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An Investigation into the Impact of CVQ Certification on the Performance of Early Childhood Practitioners in Grenada

Frances Ruffin
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Grenada National Training Agency

Abstract

In recent years there has been an increase in the need for quality Early Child Care services in Grenada. Since this is a fundamental step in the all-round development of a child, the Government of Grenada has invested significantly in developing both the human and physical capacity of that sector. Critical to developing the quality of provided child care services is the issue of training for these care givers. Training in this sector is sometimes received formally by early childhood practitioners prior to employment, while others have received training periodically in a variety of pertinent topics during employment. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the appropriateness of the Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ) training programme for preparing Early Childcare Practitioners for work. Using the purposive sampling technique, the data was collected via questionnaires administered to fifty participants who had completed the CVQ level 1 or 2 programmes within the last two years. The results indicated that Early Childhood Practitioners valued the CVQ programme since it provided training in relevant areas such as child development, physical needs of children, social environment responsibility, customer service and personal professional development. The implications of this research are that the CVQ programme should be used to train persons prior to their entry into the early childhood work setting, and should be used as professional development training for persons already employed in the sector.

Introduction

The provision of quality care and education for children is an international priority. The World Bank, UNICEF and other agencies and organisations have been investing in projects for the development and enhancement of quality early childhood education policies. These policies are informed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). To implement these policies, Early Childhood Practitioners must have the requisite skills, knowledge and attitudes. The practices of Early Childhood Practitioners are critical to the preparation of young children for entrance to primary school.

Research has shown that quality care and education must be given to young children (0-8 years) so that they can become literate, well-adjusted adults. Most theories and perspectives on development agree that early childhood is a very critical period of life when children are very dependent on reliable and secure and protected relationships with others, especially adults.

Due to the increased need for early childhood care services in Grenada, it’s important that the quality of these services be brought into sharp focus. In Grenada, most of Early Childhood Practitioners are not formally trained prior to entering the sector. Some training is acquired initially on the job, and later periodic training sessions are held to address job related skills. However, this training isn’t sufficient to help the practitioners be adequately prepared to meet the needs of the young ones. Although a high percentage of pre-school teachers are trained through the Teacher Education Department of the T.A. Marryshow Community College, most of them are in the government schools where the training is done while they are already employed as teachers.

In June 2014, a national survey was conducted in Grenada of 111 preschool and 38 infant care centres in order to provide the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development and the Ministry of Social Development with a national picture of the quality of learning environments available to children up to pre-school years. This national survey, published in October of 2014,
revealed the following about the opportunities for the professional growth of staff, expressed in percentages.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of setting</th>
<th>Inadequate</th>
<th>Minimal</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-School Government (67 centres)</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-School Private (44 centres)</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant and Toddler settings Government (10 centres)</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant and Toddler settings Private (28 centres)</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above depicts clearly that in the pre-school settings good and excellent opportunities for professional growth are very limited. In the more critical setting of infant and toddler care, however, there are more opportunities. The opportunities for professional development for those teaching infants and toddlers in the government settings are greater than those in the private settings. In its entirety, it is evident that there is an urgent need to focus on the professional development of both infant/toddler and pre-school early childhood practitioners, since they are molding the minds of young children at a critical stage in their lives. In an effort to provide professional development, two groups of early childhood practitioners were trained using the occupational standard in Early Childhood Development. Training and assessment based on this standard leads to Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ) certification.

**Literature Review**

The literature in this review will be reviewed in the following sections: definition of professional development, importance of professional development, early childhood learning and development, quality education and care, and professional development of practitioners.

Professional Development is defined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) as initial preparation (pre-service) and the knowledge, skills, behaviours and attitudes of the Early Childhood workforce. Research has indicated that despite the level of training received initially, all early childhood practitioners need ongoing professional development. According to Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin and Knoche (2009) “the process of professional development refers to how professionals move from awareness (knowledge) to action (practice) and to adoption of particular dispositions in their professional repertoires.”

“Continuing Professional Development is a life-long process of learning,” according to the Ministry of Social and Family Division, Singapore (2011). The Ministry additionally indicated that “Early Childhood Professionals have a personal responsibility to develop and maintain their knowledge and skills to ensure professional competence throughout their careers.” In early childhood education, it's critical that practitioners continue their professional development. Despite one's level of education and amount of hands-on experience, early childhood educators and caregivers should participate in regular continuing education. “There's so much research going on uncovering the way children learn it's important for caregivers to stay on top of these developments,” (Nixon, 2001). In 1991, Candy stated that, “professional development in early childhood takes place to accomplish two primary objectives. First, it is anticipated that professional development will advance the knowledge, skills, dispositions and practices of early childhood providers in their efforts to educate children and support families. A second objective is to promote
a culture for ongoing professional growth in individuals and systems.” Exposure to the most
current care-giving practices, strategies, trends and knowledge should help the early childhood
practitioners create nurturing environments and enhance their skills, knowledge and practices.

One of the oldest debates in philosophy and psychology focuses on whether children’s
learning and development are due to nature or nurture. French and Murphy (2005) concluded that
it is clear both genetic and environmental factors play vital roles in a child's chances for success.
This theory has been postulated by many of the early theorists from various perspectives including
the psycho-social, behaviorists, cognitive, socio-cultural and ecological systems theory.

Erikson, a psycho-social theorist, identified five stages in the development of a child from
birth to age six. He postulated “a basic psychosocial conflict which is resolved along a continuum
from positive to negative, determines whether healthy or maladaptive outcomes occur at each
stage,” (Berk, 2006). Behaviourists like Skinner and Watson agreed with Loche that a child is born
'tabula rosa' hence its mind is like a blank slate. As a result, the child is shaped by its environment.
Berk further posits that “This theory suggests that adults critically shape a child's learning through

Cognitive theorist, Piaget, cited in Berk (2006) believed that all children go through four
different stages of cognitive development. Three of these stages: Sensori-motor (0-2 years), pre-
operational stage (2-7 years), concrete operational (7-11 years), are part of the early childhood
stages. “According to [Piaget’s] cognitive-developmental theory, children actively construct
knowledge as they manipulate and explore their world,” (Berk, 2006).

Research beginning from the 1970s focused on the Information Processing model, Socio-
cultural and Ecological Systems Theory. Like Piaget, the Information Processing approach views
children as actively making sense of their experiences and as modifying their own thinking in
response to environmental demands (Halford, 2002; Klahr & Mac Whinney, 1998), cited in Berk
(2006). However, there are no stages in this model, just continuous changes.

Socio-cultural theorists like Vygotsky, highlighted the importance of social interaction, in
particular cooperative dialogues between children and more knowledgeable members of the
society, as necessary for children to acquire the ways of thinking and behaving that make up a
community's culture. Scaffolding is required by the parents and caregivers to assist the child's

Bronfenbrenner (1979) developed the Ecological Systems Theory to explain how
everything in a child and the child's environment affects how a child grows and develops. He
labeled different aspects or levels of the environment that influence children's development,
including the microsystem, which he sees as the smallest and most immediate environment in
which the child lives. The microsystem comprises the daily home, school or daycare, peer group
or community environment of the child. More nurturing and supportive interactions and
relationships in those environments will understandably foster the child’s improved development.

The importance of having a stimulating environment to foster child development is
emphasized by many researchers. According to the National Council for Curriculum and
Assessment (NCCA) in 2007 "children's holistic approach involves them intricately interweaving
domains of social, emotional, personal, cognitive, linguistic, creative, aesthetic, moral and spiritual
development and the whole systems of learning processes all of which influence each other in
highly complex and sophisticated ways." Hence the quality of interaction children have with adults
and the environment play an important part in the quality of their learning at all ages since these
are critical periods during which the sensory and motor systems of the brain need experiences to
help them develop.

All care and education, regardless of the setting should be of high quality; and we need to
strive to provide settings which nurture and prepare children for school. It is widely assumed that
a child's readiness for school depends on meeting his or her comprehensive needs: physical,
cognitive, social and emotional and approaches to learning. Hence, if a child enters school with a deficit in these areas, it will be difficult for him or her to catch up.

One thing required to accomplish this is a high quality early childhood programme. The NAEYC describes a high quality programme as “one which provides a safe, nurturing environment that promotes the physical, social, emotional and cognitive development of young children while responding to the needs of families” (2012). Any good quality early childhood programme must be based on the underlying principles which promote the child as an active participant in the ongoing process of learning.

According to Edwards, Fleer and Nuttall (2008), research has revealed that there’s a strong correlation between children’s home experiences and training obtained in Early Childhood Care and Education centres. This suggests that the early childhood Funds of Knowledge curriculum should use a child’s prior knowledge as a base for conceptual learning. Funds of Knowledge covers knowledge children acquired from different sectors (agriculture, fishing, culture, religion). As a result, practitioners are taught to be aware of and understand the child’s prior knowledge and use it to guide formal learning.

“Highly qualified practitioners often provide better quality early childhood education and care. This can yield better child outcomes, both socially and academically, not only in the short term but also in the long term. It's not necessary that all staff working in the early childhood settings have high levels of education, which may also be impossible to realise and not desirable. However, those with lower levels of general education should work alongside those who are highly qualified,” (OECD: Research Brief: Qualification, Education and Professional Development Matter, 2006).

Elliott (2006) cited research which indicated that pedagogy is central to quality, and that specialized training contributes to quality interactions and rich child-centered contexts. Central to these pedagogies is the practitioners’ ability to transfer the skills and knowledge they have acquired to the practice of creating quality nurturing environments which stimulate children's engagement. This point is further reiterated by Elliott (2006), who cited the research done on Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE). This research pinpoints the importance of early childhood teaching qualifications in the creation of quality environments and the positive impact of early childhood centre manager's qualifications on a centre's quality profile. This must not be underestimated, since parents usually seek out early childhood centres which are of good quality to enroll their children. Poorly qualified staff in early childhood settings is an international concern since well qualified practitioners are critical to good quality outcomes for children.

Adults are central to early childhood care and education. Therefore, it's critical that they are well-educated to perform their roles. Although the early childhood practitioners have various tasks to perform, these can be grouped into two categories of roles: management and educational. Hays writing in NCCA (2007) expounded on each of these roles by stating “the management role encompasses planning for children’s learning, resourcing and organising opportunities for learning, recording and documenting children's learning, evaluating practices and adapting to the interests and needs of the children. The educational role involves reflective observation to inform practice, supporting and extending learning in groups and with individual children, understanding what is happening as children learn and responding to this understanding, and working in partnerships with other adults and children themselves in the process that is early education”.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the Australian Vocational and Education training sector expanded its training in child care to meet the training needs of child care staff. This training which was based on the Australian Qualification Framework provided training up to an Associate Diploma. Although this was not equivalent to a university degree, it was sufficient to provide the early
childhood practitioners with a level of education to work effectively in the sector. It was also used as a base for further training at a higher level.

The early childhood stage of learning is of major importance since it forms the foundation of life-long development. In early childhood, positive or negative dispositions towards society and learning are absorbed and the basic skills acquired. These include co-operation with peers and adults, autonomy, meaning making, creativity, problem solving and persistence (OECD 2006). What someone learns in one stage of life has implications for, and sets the platform for, learning in the next stage. Home Start International (2006) reiterated this point by saying, “Children’s experiences in their early years have a profound impact on their later social, emotional and cognitive development.” Bearing this in mind, it is very critical that all provisions be made for ensuring that these young ones are placed in good quality environments where they will have nurturing experiences managed by properly trained personnel.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research is to determine the appropriateness of the Early Childhood Development occupational standard for preparing early childhood practitioners for work in the child care services sector. This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the effect of CVQ certification on the interaction between Early Childhood Practitioners and their customers?
2. To what extent has the CVQ certification influenced Early Childhood Practitioners in facilitating the child's all-around development?
3. How has the CVQ certification helped the Early Childhood Practitioners in caring for the physical needs of the child?
4. To what extent has the CVQ certification influenced the relationship between Early Childhood Practitioners and parents?

The intent of this research is to provide information relating to the effects of the training leading to the CVQ certification on the performance of the Early Childhood Practitioners. Specifically, it will focus on whether or not the early childhood practitioners who completed this training felt they benefitted from the training; and to what extent they found it useful and applicable to their daily operations at the centres.

**Definition of concepts**

- **Development** - process by which a person changes and grows over time influenced by both experiences and physiological changes.
- **Early childhood development** - physical, cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional development of a child from pre-natal stage to age eight.
- **Early childhood** - the period from birth to age eight.
- **Learning** - the complex, dynamic and interactive process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience.
- **Knowledge** - abilities, talents, ideas, vocabulary, concepts and related aspects of educational culture and best practices.
- **Skills** - abilities, talents, capabilities which result from training or practice

**Research Methodology**

A quantitative approach was used to conduct this research. Quantitative research is a method that is used to generate numerical data, by employing statistical, logical and mathematical technique. It is used to quantify attitudes, opinions, behaviors, and other defined variables – and generalize results from a larger sample population. This study focuses on the appropriateness of the Early Childhood Development occupational standard which leads to CVQ certification for
preparation of the Early Childhood Practitioners for working in the early childhood care settings, hence the use of the quantitative approach.

A questionnaire comprised of 24 questions was developed, the first five of which focused on the provision of demographic information of the participants in the sample. The questionnaire was piloted among early childhood practitioners exclusive to the sample, after which minor adjustments were made based on the recommendations suggested. Using the purposive sampling method, fifty female participants who had completed the CVQ level 1 or 2 programmes within the last two years were selected. All fifty completed the questionnaires, resulting in a one hundred percent response rate.

**Demographic information about Participants**

The charts presented below highlights the demographic information of the sample.

Figure 1
*Age range of survey participants*

![Age Range of Participants](image)

Figure 2
*Educational level of survey participants*

![HIGHEST EDUCATIONAL LEVEL ATTAINED](image)
Limitations of the Study

The main limitation of this research is the issue related to the completion of the questionnaires. Although all 50 questionnaires which were distributed, all participants did not answer all the questions. Hence some participants’ views on the topic were not obtained.

The research was limited to Early Childhood Practitioners working in government preschool and daycare centers. No conclusion can be drawn, or parallel applied, to practitioners in private school settings.
### Presentation of Findings

**Table 2**

*Ratings of the CVQ programme preparation for working in the areas related Child Development*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of Child Development</th>
<th>Very well</th>
<th>Well</th>
<th>Not very well</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Not relevant to my program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of the theories underlying child development</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to provide for children’s holistic development</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to plan a child-centred learning environment</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to communicate and demonstrate the links between ECCE theory and practice</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of the role of adults in the holistic development of the child</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to carry out and record in-depth observations of children’s learning and development</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to interpret and evaluate observations and plan for children’s learning</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of underlying theories on importance of play</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of children’s different styles of learning</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to develop, implement and evaluate a curriculum to enhance learning and development</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to devise, set up and introduce a wide variety of suitable educational/play activities that engage and involve children</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to maintain an appropriate stimulating and challenging environment (indoors and outdoors)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting children’s language and literacy development</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting the development of early mathematical skills and numeracy</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catering for the educational needs of children with special needs or disabilities</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catering for the educational needs of children from disadvantaged backgrounds</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting children to be active participants in their own learning</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of the role of the arts in supporting children’s educational development, participation and expression</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of the use of ICT as a learning support</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of the value of research in early childhood care and education</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3
*Ratings of the CVQ programme preparation for working in the areas related to Physical Needs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of Physical Needs</th>
<th>Very well</th>
<th>Well</th>
<th>Not very well</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Not relevant to my program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of pre-school regulations</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of relevant hygiene procedures</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of health and safety regulations</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of principal health needs of children</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of the nutritional needs of children</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to perform basic first-aid procedures in an emergency with a child</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of child protection policy, procedures and good practice</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting children’s physical activity</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to prepare nutritionally balanced meals for children</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4
*Ratings of the CVQ programme preparation for working in Social Environment/Responsibility areas*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of Social Environment/Responsibility</th>
<th>Very well</th>
<th>Well</th>
<th>Not very well</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Not relevant to my program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of the importance of social and environmental factors and their impact on children’s holistic development</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to establish and maintain appropriate relationships with parents, guardians and families</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to support parents, guardians and families’ understanding of and involvement in children’s learning and development</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to liaise and maintain relationships in the wider environment including other professionals, management committees, local community and voluntary organisations and statutory bodies</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and understanding of equality issues and different customs, cultures and family structures in society today; and the ability to take account of these when working with children</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting environmental awareness and sustainability</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5  
*Ratings of the CVQ programme preparation for working in Customer Service areas*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of Customer Service</th>
<th>Very well</th>
<th>Well</th>
<th>Not very well</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Not relevant to my program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to work as a team with other early years professionals within a service</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to communicate effectively with children and other adults (other early years professionals, parents, outside agencies) including awareness of barriers to communication and how these might be overcome</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to communicate information to parents about children’s learning and development</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to maintain records and documentation required for an efficient early years setting</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6  
*Ratings of the CVQ programme preparation for working in Personal Professional Development areas*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of Personal Professional Development</th>
<th>Very well</th>
<th>Well</th>
<th>Not very well</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Not relevant to my program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing the values, attitudes and dispositions appropriate for your role</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-awareness (being a reflective practitioner) and a sensitivity as to how this affects interaction with children</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to identify your own learning needs</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to manage yourself and take responsibility for specific tasks</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis

The research sought to obtain data on the following five aspects which are relevant for working in early childhood environment/ settings. These are: child development, physical needs, social responsibility, customer service and personal professional development.

In response to the question related to what extent has the CVQ certification influenced Early Childhood Practitioners in facilitating the child's all round development, the findings revealed that overall 83.3% of the practitioners who were exposed to training were satisfied that it prepared them adequately for working in early childhood settings. However, there were two areas under this aspect which were not covered adequately. These areas were: (1) Using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to support learning which 59% of the participants identified as lacking and (2) catering for educational needs of children with special needs identified by 51% of the participants. The areas relating to theories underlying child development, supporting children's language and literacy development and supporting children to be active participants in their own learning were most useful to the participants. This information is reiterated by the NCCA (2004) which indicated “Children’s holistic approach involves them intricately interweaving domains of social, emotional, personal, cognitive, linguistic, creative, aesthetic, moral and spiritual development and the whole systems of learning processes all of which influence each other in highly complex and sophisticated ways.” Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory also emphasized the importance of the child’s environment for nurturing and supporting interactions and relationships to the child’s development.

As it relates to how the training prepared the participants to cater for the physical needs of the children in their care, the research revealed that overall, 92.3 % of the participants found that the training prepared them adequately. This means that they were better able to cater to the children's physical needs using the newly acquired skills. The NAEYC, as cited by the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy (2012), described a high quality programme as “one which provides a safe, nurturing environment that promotes the physical, social, emotional and cognitive development of young children while responding to the needs of families. Any good quality early childhood programme must be based on the underlying principles which promote the child as an active participant in the ongoing process of learning.”

The one area which was not adequately covered was performing basic first aid procedures in an emergency with children. This was identified by 67% of the participants as lacking. This is
an important observation since this is the stage during which children are very tender and great care must be taken to protect them from injuries and viruses.

The response for research question three, which looked at how well the training and CVQ certification prepared the participants in customer service areas, revealed that 93% indicated that it covered this area well. The highest rating of 96% was given to the area ‘ability to work as a team with other early years professionals within the service. Since the practitioners have to work as a team with other professionals and communicate with parents and other adults, good customer service practices are critical. The results also showed that the training equipped them with the skills to communicate with adults and children and help them to be able to identify and overcome barriers to communication. It also prepared them well to communicate to parents about children’s learning and development.

Research question four focused on how the training prepared the early childhood practitioners for performing their social responsibility. Overall, 89.3% of the participants indicated that the training prepared them well hence they were better able to work in, and create, a social environment suitable for the nurturing the children in their care.

This aspect provided information for answering research question 4 which focused on how the training and certification influenced the relationship between the Early Childhood Practitioners and parents. The areas with the highest ratings (100%) were: the ability to: (a) establish and maintain appropriate relationships with parents, guardians and families (b) support parents, guardians and families understanding of and involvement in children’s learning and development. This is important since research has shown that socio-cultural theorists like Vygotsky highlighted the importance of social interaction in particular, cooperative dialogues between children and knowledgeable adults is necessary for children to acquire the ways of thinking and behaving that make up a community’s culture. This theory postulates the idea of scaffolding which is required by the parents and caregivers to assist the child’s development (Rowe and Wertsch 2002) cited in Berk, 2006. The importance of this is also highlighted by the NCCA (2007) which categorized the tasks of the early childhood practitioners into two roles, management and educational. It stated clearly that ‘The educational role involves reflective observation to inform practice, supporting and extending learning in groups and with individual children, understanding what is happening as children learn and responding to this understanding and working in partnerships with other adults and children themselves in the process that is early education’.

After analysing the data from the research, it is safe to conclude that the participants who were trained using the Early Childhood Development standards, and certified with the Caribbean Vocational Qualification, were generally satisfied that this training was suitable for helping them to work in the early childhood sector. This is particularly noteworthy since they received no initial training prior to commencing work in the early years’ sector. However, in order to help them to perform their tasks in the sector, approximately two-thirds of them did receive some formal induction training after stating employment.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this research was to determine the appropriateness of the Early Childhood Development CVQ levels 1& 2 occupational standard for preparing participants for working in the early years setting. The data obtained from the research revealed that the training which focused on five main aspects when the units were clustered were very useful and appropriate for preparing the early childhood practitioners to work in the early years sector. The training assisted them in setting up and maintaining nurturing and supportive environments for children, interacting effectively with parents and other adults to cater for the all-round development of the children.
also helped them as professionals to identify their own learning needs and showed them how to manage themselves and take responsibility for specific tasks and their learning. This highlights the importance of having continued professional development for early childhood practitioners. When early childhood practitioners are properly trained and keep up with current practices they will be better able to cater for the holistic development of children, hence getting them better equipped for entry into school.

**Recommendations**

The following are recommended after analyzing the findings of this research:

- Persons interested in becoming early childhood practitioners should receive initial professional training prior to entry into working in the early years’ sector. This will prepare them to operate more efficiently and effectively in the sector. This training should be done using the Early Childhood Development CVQ standards.

- A period of internship should be done after the completion of the training at early childhood settings which met the recommended standards. This will allow the trainees to gain work experience and be guided by good mentors before they are placed in permanent work settings.

- All early childhood practitioners who are already working in the early childhood sector who have not received formal training in that field should be trained using the Early Childhood Development CVQ occupational standard.

- A unit on Basic First Aid should be added to the standard since health and safety is a critical aspect of all training.

- Trainers should adequately provide training in the use of Information and ICT to support learning and catering to the development of students with special needs.

- The findings of this research represent the current situation in the government operated centers, additional research is needed to understand the situation in the privately owned centers.
References


