

NIGERIAN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION POLICIES AND PRACTICES FOR SUSTAINABILITY

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ABSTRACT

As a result of the importance of education to the individual as well as societal and national development, there is the need to guide its practices, not only to ensure uniformity, but also to tailor the practices to the achievement of the stated aims, goals and objectives. This explains the formulation and production of educational policies for childhood education in Nigeria and the review of some of these policies frequently. The formulation and production of educational policies are important but the achievement of the educational goals depends, most of the time, on the implementation of the policies. The last set of national policies for ECE in Nigeria has been in existence since the year 2007. This implies that the evaluation of the implementation as well as the extent of achievement of the goals of ECE in the country is long overdue. This paper examines the policies, the implementation and the achievement of the educational goals with a view to gaining insight into the sustainability of this level of education for the development of the Nigerian societies. Five educational policy documents relating to Early Childhood Education were reviewed. It was found out that there are policy statements on types of ECE and the respective age cohorts, methodology and learning resources, language of instruction and minimum standard for ECE centres. It was also found out that almost all the policy statements are not being implemented in government owned ECE centres as well as those owned by private individuals among other findings. It was recommended that government has to be more committed to the implementation of all ECE policy statements in order to achieve the stated goals.

Keywords: Educational policy, policy implementation, educational goals, early childhood educational practices, early childhood educational quality.

INTRODUCTION

The effort to make Early Childhood Education (ECE) effective, functional and appropriate rests on all and sundry but the largest of this is on the government of the given society. The parents, who are to make the children available and to co-operate with the school; the community, which is expected to make resources available; and the teachers, who are expected to facilitate the children's development, can only function if the government, in collaboration with these stakeholders, provides the work plan for the implementation of this stage of education. A part of this work plan answers the questions *why, what, how* and *how-to-be-sure* of what to teach, which is collectively termed the curriculum. Another important part of the work plan is the necessary policies to ensure uniformity, enforcement and ease of implementation of the programme.

ECE in Nigeria has been enjoying some of these facilities and support, most importantly, from the federal and state governments. The federal government, in collaboration with world development partners such as UNICEF, produced national curriculum for the education of children between the ages of 3 to 5 years plus. This was later reviewed in 2004 to cover ages 0-5 years plus. Also in 2014, another curriculum, *One-Year Pre-Primary School Education*

Curriculum, was produced by these bodies. This curriculum was meant to guide the implementation of the compulsory one-year pre-primary education. It was the first attempt by the government to provide free preschool education for Nigerian children because in the past, the provision of preschool education rested in the hands of private individuals and organisations (FGN, 1998). Besides the curricula, several policies were made and policy documents were provided to guide the implementation of ECE in Nigeria. The following policy documents have pronouncements on the implementation of ECE in the country:

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

The National Policy on Education (NPE) contains the philosophy, aims, objectives and national policies on all levels of education in Nigeria (FRN, 2013). Section 2 of the policy document presents all the policy statements on basic education in Nigeria; Section 2A covers early childhood care, development and education; Section 2B covers the one-year pre-primary education tagged *Kindergarten Education*; Section 2C covers the primary education. These three levels of education in Nigeria cover ECE as used in this document since it is taken to mean education given to children from birth through eight years (that is, from birth to Primary III Class). However, the provision of preschool education was largely in the hands of private operators who were in the competitive market; there was the need for the provision of the national minimum standard for preschool centres across the nation (Obioma, 2007).

The National Minimum Standard for Early Child Care Centres in Nigeria (NMSECCC) was produced by Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) with support from United Nation Children's Fund (UNICEF) and was first published in the year 2007. NMSECCC contains the rationale behind the setting of the minimum standards, the objectives, the strategy to be adopted, the prescribed minimum standards (which cover types of centre, location, ownership and characteristics of an effective centre), stakeholders involvement, supervision, human resources, health care and materials, protection issues and stakeholders' roles. Between 2004 and 2007 when the government of Nigeria started to provide one-year pre-primary education in the existing public primary schools, the idea of Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) came into being and the curriculum for preschool education for ages 0 to 5 years plus was reviewed to bring in other key factors for a holistic development such as health and protection issues, water and environmental sanitation, food and nutrition and safety measures. The implementation of the IECD necessitated the provision of national policy for a successful integration of the developmental factors.

The National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Development in Nigeria (NPIECD) was developed and produced by NERDC in the year 2007 also. This document contains the justification for the policy, the policy's goal and objectives, the policy's target and possible outcomes, the planning and development of interventions, national and state IECD co-ordinating committees, stakeholders' roles and responsibilities, the desirable practices for family, neighbourhood and media, implementation strategies and finally, the financial responsibilities and projection. The practices in IECD centres across the nation and an attempt to ensure that the right type of teaching/exposure, simulation and facilitation were made for this level of education. It was also ensured that the policy was properly

implemented; Federal Ministry of Education developed and produced guidelines for implementing the NPIECD (Wike, 2013).

The Guidelines for Implementing National Policy on Integrated Early Childhood Development in Nigeria (FME, 2013) was published in the year 2013 by the Federal Ministry of Education. The document features guidelines on the provision of basic services to the child, community support for socio-cultural development, inter-sectoral collaboration and partnership, integration of ECD into Quranic schools, quality assurance, research, monitoring and evaluation, funding and resources mobilisation. Another observed crucial challenge facing preschool education in Nigeria between 2007 and 2013 was the issue of the standard development expected of the children at every stage of the preschool education. It was noticed that many schools, in trying to impress the parents, exposed the children to academic activities meant for older children. This led the Federal Ministry of Education, with assistance from UNICEF, to provide a guide to teachers, parents and other stakeholders in providing learning experiences to children from ages 0 to 5 years plus (Shekarau, 2014).

The Early Childhood Development Standards for Nigeria (ECDS) included early learning/development standards in physical, affective/psychosocial, cognitive and language development. Other areas covered by the policy were food and nutrition, health, water and environmental sanitation, emergency and safety measures, protection issues, gender issues and national values, and consciousness. This policy document was the last provided on early childhood education in Nigeria.

For the purpose of giving direction and clarity of facts to this paper, the argument will be tailored towards answering the following questions:

1. What are the major pronouncements of the ECE policy documents that focus on sustainability, and how successful are their implementation?
2. To what extent are the necessary resources for the successful implementation of these policies provided?
3. To what extent are the ECE policy documents as well as the necessary resources for the implementation distributed widely and promptly to the centres?
4. Which of the policy's pronouncements is strictly implemented by the government?
5. To what extent and how frequent is the evaluation of ECE programme in Nigeria being carried out by the government?
6. How is the review of ECE policies being carried out?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Background

The position of this paper is based on several theories and principles related to educational planning and management but specifically two theories – transactional and participative theories, and a principle – principle of goal congruency – are adopted as the bases for the discussion.

Transactional theory, which is also known as management theory, was described by Max Weber in 1947 but modified by Bernard Bass in 1981. Transactional theorists believe that a leader's job is to create structures that make it abundantly clear what is expected of followers and the consequences (rewards and punishments) associated with meeting or not meeting the expectations (Lamb, 2013). This theory is related to this study in that government functionaries are seen as leaders, the structure to be created is the educational policies and the

curriculum and teachers and other school providers who are the enforcers are seen as the followers. In other words, the government who provides the educational system is expected to provide the policies/curriculum, make it available, train the enforcers and make it clear to them what is expected of the followers and the consequences (rewards and punishments) associated with meeting or not meeting such expectations.

Participatory theory on the other hand, states that a good leader is the one that takes the ideas or opinions of others into account. Such a leader encourages maximum participation and contributions from group members and makes them feel relevant and committed to the decision making process (Amanchukwu, Stanley and Ololube, 2015). This theory is related more to the process of developing educational policy, curriculum and standards. The theorists suggest that when a national educational policy, curriculum or standard is to be produced, the leader (who in this case, is the government functionaries) is expected to encourage maximum participation of group members (the experts in that level of education and other stakeholders). The educational principle that this study borrows ideas from is known as the principle of goal congruency. This principle states that organisation must ensure that all the operations and activities support the achievement of its goals. The principle also posits that an organisation with high goal congruence is the one that reviews its operations and activities frequently to ensure that nothing inhibits the ability to achieve the organisational goals (Amanchukwu, Stanley and Ololube, 2015). The principle supports the argument that whatever educational policy or activity the government takes up should be targeted towards the achievement of the educational goals. In addition, periodic evaluation of the facilities and practices should be carried out to ensure that nothing inhibits the achievement of the goals.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative research type of the phenomenological approach. But instead of studying the phenomenon by collecting the perception, attitude or opinion of selected sample of individuals from the population; the submissions of the government and the policy makers as written in the policy documents were analysed qualitatively. All the available policy documents in Nigeria on ECE (five in number) were involved in this study as primary sources of data. Content analysis was adopted to answer the research questions.

RESULTS

Major Pronouncements of ECE Policies that Focus on Sustainability

1. To start with, NPE (FRN, 2013) identifies three levels of education that make up ECE in Nigeria with their respective goals. Two of these levels are preschool education while the last one is part of primary education. These levels are identified as:
 - a. Early Childhood Care, Development and Education (ECCDE), which is meant for children between ages 0 to 4 years plus;
 - b. Kindergarten Education, a one-year education given to children between ages 4 to 5 years plus, prior to their entry into primary school and
 - c. Primary class (I to III), which is the lower level of primary education and it is meant for children ages 6 to 8 years plus.
2. The teacher-pupils ratios, for effective teaching/learning exercise, were also stipulated in the NPE as follows:
 - a. At ECCDE level, crèche (ages 1-2years plus) shall be of ratio 1:10, while nursery (ages 2-4years plus) shall be of ratio 1:25;
 - b. Kindergarten class shall be of ratio 1:25; and

- c. Lower primary classes shall be of ratio 1:35.
3. Since there cannot be a good educational system without curriculum, the policy emphasises the development, production and dissemination of curricula and necessary curriculum materials for these levels of education.
 4. In order to protect all Nigerian languages and also to ensure that a child's development is appropriate for his or her environment, NPE provides a policy on the language of instruction. To this end, it is stated that the language of an immediate community (or mother tongue) shall be the language of instruction up to Primary III class during which English language shall be taught as a school subject.
 5. The National Minimum Standards for ECE Centres (NERDC, 2007) states that the three types of ECE that can be established are day care/crèche (for 0 – 2years plus), pre-nursery/play group (for 2- 4 years plus) and nursery/kindergarten (4 – 5 years plus).
 6. Besides the types of ECE centres, the minimum standards also declare that there must be enough space for children to play and that the playground should be covered with either grass or sand; the dimension of the classroom should be 16m² for 20 – 25 children and must be well ventilated with two doors the classroom floor must be protected and save to play on; there must be science, health and nutrition, drama and shopping corners; 15 statutory record books, ranging from admission and withdrawal register up to school diary must be acquired by the centres. The furniture suggested include child-size chair (one per child and a round table per four children). It was also part of the standards that the ECE centres must be fenced for security and safety purposes. Other concerns of the minimum standard are necessary human resources. One caregiver and a help should be in custody of 20-25 children. Health facilities such as weighing scales, growth charts and other first aid materials were suggested. Assessment methods that give proper record of growth and development were suggested. The use of growth monitoring equipment and child assessment records (which should cover all round development) was suggested. Others include government, community and parental involvement, quality of nutrition and nutrition facilities, safety measures, stakeholders' roles and supervision organogram.
 7. Another policy document that was studied is Early Childhood Development Standards for Nigeria. This policy document presents the developmental domains that must be covered by the ECE centres for a holistic development. The social, emotional, physical and intellectual development should be equally and adequately emphasised by the centres among other developmental factors such as nutrition, health, safety, protection and security, water and environmental sanitation. The responsibilities of the government in order to ensure that the standards set are met are also presented. Some of these are that adequate budgetary provision for regular training of ECCDE administrators and caregivers should be made by the government; and regular evaluation of ECCDE facilities should be institutionalised to ensure quality among others.

The policy documents examined here present the intention of the government about what and how ECE should be implemented in Nigeria. The argument of this paper is not about how perfect these intentions are but the degree to which these intentions are achieved and the extent to which many sub-standard centres are being established and approved are the foci of the paper. In order to achieve this, the state of ECE centres in the country will be presented under four sub-headings namely, the public ECE centres, the low-cost, the average-cost and the high-cost private centres. The conformity of these centres to the policy and standards of the government as prescribed by the policy documents is presented. The information given about these centres are as applicable to all the preschool centres in southwest part of Nigeria which comprises of six states. It is generally believed in the country that the southwest is the most educationally advantaged region.

The Public ECE Centres

The public ECE centres came into existence in the year 2004 when the Federal Government decided to fund a one-year pre-primary education across the country. In order to be a feeder centre to the public primary school, which was experiencing low enrolment, the preschool centres were established as a section in all the public primary schools. It is expected that all the government policies about ECE will be implemented in the public centre so as to make the centres models to the private ones. However, the reverse was the case. The following were the characteristics of preschool sections in the public primary schools in Nigeria as of November 2015:

- a. The centres had no curriculum that guided their activities. Most of the time, the teachers either borrowed from the nearest private school (the curriculum used by the private schools is foreign based) or relied on the experience of the teachers to decide what to teach.
- b. About 75% of the public schools in southwest part of Nigeria did not have any of the policy documents. Therefore, the teachers were not aware of the policies guiding the implementation of ECE in the country.
- c. Children of different ages were given admission and were put into the same class in most cases. The age ranged from 2years plus to 5years plus. All the children were exposed to the same activities in the learning area.
- d. 'Experienced' primary school teachers were redeployed to teach at the pre-primary section. These 'experienced' teachers were those that had at least National Certificate in Education (NCE), who studied Primary Education Studies (PES) and had been teaching for many years. Government failed to employ teachers that studied ECE to handle the children.
- e. The major teaching strategy was direct instruction (teacher-centred) and the children were taught using *say-after-me*, *songs* and at times, *rhymes* methods to commit the content into the memory of the children. The children were only allowed to play (unguided and unplanned for) during short break (10mins), long break (30mins) and closing hour when going home.
- f. The language of instruction was the English Language which was interchangeably used with the Language of the Immediate Community (LIC) occasionally. Teaching LIC to the children was by choice; while some centres do, some do not at all.
- g. The only resources in the learning centres were chairs and tables for the children and caregivers, and chalkboard. Learning resources were either not supplied at all or grossly inadequate. Those that were supplied were kept out of reach of children in the name of protection from being getting spoilt.
- h. The activities were mainly academic and the focus was to develop the intellectual ability of the children. The social, emotional and physical development domains of the children were ignored by the centres.
- i. About 70% of the centres visited had a single teacher working with the children. There were situations in which a teacher was meant to teach the children and one other primary class at the same time.
- j. The learning environment was generally unattractive and lacks both indoor and outdoor playing materials. There were playing grounds for the children but none of the centres had play materials; the playgrounds were not well-kept and safe for the children.

The poor state of public preschool centres in the country added to the development of sub-standard private ECE centres in many ways. Most of the private school owners' argument

was that since the government could not even give standard preschool education, then, it was not possible for an individual or any organisation to do it either.

Low-cost Private Preschool Centres

Low-cost private preschool centres are usually owned by individuals and they are profit making enterprises. Therefore, tuition fee is charged. However, because of available facilities and resources which are almost like what obtain in public centres, the fee charged is relatively low. This ranges between N5000 to N30000 per term. The only good thing about this set of preschool centre is that the exterior part is painted with art works such as alphabet letters on the wall and/or some objects drawn alongside the alphabets.

Low-cost private preschool centres in Nigeria share almost all the characteristics of public preschool centre except that there are no 'experienced' teachers that are deployed to the preschool sections. The following are the characteristics of many low-cost preschool centres in Nigeria:

- a. Majority of the owners of these centres have no academic experience in child development; the centres are established as business ventures.
- b. Almost all the teachers working in these centres are not professionally qualified though very few might be academically qualified.
- c. The centres are known for not having playgrounds for the children.
- d. Teachers are strictly monitored to force children to learn through memorisation and rote learning.
- e. These schools deliberately violate the age appropriateness rule in the bid to claim better quality than other competing schools.

It is worthy of note here that this set of preschool is the largest in number and it appears to enrol the largest number of children in the country.

The Average-cost Preschool Centres

This class of preschool centres in Nigeria is established either by organisations such as religious bodies or institutions, averagely rich individuals or people with background experience in the education of children. Irrespective of who the owner is, the centres are meant for profit making and tuition fees are charged, within the range of N30 000 to N100 000 per term. These centres have the following characteristics:

- a. The curriculum adopted in these centres is basically foreign, either adopted from USA, UK or any other western country.
- b. Almost all these centres are not aware that there are policies or curriculum made for ECE in Nigeria, hence they are not implemented in the centres.
- c. The centres are classified based on what operates in the country where the adopted curriculum is borrowed from. The policies (the three classification) prescribed in the minimum standards in Nigeria are never implemented in these centres.
- d. The centres are equipped with teachers that have post-secondary education, but with very few or at times, none with an education background in childhood education. The major quality considered of a teacher is the ability to speak Queens English with almost the native speaker's accent.
- e. The common teaching strategy is memorisation, rote learning and other teacher-centred methods and strategies. This is occasionally mixed with some unplanned for, teacher dictated and directed play activities for the children.

- f. Majority of these centres do not speak the Language of the Immediate Community at all in the school. The language of instruction is English and the parents are also encouraged to use this at home with the children.
- g. Many of these centres have resources both indoor and outdoor but still, the utilisation of the resources for the holistic development of the children is poor. This is because the teachers do not have the training on how to plan and deliver child-centred instructions. Most of the time, a large proportion of the resources is dilapidated but kept to attract the parents.
- h. About 90% of the children's activities at the centres are academic oriented.
- i. There is a good teacher-children ratio, though not because of proper management but as a result of low enrolment.
- j. This set of the centres have better learning environment that is attractive, clean and safe for the children.

The High-cost Preschool Centres

This set of preschool centres is owned by individuals that are well-to-do in the society who have been exposed to the education of young children internationally. Most of them have received background education in ECE or have acquired one kind of training or the other abroad in the education of children. The centres are also profit making businesses and they charge between N100 000 to N300 000 per term. This type of centre is so few that you can only see less than 5 of them in major cities and they often have few children enrolled. The following are common characteristics of this type of centre:

- a. The centres run foreign curriculum and try to blend some local issues such as language and few cultural practices in it.
- b. Most of these centres do not have any of the policy documents for ECE in Nigeria in their schools because their practices are guided by the foreign country where the curriculum is adopted from.
- c. Professionally and academically qualified teachers are found in these centres. When a non-professional teacher is employed, such is sent for training, most of the times, abroad to acquire the necessary skills to work with children. Besides, there are periodic in-service training for the teachers to keep them abreast of the job.
- d. The teachers adopt child-centred methods and strategies to enhance the children development.
- e. There are enough resources for children's activities and the resources are appropriately put into use.
- f. The language of instruction is foreign.
- g. The learning environment is usually beautiful, attractive to children and strategically arranged to stimulate learning and child development. .
- h. The shortcomings of this type of centres are: the use of foreign curriculum to develop Nigerian children; lack of contextual appropriateness in their practices and the high cost of education which is beyond what the average citizen could afford.

The features and practices of all categories of ECE in Nigeria as presented above make it clear that the implementation of ECE in Nigeria, irrespective of the policies and curriculum produced, has not been so successful. The intention of the government on the establishment and practices of ECE in the country only exists on paper and has never come to reality.

There are several literature on the reason for the poor implementation of educational policies and curriculum. Domike and Odey (2014), while reporting the unsuccessful implementation

of primary education, emphasise the inability of the Nigerian government to supply the necessary infrastructure, and the neglect of mother tongue as the major causes. The argument of Domike and Odey supports the submission of McLaughlin (1987) that a successful implementation of a policy requires a strategic balance of pressure and support. Most of the studies on the implementation of educational policies and curriculum focus on the roles of the society and the implementers (teachers). Nevertheless, there is dearth of literature on the responsibilities of the government to ensure effective implementation. The next discussion of this paper is centred on tracking government's activities on the propagation of ECE in Nigeria and fishing out what has been left undone that resulted to the failure of this programme.

Provision of Necessary Resources for the Successful Implementation of ECE Policies and Curriculum

The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) in section 2, sub-section 16, item b states that: Government shall develop and disseminate curriculum materials such as the Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) policy, National Minimum Standard for the establishment of Early Childhood Care Education Centres, IECD curriculum, IECD implementation guidelines and all other materials that will enhance the implementation of ECCDE (Pg 19).

This commitment by the government is also in the 4th edition of this policy document published in the year 2004. In order to confirm the extent to which government have done this, visitations were made with the 200 level students studying Early Childhood Education in the Department of Teacher Education, University of Ibadan to ECE centres in public primary schools in Ibadan metropolis from November 9th to 13th, 2015, and the State Universal Basic Education Board's (SUBEB) office at Agodi, Ibadan on December 3rd, 2015. The following were found out:

- About 80% of the ECE centres in public primary schools did not have the national curriculum and all the policy documents that have been published since 2007. The few centres that had the documents claimed it was as a result of the extra efforts of the school's head teachers who heard about the documents during self-sponsored development programme they had attended.
- None of the centres visited had any of the curriculum materials such as scheme of work (based on the Nigerian ECE curriculum) and instructional resources that could facilitate the implementation of the curriculum. In fact, the caregivers who had access to the curriculum complained that it was too complex to comprehend which makes it difficult to implement.
- Majority of the centres relied on either primary one curriculum, adopted the foreign curriculum used by the private centres or the experience of the teachers to get what to teach the children.
- The school environments (indoor and outdoor) of all the centres were not adequate reflections of the recommendations of the policies. None of the schools had secured fences; majority of the centres had unkempt playgrounds but none of them had a single outdoor play material. The available materials in the learning environment were chairs and tables for the children and the teachers (which were insufficient in most places), the chalkboard and the exercise books brought by the children.
- There were insufficient human resources as prescribed by the policy documents.

The foregoing reports the state of availability of resources at the ECE centres provided by government in Ibadan, the capital of Oyo State. The case was even worst in other states in the country. It was in only Ekiti State in the southwest, during the regime of Governor Kayode Fayemi (From October 15, 2010 to October 16, 2014) that some level of implementation of ECE policies were carried out. The governor established, across the state, some mega centres that were relatively equipped; gave yearly training to the teachers; ensured that the schools acquired and used the national curriculum; and refurbished, to some extent, the centres in the existing primary schools. Parents and community in which the mega schools were established were also collaborated with to ensure sustainability of the government's efforts. However, the efforts were not sustained as the next governor in the state failed to continue the implementation of the ECE planted by his predecessor.

Prompt Promulgation of Policy Documents as well as the Necessary Resources for the Implementation of ECE Centres

The visitation to SUBEB confirmed that the documents had not been disseminated at all to the schools because the desk officer of ECE centres in the state affirmed that the materials had just been given to the state and the distribution would start when the state could afford to do so. The Director of School Services at the SUBEB office complained of shortage of staff and mobile resources at the ministry which was claimed to be seriously affecting the distribution and supervision of the centres across that state.

Another aspect to this is that it was discovered at SUBEB office that the private-owned centres were being approved and co-ordinated by the Ministry of Education. This body was originally established to oversee the day-to-day activities of secondary schools but because of the revenue generation to the state and the charges given to the private schools, private preschool centres were put under the body. The implication of this was that the standard of the centre was not considered as important if such could afford to pay the registration fees. Whatever was being supplied by the federal government to the preschool centres were sent directly to SUBEB. The private centres were not supplied and the standard of the privately owned centres were being monitored by amateurs. These undermined the standard of the centres.

With this, it can be inferred that the wide promulgation of ECE policy documents, the curriculum and other necessary materials for the effective implementation of the programme has never been achieved since 2004, not to mention promptness.

Enforcement of the Implementation of the Policy Pronouncements by the Government

Dukeshire and Thurlow (2002) view public policy as a declaration that defines the intention of a government's goals and priority which are aimed at the whole population or at a specific targeted group. Public policy can also be described as the actions of government and the intentions that determine those actions. It is whatever the government chooses to do or not to do. National policies on ECE in Nigeria, as public policies, are expected to be actions of the government and not just intentions that will never be attended to. Other educational policies such as the implementation of 6-3-3-4 educational system, the establishment of one-year pre-primary education in public primary school, the establishment of Universal Basic Education Board (UBE) and others are seen in this perspective. It is however discovered that critical policies on ECE are only intentions stated on paper that are never implemented. Some of these critical policies are highlighted below:

- Policy on the standard of ECE centres as contained in National Minimum Standard for Early Child Care Centres in Nigeria (NERDC, 2007)
- Policy on what to be exposed to the children as contained in the curriculum as well as Early Childhood Development Standards for Nigeria (FME)
- Policy on quality of instruction as related to developmental domains as stated in Early Childhood Development Standards for Nigeria (FME)
- Policy on language of instructions as contained in National Policy on Education (NERDC, 1998, 2004, 2013)
- Policy on the group of children to be admitted for one-year pre-primary education as contained in National Policy on Education (NERDC, 1998, 2004, 2013) and in National Minimum Standard for Early Child Care Centres in Nigeria (NERDC, 2007)
- Policy on teacher-children ratio and other human resources in the ECE centres as written in National Minimum Standard for Early Child Care Centres in Nigeria (NERDC, 2007)
- Policy on evaluation of instruction as well as ECE programme as contained in National Minimum Standard for Early Child Care Centres in Nigeria (NERDC, 2007)

The implementation of all these identified policies is not enforced in the ECE centres owned by the government who made the policies for the first eleven (11) years of existence. One can imagine what the situation would be in the private-owned centres.

Frequency of Evaluation of ECE Programme in Nigeria by the Government

It is obvious, from the earlier submissions in this paper, that there has been no national evaluation of ECE programme in the country since its inception. The type of evaluation mentioned here is not inspection, in which some individuals who knew next to nothing about ECE were employed in some states to visit the centres, pretending to be inspectors. By national evaluation, what is being considered here is a carefully planned evaluation in which assessment tools are designed, data is collected through pedagogical documentation, appropriate analysis is carried out, findings are made known to the public through publications which are widely distributed, and corrective measures are taken based on the findings. The discussion here is therefore on the implications of not having the national evaluation on the practices and policy reviewed in ECE.

Preschool programme in Nigeria is for five years, while lower primary education is a three-year programme. It is expected that the national evaluation of ECE should be in every five years to see if the expected outcomes are achieved. Then again because this was not done for the past eleven years, the first noticeable effect was the deteriorating practice in the centres. This manifests in unkempt surroundings to unattractive learning environment, lack of necessary resources, inappropriate developmental activities and one-domain focused assessment method. Since all these are against the policy pronouncements, frequent evaluation would have revealed the deviations and appropriate corrective measures would have been proffered by a willing government.

The Process of Reviewing ECE Policies and Curriculum in Nigeria

There is a regular review of national policies on ECE in Nigeria, most especially those contained in the NPE. The first edition of the policy document was published in the year 1977 and it was reviewed in the years 1981, 1998, 2004, and the latest was in 2013. The

National Early Childhood Curriculum for ages 0-5 years was also a product of the 2007 curriculum review because the earlier curriculum was meant for ages 3-5 years. Educational policy review is a nice exercise but the questions about Nigerian policy review are: *what informed the review? What determines when the policy should be reviewed and how is the policy reviewed?* These questions are germane because they address how scientific, valid and correct the policy pronouncements could be at the end of the review.

The first observation about policy review in Nigeria is that there is no regular number of years of implementation before the review. As mentioned earlier, the National Policy on Education was first reviewed after four years of implementation; the next review was after seventeen years; next was after six years; and the last was after nine years of implementation. The impression this gives is that the review is based on an individual's decision (Whoever is heading the Ministry of Education) and not as a result of effectiveness or otherwise of the implementation. It is expected that a specific number of years will be specified for the implementation of a carefully made policy before it could be reviewed. This would have made the review a system-based one which will be difficult to alter by any individual.

Again, it is not always clear what informs the need to review a policy in Nigeria. The expectation is that a diagnostic evaluation should be carried out towards the end of the implementation period in order to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the existing policy/curriculum which will determine what area of the policy should be reviewed and to what direction. The diagnostic evaluation is expected to be scientifically carried out such that the findings, which should be well published, could be generalised on the whole population. The only known periodical educational evaluation in Nigeria – Nigeria Educational Sector Analysis (ESA) – concentrates on the academic performance of primary school pupils across school subjects. Nonetheless, to what extent can this reveal how well implemented the policy/curriculum of ECE is? Can one then say some individuals in power review the national policy/curriculum based on their perceptions and experiences?

There is a serious question about the process of national policy review too in Nigeria. There is no doubt that some individuals have to be selected to carry out the exercise but the questions are: How is the selection of the right individuals for the assignment done? To what extent is it ensured that almost all the experts and professionals, most especially scholars in higher institution that specialise on the concerned level of education, were contacted to contribute to the final policy/curriculum?

What informed these questions is the level of errors, ambiguity and contradictions found in the policy pronouncements. For instance, in education, there is a difference between aims, goals and objectives, but these words are used interchangeably in the 6th edition of the NPE (FRN, 2013). Besides, the goals of Early Childhood Care, Development and Education (ECCDE), which is meant for children aged 0-4years old are exactly the same for Kindergarten Education (KE) which is the education for children aged 4-5 years plus. Goals, for ECCDE, are referred to as *purpose* and for KE, they are termed *objectives*. In the National Early Childhood Curriculum for Ages 0-5 Years, developmental domains were used as the themes of the curriculum. All these errors and ambiguities make one to doubt the expertise of the people that package the policy documents and the curriculum.

Implications of Nigerian ECE Policies and Practices for the Programme and Lesson for other Nations

Early Childhood Education, the education given to children during their formative years, is not only to enable the children enjoy the childhood stages of their lives but also to shape their personalities towards socially acceptable ones that will be beneficial for all (Salami, 2014). The achievement of these goals relies heavily on the extent to which this educational programme is implemented as planned. The current experience in Nigeria shows that ECE is planned for by the government; policies were put in place and curricula were developed, but the educational level is as good as not existing after eleven years of implementation. So far, the causes of this failure have been discussed and the implications of those things government left undone that led to the failure of this programme are hereby discussed. This is done not only to shed light on the past, so as to understand the current state of ECE in Nigeria and properly plan for this education in the future, but to make the other developing nations to understand what it takes to give effective and functional ECE education.

The inability of the Federal Government of Nigeria to produce the necessary documents for the successful implementation of the policies and the curricula and promulgate them at all public centres in the country led to lack of availability and awareness of the policies and the curricula among the teachers who are supposed to implement them. For instance, none of the curriculum materials that should enhance its implementation like guide to scheme of work, text materials and appropriate instructional resources that would have upheld the curriculum was produced. The one that was produced – Nigerian National Manual for Toy Making – was never distributed to the schools as and when due. This could be the cause of about 80% of the schools visited in the southwestern part of the country not being aware of its existence and in consequence, not possessing it. Those very few ones that had it did through the extra efforts of the school management.

One of the causes of poor implementation of ECE in Nigeria as discussed in this paper is the federal government's inability to enforce the policies. This inactivity violated transactional theory as discussed earlier. The direct implication of this is proliferation of harmful ECE practices by those providing this education. Practices such as implementation of foreign culture and the neglect of the culture of the land, inappropriate developmental educational practices and parading of sub-standard ECE centres in the name of making profit from investment are seen all over the country. The perpetrators of these acts are doing so in comfort because the consequences of acting contrary to government regulations are not known to them in this regard.

Lack of scientific and constant evaluation of ECE implementation across the nation has led to further deterioration of the practices at the public centres which are now increasing the harmful practices of the private owned centres too. Due to the support (such as face-lifting) that the very few public centres that are close to Abuja enjoy, it seems it is the assumption of the government that all is well with ECE across the country. Another serious implication of this is that several policy/curriculum reviews that have happened in the past were based on these wrong assumptions. The accurate state of this education available for all Nigerian children can only be revealed by a well-planned scientific evaluation of the programme across all local government areas in the country.

Finally, selecting favourite individuals for the assignment of policy making and curriculum development, without considering their experience, area of specialisation and educational

background, coupled with not making their suggestions known to the professionals before publishing has led to ambiguities, errors and misleading policies and complex-to-implement ECE curricula as we have it in the country today. Many providers of ECE in Nigeria today hide under ambiguous statements in the policies to support their harmful practices while not adopting the national curricula.

CONCLUSION

Early Childhood Education in Nigeria is as old as formal education itself in the country and the status got upgraded in the year 2004 when the federal government increased her level of commitment by providing one-year pre-primary education in the public primary schools across the nation. Hitherto, government was only involved in policy making and standard regulation but the provision of preschool education was left in the hands of private individuals and organisations. After eleven years of existence, an investigation into the state and practices of ECE centres (most especially those provided by the government) has revealed that the educational programme is in a deplorable state. In the past, private owners of ECE centres were denounced for the poor quality of ECE in the country but now, this paper has revealed the shortcomings of the government towards the successful implementation of appropriate developmental ECE in the country. Besides this finding, the implication of the neglect and suggestions on what the government need to do before expecting the achievement of the stated goals of this educational programme have been discussed. Other developing nations that are striving to promulgate effective and functional ECE could also learn from this paper, some important things to do in order to achieve such enduring project.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The effort to ensure that ECE is made developmentally appropriate, functional and effective in Nigeria in particular and other developing nations is ongoing and it calls for the support of all, most especially, scholars specialising in this level of education. Towards this, this paper proffers the following recommendations:

- The level of government commitment to ECE has to increase more than before, if the stated goals of this level of education are to be achieved. In order to achieve this, a regulatory body should be established under Universal Basic Education Board (UBE) to oversee the affairs of ECE in the country. As there are National University Commission (NUC) for university education and National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) for colleges of education, a body should be empowered and charged with the responsibilities of monitoring and supervising the ECE centre. The body should be at the federal, all states and all local government areas in the country, with more power given to the local government body since ECE is meant to be community based.
- The administrators of UBE, the level of education which ECE is part of, should realise that of all levels of basic education – preschool, primary and junior secondary – preschool requires more financial support because it is a material-driven education. It was discovered that whatever allocation was given to UBE board, very little was allocated to support preschool. This had led to lack of resources to implement this programme successfully. To avert this, the federal government should have a special budget allocation for preschool education in the country. This is necessary because of the position of this educational programme (which is at formative years) and the

benefits associated with the provision of quality ECE programme to the society at large and individual citizen.

- Finally, the federal government should send ECE scholars and practitioners to countries with well-established ECE programmes like United States, Italy among others, to understudy the administration of this level of education so as to later assist and guide Nigeria to adopt the best practices.

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