

## **An Evaluation of the Implementation of Early Childhood Education Curriculum in Osun State**

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### **Abstract**

Early Childhood Education as a subject in primary schools in Nigeria was first noticed among the private primary schools in the 80's while the public primary schools did not incorporate it in their curriculum in Nigeria. Of recent, some state governments in Nigeria have just adopted and organized early childhood education unit into their primary schools. As a result of this new development, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) developed a National Curriculum for E. C. E. which both public and private schools use to achieve the stated objectives of E.C.E. as contained in the National Policy on Education (2004) in Nigeria. It is based on this that this study carried out an evaluation of the implementation of the National Curriculum as prepared by NERDC by the primary schools in Osun State, Nigeria, vis a vis the quality of personnel on ground, the adequacy or otherwise of the teaching and learning facilities, comparison of the expected curriculum and the observed curriculum, and the constraints to its implementation. Research hypotheses and research questions were raised. The study adopted survey research design, questionnaires, observation and checklists were used to collect data. Both descriptive and inferential statistical tools were used to analyze the data. The results show that many primary schools in Nigeria do not have trained quality teachers for E.C.E., teaching and learning resources were inadequate and that many schools do not even have the recommended national curriculum.

### **Introduction**

To some scholars of thought, early childhood education is viewed as old as human existence. In the African Tradition, according to Abdullahi (2003), early childhood education (e.c.e) was the responsibility of the immediate family with the active involvement of the extended family members. Such early childhood education involved washing of face in the morning, cleaning of the teeth and greeting of the elders, proper meal habits, playing and resting, the learning of moral codes, physical fitness, norms and customs in the society were essentially supervised by the elders in the immediate environment. However, it has taken a new but formalized dimension where every organized society or community has given E.C.E official recognition with its inclusion in the Nigerian National Policy on Education (2004) which carried out the following objectives:

- effecting a smooth transition from the home to the school.
- preparing the child for the primary level of education.
- providing adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work, on the farms, in the markets, offices, etc.
- inculcating social norms.
- inculcating in the child the spirit of inquiry and creativity through the exploration nature, and the local environment, playing with toys, artistic and musical activities, etc.
- teaching co-operation and team spirit.
- teaching the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms, etc through play and
- Teaching good habits, especially good health habits.

To realize these lofty objectives, early childhood education curriculum was designed along the aforementioned objectives by Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) and recommended for use by all early childhood education centres. However it should be noted that private individuals and private organization have been officially licensed to provide early childhood education while government will provide measures to engender quality control and assurance in the system. Though of recent, government especially at the state level has embarked upon establishing early childhood education centres in every public school

especially in the South West Nigeria. It is however not certain whether these e.c.e centres are operating within the context of NERDC curriculum.

### **Statement of the problem**

Early Childhood Education has been designed to enhance quality of children's lives globally. Participants at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtein, in 1990 pledged to provide primary education for all children and massively reduce illiteracy by the end of the decade. This was followed up in year 2000 with Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All. Nigeria as a country was part of this conference and a signatory to every decision reached. As part of her efforts towards improving the quality of life of the Nigerian children, besides incorporating early childhood education in the National Policy on Education (2004), a comprehensive E.C.E. curriculum was designed for implementation to equip the children with the desired skills needed for effective primary education and social life. And it is however uncertain whether these schools are implementing the curriculum. It is on this premise that the thrust of this paper is predicated to evaluate the extent of the implementation of early childhood education curriculum especially in Osun State.

### **Research objectives**

The study is embarked upon to:

- (i) investigate the quality of the personnel involved in the implementation of E.C.E curriculum.
- (ii) find out the adequacy of the teaching and learning facilities
- (iii) compare the expected curriculum with the observed curriculum.
- (iv) ascertain the constraints to its implementation.

### **Research Hypothesis**

The study will provide answers to these questions:

- (i) Teachers and caregivers at the early childhood education centres do not have minimum qualification?
- (ii) There is adequate provision of teaching and learning facilities at E.C.E centres in Osun State.

### **Research Questions**

- (i) Do the centres make use of and implement NERDC recommended curriculum?
- (ii) What are the constraints to implementing the NERDC curriculum by these centres?

### **Origin of Early Childhood Education in Nigeria**

Oduolowu (2003) as cited by Okewole (2009) asserted that early childhood education is part and parcel of education programme or package whether formal or informal of every culture. Some schools of thought opined that early childhood education is universal; and that there is no society where human beings exist without early childhood education.

The current practice of early childhood education has deep historical roots on philosophical views of great philosophers. The welfare of children and their educational needs have been a great concern of a large group of adults of different times in history (Charles, Gast, Servey & Burnside, 1978). Plato (427-347 B.C) was the first person to classify education into the formal levels as we now know them (Oduolowu, 2003) Plato suggested a design of education for children from birth to age six. He said that learning should be a sort of amusement (Gyneer-Thomas, 1981).

There are various opinions and sources as regards the advent of modern or westernized early Childhood education. According to Fafunwa (1997), the first European to set foot on what is now called Nigeria were Portuguese during their first missionary journey. That as early as 1472, Portuguese merchants visited Lagos

The first European to set foot on what is now called Nigeria were the Portuguese merchants visited Lagos and Benin and exchanged greetings with the Oba of Benin. According to Fafunwa (1997) spasmodic missionary activities started in Benin in 1515 when some Catholic missionaries set up a school in the Oba's palace for his sons and the sons of his chiefs who were converted to Christianity. Another account, according to Fafunwa (1997) has it that the first known school was established by Mr. & Mrs. De Graft in Badagry in the 1840's was named "Nursery of the Infant School".

In his own contribution, Kolawole (1989) as quoted by Okewole (2009) early childhood education in Nigeria was dated back to 1870 and that for over a long period of time, it remained church-based. This is also corroborated by Oduolowu (2003) that early childhood education started as Sunday school classes but was later formalized in Nigeria. The classes were held between Monday and Friday like formal schools. She stated that with the influx

of foreigners who came to Nigeria to work, more of the pre-schools were established in government reservation areas (GRA) for the children of these foreigners and few Nigerians who had travelled abroad and knew the importance of this level of education. Akinbote (2001) pointed out that such pre-school later became part and parcel of primary schooling. The classes were called Infant Classes I and II. Children passed through them before proceeding to the Standard Forms. They existed in the same building with primary schools.

### **The Curricula Before and After the Rebirth of Democracy**

The curriculum of E.C.E. is guided by the National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004) which defines early childhood education as education given in an institution, to children primary school. According to Nwagbara (2003) The curriculum of E.C.E. is mentally compartmentalized into two important parts, namely; (i) the physical development and (ii) Child stimulation. These two compartments cater for (a) physical (b) socio-emotional (c) intellectual (d) aesthetic and (e) special needs of the child. The curricula before and after the re-birth of democracy in Nigeria are basically the same except for the integration of emergent sensitivity, increased child rights and nutrition education.

### **The concept of curriculum**

Oyekan (1997) revealed that the concept of curriculum has undergone marked changes during the 20th century without any plausible agreement on an appropriate universal definition. McDonald (1965) defined curriculum as “planned actions for instruction”. Lawton (1975) viewed curriculum as “a selection from the culture of society”. Scheffler (1960) opined that curriculum is the totality of experiences of each learner under the influence of the school. Bobbit (1981) also defined curriculum as series of things which children and youths must do and experience by way of developing ability to do the things well which make up the affairs of adult life.

The following are the qualities of a good curriculum: flexibility, visibility, susceptibility, functionalism, relevance, validity, learnability, comprehensiveness, dynamism, responsiveness and reliability (Oyekan, 2003).

### **The concept of curriculum evaluation**

The processes, strategies and techniques variously employed to estimate, adjust and control the fit between the planned activities and the actual outcome of instruction are what is often referred to as curriculum evaluation (Baiyelo, 2003). UNESCO (1985) as cited by Baiyelo (2003) categorized forms of evaluation into context, input, process, product, impact and effect. Context evaluation relate to the background planning prior to curriculum design. It involves situation analysis in which present conditions are identified for future transformation and reforms. While context evaluation critically examines its feasibility and acceptability input evaluation concerns itself with the administration structure of the curriculum such as the adequacy of finance, personnel qualification equipment and materials most appropriate for planned curriculum activities. Process evaluation deals with making judgement of worth about the relevance, coverage, suitability, sequencing, fit, content and teaching methodologies. It also deals with the extent to which training objectives have been achieved. Product evaluation is concerned with the evaluation of learning outcomes which throw light on the learners, the teaching-learning process and the objectives of the programme. Effect evaluation entails the assessment of the consequences of the curriculum on the population or the society indirectly, while impact evaluation refers to the assessment of the consequences of the curriculum on those exposed to it (Baiyelo, 2003).

### **Methodology**

The study employed the use of survey research design. All the early childhood education centres (both public and private) in Osun State formed the population. Out of the 30 local government areas and Ife East Area office only 5 local government areas were randomly selected. Out of these 5 L.G.As, 5 schools (One from each) were also picked randomly for the study. The research instruments used were; observation, questionnaire and checklists. The questionnaire and the checklist were given to evaluation research experts for possible corrections. Some areas where corrections were made were effected. All the instruments were administered by the researcher and five other research assistants. Data collected were analysed using appropriate statistics.

### **Results and Discussion**

Presented below is the results realized after the analysis of the data collected.

**Hypothesis 1:**

**Teachers and caregivers at the early childhood education centres do not have minimum qualification?**

**Table 1: Summary of the Statistical analysis of teachers' qualification using  $\chi^2$**

School	O <sub>1</sub>	E <sub>1</sub>	O <sub>1</sub> - E <sub>1</sub>	(O <sub>1</sub> - E <sub>1</sub> ) <sup>2</sup>	$\frac{(O_1 - E_1)^2}{E} = \chi^2$
A	1	1.4	-0.4	0.16	0.11
B	2	1.4	0.6	0.36	0.26
C	-	1.4	-1.4	1.96	1.4
D	1	1.4	0.4	0.16	0.11
E	3	1.4	1.6	1.6	1.83
	7				3.71

Where  $E_1 = \frac{\sum O_1}{n}$   
 $n = 5$

Calculated  $\chi^2_{\alpha} = 3.71$

df = (n - 1) 4

@ 0.05 level of significance

Table value of  $\chi^2_{\alpha} = 9.488$

Since calculated  $\chi^2_{\alpha} = 3.71$  which is less than the table value  $\chi^2_{\alpha} = 9.488$ . Therefore the null hypothesis is upheld and the attainable hypothesis is rejected. This implies that majority of the teachers and care givers at the E.C.E. centres do not have the minimum qualifications to teach and provide care at the centres.

	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	Total
Playground	2	3	-	4	-	9
Classroom	2	2	4	2	3	13
Instruction Facilities	3	4	2	2	5	16
Resting/Sleeping Facilities	-	2	4	3	2	11
Toilet Facilities	3	2	5	5	5	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>69</b>

**Research Hypothesis 2:**

**There is adequate provision of teaching and learning facilities at E.C.E centres in Osun State.**

**Table 2: Shows the quantity rating scale of provision of teaching and learning facilities at E.C.E centres**

**Research Hypothesis 2:**

There is adequate provision of teaching and learning facilities at E.C.E centres in Osun State.

let c equal the number of columns. Since we are also considering another variable, let r equal the number of rows. Thus, df=(c-1)(r-1) or (5-1)(5-1)=16 and with an level of .05 the critical value of chi square is 26.296.

If  $\chi^2_{obs} < 26.296$ , reject H<sub>0</sub>.

If  $\chi^2_{obs} > 26.296$ , do not reject H<sub>0</sub>.

**Computation**

First we must determine the expected frequencies. Let:

<b>E<sub>jk</sub></b>	= the expected frequency of the cell defined by the j-th column and the k-th row.
<b>O<sub>jk</sub></b>	= the observed frequency of the cell defined by the j-th column and the k-th row.
Where j = # columns and k = # rows.	

$$E_{jk} = \frac{(\text{R marginal} \times \text{C marginal})}{N}$$

Note, a helpful check is that the sum of the expected cell frequencies is equal to N, that is:

$$\sum_{j=1}^r \sum_{k=1}^c E_{jk} = N$$

Then:

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{j=1}^r \sum_{k=1}^c \frac{(O_{jk} - E_{jk})^2}{E_{jk}}$$

Substituting the values in the formula gives the figures in bracket in the contingency table below:

	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	Total
Playground	2 (62.1)	3 (47.7)	- (41.4)	4 (38.8)	-(41.4)	<b>9</b>
Classroom	2 (89.7)	2 (69.0)	4 (59.8)	2 (56.1)	3 (59.8)	<b>13</b>
Instruction Facilities	3 (110.4)	4 (84.9)	2 (73.6)	2 (69.0)	5 (73.4)	<b>16</b>
Resting/Sleeping Facilities	-(75.9)	2 (58.4)	4 (50.6)	3 (47.4)	2 (50.6)	<b>11</b>
Toilet Facilities	3 (138.0)	2 (106.1)	5 (92.0)	5 (86.3)	5 (92.0)	<b>20</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>69</b>

Consider the following data above; **contingency table** on adequacy of facilities in the schools understudied.

Summation of these figures in bracket gives;

$$\chi^2_{0.05} = 1536.59$$

Since  $\chi^2_{0.05} (1536.59) > \chi^2_{crit} (26.296)$ , we reject  $H_0$  and conclude the adequacy/provision of facilities does not affect the quality of instructions given.

### Research Question 1:

**Do the centres have and implement the NERDC recommended curriculum?**

**Table 3: Shows the observation of the researcher indicating the number of schools having and implementing the NERDC curriculum.**

School	HAS THE CURRICULUM?	CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTED?	
		Yes	No
School A	No	-	No
School B	No	-	No
School C	Yes	Yes	
School D	No		No
School E	No		No

Table 3 reveals that only 1 school has the National recommended curriculum as prepared by the Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council. Other schools claimed ignorance of the existence of the recommended curriculum.

### Research Question 2:

**What are the constraints facing the implementation of the NERDC curriculum at the centres?**

The findings reveal that what constitute major constraints of these centres as far as the implementation of e.c.e. curriculum is concerned are: poor management/leadership style, poor remuneration, unavailability of the recommended curriculum, parental desires not in line with the National Policy on Education (2004) provisions on early childhood education in Nigeria and inadequate human and material resources.

### Discussion:

This study is designed to evaluate the implementation of early childhood education curriculum with a view to

investigating the quality of the personnel; finding out the adequacy of the teaching and learning facilities; comparing the expected curriculum with the observed curriculum with the observed curriculum and finally ascertaining the constraints to the implementation of the curriculum. Two hypothesis: one null and the other alternative were used while two research questions were also used for the study to provide answers to guide in evaluating the implementation of early childhood education in Osun State.

Going by the evaluative research carried-out in the five schools of different local government area, the personnel involved in the implementation of early childhood education curriculum as prepared by NERDC are not adequately qualified to teach or provide care for the children at the centres. Out of the thirty - One respondents (i.e. teachers and care-givers) only seven of them have the minimum qualification to teach at the centres. This implies that if qualified personnel flood these centres then we should not expect anything laudable as far as teaching/learning is concerned. The result of this findings corroborates the earlier findings of Maduwesi and Nneji (2005) when they carried out a similar research in Abuja.

Similarly, the teaching/learning facilities at these centres are not adequate enough starting from the classrooms, playground, resting/sleeping facilities and lot of others are all in appalling state begging for repairs. Some of these centres are using residential buildings converted into schools. Some centres do not even have any space that could be called playground whereas children at this level cannot stay in the classroom for long but desire to play and that is why the NPE (2004) recommends play-way method for these children. After play, these children would be expected to have a place to rest or sleep. Unfortunately, most of the centres according to these study do not have adequate resting / sleeping facilities.

It is also revealed in this study that only 1 school out of the 5 schools used for the study has the recommended curriculum i.e. NERDC curriculum. Other schools claimed ignorance of the existence of any national curriculum for the early childhood education in Nigeria. This means that these schools that are not having the national curriculum are only using “a self-developed school curriculum” most of which activities and experiences are not in accordance with the recommended curriculum. This also lends credence to Maduwesi and Nneji’s (2005) report that no single centre visited had curriculum but rather presented scheme of work when asked to bring out the curriculum they were using.

The responses derived from the questionnaire reveal that some of the major constraints the personnel at these centres are facing are: poor management and leadership styles from both the proprietresses/proprietors and their head teachers who are not always ready to release them during holidays to attend in-service training programmes, workshop, seminars or even conference that could have help develop them professionally. Also, it was also discovered that most schools do not have better welfare package for the staff which may invariably affect their performance during the teaching learning process. Besides, the respondents also complained about the provisions of the National Policy on education (2004) as regards Pre-primary Education in Nigeria especially in the use of mother-tongue or the language of the immediate environment. Majorly of the parents of these children want their children to be taught in English Language which is contrary to the National Policy on Education (2004) which invariably has not been helpful in the successful and adequate implementation of the NERDC curriculum.

#### **Actions to be taken:**

Going by the situations on ground at the various centres, it is expected that if these measures that are proffered below are taken, it would go along way of improving the quality implementation of e.c.e. curriculum in the state in particular and the nation as a whole:

- The NERDC recommended curriculum should be given in publicity by the various levels of government right from the federal to the states and local government areas.
- Early childhood education as a course should be introduced at the colleges of education in the country. Only very few ones are offering it.
- Frequent supervision of these centres should be carried out by the agencies or inspectorate at every level to ensure adequate compliance of expected national and international standards.
- Urgent review of the National policy on Evaluation (2004) provisions on early childhood education as regards some aspects such as the language used for instruction. Since the parents are clamouring and pressuring the centres to use English Language instead of the mother tongue because Nigerian societies are heterogeneous, then government at the centre controlling education has to do something about this issue to be in compliance with the current reality.
- The welfare package of personnel at these centres should be looked into and improved upon to elicit better performance from them.

### Executive Summary

The case study carried out was titled: An Evaluation of the Implementation of Early Childhood Education Curriculum in Osun State with a view to investigating the quality of personnel involved in the implementation of e.c.e. curriculum, finding out the adequacy of the teaching and learning facilities; comparing the expected curriculum with the observed curriculum; ascertaining the constraints to its implementation.

Four research questions were raised for the study to provide answers: (i) Do the teachers and care-givers at the e.c.e. centres have minimum qualification? (ii) Do the centres have adequate teaching and learning facilities: (iii) Do the centres make use of and implement the NERDC curriculum? and (iv) What are the constraints to implementing the NERDC curriculum?

Instruments used for data collection from the five schools used were: Questionnaire, observation and checklist.

The results of the research work are: Majority of the staff at the centres do not have the minimum qualification; that the facilities at the centres are not adequate; that the centres used did not use the national recommended curriculum. Only one school has the curriculum; that the major constraints facing the staff in implementing the curriculum are: poor leadership/management, poor welfare package, lack of in-service programmes such as workshops, seminars, conferences to update and upgrade the staff.

The National Policy on Education is recommended for review school managers are advised to get the recommended curriculum, allow their staff to go for further training especially during holidays, permit them to attend conferences and seminars as well as workshop to enhance their professional development.

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