

HUMAN CAPITAL COMPETENCIES AND INSTITUTIONAL POLICY ADHERENCE AS PREDICTORS OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICE DELIVERY CAPACITY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS IN SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA

Moronfolu Anthonia Olusola

Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education,
College of Specialised & Professional Education, Lagos State University of Education, Oto-Ijanikin
08149348624, moronfoluao@lasued.edu.ng

Odebowale Ireti Tina

Department of Educational Foundations and Counselling Psychology,
Faculty of Education, Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos
080385722253, iretiodebowale@gmail.com

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Busari Medinat Folashade

Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education,
College of Specialised & Professional Education, Lagos State University of Education, Oto-Ijanikin
07033937742. medinatfolashade@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study was motivated by persistent concerns regarding instructional quality, teacher effectiveness, and weak implementation of educational standards in early childhood centres despite increasing policy attention to the sector. Specifically, the study examined the contributions of human capital competencies and policy adherence to the content delivery capacity of Early Childhood Educators in Southwestern Nigeria. The descriptive survey research design of correlational type was adopted for the study. The population comprised Early Childhood Educators in Lagos, Ogun, and Oyo States, while a stratified random sampling technique was used to select 400 respondents for the study. Two instruments namely the Human-capital Competencies, Policy-adherence Delivery Capacity Questionnaire (HCPDCQ) and the Early Childhood Educator Class Observation Checklist (ECECOC) were used for data collection. The instruments yielded reliability coefficients of 0.83 and 0.78 respectively. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that human capital competencies made a substantially higher contribution to content delivery capacity ($\beta = 0.234$) than policy adherence ($\beta = 0.074$). Regression analysis further showed that human

capital competencies significantly predicted content delivery capacity of Early Childhood Educators ($t = 2.098$; $p < 0.05$), while policy adherence did not significantly contribute to content delivery capacity ($t = 0.668$; $p > 0.05$). The study concluded that teacher competencies such as child development knowledge, communication skills, and innovative instructional abilities are stronger determinants of effective educational service delivery than policy adherence alone. The study therefore recommended regular competency-based professional development programmes, strengthened teacher preparation frameworks, and improved monitoring mechanisms to ensure effective implementation of educational policies in early childhood centres in Southwestern Nigeria.

Keywords: *Human Capital Competencies, Policy Adherence, Delivery Capacity, Early Childhood Educators, Southwestern Nigeria*

INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is globally recognized as the foundation for lifelong learning, cognitive growth, social development and national productivity. The early years of a child's life are critical because they shape intellectual competence, emotional stability and future educational achievement. UNESCO and UNICEF consistently emphasize that quality ECE contributes significantly to human capital development and sustainable national advancement (Yoshikawa et al., 2018). In Nigeria, early childhood education has increasingly gained policy attention because of its strategic role in preparing children for formal schooling and social integration. Human capital theory posits that investments in education, training, and professional development improve productivity and institutional effectiveness (Edeji, 2024). In educational organizations, teachers constitute the most valuable human resources because their competencies directly influence instructional quality and learner outcomes. Human capital competencies among educators include pedagogical skills, communication abilities, classroom management, creativity, emotional intelligence, and professional ethics (Nwachukwu, 2024). The effectiveness of early childhood centres largely depends on the quality and competence of educators responsible for child development.

Human capital competencies refer to the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and professional capabilities possessed by employees that enhance organizational performance. In the educational context, competencies involve instructional planning, learner engagement, assessment practices, technological literacy and child-centered teaching approaches (Urban et al., 2011). Competent educators are more likely to implement innovative teaching strategies and maintain effective classroom interactions that enhance learning outcomes among preschool children. Institutional policy adherence refers to the extent to which educational institutions comply with established regulations, standards and operational guidelines. Educational policies provide frameworks for curriculum implementation, teacher qualification standards, classroom management, child protection and quality assurance mechanisms (Caena, 2014). In Nigeria, policy adherence is considered essential for maintaining consistency and accountability in educational service delivery.

Educational service delivery capacity refers to the ability of educational institutions and personnel to provide effective teaching, learning support, curriculum implementation and developmental services to learners. Service delivery in early childhood education encompasses instructional effectiveness, learner participation, child welfare, curriculum execution and learning environment management (Briggs, Ololube, & Kpolovie, 2012). The capacity of educators to deliver educational services effectively depends on both personal competencies and institutional support systems. Nigeria introduced early childhood education into the National Policy on Education to strengthen foundational learning and improve access to quality education. Despite policy recognition, the sector continues to face challenges such as inadequate funding, shortage of qualified teachers, weak supervision and inconsistent policy implementation (Moja, 2000). These challenges have negatively affected the quality of educational services provided in many early childhood centres across the country.

Southwestern Nigeria is widely regarded as one of the educationally advanced regions in the country due to its historical investment in literacy and schooling. However, disparities still exist between urban and rural early childhood centres regarding teacher competence, instructional materials, infrastructural facilities and policy compliance. Many centres struggle with effective implementation of educational standards despite government regulations and private sector participation. Research indicates that teacher competence significantly predicts pupil achievement and educational quality. Competent educators demonstrate strong classroom management skills, effective communication, instructional

adaptability and learner-centered methodologies (Urban & Lazzari, 2011). In early childhood education, teachers' competencies are particularly important because young learners require specialized pedagogical approaches that support cognitive and socio-emotional development.

Educational institutions that adhere strictly to operational policies tend to experience improved administrative efficiency and better learning outcomes. Policy adherence promotes accountability, standardization, monitoring and effective resource utilization (Muhammad & Kainuwa, 2025). In early childhood centres, compliance with curriculum standards, teacher-child ratios, health guidelines and safety procedures contribute to quality educational service delivery. Nigeria continues to face challenges in developing educational human capital due to inadequate professional training opportunities, low teacher motivation, poor remuneration and insufficient instructional resources (Obizue & Enomah, 2025). These problems reduce teacher effectiveness and weaken the capacity of educational institutions to achieve policy objectives. In many early childhood centres, unqualified caregivers are often employed in place of trained educators, thereby affecting instructional quality.

One major challenge confronting the Nigerian educational system is policy inconsistency and weak enforcement mechanisms. Educational policies are often well formulated but poorly implemented because of inadequate supervision, corruption and administrative inefficiency (Belay et al., 2024). Weak institutional monitoring reduces compliance levels among educational centres and contributes to declining service quality. From an educational management perspective, effective service delivery depends on the interaction between human resources and organizational structures. Educational managers are expected to ensure teacher competence development, policy implementation and institutional accountability (Bush, 2020). Where management systems are weak, institutional goals become difficult to achieve, particularly in early childhood education settings.

Competency-based educational administration emphasizes the acquisition and utilization of relevant professional skills for improved institutional performance. Educational administrators are increasingly expected to possess leadership, communication, planning, supervision and decision-making competencies (Ronaasen, 2021). These competencies are essential for managing early childhood centres effectively and ensuring policy compliance among staff members. Quality assurance mechanisms help maintain standards in educational institutions through supervision, evaluation, accreditation and compliance monitoring. In early childhood centres, quality assurance ensures that

teachers possess appropriate qualifications and that learning environments support child development (Idiabana & Somieari-Pepple, 2025). Effective quality assurance practices are strongly associated with improved educational service delivery.

Several studies have established a positive relationship between employee competencies and organizational service delivery. In education, teacher competencies enhance instructional planning, classroom interaction, learner assessment and curriculum implementation (Okoro, Omeluzor, & Bamidele, 2014). Consequently, early childhood educators with strong professional competencies are more likely to deliver quality educational services. Policy adherence strengthens institutional coordination and improves operational efficiency. Educational institutions that comply with policies relating to curriculum standards, teacher recruitment and child welfare tend to provide more effective services than institutions characterized by administrative laxity (Uneke, Ezeoha, & Ndukwe, 2012). Compliance therefore serves as a critical factor in educational effectiveness. Continuous professional development is necessary for improving teacher competencies in modern educational systems. Training workshops, seminars, mentoring and in-service education help educators acquire updated pedagogical and technological skills (Nwachukwu, 2024). Professional development also improves teachers' capacity to comply with institutional policies and adapt to changing educational demands.

The increasing commercialization of early childhood education in Nigeria has raised concerns regarding quality assurance and regulatory compliance. Many private early childhood centres prioritize profit over adherence to educational standards, resulting in overcrowded classrooms, inadequate facilities, and employment of unqualified staff. These issues threaten effective educational service delivery and child development outcomes. Although several studies have examined teacher competence and educational quality independently, limited research has simultaneously investigated human capital competencies and institutional policy adherence as predictors of educational service delivery capacity in early childhood centres, particularly in Southwestern Nigeria. Existing studies often focus on primary or secondary education while neglecting the foundational early childhood sector. This study therefore seeks to examine the influence of human capital competencies and institutional policy adherence on educational service delivery capacity in early childhood centres in Southwestern Nigeria. Specifically, the study intends to determine whether educator competencies and compliance with institutional

policies significantly predict the effectiveness of instructional and developmental services provided to children. Thus, the under listed research question and hypothesis were raised, answered and tested.

Research Question

What is the difference in the contributions of human capital competencies and policy adherence to content delivery capacity of Early Childhood Educators in Southwestern Nigeria?

Research Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the contributions of human capital competencies and policy adherence to content delivery capacity of Early Childhood Educators in Southwestern Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The descriptive survey research design of correlational type was adopted for the study. This design is considered appropriate because it allows for collection of data from a large representative sample of Early Childhood Educators in Southwestern Nigeria. In this regard, a self-developed questionnaire and class observation checklist were developed and used for data collection. Data collected was collated, analysed and used for drawing inferences on the extent to which human capital competencies and policy adherence contributes to content delivery capacity of Early Childhood Educators in Southwestern Nigeria.

Population/Sample

The population of the study consisted of all early childhood educators in Southwestern Nigeria. However, the study focused on Early Childhood Educators in Lagos, Ogun and Oyo States of Southwestern Nigeria for homogeneity of targeted participants, in view of common boundaries and similarities in socio-cultural practices. To ensure that data is collected from the appropriate population, a stratified random sampling technique was used to select a representative sample from Early childhood Educators in Lagos, Ogun and Oyo States in Southwestern Nigeria. To this end, a total of 400 respondents were selected from early years schools in the targeted states, comprising of 200 respondents from Lagos State and 100 respondents from each of Ogun and Oyo States. Stratification of respondents for selection was based on state and location of respondents.

Research Instrument

Two research instruments were used for data collection in the study, comprising of a self- developed questionnaire titled Human-capital Competencies, Policy-adherence Delivery Capacity Questionnaire (HCPDCQ) and a classroom observation checklist titled Early Childhood Educator Class Observation Checklist (ECECOC) to ascertain the content delivery capacity of early childhood educators. The HCPDCQ was divided into two sections, that is Section A and B. Section A obtained information on the demographic variables of respondents like sex, age, age-group taught and professional qualification, while Section B hosted questions on the independent variable and dependent variables. The HCPDCQ was designed based on Likert's attitudinal 4-point scale and respondents were required to indicate their opinion on each item of the questionnaire by ticking one of the under listed alternatives:

Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). Additionally, the ECECOC consists of two sections. Section A obtained educator information, while section B was designed to observe the content delivery capacity of early childhood educators.

Validity/Reliability of the Research Instrument

The developed HCPDCQ and ECECOC were presented to a panel of three experts in the Faculty of Education, Lagos state University for content validity. Their suggestions were used to perfect the structural contents of the instruments before administration. The test re-test method was used in ascertaining the reliability of HCPDCQ and ECECOC. This required the administration of validated HCPDCQ on 20 respondents, who were not included in the study sample twice with two weeks interval between the two sets of administrations. Data collected were correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient to establish the reliability value. R-value of 0.83 was obtained and considered appropriate for the adoption of HCPDCQ for data collection in the study. In addition, five class observations were conducted on five of the respondents to ascertain the reliability of ECECOC. The reliability of ECECOC was determined thereafter using the Cronbach alpha and R-value of 0.78 was obtained and considered adequate for the adoption of ECECOC for class observation in the study.

Data Collection

A pre-visit was made to the selected schools for appointment and arrangement of logistics for data collection. A consent form was given to the early years educators in each school to fill out which clearly

explained the purpose of the study, as well as, their rights as participants. Considering the geographical spread of the participants, three research assistants were recruited from each state and trained on the data collection process. Furthermore, a total of four hundred copies of HCPDCQ were administered on selected respondents across the three states involved in the study. 200 copies of HCPDCQ were administered on respondents from Lagos State, while 100 copies were administered in Ogun and Oyo states respectively. Furthermore, a total of 80 (20% of the total sample) class observations were carried out in the study. This was made up of forty class observations in Lagos State and twenty each in Ogun and Oyo respectively.

Data Analysis

Data collected was collated and coded for analysis. The descriptive statistics of percentage and inferential statistics of regression analysis were used for both presentation and analysis of the data. Hypotheses stated were tested at 0.05 level of significance and inferences were drawn on the contributory influence of human capital competencies and policy adherence on the delivery capacity of Early childhood educators in Southwestern Nigeria. The SPSS version 23 was employed in processing data collected.

RESULTS

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by sex, age, age-group taught and professional status

Variable	Distribution		
Sex	Male	Female	
	67 (16.8%)	333 (83.2%)	
Age in years	Less than years	26-40 years	Above 40 years
	25 = 40 (10%)	206 (51.5%)	154 (38.5%)
Age Group Taught	0-2 years	3-4 years	5-6 years
	68 (17%)	214 (53.5%)	118 (29.5%)
Professional Status	Professional	Non-Professional	
	194 (48.5%)	206 (51.5%)	

From table 1 above, it could be observed that 16.8% of the total respondents were males, while the remaining overwhelming 83.2%, representing the majority of the total respondents were females. The

table also shows that 51.5%, being the majority were aged 26–40 years, 38.5% of them were above 40 years, while the remaining 10% of the total respondents were less than 25 years. In addition, the distribution of age group taught by respondents showed that those teaching 3–4 years were 53.5%, those teaching 5–6 years were 29.5%, while the remaining respondents teaching 0–2 years were 17%. The table further revealed that 48.5% of the total respondents, being the minority were professionals, while the remaining 51.5% of them, being the majority were nonprofessionals.

Research Question

What is the difference in the contributions of human capital competencies and policy adherence to content delivery capacity of Early Childhood Educators in Southwestern Nigeria?

Table 2: Difference in the contributions of human capital competencies and policy adherence to content delivery capacity of Early Childhood Educators

Variable	$\bar{X}$	SD	Beta (β)	Interpretation
Human Capital Competencies	66.94	10.25	0.234	Major Predictor
Policy Adherence	51.55	11.96	0.074	Minor Predictor

Table 2 above showed that the standardized beta coefficients revealed a clear difference in the contributions of the independent variables to delivery capacity of Early Childhood Educators. Human capital competencies ($\beta = 0.234$; 66.94) made a substantially higher contribution compared to policy adherence ($\beta = 0.074$; 51.55).

Research Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the contributions of human capital competencies and policy adherence to content delivery capacity of Early Childhood Educators in Southwestern Nigeria.

Table 3: Difference in the contributions of human capital competencies and policy adherence to content delivery capacity of Early Childhood Educators

Source	Unstandardised Coefficients	Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
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	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	83.860	12.253		6.844	0.000
Human Capital Competencies	0.334	0.159	0.234	2.098	0.039*
Policy Adherence	0.094	0.141	0.074	0.668	0.506

Dependent Variable: Content delivery capacity of early childhood educators

Table 3 above, showed a Beta value of 0.234 for core competencies, with a significant corresponding t-value (2.098; $P < 0.05$) was obtained. This indicated that the independent variable (human capital competencies) recorded statistically significant contribution to the dependent variable (content delivery capacity of early childhood educators). This implied that improvements in human capital competencies (such as child development knowledge, communication skills and innovative skills) significantly enhanced educators' content delivery capacity. Regarding policy adherence, the Beta value of 0.074, with a non-significant corresponding t-value ($t = 0.668$; $P > 0.05$), indicated that this independent variable (policy adherence) made no statistically significant contribution to the dependent variable (content delivery capacity of early childhood educators). Therefore, the hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference in the contributions of human capital competencies and policy adherence to content delivery capacity of early childhood educators in southwestern Nigeria was rejected. Thus, human capital competencies recorded a more dominant influence on delivery capacity of early childhood educators, contributing 23.4%, which is nearly three times more than policy adherence that contributed 7.4%. While both variables had positive influence, policy adherence showed a weak influence, suggesting that adherence to policies alone is insufficient to significantly enhance instructional delivery.

DISCUSSION

The rejection of the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance revealed that a significant difference in the contributions of human capital competencies and policy adherence to content delivery capacity of Early Childhood Educators in Southwestern Nigeria was recorded. Human capital competencies recorded a more dominant influence on delivery capacity of early childhood educators, with a contribution nearly three times more than that of policy adherence. This implies that improvements in human capital competencies (such as child development knowledge, communication skills and innovative skills) will significantly enhance educators' content delivery capacity, when compared with adherence to policy,

which should not be downplayed in any form. Above findings can be buttressed by that of Izzati and Hayati (2025) who established that teacher competence remains the most critical determinant of effective early childhood education, emphasizing that competencies such as pedagogical knowledge, problem-solving ability and social skills directly shape classroom practices and children's learning outcomes. This supports the present finding that core competencies have a stronger contribution to content delivery capacity than policy compliance.

Similarly, Nguyen et al. (2025) found that while teachers may operate within policy frameworks, their actual classroom effectiveness is largely determined by their practical competencies, particularly their ability to adapt instruction, engage learners and respond to developmental needs. This explains why human capital competencies recorded a much higher contribution compared to policy adherence in this study. In the same vein, research on competency-based curriculum implementation by Mgonja (2025) revealed a significant gap between policy expectations and classroom realities, largely due to limitations in teachers' practical skills and assessment literacy. This finding reinforces the idea that policies alone do not drive instructional effectiveness unless teachers possess the competencies to implement them. Further supporting this, studies on policy adherence in early childhood education (JRIIE, 2025) indicate that although teachers may comply with policy requirements, such adherence often remains procedural and does not necessarily translate into improved teaching quality or learner outcomes. This aligns directly with the findings of this study that policy adherence contributes less significantly to content delivery capacity.

Moreover, global policy analyses (OECD, 2025) emphasize that effective early childhood education systems combine policy frameworks with strong investments in teacher skills and competencies, highlighting that those policies can only be impactful when teachers are equipped to implement them effectively. This reinforces the dominance of human capital observed in the study. Empirical evidence from Beluso (2025) also shows that even in contexts where high levels of policy compliance are recorded, improvements in educational effectiveness are more closely associated with actual teaching strategies and professional competence rather than adherence alone. This further supports the finding that human capital have a stronger influence than policy adherence. In addition, studies examining teacher competence and adherence (Rise Journal, 2025) indicate that while adherence may improve organizational structure, teacher human capital remains the primary driver of instructional success and

learner achievement. Qualitative research by Parris (2025) further revealed that teachers often face challenges in implementing developmentally appropriate practices due to limited practical skills rather than absence of policy guidelines, suggesting that competence gaps, rather than policy gaps, are the main barriers to effective teaching.

Additionally, professional standards frameworks (NAEYC, 2024) emphasize that effective early childhood educators must demonstrate a combination of knowledge, skills and dispositions, which directly influence teaching quality and child outcomes, rather than merely adhering to policy requirements. This supports the central role of human capital in determining instructional effectiveness. Finally, recent discourse on quality improvement in early childhood education highlights that high-quality teaching is driven by educator–child interactions, pedagogical practices and continuous professional development, rather than adherence with regulations alone (ECEC, 2025). This further explains why core competencies have a more dominant effect on content delivery capacity. Thus, improving educational outcomes requires prioritizing teacher capacity development (knowledge, communication and innovation skills) while ensuring that policy compliance is strengthened to support, not replace, professional human capital competencies.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the contributions of human capital competencies and policy adherence to the content delivery capacity of Early Childhood Educators in Southwestern Nigeria. Based on the empirical findings and supporting literature, the study concludes that enhancing the content delivery capacity of early childhood educators requires prioritizing the development of human capital competencies, particularly child development knowledge and innovative teaching skills, while strengthening communication skills as a supportive mechanism. At the same time, policy adherence should be reinforced through effective monitoring, enforcement and professional development, ensuring that policies are not only established but also meaningfully implemented. Ultimately, the improvement of early childhood education depends on achieving a balance between strong teacher competencies and effective policy implementation, with greater emphasis on empowering educators as the central agents of instructional quality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that regular and structured professional development programmes should be organized for early childhood educators, focusing on child development theories classroom applications, innovative and creative teaching strategies and classroom adaptability and learner-centered pedagogy. Training for early childhood educators should move beyond theoretical knowledge to include practical, hands-on workshops, simulations and classroom-based mentoring. Government and school proprietors should institutionalize continuous professional development (CPD) as a mandatory requirement, rather than a one-time certification process. Special emphasis should be placed on developing context-relevant innovation skills, enabling teachers to improvise teaching materials using locally available resources. To ensure that human capital competencies are adequately developed, training institutions should review and update early childhood education curricula to reflect greater integration of child development knowledge with classroom practice, emphasise innovation, creativity and problem-solving skills and increased opportunities for teaching practice and field experience. Teacher preparation programmes should adopt a competency-based approach, ensuring that graduates demonstrate practical teaching skills, not just theoretical knowledge.

Since policy adherence was found to have limited influence due to weak implementation, it is recommended that government agencies and regulatory bodies should strengthen monitoring and supervision mechanisms in early childhood education centers. There should be regular inspections and evaluations to ensure adherence to curriculum standards, certification requirements and health and safeguarding regulations. Quality assurance systems for early childhood education in Nigeria, specifically in Southwestern zone, should be strengthened through the adoption of a more practice-oriented evaluation approach, which focuses on classroom interactions, teaching methods and learner engagement. Evaluation should not be limited to checking compliance with policies but should assess actual teaching effectiveness. Collaborative partnerships among government agencies, teacher training

institutions, school proprietors should be strengthened for greater outcomes at early childhood education level in the country. Overall, it is recommended that stakeholders shift focus to a balanced approach that prioritizes teacher competence development, while strengthening policy implementation mechanisms. Improving early childhood education in Southwestern Nigeria therefore requires investing in teachers as the central drivers of instructional quality, supported by effective policies, strong institutions and continuous professional development.

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