

Soft Skills and Early Childhood Education Teachers' Job Performance in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

Dr. Blessing Uwot Peter

Department of Early Childhood Care and Education, Akwa Ibom State College of Education,
Afaha Nsit

Professor Queen. I. Obinaju

Department of Early Childhood and Special Education, University of Uyo, Uyo

Dr. Nsima Festus Ikoh

Department of Early Childhood and Special Education, University of Uyo, Uyo

doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/bje.2013/vol12n146375>

Published December 15, 2024

Citation: Peter B.U., Obinaju Q.I. and Ikoh N.F (2024) Soft Skills and Early Childhood Education Teachers' Job Performance in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, *British Journal of Education*, Vol.12, Issue 14, 63-75

ABSTRACT: *This study investigated the relationship between soft skills and early childhood teachers' job performance in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study examined the relationship between communication skills, conflict management skills, stress management skills, time management skills, and early childhood teachers' job performance. To achieve the purpose of this study, four specific objectives, four research questions and four null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study and were tested at .05 level of significance. Literatures pertinent to the study were reviewed under theoretical, conceptual and empirical frameworks. Correlational research design was adopted for the study. A sample size of 600 early childhood teachers and 390 head teachers were selected for the study using multistage sampling technique. Two instruments were used for data collection and they were; Soft Skill Instrument (SSI) and Early Childhood Teachers' Job Performance Instrument (ECTJPI). Teachers responded to Soft Skill Instrument (SSI) while school head teachers responded to Early Childhood Teachers' Job Performance Instrument (ECTJPI). R and R² values of Simple Linear Regression Analysis were used for answering the research questions and for testing the hypotheses. The findings of the study revealed that there is a significant relationship between soft skills and early childhood teachers' job performance in Akwa Ibom State. It was concluded that there is a significant positive relationship between communication skills, conflict management skills, stress management skills, time management skills and early childhood teachers' job performance. It was recommended among others that early childhood teachers should seek personal development of their soft skills through workshops, seminars and conferences.*

Keywords: soft skills, early childhood education, teachers, job performance

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Teaching is one of the noble professions in our contemporary society and our educational system can be a success or a failure depending on the effectiveness of teachers' job performance. Although a degree is important to employers, having a university or college degree in education does not guarantee effective job performance of a teacher in the school environment. Employers are looking for workers who could bring both hard skills and soft skills to promote the organizational goals and objectives. Employees often display their soft skills on curriculum vitae but rarely put these soft skills into practice after being employed. Dennis and Jimmy (2018) defined soft skills as competencies that can help an individual meet the needs of a particular job and advance in his or her career. Soft skills are special characteristics and abilities that distinguish a person from other individuals who have similar professional backgrounds and experience. It includes character traits, behaviours, attitude, interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities. Soft skills are core skills which are desirous in all profession.

Teaching profession begins with soft skills such as good communication skills. Good communication skills deliver messages with clarity and comprehension without any distortion or confusion. There are various forms of communication skills and these include; gesture (body language), verbal and written communication. Poor communication skills in any organization could result in interpersonal tension which could cause disagreement that leads to conflicts (Nwosu, 2017).

Conflicts that are allowed to fester and grow will ultimately diminish job performance an organization (productivity). Knowing that conflict is inevitable, conflict management skills aim to make conflict a productive part of the workplace. Examples of conflict management skills are effective communication, active listening, practicing empathy, dialogue, problem-solving, positive attitude and emotional intelligence As pointed out by Osabiya (2015) the five levels of conflict are intrapersonal (within an individual), interpersonal (between individuals), intra-group (within a group), intergroup (between groups), and intra-organizational (within organizations).

Time management skill is another strong soft skill that enable teachers come to school on time, complete academic tasks on time, stay focused and organized, meet deadline and achieve set educational goals and objectives. Charles (2019) summarized that, knowing the value of something facilitates good time managing capability. There are various time management skills such as prioritizing, scheduling, task / work load management, duties delegation and many more. Time is the most valuable thing that cannot be recovered if lost. When time is not poorly managed, it can result in stress. When the mind is stress, the individual loses the ethical values like humanness, respect, compassion and care for others.

Stress is a very high- tasking factor that we deal with in our day-to-day life. Stress can be managed to prevent its negative effect which could be physical, mental, emotional and psychological (Constantinos, 2017). Types of stress according to Allen and Eaton (2019) are: acute stress, episodic acute stress and chronic stress. Self-awareness is the foundation of stress management. The first step in better managing your stress is to simply recognize it, so that it does not grow into bigger problems – affecting your physical and emotional health. Secondly, individuals can reduce stress through self-care ideas such as exercise, socializing and connecting with others, taking breaks, eating healthy food, fruits and drinks, saying “no” to tasks that are beyond ones’ limit, avoid people who stress you out and deliberately set aside time for relaxation .

Job performance is defined as an effort by an employee to achieve organizational set goals. The dimensions of job performance of employees are task performance and contextual performance. Teacher’s job performance can be measured in lesson note presentation, classroom management skills, interpersonal relationship with staff, pupils and parents, outcome of pupils’ academic achievement and many more (Conway, 2019).

Early Childhood Education teachers in this context (study) are not necessarily teachers who are graduates of Early Childhood Education but they are teachers in public primary schools who are assigned by the school head teacher to teach and care for pupils aged 3-5years prior to their entering into primary school. This implies that Early Childhood Education teachers in this study are teachers teaching crèche, pre-nursery and nursery classes in public schools and the study seeks to investigate the relationship between soft skills, personality traits and early childhood teachers’ job performance in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

With the researcher’s six years of professional experience as a school head teacher, the researcher observed poor job performance among Early Childhood Education teachers despite obtaining professional certificates (hard skills) like NCE, BEd, MEd. and many more. This proves that certification alone cannot guarantee effective and efficient job performance. There are certified teachers who are knowledgeable of the subject matter but they cannot communicate it accurately with the right vocabulary to the learners’ understanding. Some teachers lack the ability to manage conflict, time and stress. Although some teachers often display their soft skills on curriculum vitae, but rarely do they put these soft skills into practice after being employed. It is against this backdrop in our educational system that the researcher was motivated to investigate the relationship between soft skills and early childhood teachers’ job performance in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between soft skills, and Early Childhood Education teachers’ job performance. Specifically, this study investigated the relationship between:

- i. communication skills and early childhood teachers’ job performance.

- ii. conflict management skills and early childhood teachers' job performance.
- iii. stress management skills and early childhood teachers' job performance.
- iv. time management skills and early childhood teachers' job performance.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study.

- i. What is the relationship between communication skills and Early Childhood teachers' job performance?
- ii. What is the relationship between conflict management skills and Early Childhood teachers' job performance?
- iii. How does stress management skills relate with Early Childhood teachers' job performance?
- iv. How does time management skills relate with Early Childhood teachers' job performance?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance.

- H₀₁:** There is no significant relationship between communication skills and Early Childhood teachers' job performance.
- H₀₂:** There is no significant relationship between conflict management skills and Early Childhood teachers' job performance.
- H₀₃:** There is no significant relationship between stress management skills and Early Childhood teachers' job performance.
- H₀₄:** There is no significant relationship between time management skills and Early Childhood teachers' job performance.

RESEARCH METHOD

A correlational research design was adopted for this study. The area of study was Akwa Ibom State. Akwa Ibom state is in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria, bordered on the east by Cross River State, on the west by Rivers State and Abia State, and on the south by the Atlantic Ocean. The Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Education is tasked with monitoring the education sector of the state. There are numerous private and public nursery, primary and secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State (Nsoh, 2021). The population of the study consists of 571 head teachers and 1,250 Early Childhood Education teachers in Akwa Ibom State. A sample size of 390 head teachers and 600 Early Childhood Education teachers were selected for this study using multistage sampling technique. This sample size forms 48% of Early Childhood Education teachers' population and 52.6% of head teachers' population in Akwa Ibom State public primary schools with early childhood education classrooms (ECCE classrooms). Two instruments were developed by the researcher for data collection and they are; Soft Skill Instrument (SSI), and Early Childhood Teacher's Job Performance Instrument (ECTJPI). These instruments were face validated by three

experts, the researcher’s supervisor, and an expert in Early Childhood Education, Educational Management and Educational Research. These instruments were subjected to a reliability test using test-retest method with 50 teachers and 10 head teachers who were not part of the study sample. Data collected were correlated using Cronbach Alpha. Reliability coefficients obtained from these instruments were .85 and .80 respectively. R and R2 values of Simple linear regression analysis were used for answering the research questions while the F-value was used for testing the hypotheses. Each of the hypotheses was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Research Question One

What is the relationship between communication skills and Early Childhood teachers’ job performance?

Table 1: Result of R-Value of Simple Linear Regression of the Relationship between Communication Skills and Early Childhood Teachers’ Job Performance (N= 990)

Variables	R	R2	Adjusted R2
Communication skills	.647	.418	.418
Teachers’ Job Performance			

The result presented in Table 1 revealed the R-value of .647 as the strength of the relationship between communication skills and Early Childhood teachers’ job performance which implies a high and positive relationship between communication skills and Early Childhood teachers’ job performance.

Research Question Two

What is the relationship between conflict management skills and Early Childhood teachers’ job performance?

Table 2: Result of R-Value of Simple Linear Regression of the Relationship between Conflict Management Skills and Early Childhood Teachers' Job Performance (N = 990)

Variables	R	R2	Adjusted R2
Conflict management skills	.654	.427	.427
Teachers' Job Performance			

The result presented in Table 2 revealed the R-value of .654 as the strength of the relationship between conflict management skills and Early Childhood teachers' job performance which implies a high and positive relationship between conflict management skills and Early Childhood teachers' job performance.

Research Question Three

How does stress management skills relate with Early Childhood teachers' job performance?

Table 3: Result of R-Value of Simple Linear Regression of the Relationship between Stress Management Skills and Early Childhood Teachers' Job Performance (N = 990)

Variables	R	R2	Adjusted R2
Stress management skills	.707	.500	.500
Teachers' Job Performance			

The result presented in Table 3 revealed the R-value of .707 as the strength of the relationship between stress management skills and Early Childhood teachers' job performance which implies a high and positive relationship between stress management skills and Early Childhood teachers' job performance.

Research Question Four

How does time management skills relate with Early Childhood teachers' job performance?

Table 4: Result of R-Value of Simple Linear Regression of the Relationship between Time Management Skills and Early Childhood Teachers' Job Performance (N = 990)

Variables	R	R2	Adjusted R2
Time management skills	.645	.416	.416
Teachers' Job Performance			

The result presented in Table 4 revealed the R-value of .645 as the strength of the relationship between time management skills and Early Childhood teachers' job performance which implies a high and positive relationship between time management skills and Early Childhood teachers' job performance.

Hypothesis One

There is no significant relationship between communication skills and Early Childhood teachers' job performance

Table 5a: Simple Linear Regression of the Relationship between Communication Skills and Early Childhood Teachers' Job Performance (N = 990)

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	7117.22	1	7117.22	81.41	.000b
Residual	86371.75	988	87.42		
Total	93488.97	989			

Table 5b: Simple Linear Regression of the Relationship between Communication Skills and Early Childhood Teachers' Job Performance (n=990)

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	49.21	1.25		39.28	.000
Communication skills	1.98	.07	.647	26.66	.000

The result in Table 5a shows that the computed F-ratio of the relationship between communication skills and Early Childhood teachers' job performance at 1 and 988 degrees of freedom is 81.41, while its corresponding computed level of significance is .00 alpha. This level of significance is less than .05 in which the decision is based. The result in Table 10b gives an unstandardized

coefficient (B) of 1.98. This indicates that for every unit rise in teachers' communication skills, teachers job performance increases by 1.98. With this result, the null hypothesis was rejected. This result implies there is significant relationship between communication skills and Early Childhood teachers' job performance.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant relationship between conflict management skills and Early Childhood teachers' job performance.

Table 6: Simple Linear Regression of the relationship between conflict management skills and Early Childhood teachers' job performance (n = 990)

Model	Sumof Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	7266.13	1	7266.13	83.26	.000b
Residual	86222.85	988	87.27		
Total	93488.98	989			

Table 6b: Simple Linear Regression of the relationship between conflict management skills and Early Childhood teachers' job performance (n=990)

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	16.74	2.41		6.94	.000
Conflict management skills	3.84	.14	.654	27.16	.000

The result in Table 11a shows that the computed F-ratio of the relationship between conflict management skills and Early Childhood teachers' job performance at 1 and 988 degrees of freedom is 83.26, while its corresponding computed level of significance is .00 alpha. This level of significance is less than .05 in which the decision is based. The result in Table 11b gives an unstandardized coefficient (B) of 3.84. This indicates that for every unit rise in teachers' conflict management skills, teachers job performance increases by 3.84. With this result, the null hypothesis was rejected. This result implies there is significant relationship between conflict management skills and Early Childhood teachers' job performance.

Hypothesis Three

There is no significant relationship between stress management skills and Early Childhood teachers' job performance

Table 7a: Simple Linear Regression of the relationship between stress management skills and Early Childhood teachers' job performance (n = 990)

Model	Sumof Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	8162.927	1	8162.927	94.52	.000b
Residual	85326.048	988	86.3623		
Total	93488.975	989			

Table 7b: Simple Linear Regression of the relationship between stress management skills and Early Childhood teachers' job performance (n= 990)

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	45.26	1.19		38.08	.000
Stress management skills	2.33	.07	.707	31.45	.000

The result in Table 7a shows that the computed F-ratio of the relationship between stress management skills and Early Childhood teachers' job performance at 1 and 988 degrees of freedom is 94.52, while its corresponding computed level of significance is .00 alpha. This level of significance is less than .05 in which the decision is based. The result in Table 7b gives an unstandardized coefficient (B) of 2.33. This indicates that for every unit rise in teachers stress management skills, teachers job performance increases by 2.33. Also, computed t-value of 31.45, while its corresponding computed level of significance is .00 alpha. This level of significance is less than .05 in which the decision is based. With this result, the null hypothesis was rejected. This result implies there is significant relationship between stress management skills and Early Childhood teachers' job performance.

Hypothesis Four

There is no significant relationship between time management skills and Early Childhood teachers' job performance.

Table 8a: Simple Linear Regression of the relationship between time management skills and Early Childhood teachers' job performance (n = 990)

Model	Sumof Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	7106.87	1	7106.87	.29	.000b
Residual	86382.11	988	87.43		
Total	93488.98	989			

Table 8b: Simple Linear Regression of the relationship between time management skills and Early Childhood teachers' job performance (n= 990)

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	44.11	1.447		30.48	.000
Time management skills	2.34	.088	.65	26.55	.000

The result in Table 8a shows that the computed F-ratio of the relationship between time management skills and Early Childhood teachers' job performance at 1 and 988 degrees of freedom is 81.29, while its corresponding computed level of significance is .00 alpha. This level of significance is less than .05 in which the decision is based. The result in Table 4.13b gives an unstandardized coefficient (B) of 2.34. This indicates that for every unit rise in teachers' time management skills, teachers job performance increases by 2.34. Also, the computed t-value is 26.55 while its corresponding computed level of significance is .00 alpha. This level of significance is less than .05 in which the decision is based. With this result, the null hypothesis was rejected. This result implies there is significant relationship between time management skills and Early Childhood teachers' job performance.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Communication Skills and Teachers' Job Performance

Result in Table 1 and Table 5 revealed that there is a significant relationship between teachers' communication skills and their job performance. This implies that poor communication skills can hinder teachers' job performance. This finding is in support with the finding of Obilor (2020) who stated that good communication skills of a teacher are the basic need of academic success of learners and teachers' professional success in life. He furthered highlighted that without good communication skills, teachers disable the teaching-learning process as well as their own career mobility. Teachers with poor communication skills hinder pupils' comprehension and interest towards the subject matter while good communication skills maximize the learners' interest, attention and retention ability.

Conflict Management Skills and Teachers' Job Performance

Result in Table 2 and Table 6 proved that there is a significant relationship between communication skills and teachers' job performance. This finding is in agreement with the finding of Amie-Ogan (2021) who noted that conflict management skills such as avoidance, collaborating, compromising and accommodating have strong relationship with teachers' job performance. Unresolved conflict is highly detrimental to the school system and team work. Yasin (2019) also affirmed that conflict management skills have positive impacts on teachers' job performance.

Stress Management Skills and Teachers' Job Performance

Result in Table 3 and Table 7 proved that stress management skills have significant relationship with teachers' job performance. This finding is in agreement with the finding of Werang (2019) who affirmed that work-related stress is linked with job performance. He posited that sources of stress facing individual teachers are educating slow learners, time pressure, role conflict, poor working conditions, pupils' disruptive behaviours, excessive work load and many more. Bassey (2021) also noted that if stress is not handling effectively, it could be destructive to teachers' job and health. Stress decreases productivity, increases interpersonal conflicts, increases absenteeism and turnover rate.

Time Management Skills and Teachers' Job Performance

Result in Table 4 and Table 8 indicated that time management skills are significantly related to teachers' job performance. Time is most valuable and it waits for no man. This finding is in consonance with the finding of Etor (2019) who noted that there is a significant relationship between teacher time management technique and their job performance. He furthered explained that time management skills help teachers set realistic and achievable goals, avoid procrastination, prioritize activities and use time log especially when there is pressure. Adebajo and Adewale (2022) also noted that effective time management potentially increases productivity, promote job satisfaction and improves both professional and personal satisfaction.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Based on the data analyzed, the findings of the study revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between communication skills, conflict management skills, stress management skills, time management skills and Early Childhood teachers' job performance in Akwa Ibom State.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that soft skills are positively related to early childhood education teachers' job performance. Secondly, acquisition of educational certificate alone does not guarantee teachers' effective job performance. To achieve effective job performance, teachers need both the hard skills (educational qualifications) and soft skills.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made.

1. Teachers should strive to enhance their soft skills through personal development at workshops, seminars and conferences. Acquisition of soft skills will enhance their employability and job retention rate.
2. Teachers should be trained on effective communication skills because poor communication skills impede effective teaching and learning.

3. Higher institutions should integrate soft skills as one the general courses irrespective of an individual's course of study. In today' 21st century, employability and job efficiency requires more than certification; employees' soft skills are prerequisite for job effectiveness.
4. School authorities should constitute staff disciplinary committee that will ensure efficient conflict management strategies in school.
5. Teachers should be encouraged to manage stress effectively by engaging in recreational activities such as sports, picnic and many more. These activities can be done daily, weekly, or monthly.
6. School head teacher through consistent supervision and disciplinary measures should ensure that teachers manage their time effectively by their punctuality rate and ability to meet targeted goals within a set time limit.

REFERENCES

- Adebajo, O. and Adewale, E. (2022). Linking soft skills to business education and teachers' job effectiveness. *Journal of management and Business Education*, 4(3): 12-15.
- Allen, P. and Eaton, S. (2015). Occupational stress and management strategies of secondary school principals in Cross River state Nigeria. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 6(27): 39-45.
- Amie-Ogan (2021). Examine relationship of soft skills, hard skills, innovation and performance the mediation effect of organizational learning. *International Journal of Science and Management Studies*, 3(3): 81-89.
- Bassey, A. (2021). Stress management strategies and teachers' productivity in public secondary school in Ikom Education Zone of Cross River State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Science and Applied Research*, 8(9): 10-20.
- Charles, A. (2019). Stress Management among teachers; Implications for counseling. *The Nigerian Journal of Research and Production*, 3(2): 11-20.
- Constantinos, M. (2017). Job stressors, personality and burnout in primary school teachers. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 77(2): 229-243.
- Conway,N. (2019) The Importance of Communication in the classroom. The Impact of effective communication skills on student enthusiasm.
- Dennis, R. and Jimmy, C. (2018). The difference between hard and soft skills and their relative impact in training transfer. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 22(1): 111-120.
- Etor, S. (2019) *Stress management in organization*.1st Edition. Enugu; CECTA press. p80.
- Nwosu, J. (2017). Principals' communication strategies and teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Ikonne Local Government Area of Ogun State. *International Journal of Education, Learning and Development*, 5(9): 1-12.
- Obilor, I. (2020). Teachers' communication skills and students' academic performance. *European Educational Research Journal*, 13(4):1-16.
- Obinaju, Q. and Umoh,I. (2012). Introduction to early childhood care, development and education.1st Edition. Uyo; Soulmate press.

- Osabiya, B. (2015). Conflict Management and Resolution in Nigeria Public Sector. *Review of Public Administration and Management*, 4(8): 60-70.
- Werang, B. (2019). Work– related stress and job performance among primary school teacher. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education*, 9(2): 352-358.
- Yasin,S. (2019). Teachers’ time management and the performance of student: A comparing of government and private school of Hyderabad, Pakistan. *World Journal of Education*, 6(6): 21-30.