



Professionalism and Caregivers' Emotional Intelligence in Early Childhood Education Centres, Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State

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Abstract

Caregivers' emotional intelligence and the limited empirical evidence on the role of professionalism in shaping it, particularly among ECCE caregivers in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State. The study investigated professionalism as a determinant of caregivers' emotional intelligence in early childhood education centres in Adavi Local Government Area. The study adopted a descriptive-correlational research design and involved 232 caregivers selected through census sampling. Data were collected using the Caregivers' Professionalism Scale (CPS) and the Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS), which had Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients of 0.84 and 0.82, respectively. We analysed the data using percentages, means, standard deviations, and regression analysis. The findings showed that caregivers' professionalism was high ($M = 1.57$), while their overall emotional intelligence was also high ($M = 3.15$). Self-awareness ($M = 3.05$), self-regulation ($M = 3.31$), motivation ($M = 3.16$), empathy ($M = 3.17$), and social skills ($M = 3.09$) were all rated highly. Regression analysis further revealed that professionalism significantly determined caregivers' emotional intelligence ($R = 0.464$, $R^2 = 0.332$, $F = 35.056$, $p = 0.001$), explaining 33.2% of the variation in emotional intelligence. The study concluded that caregivers' professionalism was an important factor in their emotional intelligence. It recommended regular professional development, emotional intelligence training, and practical capacity-building programmes for caregivers to strengthen professional competence and emotional effectiveness in early childhood education centres.

Keywords: Caregivers, Emotional Intelligence, Early Childhood Education; Early Childhood Education Centres, Caregiver Professionalism.

Introduction

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) has increasingly emphasised the importance of caregivers' emotional intelligence as a fundamental requirement for promoting children's holistic development and creating supportive learning environments. Emotional intelligence, which encompasses self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, enables caregivers to manage their emotions effectively, build positive relationships with children, and respond appropriately to classroom challenges. Despite its importance, many early childhood education centres continue to face challenges such as caregiver emotional exhaustion, poor emotional regulation, and reactive classroom management practices, all of which may negatively affect the quality of care and learning provided to young children. These difficulties may be influenced by variations in caregivers' professional attributes, such as their educational qualifications, training experiences, and level of professional competence, as well as by the conditions in which they carry out their duties. A well-organised and supportive classroom setting can promote caregivers' emotional well-being and strengthen their effectiveness in working with young children. Conversely, insufficient professional preparation and challenging classroom conditions may limit caregivers' capacity to manage their

emotions, show understanding towards children, and establish constructive relationships with them. Consequently, research should examine the extent to which caregivers' professionalism, particularly as it relates to emotional intelligence, is associated with outcomes in early childhood education settings. Similarly, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation recognises that the quality of early childhood education depends largely on a competent and professionally prepared workforce that adheres to established standards of practice. Caregiver professionalism goes beyond the possession of certificates to include continuous professional development, adherence to codes of ethics, reflective practice, emotional responsibility, and the ability to build nurturing, respectful relationships with children, families, and colleagues, all of which are fundamental in early childhood settings (Harwood et al., 2012).

Caregivers' emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and effectively use emotions in oneself and others, particularly in interactions with young children (Kitsios et al., 2022). In practice, emotionally intelligent caregivers demonstrate calmness under stress, empathy for children's feelings, effective communication, and the capacity to create supportive classroom climates that enhance socio-emotional development. Aggarwal (2024) reported that while most caregivers exhibited average to high emotional intelligence, this significantly influenced their ability to manage stress. By contrast, Jyothis et al. (2025) found moderate emotional intelligence levels among caregivers, with notable variation across roles. Emotional intelligence encompasses dimensions such as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, which enable caregivers to manage classroom situations, respond sensitively to children's needs, and build positive relationships that support learning and development (Musa & Awoyemi, 2020). Self-regulation is another essential dimension of emotional intelligence and refers to an individual's ability to manage emotions, impulses, thoughts, and behavioural responses in ways that are appropriate to particular situations. In early childhood education, self-regulation is particularly important because caregivers regularly encounter situations that require patience, emotional control, flexibility, and thoughtful decision-making. Children's crying, conflicts, disobedience, frequent questioning, or other challenging behaviours may generate frustration; however, emotionally competent caregivers are expected to regulate their reactions and respond in ways that protect children's emotional well-being and promote positive classroom relationships (Goleman, 2020). Caregivers' professionalism is closely associated with the development of self-regulation.

Professionalism involves not only relevant qualifications and knowledge but also appropriate attitudes, ethical conduct, interpersonal skills, and competence in caregiving responsibilities. Professional training and continuous professional development may equip caregivers with strategies to manage stressful situations, control impulsive reactions, resolve conflicts, and maintain appropriate professional behaviour. Consequently, caregivers with stronger professional competence may be better able to exercise emotional control in demanding classroom situations (Amosun, 2026). It also includes recognising emotional triggers, understanding personal biases, and maintaining emotional clarity when responding to children's needs, thereby fostering more responsive and supportive caregiving practices. Amosun (2026) reported a moderate level of awareness, while Adefabi and Adebisi (2026) found that although caregivers demonstrated fair awareness, their practical application remained limited, suggesting a gap between knowledge and practice and highlighting the need for improved reflective training and professional development in self-regulation.

Self-regulation is an important dimension through which caregivers' emotional intelligence may be understood in relation to professionalism and the classroom environment. Professional preparation can strengthen caregivers' capacity to manage their emotions and behaviour, while a supportive classroom environment can create conditions that make emotional regulation easier to sustain (Iriogbe-Efionayi, 2020). Conversely, weak professional preparation and unfavourable classroom conditions may place additional emotional demands on caregivers and potentially undermine effective self-regulation. Examining self-regulation within these contexts is therefore relevant to understanding caregivers' emotional intelligence in early childhood education centres in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State (Goleman, 2020). Motivation is widely regarded as a key component of caregivers' emotional intelligence because it shapes their commitment, enthusiasm, and persistence in delivering quality early childhood education (Goleman, 2020). It encompasses caregivers' dedication to children's learning and emotional development, persistence in the face of classroom challenges, and willingness to engage in continuous professional development (Kolawole, 2026). Highly motivated caregivers are more likely to demonstrate resilience, maintain positive attitudes towards their work, manage classroom responsibilities effectively, and build supportive relationships with children,

parents, and colleagues (Gbadegesin et al., 2024). Empathy is an important dimension of emotional intelligence and refers to the ability to recognise, understand, and respond appropriately to the emotions and experiences of others. In early childhood education, empathy is particularly relevant to caregivers because young children may communicate their feelings through behaviour, facial expressions, gestures, or other non-verbal forms rather than through words. An empathetic caregiver is therefore able to identify children's emotional needs, consider situations from their perspectives, and respond with patience, warmth, and sensitivity. Such responses can promote children's sense of security, trust, and positive social and emotional development.

Empathy is also closely linked to caregivers' professionalism. Professional caregiving requires more than academic qualifications; it involves demonstrating appropriate attitudes, ethical conduct, interpersonal competence, and sensitivity to children's individual differences. Through professional preparation, training, and reflective practice, caregivers can develop greater awareness of children's developmental and emotional needs and improve their ability to respond appropriately to different situations. Thus, professional competence may enhance caregivers' capacity to demonstrate empathy in their daily interactions with young children (Bouton, 2024). The classroom environment is another important context for expressing empathy. Caregivers working in supportive, inclusive, and well-organised classrooms may have better opportunities to observe children's behaviour, understand their individual needs, and respond appropriately to their emotional experiences. In contrast, overcrowding, excessive noise, inadequate learning resources, poor classroom organisation, and other unfavourable conditions may place additional demands on caregivers and make sensitive responses to individual children's needs more difficult. The classroom environment may therefore influence the extent to which caregivers can demonstrate empathy in their interactions with children.

Empathy is a key link between professionalism, the classroom environment, and caregivers' emotional intelligence. Caregivers with appropriate professional knowledge and interpersonal competence, working within a supportive classroom environment, may be better placed to recognise children's emotions and respond in caring, constructive ways. Examining empathy in relation to professionalism and the classroom environment is therefore important for understanding factors that may contribute to caregivers' emotional intelligence in early childhood education centres in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State. Since empathy can be developed through intentional learning and reflective practice, it remains an essential professional attribute that contributes to high-quality caregiving and effective early childhood education (Samavi et al., 2022). Social skills are widely recognised as an important component of caregivers' emotional intelligence because they promote effective communication, collaboration, and positive interpersonal relationships in early childhood education settings (Goleman, 2020). Social skills also encompass active listening, empathy, teamwork, and the ability to create an inclusive and supportive social environment that enhances children's social competence and emotional well-being. Olayonu et al. (2025) reported that although most caregivers demonstrated moderate awareness of their roles, their actual participation and engagement were low, suggesting limited practical application of social skills. Similarly, Saadu (2017) found that while caregivers showed moderate awareness of best practices, their utilisation remained low.

In practice, emotionally intelligent caregivers demonstrate calmness under stress, empathy for children's feelings, effective communication, and the capacity to foster supportive classroom climates that enhance socio-emotional development. Aggarwal (2024) reported that a majority of caregivers exhibited average to high emotional intelligence, which significantly influenced their ability to manage stress. By contrast, Jyothis et al. (2025) found moderate emotional intelligence among caregivers, with notable variation across roles. Emotional intelligence encompasses dimensions such as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, enabling caregivers to manage classroom situations, respond sensitively to children's needs, and build positive relationships that support learning and development (Musa & Awoyemi, 2020). Caregivers' professionalism may contribute to emotional intelligence through relevant qualifications, professional training, experience, ethical conduct, reflective practice, and professional competence. Although existing studies have examined different aspects of caregivers' emotional intelligence, professionalism, and classroom conditions, much of the available evidence has considered these factors independently or in different educational contexts. There appears to be limited empirical evidence on the extent to which caregivers' professionalism determines their emotional intelligence, particularly within early childhood education centres in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State. This contextual and empirical gap provides justification for the present study, which seeks to determine the extent to which professionalism predicts caregivers' emotional intelligence in early childhood education centres in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State.

Caregivers in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) centres experienced difficulties with key components of emotional intelligence, including self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, which could affect their interactions with children and the quality of care provided. These challenges may be influenced by caregivers' professionalism, particularly their professional training, continuous development, competence, and adherence to professional standards, as well as by classroom conditions. Although previous studies examined caregivers' emotional intelligence in relation to stress, burnout, job satisfaction, and other occupational factors, they paid limited attention to the roles of professionalism and classroom environment, especially among ECCE caregivers in Kogi State. The limited empirical evidence in Adavi Local Government Area therefore created a need to establish the extent to which professionalism and classroom environment predicted caregivers' emotional intelligence in ECCE centres.

The study examined;

1. The level of professionalism among caregivers in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State?
2. The level of emotional intelligence among caregivers in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State?
3. The caregivers' professionalism does not significantly determine their emotional intelligence in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State

The study raised and answered the following research questions.

1. What is the level of professionalism among caregivers in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State?
2. What is the level of emotional intelligence among caregivers in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State?

The following null hypothesis was postulated and tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

H₀₁: Caregivers' professionalism does not significantly determine their emotional intelligence in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive, correlational research design to investigate whether professionalism determines caregivers' emotional intelligence in early childhood education centres in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State, Nigeria. The study covered all 235 caregivers in early childhood education centres in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State. According to records obtained from the Department of ICT/PRS (Information and Communication Technology/Primary Research and Statistics) in Adavi Local Government Area, there were exactly 235 caregivers working within the early childhood education sector in the Local Government. The study sample comprised all 235 early childhood caregivers in Adavi Local Government Area, Kogi State. The study used a census sampling technique to include all 235 respondents.

This study used two instruments: the Caregivers' Professionalism Scale (CPS) and the Questionnaire on Level of Emotional Intelligence (LEI). The Caregivers' Professionalism Scale (CPS) was a structured instrument designed to assess caregivers' professionalism in early childhood educational centres. The instrument consisted of two sections: Section A captured respondents' demographic information, such as gender and school type, while Section B contained ten items reflecting key components of professionalism. The items were presented in a checklist format with Yes/No response options. The Questionnaire on Emotional Intelligence (EI) was designed to measure caregivers' emotional intelligence and its components. The instrument consisted of two sections: Section A captured respondents' demographic information, such as gender and school type, while Section B contained twenty-five items grouped into five subscales, namely Self-Awareness, Self-Regulation, Motivation, Empathy, and Social Skills, with five items under each subscale. Respondents rated the items on a four-point frequency scale of Always (A), Sometimes (S), Rarely (R), and Never (N). Copies of the instruments were submitted to the researcher's supervisor and to experts in Early Childhood and Primary Education, as well as in Test, Measurement, and Evaluation in the Faculty of Education, Kwara State University, Malete, for face and content validity. The Caregivers' Professionalism Scale (CPS) and the Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS), which had Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients of 0.84 and 0.82, respectively. Descriptive statistics, such as mean and standard deviations, were used to describe the demographic information and to answer the research questions relating to the level of caregivers' professionalism, the quality of the classroom

environment, and the level of emotional intelligence (including self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills).

Results

Table 1: Table showing the level of professionalism among caregivers in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State

S/N	Professionalism	Mean	SD	Remarks
1.	I possess a relevant educational qualification in early childhood education or caregiving.	1.53	.499	High
2.	I have obtained professional certification in caregiving or early childhood education.	1.45	.499	High
3.	I possess a valid professional license or registration to practice as a caregiver/teacher.	1.62	.486	High
4.	I have received formal training in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE).	1.50	.501	High
5.	I regularly attend workshops or seminars related to early childhood education.	1.41	.494	High
6.	I participate in in-service or continuous professional development training programmes.	1.63	.481	High
7.	My years of experience have enhanced my effectiveness in caregiving practices.	1.63	.482	High
8.	I demonstrate practical skills in managing children's learning and behaviour.	1.68	.465	High
9.	I effectively assess and respond to children's developmental and emotional needs.	1.53	.499	High
10.	I apply knowledge gained from my education, training, and experience in my daily caregiving activities.	1.68	.465	High
Mean		1.57		

Decision: Low: 1.00-1.49

High: 1.50-2.00

Table 1 shows the level of professionalism among caregivers in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State. The mean is 1.57, which is greater than 1.49, the baseline for a positive opinion. This therefore indicates that the level of professionalism among caregivers in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State was high.

Table 2: Table showing the level of self-awareness among caregivers in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State

S/N	Self-Awareness	Mean	SD	Remarks
1.	I am aware of my emotions while interacting with children.	2.80	.654	High
2.	I can easily identify my strengths as a caregiver.	2.76	.534	High
3.	I reflect on my weaknesses to improve my caregiving practices.	3.18	.575	High
4.	I recognise how my mood affects children in my care.	3.41	.493	High
5.	I am conscious of my emotional reactions in stressful classroom situations.	3.10	.551	High
Mean		3.05		

Decision: Low: 1.00-2.49

High: 2.50-4.00

Table 2 shows the level of self-awareness among caregivers in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State. The mean is 3.05, which is greater than 2.50, the baseline for a positive opinion. This therefore indicates that the level of self-awareness among caregivers in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State was high.

Table 3: Table showing the level of self-regulation among caregivers in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State

S/N	Self-Regulation	Mean	SD	Remarks
1.	I control my emotions when dealing with children.	3.63	.482	High
2.	I remain calm in stressful classroom situations.	3.04	.636	High
3.	I avoid reacting impulsively to children's behaviour.	3.40	.491	High
4.	I manage my frustration effectively during classroom activities.	3.49	.501	High
5.	I respond thoughtfully rather than emotionally to classroom challenges.	3.01	.670	High
Mean		3.31		

Decision: Low: 1.00-2.49**High: 2.50-4.00**

Table 3 shows the level of self-regulation among caregivers in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State. The mean is 3.31, which is greater than 2.50, the baseline for a positive opinion. This therefore indicates that the level of self-regulation among caregivers in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State was high.

Table 4: Table showing the level of motivation among caregivers in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State

S/N	Motivation	Mean	SD	Remarks
1.	I am enthusiastic about my caregiving responsibilities.	2.70	.544	High
2.	I remain committed to my duties even when faced with difficulties.	3.37	.484	High
3.	I set personal goals to improve my performance as a caregiver.	2.98	.689	High
4.	I am motivated to support children's learning and development.	3.48	.500	High
5.	I find satisfaction in contributing to children's emotional well-being.	3.29	.558	High
Mean		3.16		

Decision: Low: 1.00-2.49**High: 2.50-4.00**

Table 4 shows the level of motivation among caregivers in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State. The mean is 3.16, which is greater than 2.50, the baseline for a positive opinion. This therefore indicates that the level of motivation among caregivers in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State was high.

Table 5: Table showing the level of empathy among caregivers in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State

S/N	Empathy	Mean	SD	Remarks
1.	I understand children's feelings even when they do not express them clearly.	3.12	.458	High
2.	I show concern when a child appears emotionally distressed.	3.41	.574	High
3.	I listen patiently when children express their feelings.	3.14	.632	High
4.	I consider children's emotional needs when making classroom decisions.	2.97	.521	High
5.	I respond sensitively to children's emotional challenges.	3.23	.517	High
Mean		3.17		

Decision: Low: 1.00-2.49**High: 2.50-4.00**

Table 5 shows the level of empathy among caregivers in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State. The mean is 3.17, which is greater than 2.50, the baseline for a positive opinion. This therefore indicates that the level of empathy among caregivers in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State was high.

Table 6: Table showing the level of social skills among caregivers in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State

S/N	Social Skills	Mean	SD	Remarks
1.	I communicate effectively with children in my care.	3.22	.606	High
2.	I maintain positive relationships with other caregivers and teachers.	2.98	.670	High
3.	I encourage cooperative behaviour among children.	2.96	.569	High
4.	I resolve conflicts among children peacefully.	3.26	.586	High
5.	I model appropriate social behaviour for children to learn from.	3.03	.576	High
Mean		3.09		

Decision: Low: 1.00-2.49**High: 2.50-4.00**

Table 6 shows the level of social skills among caregivers in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State. The mean is 3.09, which is greater than 2.50, the baseline for a positive opinion. This therefore indicates that the level of social skills among caregivers in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State was high.

Table 7: Table showing the level of emotional intelligence among caregivers in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State

S/N	Emotional Intelligence	Mean	Remarks
1.	Self-awareness	3.05	High
2.	Self-regulation	3.31	High
3.	Motivation	3.16	High
4.	Empathy	3.17	High
5.	Social skills	3.09	High
Mean		3.15	

Decision: Low: 1.00-2.49**High: 2.50-4.00**

Table 7 shows the level of emotional intelligence among caregivers in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State. The mean is 3.15, which is greater than 2.50, the baseline for a positive opinion. This therefore indicates that the level of emotional intelligence among caregivers in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State was high.

Table 8: Summary of Regression Analysis between Caregivers' professionalism and emotional intelligence in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State

Model	N	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F-cal.	P-value
1	232	0.464	0.332	0.328	35.056	0.001

Dependent Variable: Emotional Intelligence

Source: Field Survey 2026

Table 8 summarises the regression results for the relationship between caregivers' professionalism and emotional intelligence in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State. The results indicate a positive association between caregivers' professionalism and emotional intelligence ($R = 0.464$), with an R-squared of 0.332, meaning that the independent variable (caregivers' professionalism) explains 33.2% of the variation in the dependent variable (emotional intelligence). Thus, the findings provide evidence that caregivers' professionalism determines emotional intelligence in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State ($F_{232} = 35.056$, $p = 0.001$).

Table 9: Test of determinant between caregivers' professionalism and emotional intelligence in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient		T	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
	B	Std. Error	Beta				Low/Bound	Up/Bound
1 (Constant)	56.170	3.877			14.490	.001	48.532	63.808
Caregivers' Professionalism	1.458	.246	.464		5.921	.001	.973	1.943

Dependent Variable: Emotional Intelligence

Source: Field Survey 2026

The test of the determinant results, as presented in Table 9, showed that caregivers' professionalism statistically significantly determined emotional intelligence in the Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State ($B = .464$; $t(232) = 14.490$, $p = 0.001$). This indicated that, at the 5% level of significance, there was sufficient evidence that the regression equation specified that caregivers' professionalism statistically significantly determined emotional intelligence in the Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State. Based on this, the null hypothesis was rejected, and it was concluded that caregivers' professionalism statistically significantly determined emotional intelligence in the Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that the level of professionalism among caregivers in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State was high, indicating that caregivers generally demonstrated a good level of professional qualities, including relevant qualifications, training, certification, professional development, and caregiving competencies. This suggests that caregivers possessed the knowledge, skills, and professional attributes needed to perform their responsibilities effectively. This result might be attributed to increased awareness of the importance of professional standards in early childhood education, participation in training and professional development activities, and institutional or regulatory expectations placed on caregivers. The finding aligns with Uchenyi and Osaat (2023), who found that caregivers' professional competencies, particularly social competence and classroom management competence, were strongly related to effective service delivery, suggesting that competent caregivers were better positioned to perform their professional roles effectively. It also aligns with Egbeh (2022), whose findings showed strong relationships between caregiver standards and various professional roles and educational outcomes. However, the finding does not align with Oyewumi et al. (2025), who reported that caregiver professionalism was low, particularly in terms of ECCE certification and professional registration, although caregivers showed moderate engagement in professional development activities. The difference might be explained by variations in study locations, institutional settings, professional requirements, and the specific indicators used to assess caregiver professionalism.

The findings revealed that caregivers in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State had a high level of emotional intelligence. This means that the caregivers were generally able to understand their own feelings, recognise the emotions of others, control their emotional reactions, and respond appropriately to children and people around them. The high level of emotional intelligence may be attributed to caregivers' frequent interaction with young children, which requires patience, empathy, self-control, sensitivity to children's emotional needs, and appropriate responses to different behaviours and situations. The finding aligns with Jyothis et al. (2025), who reported relatively higher emotional intelligence among caregivers of children with special needs than among teachers, indicating that caregiving responsibilities may be associated with the development or use of emotional competencies. It also aligns with Goyal (2025), who found that a large proportion of teachers could recognise their own emotions and those of their students and practised emotional regulation, suggesting that educators commonly possess key emotional intelligence competencies needed for effective interaction with children. Similarly, Angelo et al. (2026) reported high caregiving roles and very high caregiver-centred communication, with emotional response as a significant component of effective caregiving communication, supporting the present finding that caregivers demonstrate strong emotional competencies. However, the finding differs from the implication of Jyothis et al. (2025) that emotional intelligence did not have a significant relationship with caregiver burden, and from Goyal (2025), who found that emotional intelligence alone did not significantly relate to classroom management effectiveness or student engagement. These differences may be explained by the fact that the present study assessed caregivers' emotional intelligence directly, whereas the other studies examined its relationship with other outcomes, meaning caregivers can possess high emotional intelligence without it necessarily producing significant effects on every aspect of caregiving or educational outcomes. The finding showed that caregivers' professionalism was statistically significantly related to their emotional intelligence in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State. This depicts that the way caregivers conduct themselves professionally, including their commitment to their duties, adherence to professional standards, responsible behaviour, and interactions with children and colleagues, is meaningfully connected with how well they understand, regulate, and respond to emotions. This result may be because professional caregivers are regularly exposed to situations that require patience, self-control, empathy, effective communication, reflection, and appropriate responses to children's

emotional and behavioural needs; therefore, consistent professional practice may help caregivers develop stronger emotional competencies.

Musa and Awoyemi (2020) support this finding, finding that emotional intelligence significantly contributed to teaching effectiveness and suggesting that emotional competence is closely associated with professional competence and effective service delivery among educators. It also aligns with Nwokolo and Ajufo (2024), who reported a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and teachers' job commitment, indicating that emotionally competent educators tend to demonstrate stronger professional dedication and responsibility. Similarly, Lamothe et al. (2018) found that professional caregivers' emotional competencies, including emotional awareness, acceptance, perspective-taking, and emotion recognition, could be improved through structured professional intervention, supporting the view that professional caregiving experiences and practices can influence emotional competence. However, the finding differs somewhat from Duguryil and Katnison (2025), who reported weaknesses in professional conduct, teaching strategies, classroom management, and familiarity with professional standards among some early childhood and primary teachers, with only a proportion demonstrating high effectiveness. The difference may be attributed to differences in study setting, respondents, professional preparation, and the specific dimensions of professionalism examined; nevertheless, this finding suggests that stronger professionalism among caregivers can play an important role in developing and sustaining emotional intelligence.

Conclusion

The findings indicated that caregivers in Early Childhood Care and Education centres in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State demonstrated generally positive levels of professionalism and emotional intelligence across self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. The findings further established that caregivers' professionalism was an important factor in their emotional intelligence, suggesting that professional preparation, competence, experience, and adherence to professional practices may play an important role in strengthening caregivers' capacity to understand and manage emotions and to interact effectively with young children. Therefore, promoting and sustaining caregivers' professional development and competence could improve emotional functioning and caregiving practices in early childhood education centres.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Early childhood education centre proprietors and administrators should organise regular professional development programmes, workshops, seminars, and refresher courses for caregivers to strengthen their professional competence and enhance their emotional intelligence. Such programmes should focus particularly on self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, communication, and interpersonal skills.
2. Teacher-training institutions and professional development providers should incorporate emotional intelligence training into programmes for early childhood caregivers. Place greater emphasis on practical activities, role-play, reflective exercises, classroom-based problem-solving, and strategies for managing children's emotional and behavioural challenges.
3. Early childhood education stakeholders should adopt an integrated approach that addresses caregivers' professional development alongside improvements in classroom conditions rather than focusing on either factor in isolation.

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