Caregiver's Sensitivity and Children’s Learning in Early Childhood Education Settings in Ghana

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Introduction:
- Studies suggest that early childhood education settings should support basic attachment needs of children and provide feelings of security so that children can explore freely and feel secure (Bergin & Bergin, 2009).
- Caregiver sensitivity is the ability to respond, to be emotionally available and provide contingent, appropriate and consistent responses to the child’s emotional and physical needs (Gerber et al., 2007). Also La Paro et al. (2009) emphasize caregiver sensitivity as caregivers awareness of and responsiveness to children’s emotional and academic needs (i.e. provide both instructional and emotional support).
- The literature also indicates that when there are high levels of caregiver sensitivity, even children growing in disadvantaged early childhood education environments may benefit from secure and positive relationships with caregivers which will uniquely contribute to their social and emotional development and school readiness.
- This proposal aspires to advance the very limited knowledge about Early Childhood Education settings in Ghana which is characterized by both structural, emotional, and learning challenges.
- The current study is a qualitative design, and will examine the relationship between caregivers’ emotional and instructional support and children’s learning within early childhood education settings in Ghana.

Hypothesis:
Children who learn in early childhood education settings in which caregivers display higher levels of sensitive behavior and instructional support will present better learning achievements compared to children who learn in early childhood education settings in which caregivers display lower levels of sensitive behavior and instructional support.

Expected learning outcome
- Listening skills
  - Vocabulary growth
  - Expressive language
- Positive engagement
- Manipulative skills
- Social competence
- Cognitive development
- Literacy development

Participants:
- 95 early childhood education caregivers in Kpandai District, Ghana
- 2750 children between the ages of 3yrs to 5yrs

Measures:
- CLASS: the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS; Pianta et al, 2004) will be used to evaluate the early childhood education settings in terms of emotional support (based on 4 scales: positive, climate, negative climate, teacher sensitivity, and regard for students’ perspective) and instructional support (based on 3 scales: concept development, quality of feedback, and language modeling).
- Children Academic Achievement Scores: recording and coding of achievement scores regarding listening comprehension and speaking skill, numeracy, dramatic play and interaction with nature, painting, coloring, and poetry.

Conclusions:
- The proposal emphasizes the importance of caregivers’ sensitive behaviour in promoting attachment-like early childhood education settings and enhancing better learning abilities.
- When caregivers show insensitive behaviour within early childhood education settings they may hinder children’s learning and emotional development.
- When caregivers in early childhood education settings display sensitive behaviour towards the child, the early childhood setting becomes an interactive instructional environment which supports children's social, emotional and cognitive development. Furthermore in such circumstances the teacher and the early childhood setting may be a protective factor in light of challenges outside the class.