



Early Childhood Teachers' Perspectives and Needs for Professional Development: Variations by Their Characteristics

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Background

- Professional development (PD) is a training opportunity with multiple formats for educators and can improve classroom environment, skills, and knowledge base, increase self-efficacy, and build relationships with colleagues (Fulligni et al., 2009; Vu et al., 2015; US Department of Education, 2010).
- Since evidence suggests teachers with more education and training provide higher quality instruction and care, PD may be especially beneficial (Goble, 2015).
- However, there is not a universal educational requirement for early childhood teachers (Buettner et al., 2015) and the effectiveness of PD trainings is often questioned. This may be in part because these trainings are not tailored to individual teachers' characteristics, needs, and preferences.
- Few studies examined teacher experiences with PD trainings, views of future opportunities, and how their needs vary by characteristics.

Purpose

The present study examined early childhood teachers' experiences with and needs for PD trainings and how their views differ by their characteristics (i.e., age group they serve, level of education). We sought to answer the following research questions.

- 1) What do teachers experience with their education and PD?
- 2) What characteristics of PD do teachers find most effective?
- 3) Do early childhood educators PD needs vary by their characteristics?

Method

Participants

- Forty teachers (30 infant toddler teachers and 10 preschool teachers) from 14 early childhood settings.
- Participants were from a metropolitan city in a southern state in the US and were from diverse racial backgrounds (44% Caucasian, 17% African American, 17% Native American, 12 % Hispanic).
- Participants varied by education level (39% bachelor degree or higher) and years of teaching experience (Mean = 11years; Range = 1-41 years).

Method & Analysis

- Semi-structured, one-hour long face to face interviews asking about personal and classroom background information, job preparation, training, helpful content and formats, and needs for future trainings.
- Qualitative data analysis using InVivo coding
- Interviews member checked for accuracy

Results (Continued)

- Most early childhood educators feel they were well prepared from the formal education previously received, regardless of their level of education.
- Interactive learning and immediate feedback such as coaching and mentoring were among the characteristics of the PD delivery method teachers found most effective.
- With regards to the content, many participants preferred trainings on curriculum focusing on social-emotional development and individualized learning strategies.
- Participants with at minimum a bachelor's degree and the infant / toddler teachers were more interested in trainings on effective instruction and individual learning strategies than teachers with less education and preschool teachers.
- Teachers without a bachelor's degree desired PD on how to handle challenging and difficult behaviors in the classroom.
- Preschool teachers requested more conscious discipline trainings.

Discussion

- Early child educators in our sample vary by their level of education, years experience, and earned certificate.
- Teachers with different education levels and serve different age groups had different professional development needs, revealing the importance of individualizing training opportunities.
- Individualizing professional development may allow teachers to have a choice in best meeting their educator needs which may maximize the benefit of the training and lead to increased self-efficacy and motivation.
- Mentoring from instructional coaches, lead teachers, and/or peers provided to be an effective way to receive feedback, support, and individualized training.
- More studies are needed to address this topic with more participants and the PD effect on teachers' actual practices in long-term.

Results

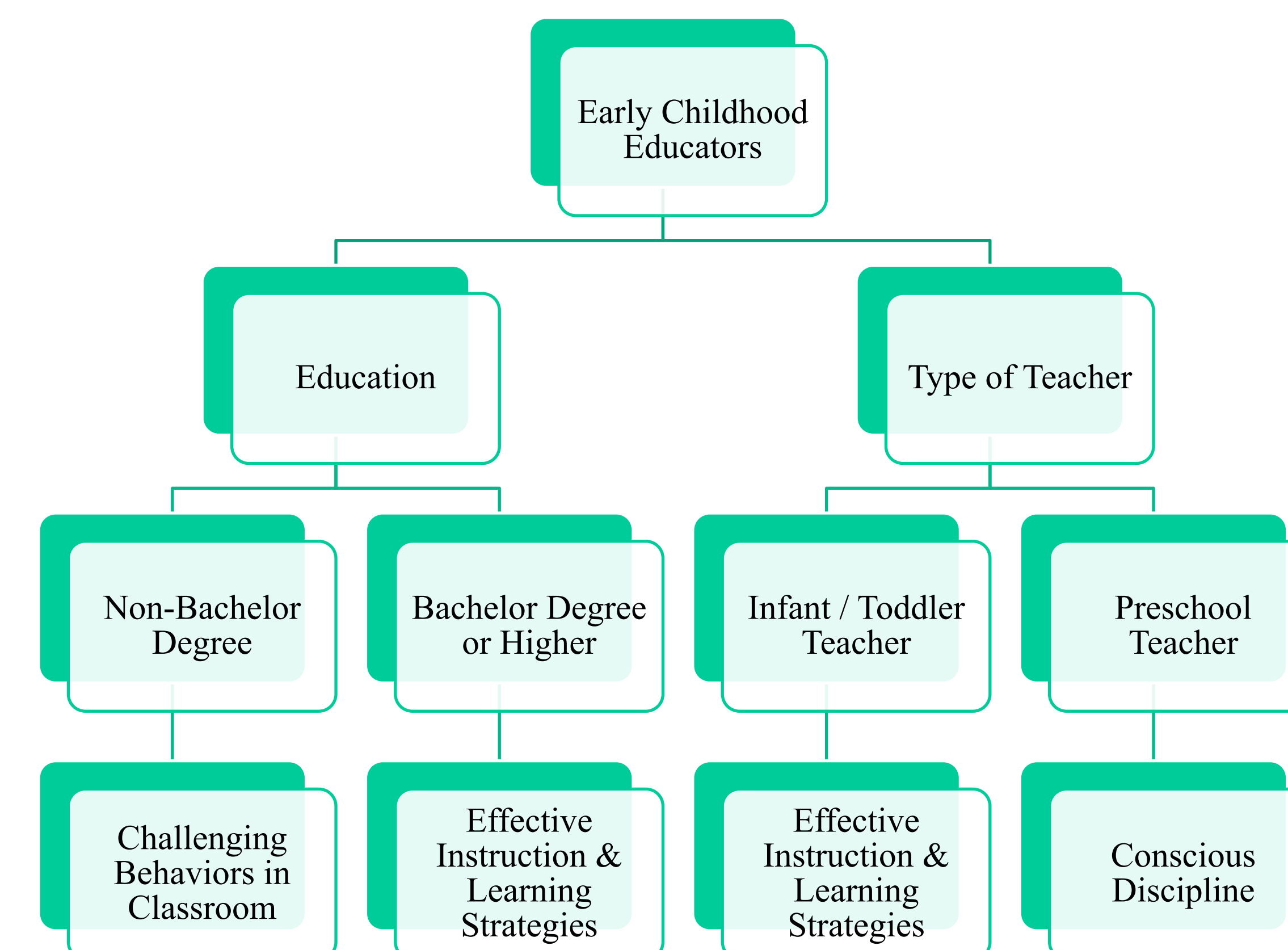


Figure 1. InVivo coding results from early childhood educators on professional development needs