

NIGERIA'S EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CURRICULUM: TEACHERS' ROLES IN ITS EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

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Abstract

Early childhood education is a key foundation of the Nigerian educational system. Early quality care and education given to a child is a determinant to the level of the child's physical and cognitive development right into the future. The effective execution of the stated curriculum for early childhood education as it is clearly stated in the National Policy on Education is questionable. Undoubtedly, quality educators do have a huge part in the operative execution and implementation of the early childhood education curriculum in Nigeria. Teachers are the central code to any curriculum enhancement exertion, and they are well accountable for presenting the curriculum within the confine of the classroom as well as outside the classroom. The crux of this study therefore, is to critically undersee the teachers as the protagonists in the effective enactment of the early childhood education curriculum in Nigeria. Attaining this main objective of this paper, the summary of early childhood education, as well as the challenges of the implementation of early childhood education curriculum and the roles of teachers in the effective implementation of the early childhood education curriculum were discussed extensively.

Keywords: Early Childhood, Early Childhood Education, Childhood, Curriculum.

Introduction: Early childhood education in Nigeria

The definition of Early Childhood Education (also known as Early Childhood learning and Early Education) varies in scope and seem to be closely linked to geographical locations. While the main thrust of some definitions is based on age bracket, some consider the environment within which the education is delivered, others combine both. ECE has been considered to be a pre-school, semi-formal education outside the home (Oyewumi, Alhassan, & Ofoha, 2010). It includes the crèche, the nursery and kindergarten (National Policy on Education, 2004). This program was introduced for children between the ages of 0 – 5 years. In Nigeria, ECE came into being in order to assist and bring early child care within the reach of majority of Nigerian children, particularly those in rural and low socioeconomic areas. Hence, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council in collaboration with United Nations of Children's Fund (UNICEF) is implementing a low cost, community based and non-formal day care program. Locally sourced educational materials are introduced to caregivers, to provide avenues for

cognitive, affective and psychomotor development of the child (Zakariyah, 2012). Nigeria subscribed to the Convention Rights of the Child (CRC). In order to domesticate it, a National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) was developed and adopted in 2007. It was geared at accommodating children between the ages of 0 to 5. This was consequent upon the discovery that the growth, survival, and development of children within this age group are mutually dependent. The policy would incorporate and develop further interventions on the Nigerian child from relevant sectors. It is based on the premise that ECE for these children, which caters for their physical, mental and social development, is heavily dependent on families and caregivers support (Guidelines for implementing National Policy in integrated early childhood development in Nigeria, Federal Ministry of Education (GINPIECDN), 2011)

Furthermore, the National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), in (2007) said childhood training advancement is merciful with care and instruction of kids from birth to 5 years old or genuinely sooner than formal young. This type of training indicates different inventive projects fundamental for children from birth to preschool ages (Akinbote, 2006). These inventive exercises incorporate early feeling, sustenance and ideal intelligent climate. As per the public approach on training (2013), childhood instruction is the training given in an instructive foundation to kids preceding their entering the elementary school. The early years are urgent for the advancement of a person. It is the establishment to the achievement or disappointment of the entire arrangement of schooling and any help given at this stage assists with advancing turn of events.

According to Oyewumi, et al., (2010), childhood instruction in Nigeria began with the British pioneer aces. It spreads to Nigerians who attempted to copy their lords. Around then, just the affluent could bear to send their kids for such training. Nonetheless, the Universal Primary Education (UPE), a drive that managed the cost of free schooling ended up being the help for the kids from helpless homes. As more kids were shipped off school the accessibility of these kids for family workers declined quickly. The necessities of working moms around then for where to keep their infants subsequently turned into the impetus for the development of nursery schools in Nigeria. Akinbote (2006) varied in the beginning of pre-school in Nigeria. Church premises filled in as the scenes for the schools, coordinated by teachers, with their spouses frequently accountable for their youngsters and those of their individuals. A segment of Sunday schools was likewise devoted for zeroing in on these youngsters. As the quantity of the kids expanded, school days spread from Sunday alone to traverse Monday to Friday.

The functional destinations of youth schooling as expressed in the National Policy of Education (NPE) (2013) include:

- i. effecting a smooth transmission from the home to the school;
- ii. preparing the youngster for the essential degree of instruction;
- iii. providing satisfactory consideration and management for the youngsters while their folks are working;
- iv. inculcating in the kid the soul of enquiry and innovativeness through the investigation of nature and climate, workmanship, music and playing with toys, and so forth;
- v. develop a feeling of co-activity and camaraderie;

- vi. inculcating normal practices;
- vii. learn positive routines, particularly great wellbeing propensities; and
- viii. Teaching basics of numbers, letters, colors, shapes, structures and so on through play.

In the NPE (2013), the execution rules expressed by the public authority to accomplish these goals are as per the following:

- i. encourage private endeavors in the arrangement of pre-essential schooling.
- ii. make arrangements in educator instruction programs for specialization in youth training;
- iii. ensure that the vehicle of guidance is primarily the first language or the language of the prompt local area; and to this end will:
- iv. develop the orthography of a lot of more Nigerian dialects;
- v. produce course readings in Nigerian dialects;
- vi. ensure that the fundamental strategy for instructing at this level will be through play and that the educational program of instructor training is situated to accomplish this, and
- vii. regulate and control the activity of pre-essential instruction.

Inferentially, a study by Mweru (2012) concurs with Goffin and Wilson's (2003) findings when it postulates that, teachers should also take care of their children's good grooming and hygiene; encourage children to work, discuss and solve problems in groups; introduce children to Mathematics, Language, Science, Social Studies, Play activities and games. The study emphasizes that teachers are expected to use games, music, artwork, films, books, charts and the like to teach basic skills. Mweru's (2012) study focused on the teachers' influence on children's selection and use of play materials in the whole country, while the present study focused on the role of teachers in the integration of play in ECDE curriculum.

Saide (2009) carried out in Britain on teachers' roles in children's literacy – related play found out that; teachers should act as a role model and guide in the process of teaching and learning through literacy-related play for effective curriculum implementation in early childhood centres. Though the study employed descriptive survey design as the current study, it involved 60 teachers and 120 preschool children which was a smaller sample size as compared to the sample size of this study that involved 430 teachers, 1,719 parents and 1 District Program Officer and it examined the role of teachers in integration of play activities, in ECDE curriculum in Emuhaya District, Vihiga County, Kenya which was a different area of a study from Britain. Another study carried out in Europe, Britain by Sarah (2013) on teachers' roles in promoting literacy in the context of play, assessed the role of kindergarten teachers in order to promote literacy during children's play. The study revealed that; teachers act as; discussion leaders, storytellers, examiners and decision makers. While the study used observation only as a method of data collection, the current study utilized various methods of data collection e.g. questionnaire, interviews, to add on lesson observation schedule. This study was also meant to find out the role of teachers in integration of play activities in the entire ECDE curriculum other than looking at integration of play in a specific aspect of curriculum like literacy only.

A study carried out in Southwest United State of America by Saracho and Olivia (2001) on the role and perceptions of teachers in promoting literacy during periods of play

for Spanish speaking children found out that; teachers are expected to provide teaching and learning materials during learning/play process. The study had a smaller study sample size of 40 teachers as compared to this study which had a larger study sample size of 430 teachers, 1,719 parents and 1 District Program Officer. This study was also meant to find out the role of teachers in integration of play in ECDE curriculum in Emuhaya District, Kenya which was a different area of study from Southwest United States of America.

Niklas and Pramling's (2008) study, carried out in Sweden examining teachers' use of storytelling as a method of integrating play in teaching and learning of 'division in Mathematics' to 2 to 6 years old pre-school children established that; ECDE teachers have a role of integrating storytelling in the process of teaching division in Mathematics so as to motivate learners. The study employed experimentation only as a method of data collection while this study employed: interviews, questionnaires and lesson observation as methods of data collection and it examined the role of teachers in integration of play in ECDE curriculum in Emuhaya District, Kenya which is a different study area from Sweden.

An exploratory study carried out in Kenya by Mweru (2012) on teachers' influence on children's selection and use of play materials in selected ECDE Centres in Nairobi City Council, Kenya, was meant to establish among 36 teachers, teachers' gender stereotyped views and if they communicated these views to children during selection and use of play materials. An observation schedule was used to collect data. T-tests were then performed to find out specific intergroup differences. The study found out that teachers were found to influence children in a gender stereotyped manner with more influence being exerted on boys than girls. The influence on children was found to encourage them to adopt gender roles that were not always fair to both genders.

Mweru's (2012) study differs from the current study as it adopted descriptive survey design. The current study had a larger study population than Mweru's (2012) which had 36 teachers. The present study also employed: interview schedule, questionnaires and lesson observation schedule and it was meant to find out the role of teachers in integration of play in ECDE curriculum. A teacher is an important factor in teaching and learning of language in Early Childhood Development and Education centre and a well-prepared teacher could be very effective in the selection, development and use of materials (Ogott, 2011).

A study carried out in Gem District by Ogott, Indoshi and Okwara (2010) on teacher factors in language curriculum material selection, development and use in Early Childhood Education program which was meant to ascertain the extent of influence of teacher factor in selection, development and use of materials in a language classroom. The study involved a smaller sample of 68 teachers drawn from 115 ECDE centres as compared to this study that employed a larger study sample of 430 teachers, 1,719 parents and 1 District Program Officer and it examined the role of teachers in integration of play in ECDE curriculum.

Ogott, (2011) carried out another study on teachers' attitudes towards selection, development and use of language materials with regards to; target task, human, administrative and physical factors. Though the study was based on descriptive survey design as the current study, it employed attitude test questionnaires only as a method of data collection, while the current study employed interview schedule, lesson observation schedule and questionnaires as methods of data collection.

Ogott's, (2011) study found that most teachers had a positive attitude towards target task human factors, physical factors and administrative factors with regard to language material selection, development and use. This study on the other hand examined the role of teachers in integration of play activities in ECDE curriculum.

A study conducted by Obuchere (2011) as cited in Emuhaya District, Kenya on factors influencing implementation of ECDE curriculum pointed out that; ECDE teachers play a key role in the preparation of learning environment and play materials in ECDE centres to ensure school/home or parent/teacher relationship is achieved. The study differs from the current study because it had a study sample of 65 teachers and 1 program officer while this study had a larger study sample of 430 teacher, 1,719 parents and 1 Program Officer and it was meant to find out the role of teachers in integration of play activities in ECDE curriculum.

A Study conducted by Njoroge (2011) in Thogoto and Karai Zone in Kikuyu Division, Kikuyu District, Kenya on factors influencing children enrolment in pre-school education mentioned the role of pre-school teachers as one of the major factors influencing children enrolment in pre- school education. The study pointed out that the role of teachers in early childhood education is highly influenced by their; training, attitude, motivation and remuneration. The study sample comprised of 3 head teachers, 6 teachers, and 6 parents. The current study on the other hand comprised of a larger sample size of 430 teachers, 1,719 parents and 1 District Program Officer and it was meant to examine the role of teachers in integration of play in ECDE curriculum. This study therefore, is to critically and concisely undersee the teachers as the protagonists in the effective enactment of the early childhood education curriculum in Nigeria. There will be emphases on early childhood education, as well as the challenges of the implementation of early childhood education curriculum and the roles of teachers in the effective implementation of the early childhood education curriculum in Nigeria's educational system as overall.

The current state of curriculum implementation in education in Nigeria

Disregarding this clear and productive strategies expressed, the issue of powerful execution of youth schooling actually persevere. Obviously, numerous instructive partners play parts to play in carrying out this educational program, yet the job of instructors in executing it is gigantic. Youth Development and Education (ECDE) educational plan arranging and improvement is an aggregate liability which includes numerous members, instructors being comprehensive (Shiundu and Omulando, 2012). A few experts in play exercises contend that, the steadily expanding measure of information and abilities required by small kids through play require educator's direction or direct guidance to indicate the particular learning objectives and goals. Educators play massive parts in educational plan execution notwithstanding different jobs like youngster direction and discipline, regarding social variety (McDonnell, 2019), setting up complementary relationship with families, (Lundin, 2000) making a mindful local area of students, instructing to upgrade improvement and learning (NAYEC, 2019) in the homeroom.

In the educational program execution, both individual and ecological variables are compelling. To show educators as individuals, they bring their previous experience into homeroom settings, thus, their convictions with respect to what youngsters realize and foster mean for the nature of the educational plan execution. In the investigation of Cronin-

Jones (2006) as referred to in Erden (2010), it was explained that on the off chance that the instructors' current conviction structures were not predictable with the way of thinking of the educational plan, then, at that point, they influence the accomplishment of educational plan execution unfavorably. Corresponding to this review, Kern, Kruse and Roehring (2007) likewise referred to in Erden (2010) observed that instructors' convictions about educating and learning are unequivocally affecting the educational plan execution. At the end of the day, when the educators are guarding the philosophy of the educational plan being executed, then, at that point, the presentation of the instructor in the genuine homeroom setting is impacted emphatically during execution.

Onwuka, (2018) distinguished the instructor as the specialist in the educational plan execution process. She contends that execution is the way where the instructor chooses and blends the different parts of information contained in an educational program record or schedule. According to her, implementation happens when the teacher built the prospectus, the educator's character, the showing materials and the showing climate interface with the student and the student gains the arranged or the expected encounters, information, abilities, thoughts and perspectives that are pointed toward empowering a similar student to work adequately in the general public. This concentrate accordingly plans to test into the jobs of instructors in compelling execution of youth schooling educational program in Nigeria.

Since the beginning of the execution of the National Policy on Education in Nigeria which tries to guarantee an ideal and subjective youth instruction, stream of worries have been brought by partners up in regard of the nature of training in Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) and its real execution. In spite of all actions set up by the Federal Ministry of Education in Nigeria, there are still a few slips in the execution and non-execution of this program (Osho, Aliyu, Okolie&Onifade, 2014).

The jobs of educators in viable execution of youth schooling educational plan in Nigeria

Educators are the significant support points in the instructing and learning process. The main individual in the training educational program is the educator. With their insight, experience and skills, educators are fundamental to any educational plan improvement exertion. They are liable for presenting the educational plan in the homeroom and outside the study hall also. Instructors are burdened with the obligation of carrying out the educational program in their own study hall staying on track that has required some investment, cautious preparation and work to make. At the point when an instructor neglects to appropriately execute a solid educational program, he/she hazards not covering guidelines or neglecting to carry out viable practices in the homeroom.

Educator is a significant element in instructing and learning of language in Early Childhood Development and Education focus and a ready instructor can be exceptionally compelling in the determination, improvement and utilization of materials (Ogott, 2011). Saide(2019) discovered that educators should go about as a good example and guide during the time spent instructing and learning through proficiency-related play for powerful educational plan execution in youth schools. A concentrate by Mweru (2012) was in accordance with Goffin and Wilson (2003) discoveries, that, instructors ought to likewise deal with their kids' great preparing and cleanliness; urge youngsters to work, talk about and tackle issues in gatherings; acquaint kids with arithmetic, language, science,

social investigations, play exercises and games. The review accentuates that educators are relied upon to utilize games, music, craftsmanship, films, books, graphs and so forth to show fundamental abilities.

Instructors ought to consistently investigate for strategies that are "proof based", - those techniques that reviews have exhibited that the methodology is viable in assisting youngsters with learning. These incorporate (yet not restricted to): play-based exercises, formatively proper practices (DAP), purposeful instructing, platform, nicely planned learning conditions, youngster started exercises, educator coordinated exercises, parent commitment, displaying, peer-interceded mediation and shared insight. (Obidike&Enemuo, 2013). Youth training instructors are burdened with the obligation of assuming a critical part in the planning of learning climate and play materials in youth training focuses to guarantee school/home or parent/educator relationship is accomplished (Obuchere, 2011). It is the obligation of the educators to give fitting room game plans that welcome kids to examine and effectively participate in opportunities for growth as they cooperate with others (Isbell and Exelby, 2001). The educators are relied upon to guarantee viable youth schooling educational plan execution by giving adequate assortments and amounts of play and learning materials connected with every one of the formative spaces to help advancement of the entire kid. Youth educational plan execution likewise requests that the instructor makes proper choice of sturdy study hall hardware. This starts by considering the ages and formative levels of the kids who will utilize the play and learning spaces (Obidike&Enemuo, 2013).

To exacerbate this matter, in exclusive pre-grade schools, instructors with no preparation in youth training are frequently found in kids study halls while in pre-essential areas of government claimed state-funded schools, old female educators with no capability in youth schooling are regularly found in homerooms (Akinrotimi & Olowe, 2016; Ibhaze, 2016).

Difficulties of implementation of early childhood education curriculum in Nigeria

Numerous pre-grade schools in Nigeria are encountering intense deficiency of foundations, non-installment of educators' pay rates and security issues. A few pre-grade schools need more study halls and furniture to the degree that classes are held under shades of trees, a few understudies convey homes their branches and work areas and carry them to school each day (Domike&Odey, 2014). The informative materials expected to help instructing learning exercises are not accessible. The instructors are not generally dedicated to their positions since they are not generously compensated. Clearly except if these educators are given the drive that would empower them or the instruments required their best couldn't be tapped, and the achievement of instructive objectives would be troublesome (Bruns, Mingart&Rakotomalal, 2003). It is pivotal to take note of that the National Policy on Education recommends that the educator student proportion ought to be 1:25. This proportion isn't achievable in Nigeria due to the lack of labor

Helpless subsidizing could likewise be viewed as one more element that has bothered the execution of the pre-elementary school educational plan in Nigeria. Nigerian youth schooling is ludicrously underfunded. This could be connected to the low monetary assignment to the instruction area in the country (Akinrotimi & Olowe, 2016). This has impacted the obtaining of value staff, student: instructor proportion, the arrangement of

foundation, etc, and this would gravely affect what is probably going to be the nature of the result created (Ibhaze, 2016).

Management plays a vital job in instructive execution. No instructive arrangement would be successfully executed assuming the school management is insufficient. The issue of management is fundamental during the time spent executing youth care schooling in Nigeria in the event that achievement is to be accomplished (Ibhaze, 2016). Regardless of the gigantic advantages that oversight brings to the table for the youth training, the Nigerian pre-grade school level isn't given these advantages, as it is normally left solo. This has prompted ineffectual execution of youth instructive projects at pre-elementary school level in Nigeria.

It was proposed that the disregard of the native language in the educational plan is a not kidding incorrectly, and it makes learning troublesome and tedious to the students. There is no question that the native language gives the sweet key to the youngster's psyche as he acquires the experience of his nearby environmental elements through a similar language (Onah, 2018). The carelessness of native language which was incorporated generally in the instructive strategy in showing the students has not been executed by any means in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The paper presumes that the pre-essential schooling is clearly the reinforcement of all degrees of instruction. Helpless scholarly or non-scholastic execution of understudies at the optional and tertiary training could be followed to the essential degree of schooling, implying that strong establishment should be laid at this degree of instruction. Be that as it may, inadequate execution of educational plan at this level and other degree of schooling is of incredible concern, which should be done instructors, yet are not conveyed along. Educators ought to be viewed as a significant specialist who can assist with guaranteeing smooth execution of youth schooling educational plan. To guarantee ideal execution of educational plan in Nigeria, educators of small kids subsequently should be conveyed along as far as arrangement and coordinating great learning climate, appropriate utilization of significant showing helps and viable instructing strategies that will work with learning and maintenance; and furthermore, to advance warm relationship with the guardians or gatekeepers of their students.

Recommendations

- The paper hence reasons that:
- i. Adequate educators that can deal with the number of inhabitants in students should be utilized in schools at all levels.
 - ii. Teacher preparing schools should make their educational program wealthy to familiarize educators - in - preparing with all they should be compelling on the field.
 - iii. Training and retraining of in-servicer educators ought to be finished great conveyance of the educational program content and to keep them side by side of the most recent showing instructional methods and utilization of instructing materials that can improve successful instructing and learning.
 - iv. Teachers at all degrees of training ought to be conveyed along when planning arrangements on instruction.

- v. Government at all levels ought to give reserve as far as grant for instructors in to run the undertakings of the to get educating and learning materials like furniture for the two educators and students, TVs/PC frameworks, nature table/corners, toys and models, outlines just as playing offices should be made accessible in all learning places for compelling instructing and learning. This arrangement of assets could be upheld by non-administrative association, private area and even givers.

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