

Assessment of Stakeholders' Awareness and Implementation of the Early Childhood Education National Curriculum in Ilorin Metropolis

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Abstract

The study assessed the stakeholders' awareness and implementation of the Early Childhood Education National Curriculum in Ilorin Metropolis, Kwara State. Research and reports showed that the first six years of life are critical period of growth and development that form the foundations for achievement in life. Hence, the need for an integrated and holistic Early Childhood Development curriculum that guarantees best care and support to young children. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. Purposive sampling technique was used to select thirty public primary schools within Ilorin metropolis. The samples comprised of thirty teachers/caregivers, thirty head- teachers and twelve local government education inspectors. Three self- developed questionnaire tagged 'teacher/caregivers awareness and implementation of ECE curriculum' (TAIEC): 'Head teacher awareness and implementation of ECE curriculum' (HAIEC) and education officer awareness and implementation of the ECE curriculum questionnaires. Data collected were analyzed using percentage, mean and standard deviation. The result showed low level of awareness of the ECE national curriculum by all stakeholders (<

2.50). Some of the problems facing the implementation of the ECE curriculum were also identified to include lack of funding, inadequate teaching and learning materials. The study recommended among others the awareness campaign by the government on the national ECE curriculum, workshop for stakeholders on how to implement the curriculum effectively. Caregivers were also advised to seek for knowledge on ECE and how to improvise teaching and learning materials rather than depending on government.

Introduction

Early childhood could be referred to as that period in life when man is free from any form of responsibilities and depends mainly on adult for care and protection. At this period, children learn mostly through imitation and play. This is the period in which the gap between the shelter of home and demand of school environment are bridged. The period of human development which falls between the age of 0 and 8. Since development is said to be moving at a very fast rate at this period, it could also be referred to as the most critical period therefore, environmental enrichment and deprivation could have a greater effect.

The effect of childhood care is long lasting because the foundation of development in later years is laid at this period. During this period, a lot of changes and progress are made in terms of learning, reasoning and in child's social relationship with others. The education given during this period plays a very significant role in the development of children.

Learning has been said starts from birth. Therefore, education starts once man begins to exist on earth, hence the need for a planned Early Childhood Education. Other terms used for early childhood education are Nursery Education, Early Childhood Care Development and Education, Pre-school Education, Pre-primary among others. Early childhood education according to National Policy on Education (2013) is all the care, protection, stimulation

and learning promoted in children from age 0 to 4 years in a crèche or nursery. At this period, all the purposes of ECE as stated by the policy are expected to have been met so as to lay a sound educational foundation for the child. Akinbote, Oduolowu and Lawal (2001) see pre-primary education as semi-formal education arrangement usually outside home environment where children from about 3 years old are exposed to mental, social and physical learning through play in a group setting before the age of formal schooling. Also Mishra (2008) refers to ECE as a programmes all aimed at the physical, cognitive and social development of children before they enter primary school.

It is clear that when children are nurtured through Early Childhood Education, the specialized programme has the capacity to reduce the problems of insecurity, religion and political intolerance and violence illiteracy and ignorance in these future leaders. In order to realize these benefits of ECE, there is therefore the need to have a dedicated, competent and well informed professionals who will be well trained, equipped with all the needed knowledge, teaching skills and curriculum implementation among others, to enhance the development of a whole child. Hence the need for awareness and effective implementation of the curriculum.

The word curriculum in a formal setting can be seen as the planned learning experiences offered to the learners in school. Curriculum according to Oyekere (2014) is a deliberate, systematic and planned attempt undertaking by the school to modify or change the behaviors of the citizen of a particular society. Omoniyi (2009) defines curriculum as made up of learning opportunities intended to bring about certain changes in pupils and the assessment of the extent to which changes have taken place. In the same vein, Offorma (2005) defines curriculum as programmes which is made up of three components: programmes of studies, programmes activities and programmes of guidance. It is therefore

the blue-print or instrument by which school seeks to translate the hope and values of the society in which it operates into reality.

Early Childhood Education Curriculum can be referred to as all learning experiences children between the ages 0-8 are exposed to in a formal school setting under the guidance and supervision of a teacher or caregiver. The Nigeria government according to the Nigerian Educational Research and Development council (NERDC) has translated the Convention on the Right of the Child (CRC) into Child Right Act and further into Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act of 2004, which placed ECE into the mainstream. These laws and acts provide the political impetus for interventions and actions that will improve the well-being of Nigerian children. Apart from the planning and institutionalizing of ECE, such that Nigerian children may have the opportunity for a qualitative head start, a curriculum also becomes imperative. Therefore, the NERDC and UNICEF took the lead in providing a national curriculum for ECE. For the aims and objectives of the curriculum to be achieved, the stakeholders must be conversant with the content and be effectively implemented.

Curriculum implementation is said to involve every action put into place at the appropriate time and space by appropriate persons to effectively and efficiently 'deliver' the curriculum for optimum realization of the predetermined goals and objectives Duze (2011). From the foregoing, curriculum can be said to be all actions and processes designed for effective delivery of the curriculum in order to attain the predetermined goals and objectives of the curriculum. Yusuf (2014) opines that for curriculum to be well implemented, it requires the determination among the curriculum implementers (that is teachers, head teachers and others), resources by the government or funding agency and monitoring agents. Therefore, curriculum implementation is a collaborative effort between the curriculum planner and the implementers.

Without the collaborative effort among the stakeholders involved in the curriculum implementation such as head- teachers, class teachers or caregivers, pupils/learners, local government education officers, education supervisors and parents among others, little or no success may be achieved in curriculum implementation. Nwara (2017) observed that Early Childhood Education in Nigeria are been managed mostly by unqualified personnel expected to implement the ECE curriculum. This problem is aggravated by the non-training of the serving teachers to be able to cope with the demands of the new programmes. Since new curricula or even new methods of teaching calls for knowledge, understanding and skills required of a qualified and competent early childhood education teacher, therefore, teachers or caregivers has to be in tune with the recent trends towards acquainting themselves with the pupils or learners in the smooth implementation of a knowledge based early childhood education not only in Nigeria but the world in general. Against this background, Salami (2018) opines that teachers or caregivers at this crucial stage of learning should have mastery of the pedagogical and androgogical content of the curricular prescription of early childhood education in line with the international global practices, bearing in mind with the diversity and the differences that learner are characterized with. This he further reiterated that such degree of skills and aptitude with which teachers of early years exhibits goes a long way in the development and realization of the intricate objectives of education in terms of the cognitive, affective and psychomotor skills.

Statement of the Problem

It has long been realized that the period from birth to eight years is a period of immense opportunity for growth and development. It is the most delightful, yet risky period in the development of the child because the quality of experience gained during this

formative years can make or mar the child permanently. It is on this note that the Federal Government of Nigeria considered the institutionalization of ECE imperative. Therefore, NERDC and UNICEF took the lead in providing a national curriculum for ECE. However, the quality of experiences given to these children is still questionable as most centers seems to concentrate more on cognitive development than affective and psych-motive development which may be due to so many reasons. This include, non-awareness of the new early childhood education curriculum that has to do with the three domains of learning and lack of qualified teachers for ECE. Hence, the need to assess the stakeholder's awareness and implementation of the new ECE national curriculum.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of awareness of the new ECE national curriculum by the following stakeholder in Ilorin metropolis
 - Teacher/caregiver;
 - School head;
 - Local government education supervisor?
2. Is there any significant difference in the level of awareness among the various stakeholders?
3. To what extent has the ECE national curriculum being implemented in public primary school in Ilorin metropolis?
4. What are the problems facing the implementation of the ECE national curriculum in public primary school in Ilorin metropolis?

Methodology

The study adopted a survey design to assess the level of stakeholder's awareness and implementation of the new national early childhood education curriculum in public primary schools within Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State. The population of this study

comprised all the stake- holders in early childhood education within Ilorin metropolis that is Ilorin east, Ilorin south and Ilorin west local governments comprising about four thousand teachers and care-givers. The stakeholders includes Teachers/care-givers, Head teachers and Local inspectors of education. A sample of 30 primary schools were randomly selected using purposive random selection technique. The schools to be considered for the study must have pre-primary section. All the care-givers and school heads of the selected schools and the local education inspectors within the three local governments participated in the study. The sample therefore comprises of 30 head teachers, 30 teacher/care givers and 12 education inspectors to make a total of 72 samples. A researcher's developed questionnaire was used for the study. It is divided into four sections. Section A gathers information on highest qualification, gender, age, teaching experience. Section B collected information on extent of teachers' awareness of some aspects of the curriculum and it consists of questions selected from the curriculum. Section C solicited information on the implementation. For content and face validity of the instrument, the researcher gave the instrument to experts in the field of ECE , research and statistics for validation, correction, modification and content validity. Test-retest was used for the reliability test.

Data Analysis and Presentation

In this section, the results obtained in the study are presented in line with the three research question raised.

Bio Data Analysis of the Respondents

Table I:Gender Distribution of the Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	40	55.6
Female	32	44.4
Total	72	100.0

Results in Table 1 show the gender distributions of the respondents, where male respondents are 55.6% (40) and female respondents are 44.4% (32) which makes a total of 100%. The results imply that male respondents are more than female respondents in the study.

Table 2: Gender Distribution of the Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
Below 30yrs	10	13.9
31-40yrs	53	73.6
41-59yrs	9	12.5
Total	72	100.0

Table 2 showed the age distribution of the respondents where age range below 30 years respondents were 13.9% (10), 31–40 years respondents were 73.6% (53) while age range between 41-59 years respondents recorded 12.5% (9). Age range between 31–40 years respondents were in majority.

Table 3: Qualification Distribution of the Respondents

Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
NCE	23	31.9
First Degree	35	48.6
M.Ed	10	13.9
Post Graduate	4	5.6
Total	72	100.0

Table 3 showed an evidence of qualification of the respondents where NCE respondents constituted 31.9% (23), respondents with first degree constituted 48.6% (35), M.Ed holders constituted 13.9% (10) and post graduate respondents constituted 5.6% (4). This revealed that respondents qualification who had first degree certificate (48.6%) were in majority while the least respondents' qualification (3.43%) was post graduate holders.

Table 4: Years of Experience of the Respondents

Experience	Frequency	Percentage
0-5yrs	11	15.3
6-10yrs	38	52.8
11-15yrs	13	18.1
16yrs & above	10	13.9
Total	72	100.0

Table 4 showed that 11 teachers (15.3%) of the 72 sampled had between 0-5 years teaching experience. Another 38 teachers (52.8%) had between 5-10 years of teaching experience while 13 (18.1%) had between 11 to 15 years teaching experience. The remaining 10 teachers (13.9%) had above 16 years teaching experience. This implies that 38 (52.8%) sampled is dominated by teachers with less than 10 years teaching experience.

Table 5: Years of Experience of the Respondents

Experience	Frequency	Percentage
0-5yrs	11	15.3
6-10yrs	38	52.8
11-15yrs	13	18.1
16yrs & above	10	13.9
Total	72	100.0

Table 5 showed that 11 teachers (15.3%) of the 72 sampled had between 0-5 years teaching experience. Another 38 teachers (52.8%) had between 5-10 years of teaching experience while 13 (18.1%) had between 11 to 15 years teaching experience. The remaining 10 teachers (13.9%) had above 16 years teaching experience. This implies that 38 (52.8%) sampled is dominated by teachers with less than 10 years teaching experience.

Research Question 1: What is the level of awareness of the new ECE national curriculum by the head teacher, teachers/caregiver and educational inspector in Ilorin metropolis?

Table 5: The Mean and Standard Deviation of the Level of Awareness of the New ECE National Curriculum by the Stakeholders.

Level of awareness of the new ECE national curriculum by the stakeholders	N	Mean
Head Teacher	30	1.56
Teacher/Caregiver	30	1.20
Educational Inspector	12	2.48

The result in the table 5 shows that the level of awareness of the new ECE national curriculum by the head teacher, teachers/caregiver and educational inspector in Ilorin metropolis had mean scores of 1.56, 1.20 and 2.51 respectively. As such, the result implies that there is low level of awareness of the new ECE national curriculum by the head-teacher, teachers/caregiver and educational inspector in Ilorin metropolis. This is because the mean responses of the stakeholders are all below the criterion level of 2.50 set as bench mark for accepting an item. All the items had means that are within the ranged of 1.20-2.48.

Research Question 2: Is there any difference in the level of awareness among the various stakeholders in Ilorin metropolis?

Table 6: Difference in the Level of Awareness among the various Stakeholders

Variables	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Head Teacher	30	1.56	0.83
Teacher/Caregiver	30	1.20	0.80
Educational Inspector	12	2.48	0.87

Result in Table 6 shows the difference in the level of awareness among the various stakeholders in Ilorin metropolis. The mean score of head teachers, teacher/caregiver and educational inspectors are 1.56, 1.20 and 2.51 respectively. Also, standard deviation score of head teachers, teacher/caregiver and educational inspectors are 0.83, 0.80 and 0.87 respectively. Therefore, the results imply that there is a slight difference in the level of awareness among the various stakeholders in Ilorin metropolis.

Research Question 3: What extent has the new ECE national curriculum been implemented?

Table 7: Extent to which the New ECE National Curriculum has been Implemented

S/No	Items	Mean	Remark
1	Stakeholders are fully aware of the ECE programme and its objectives.	1.58	Low Extent
2	School organizes awareness campaign on ECE.	1.91	Low Extent
3	Every parent now sends their children/wards to ECE before primary school.	1.71	Low Extent
4	There is effective school community relationship in the implementation of ECE programme.	1.77	Low Extent
5	The ECE curriculum is closely monitored and supervised to actualize its objectives.	1.61	Low Extent
6	There is constant monitoring of ECE projects.	1.63	Low Extent
7	There is feedback to teachers after supervision of instruction	1.97	Low Extent
Grand Mean= 2.5			

Results in Table 7 revealed the extent the new ECE national curriculum has been implemented as expressed by stakeholders, where decision rule says that the mean (\bar{X}) of the scale used is 2.50, hence any score above 2.5 shows a “very high extent” while any score below 2.50 indicates “low extent” the new ECE national curriculum has been implemented in Ilorin metropolis. Therefore, all the scores in the table showed the new ECE national curriculum has not been implemented to a very high extent in Ilorin metropolis. This is because the mean responses of the stakeholders are all below the criterion level of 2.50 set as bench mark for accepting an item. All the items had means that are within the ranged of 1.58 - 1.97.

Research Question 4: What are the problems facing the implementation of the ECE curriculum?

Table 8: Problems Facing the Implementation of the Curriculum

S/No	Items	Mean	Remark
1	Inadequate provision of facilities.	3.38	Strongly Agree
2	Enrolment of large number of pupils into the ECE scheme.	3.08	Strongly Agree
3	Inadequate number of teachers.	2.68	Strongly Agree
4	Instability in government policies and actions.	2.97	Strongly Agree
5	Inadequate planning.	2.89	Strongly Agree
6	Poor funding.	2.65	Strongly Agree
Grand Mean= 2.5			

Results in Table 8 revealed the problems facing the implementation of the ECE curriculum as expressed by stakeholders, where decision rule says that the mean (\bar{X}) of the scale used is 2.50, hence any score above 2.5 connote “stakeholder strongly agree with the item” while any score below 2.50 indicates “stakeholder strongly disagree with the item”. Since, all the scores in the table are above 2.50, every items in the table are the problems facing the implementation of the ECE curriculum in Ilorin metropolis. All the items had means that are within the ranged of 2.65–3.38.

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