

**AN ASSESSMENT OF GOVERNMENT POLICY ON EFFECTIVE DELIVERY OF
EARLY CHILDHOOD AND CARE EDUCATION IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA**

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Abstract.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest across governments, multilateral and bilateral development agencies in looking beyond the formulation of best practice policies and focusing on implementation and effective delivery of Early Childhood and Care Education (ECCE). The purpose of this paper is to examine government policy on effective delivery of Early Childhood and Care Education in Nigeria. The study adopted descriptive survey research design type as the information collection mechanism from the participants (Child caregivers in Early childhood education Care centres) for the purpose of predicting, describing and interpreting the subject matter. The population consists of some selected Child caregivers within the study area. A total of 80 participants were randomly selected from 10 purposively selected ECCE care centres in Ojo Local Government Area of Lagos State. The main instrument for data collection was a self-structured questionnaire based on the research objectives raised in the study. The data collected

from the respondents were analysed using Chi-square statistical tools. The study found that there is significant influence of government policy documents as it relates to minimum standards on effective delivery of ECCE; there is significant influence of curriculum implementation as contained in the government policy documents on effective delivery of ECCE and finally there is significant influence of supervision as contained in the government policy documents on effective delivery of ECCE in Nigeria. The study concludes that influence of Government policy plan documents on effective delivery of ECCE cannot be over emphasised. The study recommends that government needs to inaugurate and empower a body that will be charged with the responsibility of monitoring and supervising the activities and operations of ECCE in Nigeria. The researcher recommends that training and re-training of Caregivers is paramount to ensuring effective delivery of ECCE in Nigeria.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Effective Delivery, Government Plan and Policy, Children and Care Centres.

Introduction

It is an incontrovertible fact that early years experiences in the life of a child have a significant influence on the later life of any child. This implies that, early childhood education is the foundation upon which a child wholesome development is built (Akinbote *et al.*, 2001 & Fowowe, 2018). As a result of the importance of education to the individual as well as societal and national development, every nation is working tirelessly towards providing quality early childhood education and care.

The effort to make Early Childhood Education effective and its services efficient and satisfactory rests on all and sundry, but the chunk of this activity is on the government at all level of operations. The parents of the child have their part to play in making the child available for school and prepare the child's mind in readiness for education activities; the community and Educators whose duty is to ensure that all necessary facilities needed for educational operations are available and provided for; as well as caregivers whose role is to facilitate the children's development can only function effectively, if the government through policy support, policy making and policy enforcement for implementation is in collaboration with all the aforementioned stakeholders. The delivery approach of Early Childhood and Care Education was intended to bring about a transformative shift in attitudes and behaviour of education stakeholders towards education service delivery and therefore needs to be viewed as more than just a narrow, technical approach to implementation challenges.

Effective delivery of Early Childhood and Care Education was intended to enhance clarity as to the practical steps needed to turn National Policy on Education into tangible outcomes by placing priority on national policy over and above personal interest. Effective education delivery also ensures quality service delivery of education in all its ramifications as well as the need to focus on process and procedures rather than outcomes with little sense of urgency to make a positive difference within schools through the instrumentality of government policy documents on Education.

It was for the first time in 1977 with the introduction of National Policy on Education by the then military government of Nigeria that the importance and need for early childhood education was given official recognition and linked with the child's educational performance in primary school. Gradually, early childhood education became generally acceptable, and by 1985, Nigeria had about 4200 early childhood educational institutions (Osanyi, 2002). In order to provide quality and comprehensive early childhood education and care for all preschoolers, Nigeria signed up to the Jomtien Declaration on Education for All in Thailand in 1990. Nigeria had early childhood centres before this, but it was left in the hands of the private sector, which either provided a low-quality service or charged very high fees, thereby frustrating the purpose of making every child's ability to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs (United Nation, 1990). Government commitment to early years education as contained in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) was reinforced through the inauguration of Early Childhood Education policy in 2007 (Ajayi, 2008), which was a result of its inclusion in the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programmes.

Through the National Policy on Education (NPE), national policies on all levels of education in Nigeria were drafted and formulated (FRN, 2004). Section 2A covers early childhood care, Section 2B covers one-year pre-primary education, and Section 2C covers primary education in Nigeria. Children from birth to Primary III Class are covered by the three levels of education in Nigeria. But there was a need for a national minimum standard for preschool centers across the country, because as earlier mentioned, private operators were in the competitive market and provided most of the preschool education.

The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) regarded the Early Childhood and Care Education as pre-primary form of education and outlines its objectives as:

- i. Effecting a smooth transition from the home to the school
- ii. Preparing the child for the primary level of education
- iii. Providing adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work
- iv. Creating individuals who are responsible citizens
- v. Inculcating in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature and the local environment, playing with toys, artistic and musical activities etc
- vi. Teaching cooperation and team spirit
- vii. Teaching the rudiments of numbers, letters, colors, shapes forms, etc., through play
- viii. Teaching of good habits, especially good health habits.

The effective delivery approach of Early Childhood and Care education can best be appreciated through its stated objectives via the following means:

- i. establishing pre-primary sections in existing public schools and encouraging both community and private efforts in the provision of early childhood education;
- ii. making provision in teacher education programs for specialisation in early childhood education;
- iii. ensuring that the medium of instruction will principally be the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community; and to this end:
 - a) developing the orthography for many more Nigerian languages; and
 - b) producing textbooks in Nigerian languages;

- iv. ensuring that the main method of teaching in the childhood education centers will be through play, and that the curriculum of teacher education is appropriately oriented to achieve this;
 - a) regulating and controlling the operation of early childhood education – to this end, the teacher-pupil ratio is set at 1:25;
 - b) setting and monitoring a minimum standard for early childcare centers in the country; and
 - c) ensuring full participation of government, communities and teachers' associations in the running and maintenance of early childhood education facilities (FRN, 2004).

Maduewesi (2009) defined pre-primary education as the comprehensive social, physical and intellectual development and education of children below six years of age. The term also includes the education of children between the ages of 3 and 5 years before the start of primary school in educational institutions as defined in the Federal Republic of Nigeria, (FRN) 1977, 1981 and 1998. However, the 2004 revision of the National Policy Education (NPE) includes crèche (0-2), kindergartens and other institutions that offer education to children. Globally, however, the term refers to all educational activities for children between the ages of 0 and 8. However, the latest national education policy (FRN, 2013) identified three levels of education that constitute pre-primary education in Nigeria (Ishola, 2016). These levels are defined as:

- a. early Childhood Care, Development and Education (ECCDE) for children between the age of 0-4;
 - b. kindergarten education, which is the school year for children aged 4 to 5 years before primary school,
 - c. Primary classes (1st to 3rd), the lowest level of primary education, for children aged 6 to 8 years.
- From the various definitions, it is clear that the system had a different name before independence. Over the past 50 years, the term has gradually evolved.

There are many other government policy documents besides the National Policy on Education (2004) and the contents of this policy as well as other policy documents are detailed and planned, because it embraces the stated goal of the Nigerian government that its education system should be comparable to all others in the world.

Furthermore, in 2007, the National Minimum Standard for Early Child Care Centres in Nigeria was published by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) with support from the United Nation Children's Education Fund (UNICEF) (FGN, 2007). A curriculum for preschool education for ages 0 to 5 years was reviewed to bring in other key factors for holistic development of a child such as health and protection issues, water and environmental sanitation, food and nutrition and safety measures in order to promote effective delivery of Early Childhood Education in Nigeria.

In the year 2007, the NERDC produced the National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) in Nigeria (Ruma, 2007). This document explains the policy's goal and objectives, the policy's target and possible outcomes, how the policy was planned and developed, the roles and responsibilities of national and state IECD co-ordinating committees, stakeholders, the practices families, neighborhoods and media should have, how the policy was put into action, and how the policy will be beneficial and effective. The standards for early learning and development were included in the Early Childhood Development Standards for Nigeria (Odiagbe, 2015). The policy covered a number of other areas, including food and nutrition, health, water and

environmental sanitation, emergency and safety measures, protection issues, gender issues, and national values which serves is the last document on early childhood education in Nigeria.

In achieving effective delivery of Early Childhood Education in Nigeria, the Federal Government worked with partners like UNICEF to create a national curriculum for the education of children aged 3 to 5 years. This was reviewed in 2004, to cover ages 0-5 years. The One-Year Pre-Primary School Education curriculum was added in the year of 2015 (FRN, 2004 & Odiagbe, 2015). The UNICEF and Federal Government of Nigeria made the curriculum and the implementation of Early Childhood Education in Nigeria and the curriculum was aided by several policies and policy documents. The following policy documents therefore, have pronouncements on the implementation of Early Childhood Education in Nigeria:

- i. National Policy on Education (NERDC, 1977, 1981, 1998, 2004, 2013)
- ii. National Minimum Standard for Early Child Care Centres in Nigeria (NERDC, 2007)
- iii. National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Development in Nigeria (NERDC, 2017)
- iv. Guidelines for Implementing National Policy on Integrated Early Childhood Development in Nigeria (FME, 2013)
- v. Early Childhood Development Standards for Nigeria (FME)

In a nutshell, the rationale for the provision of Early Childhood and Care Education was to ensure the effective delivery and overall development of the child who is endowed with nascent potentials that need to be nurtured properly right from the cradle for them to cultivate a good sense of maturity meaningfully. This study therefore seeks to investigate the influence of government policy on effective delivery of Early Childhood and Care Education in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

In recent years there has been a growing interest across governments, multilateral and bilateral development agencies in looking beyond the formulation of best practice policies and focusing on implementation and ‘getting things done’ as regards Early childhood and Care Education. At the heart of this interest has been a set of ideas and structures which can be referred to as effective delivery approach. This approach can involve the set-up and operations of all Early Childhood and Care Education stakeholders in conjunction with relevant government agencies in the application and implementation of a set of best practice principles that guarantee high learning performance of children in Early Childhood care centres in Nigeria.

Yet, some important issues need to be looked at if this set objective of Early Child Education is to give all Nigerian children the best possible education. This paper investigated into the influence of government policy plan on effective delivery of Early Childhood Education and Care programme in Nigeria to meeting the standards of global quality requirements. To make this educational level a reality in Nigeria, the following aspects must be considered; the policy itself, minimum standards, curriculum-related challenges, caregivers factors, facilities and supervision. It is against this background that this study examined the influence of government policy plan on effective delivery of Early Childhood and Care Education in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The following research objectives guided this study:

- i. Examine the influence of government policy documents as it relates to minimum standards on effective delivery of Early Childhood and Care Education in Nigeria.

- ii. Investigate the influence of curriculum implementation as contained in the government policy documents on effective delivery of Early Childhood and Care Education in Nigeria
- iii. Assess the influence of supervision as contained in the government policy documents on effective delivery of Early Childhood and Care Education in Nigeria.

Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses guided this study:

- i. There is no significant influence of government policy documents as it relates to minimum standards on effective delivery of Early Childhood and Care Education in Nigeria.
- ii. There is no significant influence of curriculum implementation as contained in the government policy documents on effective delivery of Early Childhood and Care Education in Nigeria
- iii. There is no significant influence of supervision as contained in the government policy documents on effective delivery of Early Childhood and Care Education in Nigeria.

Method

Descriptive survey research design was adopted in this study. The population of the study consisted of all approved Early Childhood Education Centers in Ojo Local Government limited sample size composing of caregivers from ten (10) purposively selected Early Childhood Education care centres in Ojo Local Government Area of Lagos State. A self-structured questionnaire was the main instrument used for data collection in this study. The questionnaire was divided into two (2) sections. Section 'A' dealt with the bio-data of the respondents, while 'B' which was in Four-Likert scale pattern contained items that sought information on stated objectives as regards government policy documents as it relates to minimum standards; curriculum implementation as contained in the government policy documents and supervision as contained in the government policy documents on effective delivery of Early Childhood and Care Education in Nigeria. A total number of 80 caregiver respondents came from the 10 purposively selected care centres through random sampling.

The questionnaire was given to two (2) experts in early childhood department for content and construct validation. It was therefore subjected to test re-test method of analysis to establish its reliability co-efficient. The data collected were statistically analysed via Pearson Product Moment Correction coefficient (PPMC) and this gave a result of $r = 0.91$. The instrument was administered on the subject personally by the researchers. To make data collection easier and faster, five (5) research assistants chosen among the student of Department of Early Childhood Education, Lagos State University, Ojo Campus, Lagos state were employed to cover some of the selected care centres. All copies of questionnaire administered were retrieved and this gave hundred percent (100%) retrieval. The data collected were analysed using simple percentage on the demographic characteristics. Hypotheses for the study were tested and inferences were made using Chi-square statistical method of analysis at 0.05 alpha level.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Respondents Distribution According to Gender (n=80)

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Female	53	66.25%
Male	27	33.75%
Total	80	100%

From the Table 1, 53 (66.25%) participants were female, while the remaining 27 (33.75%) participants were male. This means that female caregiver were more than male caregivers.

Testing of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

There is no significant influence of government policy documents as it relates to minimum standards on effective delivery of Early Childhood and Care Education in Nigeria.

Table 2: Chi-square statistical analysis on influence of government policy documents as it relates to minimum standards on effective delivery of Early Childhood and Care Education in Nigeria.

Options	Respondents	X ² calculated	X ² critical	Df	Remark
SA	24	10.25	7.82	3	Rejected
A	38				
D	8				
SD	10				
Total	80				

$X^2 = 10.25$, $df = 3$, Chi-square critical value = 7.82 p @ 0.05 alpha level.

Decision Rule:

The null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant influence of government policy documents as it relates to minimum standards on effective delivery of Early Childhood and Care Education in Nigeria was tested based on the results of analysis on table 2 and was not accepted. The alternate hypothesis which states that there is significant influence of government policy documents as it relates to minimum standards on effective delivery of Early Childhood and Care Education in Nigeria was accepted.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant influence of curriculum implementation as contained in the government policy documents on effective delivery of Early Childhood and Care Education in Nigeria.

Table 3: Chi-square analysis effect of curriculum implementation as contained in the government policy documents on effective delivery of Early Childhood and Care Education in Nigeria.

Options	Respondents	X ² calculated	X ² critical	Df	Remark
SA	50	23.10	7.82	3	Rejected
A	20				
D	6				
SD	4				
TOTAL	80				

$X^2 = 23.10$, $df = 3$, critical value = 7.82 @ 0.05 alpha level

Decision Rule:

The null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant influence of curriculum implementation as contained in the government policy documents on effective delivery of Early Childhood and Care Education in Nigeria was tested and rejected. The alternate hypothesis which states that there is significant influence of curriculum implementation as contained in the government policy documents on effective delivery of Early Childhood and Care Education in Nigeria was accepted.

Hypothesis Three

There is no significant influence of supervision as contained in the government policy documents on effective delivery of Early Childhood and Care Education in Nigeria.

Table 4: Chi-square statistical analysis on influence of supervision as contained in the government policy documents on effective delivery of Early Childhood and Care Education in Nigeria.

Options	Respondents	X ² calculated	X ² critical	Df	Remark
SA	45	43.69	7.82	3	Rejected
A	30				
D	4				
SD	1				
TOTAL	80				

$X^2 = 43.69$, $df = 3$, Chi-square critical value = 7.82 @ 0.05 alpha level.

Decision Rule:

The null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant influence of supervision as contained in the government policy documents on effective delivery of Early Childhood and Care Education in Nigeria was tested and not accepted based on the result in table 4. The alternate hypothesis which states that there is significant influence of supervision as contained in the government policy documents on effective delivery of Early Childhood and Care Education in Nigeria was accepted.

Discussion of Findings

From the data obtained from table 2 as regards the responses on null hypothesis one, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant influence of government policy documents as it relates to minimum standards on effective delivery of Early Childhood and Care Education in Nigeria was not accepted, while the result, where the calculated Chi-square was higher than the critical value of 7.82 with degree of frequency of 3 at 0.05 alpha level. This is in harmony with Shekarau's (2014) submission when writing the foreword in early childhood development standards for Nigeria that the standards set by government for Early Childhood and Care Education operations are the universally accepted variables to determine quality of the education. It will be the yardstick to measure whether the service provided is either adequate or below standard. All the earlier discussed government policy documents are pointing to the requisite minimum standards set for Early Childhood and Care Education activities.

The null hypothesis two which states that "there is no significant effect of curriculum implementation as contained in the government policy documents on effective delivery of Early Childhood and Care Education in Nigeria" was not accepted due to the result obtained in Table 3 which shows that the Chi-square calculated value (23.10) with degree of freedom of 3 was higher than the critical value which is 7.82 at 0.05 alpha level. The alternate hypothesis which states that "there is significant effect of curriculum implementation as contained in the government policy documents on effective delivery of Early Childhood and Care Education in Nigeria" was accepted. The first edition of the policy document was published in the year 1977 and it was reviewed in the years 1981, 1998, 2004, 2013, 2014. Maduewesi, (2016) opined that effort of Federal Government of Nigeria at reviewing the National Education Policy is both timely and necessary. First, as a policy, the periodic review of its curriculum is necessary to align it with developing current national initiative, as well as, emerging global trends. When, the National Policy was first enunciated in 1977 the educational system was 'manual' -driven, while almost 45 years on, education has become electronically/ globally ICT-driven and Nigeria cannot be an exception. That is why we now have such concepts as e-education, e-classrooms, e-library or even e-governance.

The third null hypothesis which stated that "there is no significant influence of supervision as contained in the government policy documents on effective delivery of Early Childhood and Care Education in Nigeria" was not accepted, while the alternate hypothesis three which state that "there is significant influence of supervision as contained in the government policy documents on effective delivery of Early Childhood and Care Education in Nigeria" was accepted due to the results obtained from table 4 which indicates Chi-square calculated value to be 43.69 when the degree of freedom (df) is 3 was greater than the Chi-square critical value of 7.82 at 0.05 alpha level. This is supported by Salami, (2014) when he submitted that the issue of supervision is vital in the process of implementing early childhood care education in Nigeria if success is to be attained. There is the need to point out that laudable programmes with adequate facilities will eventually crumble if there is no supervision.

Supervision must be an integral part of preschool education. Supervision should be designed as constructive criticism and guidance to develop teachers' confidence and competence and promote

improvement. In this way, regular and appropriate monitoring of childcare education will assist in the program evaluation and decision-making process.

Conclusion

This study showed that pre-primary education in Nigeria is as old as formal education itself and got a boost in 2004 when the government made one year of pre-primary education mandatory in public primary schools across the nation. Before then, the provision of preschool education was left in the hands of private individuals and government was only involved in policy making and standard regulations through its relevant agencies. After several years of practice, an investigation into the state and practices of Early Childhood Education centres (mostly Public Preschools) revealed that the Early Childhood educational programme is in a deplorable state. Private owners and individuals of Early Childhood Education centers were denounced for the poor quality of Early Childhood Education in the country but now, this study has revealed the important factors that can determine the effectiveness of Early Childhood educational delivery which are minimum education standards, curriculum implementation and supervision as contained in government policy documents on effective delivery of Early Childhood and Care Education in Nigeria. Only when these three variables are properly attended to by the government can Early Childhood Education experience effective policy implementation and service delivery.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. There is need for more government involvement as well as commitment in both policy making and implementation of Early Childhood Education standards.
2. Federal Government of Nigeria needs to inaugurate and empower a body that will be charged with the responsibility of monitoring and supervising the activities and operations of Early Childhood Education Care centres in the country.
3. There is a need to train the caregivers more professionally through seminar, conferences and workshop.
4. Finally, government and private owners of Early Childhood Education care centres should endeavour to send Early Childhood education caregivers to countries with well-established Early Childhood Education programme in order to understand and under study the administration and operations of this education programme so as to assist Nigeria in adopting the best practices for Early Childhood Care and Education programme.

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