

VOLUME 8 NO 1 APRIL 2012

ISSN 0794-2192

# African Journal of Historical Sciences in Education

*A journal of the History of Education Society of Nigeria  
An Affiliate of the International Standing Conference for  
the History of Education (ISCHE).*

**Secretariat:**

Department of Teacher Education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan Nigeria

AFRICAN JOURNAL OF HISTORICAL SCIENCES IN EDUCATION

VOLUME 8 NO 1 APRIL 2012

**MANAGEMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD  
DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: EARLY CHILDHOOD  
EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT POLICY  
IMPLEMENTATION IN KWARA STATE AND ITS  
CHALLENGES.**

**Ijaiya, N.Y.S; Murtala Abdulyaqin Tukur and Olaolu Paul Akinnubi**

***Abstract***

*The study focuses on the implementation of ECCD policy in Kwara State. The research made effort in assessing the implementation of the programme so far, with a view of identify its are of success and needs for improvement. Two researcher questions were drawn for the study and a researcher designed questionnaire was used to collect relevant information for the study. Eighty four ECCD teachers were selected from 250 ECCD teachers in the state using random sampling technique. Frequency count and percentage was used to analyze the data. The study revealed among others that non of the teachers in the ECCD programme in Kwara State have professional qualification and the classes are over populated all over the state. Recommendations was therefore made among others that the Government (National, State, and Local) should increase their financial responsibilities for effective implementation of ECCD policy.*

***Introduction***

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) was introduced to Nigeria about 20 years ago as a special field of study focusing on the development and intervention on the delivery of early childhood Education. The world declaration on the survival, protection and development of children in 1990 undertook a joint commitment and to make urgent universal appeal to give every child a better future (Tahir, 2003) starting today. The world conference on Education for All (EFA) and the Convention on the Right of Child (CRC) also emphasized most urgent measure to ensure access to and improve the quality of education for all children. Further more, in recognition of the importance of Early Childhood Education (ECE), the Jomtien Declaration on Education for All (EFA) states that "Learning beings at birth" thereby making the early child care the unalloyed

foundation for Basic Education programme if it is to achieve its deserved aims and objectives.

Government involvement in pre-primary education for a long time was limited to regulatory functions ensuring standards and in teacher education. Also, while the National Policy on Education (1998) specifies the guidelines for operating Pre-Primary Education in Nigeria, it did not specify the care and support requirements for children aged 0-3 years. This lack of clear specification has left the operation of ECE or Pre-Primary Education more in the hands of Private Operators without adequate guidelines or standardization. It is against this background that UNICEF initiated an ECCDE programme in Oyo, Ondo, Kwara, Cross River and Bauchi in 1985 with funds provided by Bernard Van Leer Foundation of Holland in ECCDE. The Kwara State government as part of its Education Reforms agenda gave priority to early childhood education and has demonstrated seriousness in its implementation since 2006. As at 2010 there are 774 ECCD classes across the 16 Local Government Areas. This paper is thus focused on the implementation of ECCD in Kwara State to assess the implementation of the programme so far, with a view to identify its areas of success and needs for improvement.

### **Concept of Early Childhood Development**

There are lots of research evidence from many study fields that the care and support accorded a child in terms of good health, nutrition and psycho-social care and protection are very important in the formation and development of intelligence, personality and social behavior (Lenira, (2002), Philip Gammages (2004), Jill Cameron & Associates, (2009). Information from the delegates at the world conference of education for all held in Jomtien (Thailand 1990) changed the views on early childhood care and education, which began to be considered an important and integral component of the education system. (Lenira 2002). According to Oshunbohun (2011) early childhood development is that form of socialization given to and received by the child age 0-5 (in the Nigeria context) and 0-8 by international definition, through informal/non-formal and formal methods. It is a process of exposing the child to his/her immediate environment for maximum exploitation when the need arises. It requires the responsibilities of parents of the child, teachers and community members.

UNICEF (2008) referred to pre-primary education/ECCE as education provided for children 0-5 years in an educational system. This period in the life of an individual is considered a period of great opportunity for growth and development. Early childhood development is the overall advancement of the child socially, physically and intellectually (ECD Training Guide, 1996).

Early childhood care and education started in Nigeria as a result of urbanization and the involvement of mothers in the workforce (Tahir 2005). This assertion corroborates the opinion of Lenira (2002) that the proportion of full-time working mothers in the in EU states are on the increase, even though there is a strong belief in the society in general and even strong women themselves that a mother's primary role should be to care for her children and family. Particularly for children from birth to age three. The consequences so far have been a significant lack of centre-based provision for this age group, great parental demand for longer opening hours and intense pressure on women to reconcile work and family responsibility.

According to National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Policy in Nigeria (2007), the average Nigerian child is highly deprived in terms of good health, proper care, education and right to basic requirements of life. As one of the poorest nations of the world, high level of **mismanagement**, unemployment and poor basic social services limit the access of Nigerians in general and the child in particular to a quality life. This is quite revealing from the following statistics. Infant Morality Rate (IMR) and under five Morality Rate (U5MR) from 90 and 168/1000 live birth in 1999 (MICS) worsened to 109 and 217/1,000 live births, respectively in 2003. The weakened Primary HealthCare (PHC) system has resulted in a persistent high disease burden affecting mostly very young children. Malaria, ARI, diarrhea, measles, parental problems and HIV/AIDS continue to ravage young children and cause high childhood morbidity and mortality. These problems are further compounded by prevalence of malnutrition, including micronutrient deficiencies, which contribute to about 54% of U5 mortality. Immunization coverage continued to be low, and has been on the decline, 13% (HDHS, 2003) Nigeria for instance, reported 518 cases of paralytic polio in mid 200, representing about 80% of the global case load. (UNICEF, 2008).

Furthermore, there has been a marked deterioration in access to safe water, in urban areas dropping from 89% in 1999 to 65% in 2003, and in rural areas decreasing from 58% in 1999 to 40% in 2003 (NDHS, 2008). The situation of children in the education sector is not cheering in that 30% of 6-11 year old children are not in school while less than 20% of children age 0-5 years are attending any form of organized child care programmes or pre-schools (NDHS, 2003). According to United Nations Agency for International Development (UNAID) 1.8m children are orphaned by AIDS in Nigeria and majority of whom lack education. The importance of this, necessitate the promotion of children and AIDS Campaign by UNICEF in 2005. Access to safe water is still a mirage in most parts of the northern states while access and use of sanitary means of excreta disposal, has shown only marginal improvement over time in all of Nigeria. (UNICEF, 2008).

Early Childhood Development (ECD) is the foundation of human development. A focus on the young child provides an opportunity for sustainable human development, economic growth, social change and transformation in Africa. To that end, countries need to develop ECD policies that will guide strategic decision making (Agnes, 2008). The ECD has become a national issue in which government through her agencies are putting resources (human and material) in various quarters to ensure that the lives of the young citizens improve considerably in order to face future challenges.

### **Types of ECE Centres**

There are basically three types of ECCE levels in operation in Nigeria, which may be home based, centre based or mobile.

They are:

1. Day Care/crèche (for ages 0-2years)
2. Pre-nursery/play group (ages 3-4 years)
3. Nursery/Kindergarten (ages 3-5years)

### **National Minimum Standard**

These three categories of ECCE classes may exist together or independently. They are both private owned and government owned. They also vary in terms of quality of implementation of the ECE policy.

### **Characteristics of an Effective ECCE Centre**

The National Minimum standard provides that a good/effective ECCF center must have:

- A playground that is spacious enough to take 20-25 children and two adults at a give time this play grown should not be water logged but safe, secured and free from dangerous objects. The facility should also be fenced with good office accommodations for safety school records and materials.
- Classroom with enough space which size should be between 20-25 children. To be well ventilated. The class design which should allow for free movement, and the sitting arrangement should be rigid like in formal school setting but flexible and allow for plan and interaction with other children.
- Furniture should by child-sized chair (one per child) and one round table per 4 four children. The should also be a display table, cupboards, shelves for children items and caregiver table and chair etc.

### **Challenges in the implementation of ECE programme**

Following governments effort at a dressing the gaps in child education and increasing number of working mothers. Also the EFA associated national education

goal, proved for the rise in the enrolment of children to the ECCE classes. However, the function of the Early Child Care Education have for many years being in the hand of private investors (private schools). Thus the problem of system standardization. In Kwara State as adopted from the report of the task force on Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD). Ijaiya Committee (2009) identify the following challenges faced by ECE programme in the stated any others that:

- (i) There is clear evidence of exploitation on the part of the owners in that they do not have any plan to invest in the centres. Children were found sitting on bare floors, old tattered mats, dirty old carpets and nylon sacks (Apo saka saka). Some however pay rents for using uncompleted and old abandoned building in many cases.
- (ii) There is no enough space, the children in are packed like sardine in one or two rooms without the ceiling, or on a small verandah in front of the house. Some uncompleted and abandoned buildings and sheds, made with planks.
- (iii) There are inadequate furnitures many do not have provision for children who fall asleep.
- (iv) Many school do not accept babies of 0-1 years. They only accept children who are already walking.
- (v) There are no evidence of record keeping in all centers
- (vi) On the whole none of the centers visited, including the Government-owned and private Nursery/Primary school quality as a good model.

This problem corroborate the finding of Lenira, (2002) that the ECCE programme were not adequately funded in the developing countries.

Hence, if the ECE programme is to be effective there is need for serious government expenditure for the ECE school.

Agnes (2008) submitted that African societies value children and place them at the center of their family life and communities. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) stated that 'the child occupies a unique and privilege position in the African society' (Organization of African Unity, 1999, preamble para.4). Over many decades, government have declared the importance of children in their development offers and have devoted considerable resources to child development, especially in education and health. The role of the parents and community members cannot be underestimated in the aspect of ensuring that children are exposed to all the necessary care. The child's cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. The challenges and opportunities for Early Childhood Development (ECD) are greatest in Nigeria.

Early childhood development is concerned with the care and education of children aged 0-5 years or just before the age of formal schooling. The age of 0-5 years is perceived as the period of immense opportunity for growth and

development. It is the most delightful, yet risky period in the development of the child as experience gained at this stage may make or mar the child permanently. Therefore, deliberate efforts must be made to ensure that there is quality care for children at this age. Therefore, this paper examined management of early childhood development in Nigeria.

### **Establishment of Early Childhood Development Centres in Nigeria**

Early childhood development evolved in Nigeria about three decades ago as a private venture. It was facilitated by the needs of working mothers to find a safe place for their children under the age of 4 years while at work. The recent development however is not based on that narrow scope but a new broader concept and global recognition of the benefits of head start for younger citizens to be prepared for life long development. It is to this end that IECD was incorporated into the UBE policy in Nigeria in 2004. The objectives of IECD in Nigeria are as follows among others:

- (a) Provide care and support to the child in form of:
  - Good nutrition and health of children
  - A healthy and safe environment
  - Psycho-social stimulation
  - Protection and security
- (b) Inculcate the in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploitation of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys etc.

### **The Statement of the Problem**

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) provision has become a public concern central to the political agenda at both state and national levels in Nigeria as in other parts of the world. Substantial investments have been made to improve access since the ECCE policy implementation began around 2006 in Nigeria. Kwara State has also taken giant studies to ensure effective implementation of the policy by creating increasing access for ECE in most of the primary schools in the three Senatorial Districts of the State. As at 2010, there are 774 ECCE classes across the state according to the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB). But the question is: is this wide access matched by provision of adequate resources of quality and quantity of teachers, furniture, school meals, classrooms, funds? The aim of this paper is therefore to investigate the adequacy of the provision of resources in Government owned centers towards the implementation of ECCE in Kwara State and to suggest ways for improvement.

**Research Questions**

1. Are there qualified and sufficient teachers for ECCD programme in the State?
2. What are the problems faced by the ECCD teachers?

**Methodology**

Eighty four ECCD teachers were selected from 250 ECCD teachers at a training workshop in the State representing 33.6% of the total participant, using random sampling technique. The study covered all the 16 Local Government Areas using a researcher designed questionnaire. Questionnaire on Early Childhood Care and Development Implementation (QECCD) was used for data collection. The questionnaire was aimed at collecting relevant information on quality of ECCD in Kwara State. The data collected were analyzed using frequency count and percentage.

**Presentation of Result and Discussion**

Research Question 1: Are there qualified and sufficient teachers for the ECCD programme in Kwara State?

**Table 1: Quality of ECE Teachers (Based on qualification)**

| Certificate Qualification | Respondent | %     |
|---------------------------|------------|-------|
| SSCE                      | 2          | 2.4%  |
| Gd II                     | 5          | 6.0%  |
| NCE                       | 69         | 82.1% |
| B.Ed (and others)         | 8          | 9.5%  |
| ECE                       | 0          | 0%    |
| Total                     | 84         | 100%  |

Table 1 revealed the inadequacy in the availability of professional teachers for the ECCD programme. Of all the 84 respondents to the questionnaire, none is professionally trained to teach at the ECCD level. The table shows clearly that Kwara State relies greatly on NCE teachers (82.1%) for the implementation of ECCD programme. This finding corroborates that of Ishola (2008) which also revealed that none of the teachers in the ECCD classes have professional qualification.

**Research Question 2:** What are the problems faced by the ECCD teachers and caregivers in Kwara State. Problems of ECCD facilities by Senatorial Districts.

**Table 2:** Class size by Senatorial Districts

| No in class      | Kwara Central | Kwara South | Kwara North |
|------------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|
| 5-15             | 1(5%)         | 0(0%)       | 0(0%)       |
| 15-25            | 2(10%)        | 3(9.7%)     | 2(6.9%)     |
| 25 and above     | 17(85%)       | 28(90.3%)   | 27(93.1%)   |
| Total respondent | 20(100%)      | 31(100%)    | 29(100%)    |

**Table 3:** Availability of Class Furniture by Senatorial District

| No in class                | Kwara Central | Kwara South | Kwara North |
|----------------------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|
| Adequate                   | -             | -           | -           |
| Available but not adequate | 14(77.78%)    | 12(63.16%)  | 14(58.33%)  |
| Not available              | 4(22.22%)     | 7(36.84%)   | 10(41.67%)  |
| Total respondent           | 18(100%)      | 19(100%)    | 24(100%)    |

**Table 4:** Welfare provision for ECCD (School meal)

| No in class      | Kwara Central | Kwara South | Kwara North |
|------------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|
| Adequate         | -             | -           | -           |
| Not adequate     | -             | -           | -           |
| Not provided     | 18(100%)      | 20(100%)    | 21(100%)    |
| Total respondent | 18            | 20          | 21          |

Table 2 revealed the inadequacy in ECCD facilities in all the Senatorial Districts in Kwara State. This fact is corroborated by the results tables 2, 3 and 4 on class size, furniture, and school meal. Table 2 shows that the ECCD classes are over populated across the State, where 86%, 96.32%, and 93.1% respondents from Kwara Central, Kwara South and Kwara North Senatorial districts respectively were of the opinion that the ECCD classes are over populated.

Table 3 also showed that even though the State provides some class furniture but they are grossly inadequate. This is in line with the evidence of over population as shown in Table 2 above. Thus, 77.78%, 63.16% and 58.33% respondents from Kwara central, Kwara South, and Kwara North respectively were of the opinion that class furniture are not adequately provided.

Table 4 revealed that government is not making available school meal such as snacks, (e.g fruits) as required in the policy. This implies incomplete implementation of free ECCD in the State.

### Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that;

- None of the teachers in the ECCD programme in Kwara State have professional qualification to teach at ECCD level.
- The ECCD classes are over populated.
- Classroom furniture are not adequately provided
- There is no provision for school meals that is necessary to keep the children happy and stimulate their interest in schooling as well as contribute to their physical development.

### Recommendations

This study therefore recommends that;

- The government (National, State, and Local) should increase their financial responsibilities for effective implementation of ECCD policy.
- That if the ECCD programme is to be more effective in the public schools, there should be a radical expansion of classrooms and infrastructure to cater for the increasing enrolment.
- Government should as a matter of policy create special salary scale for ECCD professionals.
- Government should provide regular training and re-training for ECCD teachers and caregivers so as to provide them with professional knowledge required.
- That the training and re-training of ECCD teachers and caregivers should not be left at the level of the State Government alone, but there should be good participation from the LGAs and the civil society such as religion associations and NGOs.

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