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ASSESSMENT OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (ECE) IN PRIMARY SCHOOL IN OGBOMOSHO NORTH

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Abstract
Early Childhood Education (ECE) being the ultimate background needed by the child to smoothly transit to the formal school system needs a solid foundation as any unstable foundation naturally will affect the other levels. Although the Early Childhood Education (ECE) has been entrusted in the hands of private owners, there is still a concern over the quality of the education given to these children. This necessitated a study that seeks to assess the implementation of Early Childhood Education (ECE). This study therefore focused on assessment of government efforts on policy and implementation of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in primary school in Ogbomosho North. The descriptive research design was used for this study, the population consisted all primary school teachers and head teachers in Ogbomosho North and a sample of 100 respondents consisting of 20 head-teachers and 80 teachers was chosen with the use of simple random sampling technique. A researcher-designed questionnaire was used as instruments for data collection in this study. The data collected were analysed with the use of frequency count, percentage, mean rating and rank order. The findings of this study revealed that (i) to an average extent, government has made efforts towards the policy making and implementation of early childhood education and (ii) some of the challenges facing Early Childhood Education are lack of provision for ECE teacher specialization, lack of qualified and trained teachers. Based on the findings from this study, it was recommended that Government and all stakeholders should ensure effective implementation of the policy by providing all that is needed for the policy to work and that Government at the Federal, State and Local levels should show more interest in ECE by providing needed quality human and materials resources to ensure the effective implementation of the policy of ECE.

Keywords: Assessment, Policy, Implementation, Early Childhood Education (ECE)

Introduction

Education as is the fulcrum around which development of any country revolves. In this context, education is an act that has a formative effect on the mind, character or physical ability of an individual. This is why developed countries always guard their educational industries with jealousy and total commitment (Olaleye&Omotayo, 2009). In order to address issues of holistic transformation, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) refers to education as an instrument 'par excellence' for national development and has initiated several educational policies over the past decade. One of such policies is the 2004 edition of the National Policy on Education (NPE), which

specifies the objectives and guidelines of action on Early Childhood Education (ECE) (Aghor, 2008). Early Childhood Education (ECE) consists of varied formal or informal initiatives required for children from birth to pre-school age to make them thrive. These activities are intended to effect developmental changes in children prior to their entry into primary school.

Mitchell (2011) described Early Childhood Education (ECE) as the overall development of the child, physically, socially and intellectually. It is the foundation for a life-long education for children which provides for the physical, motor, health, nutritional, intellectual, aesthetic, emotional and social development of the pre-school child. According to Mezieobi (2006), if a child's education can provide these vital fundamental necessities, it is likely to have an important and strong relationship with the pupil's performance at the primary school level and perhaps at the secondary and tertiary levels. Early Childhood Education (ECE) is the education given to younger learners before the age of entering primary education (6 years). Early Childhood Education (ECE) or pre-primary education is defined by the National Policy on Education (NPE) (FRN, 2013) as education given in an educational setting for children aged 3 through 6 years in preparing their entry into primary school. It includes 'jileosemi' popularly named in some parts of the country, to be precise South West, the crèche, the nursery and the kindergarten. These types of educational settings are currently provided by private entrepreneurs.

Early Childhood Education (ECE) can be traced to the efforts of prominent European education experts like Comenius (1590-1690), Rousseau (1782-1788), Pestalozzi (1748-1827) and Froebel (1782-1751). These experts championed the right of children to early education. Many educationist and scholars including Maduewesi (1992) and Fafunwa (1967) support and advocate for the views held by these earlier educators that there is the need for good Early Childhood Education (ECE) to help and facilitate to develop their full potentials.

In every modern society, it is believed that education is the key to national development and there is a need to maintain every level of education especially the Early Childhood Education (ECE) level, because it is the bedrock upon which all other educational levels build (Iloh, 2013). Once a child misses that early stage, it is usually difficult for the child to get back to the basics. Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a common practice in most societies; they make provision for Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs of various types for children below the official school age (usually 0- 6 years) mainly to prepare them for the harshness of Primary Education and beyond. It is important for every child to have a good start to life. Essential factors for a good start include quality nurturing, care and safe environment (Githinji & Kanga, 2011).

Unprecedented attention to young children has made parents to be concerned about their children's learning, and readiness for school. Parents are more concerned than ever before about their children's learning, care, protection and readiness for school and values for life challenges and others. Early childhood teachers are taking on the challenges of serving all children equitably and well. Policymakers are looking carefully at the outcomes reported about children participating in early education programs. Motivated by these concerns and by the growing emphasis on accountability, parents, teachers and policymakers all want more information as they make decisions on how to foster children's early learning and development (Nakpodia, 2003).

The early childhood period is a critical foundational moment in human development. Brain development is at its fastest and most complex during this time, and the neural pathways that support and facilitate later learning and growth are largely defined in these early years and it must be handled with all care and diligence (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Researches carried out by Karoly, Kilburn, and Cannon, (2005) and Heckman, (2006) indicated that Early Childhood Education (ECE)

experiences notably influences life chances for a child, including success in education, overall health and welfare, and social integration. The Federal Republic of Nigeria places the child at the centre of learning activities, but left ownership mostly in the hands of 'private owners', most of whom lack knowledge of the national philosophy behind Early Childhood Education (ECE) (FRN, 2004). One wonders if these 'private owners' can implement the policy as was designed to be done (Borishade, 2009). Thus, the thrust of the 2013 edition of the National Policy on Education (NPE) Guidelines of action on Early Childhood Education (ECE).

The guideline of action borders on school establishment, teacher factors, language of instruction, and method of teaching among others. This National Policy on Education (NPE) serves as a guide to the current Early Childhood Education (ECE) and other levels of educational programme in the country. Eresimadu (2008) insisted that 'for this educational level to be a reality in Nigeria, the aspects of the 2013 edition of the NPE, that stipulates government's guidelines of action need to be considered seriously'. Supportively, Adenipekun (2004) ensued that 'for a Nation to develop quality Early Childhood Education (ECE) programme, faithful utilization of Government's guidelines for such institutions is the only sure way'. Adesina (2007) opined that 'in spite of the glaring recognition given to Early Childhood Education (ECE) programme the real challenge will lie in the successful implementation of these educational policy guidelines by all stakeholders'. Certainly, objectives of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in any country can only be achieved if the policy is consistently and effectively implemented.

However, Nakpodia (2010) observed that the government proposed encouraging private efforts in the establishment of ECE centres but what is obtainable now is a far cry from all expectations as he observed that the private institutions are not implementing the content of the early childhood curriculum as it ought to be done. Presently, there are so many ill equipped, sub-standard (Early Childhood Education) kindergarten and nursery institutions scattered all over the urban centres and some in the rural centres of Nigeria (Amakievi, 2013). Standards or quality is an abomination to most of these Early Childhood Education (ECE) centres. Most ECE centres even charge higher fees than what many model secondary schools and even Federal Universities charge. The extra-ordinarily prohibitive high cost has not been reciprocally matched by an encouraging provision of facilities and basic equipment (UNESCO, 2009). Early Childhood Education (ECE) being the ultimate background needed by the child to smoothly transit to the formal school system needs a solid foundation, any unstable foundation naturally will affect the other levels.

This situation has, for some time now, remained a big challenge to the education sector and amounts to an indictment on government's inability to do all the right things. There is need for a laid down solid foundation for future growth of the country children. It is therefore necessary to assess policy implementation on Early Childhood Education (ECE). Although the Early Childhood Education (ECE) has been entrusted in the hands of private owners, there is still a concern over the quality of the education given to these children as Nakpodia (2010) has observed stated that the policy and curriculum is not been implemented as it ought to. must play its role then the need to assess the extent of the implementation of its policy strategies becomes imperative.

In Isi-Uzo Local Government Education Authority of Enugu state, Ugwu (2011) carried out a study on policy implementation in Early Childhood Education and Care. The findings reveal that apart from encouraging private effort in the provision of Pre-primary education, the government has failed in its responsibilities in implementing the policy on early childhood care program

(Lawal, 2003). Governments are reluctant to commit large sums to Early Childhood Education (ECE), seeing it as a luxury or a task to be addressed after achieving universal primary education.

Illoh (2013) the study revealed that government efforts toward policy implementation in Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Ogoja Education Zone, Cross River State. All these efforts were stated in the policy but none of them was fulfilled in in Ogoja Education Zone, Cross River State according to the study Uzoma (2004) carried out a study on the assessment of Physical Education (PE) and programme implementation of pre-primary school in primary schools, in Nsukka Local Government Area, Enugu State. The findings of the study revealed that the implementation of pre-primary education programme was generally poor due to some militating factors including: inadequate personnel, funds, facilities and equipment, have proved obstacle to effective implementation of pre-primary education. Michael Okwara (2010) embarked on a study on School based factors influencing Implementation of Early Childhood Development and Education Curriculum in Emuhaya District, Kenya. The researchers findings include: that lack of suitable teaching and learning resources, inappropriate diet, understaffing, inappropriate medium of instruction and teacher-child ratio, and poor grouping practices were the factors hindering effective implementation of the curriculum in ECDE centres.

From the above mentioned studies, they examined the policy implementation and problems associated with its execution, in which none of them discusses the impact of this programme (Early Childhood Education (ECE)) on the recipients. This gap researcher tries to find out and fill among primary schools in Ogbomosho North Local Area.

Furthermore, through literatures review, no study was discovered to have carried out in Ogbomosho area of Oyo State that is why the researcher seeks to find out government efforts on policy and implementation of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in primary school in Ogbomosho North.

Research Questions

1. To what extent has government made efforts towards the policy making and implementation of Early Childhood Education (ECE)?
2. What are the challenges and problems facing Early Childhood Education (ECE)?
3. What are the barriers to policy implementation of the Early Childhood Education (ECE)?

Methodology

The research design adopted for the study was a descriptive survey research design so as to arrive at coherent and logical conclusions in assessing the government efforts on policy and implementation of Early Childhood Education in primary schools in Ogbomosho North, Oyo State. The total numbers of Nursery and primary schools in Ogbomosho North as at the period of this research was 134; there were 27 Government primary schools while individually owned Nursery and Primary was 107. Thus, the population for this study consisted the Head-teachers and teachers (both public and private) from primary schools in Ogbomosho North, Oyo State. The sample consisted of 20 Head-teachers and 80 teachers making a total of 100 respondents. The respondents were selected using simple random sampling technique from the schools in Ogbomosho North, Oyo State.

The instrument used for data collection was a structured close ended questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A was used to elicit information on

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demographic data of the respondents while section II consisted items which were used to assess responses on the variable under study. The research instrument was validated using face validity by experts in education. Thereafter, the final draft was prepared in which the necessary modification was ascertained using split half method of reliability. The reliability coefficient yielded 0.69 (69%) which indicated that the instrument was reliable. The data obtained were stored, coded and subjected to appropriate statistical analysis. The descriptive statistic of frequency counts and percentages while the research questions were answered using frequency count, percentage, mean rating and rank order.

Findings and Discussion

Research Question One: *To what extent has the government made efforts towards the policy making and implementation of Early Childhood Education?*

Table 1: Extent to which government has made efforts towards the policy making and implementation of early childhood education

Extent	Frequency	Percent
Average	82	82.0
High	18	18.0
Total	100	100.0

Table 1 shows that out of the 100 respondents that participated in this study, 82% (82) noted that government has made efforts towards the policy making and implementation of Early Childhood Education to an average extent and the remaining 18% (18) noted to a high extent. This means that to an average extent, government has made efforts towards the policy making and implementation of early childhood education.

This finding is in line with that of Ugwu (2011) on a study on policy implementation in Early Childhood Education and Care. The findings reveal that apart from encouraging private effort in the provision of Pre-primary education, the government has done little in its responsibilities in implementing the policy on early childhood care programme. Some factors such as lack of funds, unqualified personnel were identified as being responsible for this anomaly.

Research Question Two:

What are the challenges and problems facing early childhood education?

Table 2: Mean rating on the challenges and problems facing early childhood education

S/N	Items	Mean	Rank
1.	Untrained teachers contribute to the problems of ECE	2.80	3 rd
2.	The medium of instruction in ECE create constraint for achievement of its objectives	2.86	2 nd
3.	Most of the ECE centres are not conducive for learning	2.96	1 st
4.	Most of the ECE centres are profit-driven and not value-oriented	2.76	4 th

Table 2 shows the response on the challenges and problems facing Early Childhood Education. With a benchmark mean of 2.5, any item that is less than the benchmark mean is considered not to be one of the challenges and problems facing early Childhood Education and any variable that is greater than the benchmark mean is considered to be one of the challenges. However, from the table, it can be seen that all the items noted by the respondents are above the benchmarked mean. This shows that all the items listed are the challenges and problems facing Early Childhood Education.

This finding corroborated the assertions of Nneoma (2013) that some of the challenges facing Early Childhood Education are lack of provision for ECE teacher specialization, lack of qualified and trained teachers, lack of proper monitoring etc. He further explained that these are as a result of the fact that the government has entrusted Early Childhood Education into the hands of private individuals.

Research Question Three: *What are the barriers to policy implementation of early childhood education?*

Table 3: Mean rating on the barriers to policy implementation of early childhood education

S/N	Items	Mean	Rank
1.	Private organisations and individuals hinder the policy of ECE	2.60	3 rd
2.	The government is weak to implement the policy of ECE	2.90	2 nd
3.	Socio-economic factors can facilitate the implementation of ECE policy	3.18	1 st

Table 3 shows the response on the barriers to policy implementation of Early Childhood Education. With a benchmark mean of 2.5, any item that is less than the benchmark mean is considered not to be one of the barriers to policy implementation of Early Childhood Education and any variable that is greater than the benchmark mean is considered to be one of the barriers. However, from the table, it can be seen that all the items noted by the respondents are above the benchmarked mean. This shows that all the items listed are the barriers to policy implementation of Early Childhood Education.

This agrees with the submission of Lawal (2003) that as far as the government is concerned, in view of the fact that the government is not that deeply involved, other than dealing with the formulation of policy. He further buttressed on this fact that Governments are reluctant to commit large sums to Early Childhood Education (ECE), seeing it as a luxury or a task to be addressed after achieving universal primary education.

Based on the findings and conclusions in this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government and all stakeholders should ensure effective implementation of the policy by providing all that is needed for the policy to work.
2. The Government at the Federal, State and Local levels should show more interest in ECE by providing needed quality human and materials resources to ensure the effective implementation of the policy of ECE.
3. The ministry of education officials should enforce its regulations with regard to the provision of ECE Centres. Effective quality monitoring units should be set up and provided with necessary logistic support to ensure that standards are maintained in both public and private ECE Centres.
4. Proper planning and preparation are required for effective execution of Early Childhood Education policy and Early Childhood Education should be given proper attention because children are the leaders of tomorrow and the future of the country is dependent on them.

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