek et al., 2020; Edwards et al., 2022). Contextual innovation was also evident in the use of locally sourced materials to support instruction. This adaptive approach reflects the ability of educators to navigate resource limitations while maintaining pedagogical effectiveness. Although digital tools were present, their use was limited and primarily supplementary. This suggests a cautious but emerging integration of technology within the learning environment, consistent with studies that advocate for developmentally appropriate and guided use of digital tools in early childhood settings (Neumann, 2022). A critical insight from the study is the strong interrelationship between assessment and classroom innovation. Assessment data were actively used to inform instructional decisions, resulting in tailored learning experiences that addressed individual developmental needs. This dynamic interaction created a responsive classroom environment where teaching strategies evolved based on evidence of learning. This finding reinforces the argument in contemporary literature that effective early childhood pedagogy depends on the integration of assessment and innovative practice (Fleeer, 2021).

However, challenges were identified. Teachers reported constraints related to time, workload, and limited access to modern instructional resources. While they demonstrated awareness of innovative strategies, consistent implementation was occasionally hindered by these structural factors. This reflects broader systemic issues within early childhood education in developing contexts, where gaps between policy and practice persist (Ogunyemi & Ragpot, 2023; World Bank, 2023).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND POLICY

The findings of this study have significant implications for both educational practice and policy development. At the level of practice, there is a clear need to strengthen teachers' capacity in assessment literacy and innovative pedagogy. Professional development programs should focus on practical application, enabling

educators to effectively integrate assessment into daily teaching and to design engaging, child centered learning experiences (McLachlan, 2022).

Teacher education institutions should incorporate more experiential training models that expose pre service teachers to real classroom dynamics involving assessment and innovation. This aligns with current recommendations that emphasize practice based teacher preparation in early childhood education (Fleer, 2021). At the policy level, there is a need for sustained investment in early childhood education, particularly in the provision of instructional resources and supportive learning environments. Policies should emphasize the integration of assessment and innovation as core indicators of quality education (UNESCO, 2022). Monitoring and evaluation frameworks should also move beyond compliance to focus on pedagogical effectiveness.

Furthermore, there is a need to promote context responsive innovation by encouraging the use of locally available materials and culturally relevant teaching strategies. This will ensure that early childhood education remains accessible, relevant, and sustainable within diverse settings (World Bank, 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that assessment and classroom innovation are fundamental to the effective delivery of early childhood education. Their integration creates a responsive and engaging learning environment that supports holistic child development. Within the Early Childhood Centre of Adeyemi Federal University of Education, the use of continuous assessment and innovative teaching strategies has contributed to improved learner engagement and developmental outcomes, consistent with contemporary research in early childhood pedagogy (Fleer, 2021; Hirsh Pasek et al., 2020). The study highlights the importance of moving beyond isolated pedagogical practices toward a more integrated approach in which assessment informs innovation and innovation enhances learning. While challenges persist, particularly in relation to resources and teacher workload, the findings provide evidence that meaningful improvements are achievable through targeted interventions and institutional support (Ogunyemi & Ragpot, 2023). Future research should extend this inquiry to multiple early childhood centres across different contexts to provide comparative insights and improve the transferability of findings. In addition, mixed-methods and longitudinal studies would strengthen the evidence base by examining the long-term influence of assessment and classroom innovation on children's developmental progress.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Regular in-service training on formative assessment techniques.
2. Institutional support for teacher workload management.
3. Provision of low-cost, locally adaptable instructional materials.
4. Structured portfolio use across early childhood centres.
5. Policy monitoring focused on pedagogical quality rather than compliance.
6. Integration of observation techniques as outlined by Fowowe & Ola-Alani (2022) into teacher training.
7. Gradual, guided integration of developmentally appropriate digital tools.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study adopted a qualitative case study approach based on classroom observations, pedagogical documentation, and the analysis of relevant literature. Consequently, the findings provide an in-depth understanding of assessment practices and classroom innovation within the selected setting but do not establish causal relationships between these practices and children's developmental outcomes. Furthermore, the study was conducted in a single early childhood centre, which may limit the transferability of the findings to other educational contexts with different institutional, cultural, or resource characteristics. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable contextual insights into the integration of formative assessment and innovative pedagogy in early childhood education and offers a foundation for future empirical investigations

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