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# AN OVERVIEW OF THE MANAGEMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION POLICY AND PLANNING IN NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

This paper provided an overview of the management of early childhood education (ECE) policy and planning in Nigeria. It highlighted key challenges and opportunities in the sector. Early childhood education is crucial for child development and lifelong learning, yet Nigeria faces significant hurdles in implementing effective policies. The paper examined the historical context of ECE in Nigeria, tracing the evolution of policies and their alignment with global standards. It discusses the roles of various stakeholders, including government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and communities, in shaping ECE frameworks. Additionally, the paper analyzed the current state of ECE policy implementation, identifying gaps in infrastructure, teacher training, and funding. It emphasized the need for a coordinated approach to planning that involves all stakeholders, ensuring that policies are not only well-formulated but also effectively executed. Furthermore, the paper explores the impact of cultural and socio-economic factors on ECE access and quality, particularly in rural and marginalized areas. The findings suggested that a more integrated management strategy, prioritizing collaboration and community involvement, is essential for enhancing ECE in Nigeria. By solving the existing challenges and leveraging available resources, the country can improve its early childhood education landscape, ultimately contributing to better educational outcomes and socio-economic development. This overview serves as a foundation for further research and policy recommendations aimed at fostering a more effective ECE system in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Management, Early Childhood, Planning, Educational Policy.

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## INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is the period from birth to eight years old; it is a time of remarkable growth with brain development at its peak. During this stage, children are highly influenced by the environment and the people that surround them. Early childhood education (ECE) is the foundation of the child's development holistically, social, emotional, cognitive and physical needs in order to build a lifelong learning and wellbeing.

Early childhood education is defined by the National policy on education (FRN, 2014) as education given to children at the age of 3 years through 5 years in preparing their entry into primary school. Ng'anga (2012) said that in a country like Nigeria, early childhood education serves the critical purpose of preparing young children for pre-school and primary education. In essence, early childhood education (ECE) refers to education which includes the crèche, nursery and kindergarten, while the primary education refers between 6-10 years and above. The effort to make early childhood Education (ECE) effective and functional rest on the government of the given society; for example the parents, community, the teachers, which are expected to provide the resources and work plan for the implementation of the childhood education.

The origin of child-center education was established by the Greeks and European philosophers and educator. They contributed to the development of child study and 'infants' learning methods such as discovery method, problem solving method, question method, experimental methods, group method and use of teaching aids.

As stated in presidential regulation No.60 of 2013 as follow... implementation of holistic –integrative early childhood development serves toward the realization of healthy, intelligent, cheerful and noble children and the realization of the commitment of all relevant elements, namely parent, families communities, government and local government, in the effort of holistic-integrative early childhood development.

The federal government, in collaboration with the world development partners such as UNICEF, produced national curriculum for the education of pre-primary education as a guide. In 2014, the government provided a curriculum called one year pre-primary school education curriculum for the Nigeria children.

Besides the curricula, there have been several policies and policy documents which were provided to guide the implementation of early childhood Education in Nigeria. These include:

- National Policy of Education (NERDC, 2014).
- National minimum standard for early childhood care centers in Nigeria (NERCD 2007).
- National policy for integrated early childhood development in Nigeria (NERDC 2017).
- Guidelines for implementing a National policy on integrated early childhood development in Nigeria (FME, 2013).
- Early childhood development standard for Nigeria (FME).

It is important to note that curriculum implementation cannot take place without the learner, therefore the central figure in the curriculum implementation process which takes place as the intended experiences, skills, knowledge, idea and attitudes that aimed at enabling the learner to function effectively in a society (Ntumi, 2012). The relevance and quality of curriculum implementation has been a concern to all stakeholders. Ololube et al. (2010) emphasized that the importance of teacher preparedness in terms of professional records preparation, academic and professional training, and levels of the pre-school is for effective implementation.

Chebet (2016) noted that the role of a pre-school teacher is very important in curriculum implementation. Pre-school teachers as key players in young children education have a crucial roles to play in early childhood curriculum implementation. This may include child guidance and discipline, respecting cultural diversity, adopting the appropriate methods of teaching and learning, encouraging self-dependence and many (Ntumi, 2012). Since curriculum implementation takes place through the interaction of the learner and the planned learning opportunities, the role and influence of the teacher in the process is undisputable. It is evident in the work of Ololube et al. (2016) that teachers as social beings coming from different backgrounds, they bring their experience into their classroom practice to influence the curriculum.

Ololube et al. (2009) indicated that teachers who are characterized as motivated, responsible, and organized and are open to new learning opportunities were found to be high curriculum implementers compared to teachers described as unmotivated, not open to changes. Ochenga (2015) alluded that implementation of curriculum is hindered by common problems and dilemmas confronting teacher educators in the global knowledge society. With respect to the above information, concerns have been raised over the state of the Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) programmes with regard to the negative teacher attitudes towards selection and use of instructional resources due to low remuneration, lack of time and demotivation (Ololube et al., 2013). In Nigeria, Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016) noted that despite all these interventions and efforts of the government, it is glaring that the implementation of Early Childhood Education programmes is still affected by many challenges. These challenges relate to professional qualification of caregivers/teachers, resources, early childhood curriculum, professional development training, staff-child ratio and funding.

### **Concept of Early Childhood Education**

Education is one of the vital factors that help in the development of a human being. The fundamental right of every child is to learn and develop to his or her full potentials through equal access to quality education regardless of their age, gender, origin ethnicity and social background. However, Early Childhood Education (ECE) provides the foundation of education in the pre-school education which forms an integral part of a child's early education, given formally or informally, in an educational institution to children ages two-five years prior to entering the primary school (Ololube et al., 2009). Early childhood is the most critical period in human development, thus comprehensive and quality early childhood education can make a significant contribution to the physical psychomotor, cognitive, social and emotional development of the child; including the acquisition of languages and early literacy. Early childhood education might be considered to be education which takes place before compulsory education.

The term refers to education in its broadest sense, including childcare and development. This includes early childhood services provided in kindergartens, nurseries, pre-school classes, child-care centers and other similar institutions. It goes beyond what some refer to as pre-school education, as it is education in its own right, having not only the purpose of preparing children for school, but for life in the same way as all other parts of education systems contribute to this process (Ololube et al., 2010). In addition, early childhood education (ECE) has an important role in securing all children good education, thus, childhood years are important in themselves

and Early Childhood Education (ECE) can contribute too many positive and valuable experiences which form a solid basis for future life and learning.

This is supported by the 2007 edition of the Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report (GMR), which provides evidence that children's experiences in the first years create a solid foundation for subsequent learning. In addition, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development starting strong (OECD) asserted that Early Childhood Education (ECE) addresses issues of child poverty and educational disadvantage, as well as promoting women's labor market participation. In recent studies, OECD examined the long term impact of Early Childhood Education (ECE), and its findings revealed that 15 year olds who had attended pre-school were on average, a year ahead of those who had no reading literacy. United Nation Report insists that no child should be denied the benefits of good quality early childhood education. At present various opportunities are provided and several avenues are opened that help in imparting knowledge to children all over the world (Ochenga, 2015).

Globally, individuals and governments invest heavily to ensure high quality and accessible early childhood education at early stage of life. The importance of the early years, in a child's physical, social, emotional, linguistic and cognitive developments cannot be over emphasized. Future capabilities and successful educational practices are notably linked up with both knowledge and good reasoning ability acquired in the early years of life.

Research studies on capabilities of young children's stages, styles of learning, social, emotional, moral developments and successful educational practices have established that children who lack knowledge and experience may not have good reasoning ability. Hence education provided at early childhood specifically at nursery and primary education level, will enhance children's future or later reasoning and educational needs within the formal school system which will promote their educational success and ability.

Early childhood education is an activity that takes place before formal school, in this case, preschool is a part of early childhood, and the aim is the versatile development of child's personality and also helping the child to be ready and mature for a smooth transition to school (Ochenga, 2015). In other words, early childhood programme encompasses both qualitative education and care, which should not be separated but provided in a complementary fashion. Quality early childhood education will earn children a position or state of readiness to learn in a formal and non-formal setting. Disposition to learn refers to development of social skills and behavior in formal educational environment, while readiness to learn is related to the fact that children will start schooling on a solid (footing) foundation to develop their potentials.

Emphatically, early childhood education is seen as an evolving field of study, research and practice, which concern itself with all aspect of early life experience, from separation of anxiety to early literacy development. Early childhood education sometimes called early childhood care and education or early childhood care development education refers to the education that children obtain during early stages of life. Learning is known to be greatly influence by extraneous factors like the nature of educational environment: instruction material, conducive environment, provision of facilities to which the child is exposed during the first six years of life (Ochenga, 2015).

Early gains in school readiness due to early childhood education have been shown to have enormous positive economic and social impacts, lasting well into adulthood; ranging from higher educational attainment and less chance of involvement in criminal activity to higher status employment and higher earnings. Hence, early childhood education is crucial in life in terms of a child's physical, intellectual, emotional, moral and social development; growth of mental and

physical abilities progresses at an astonishing rate and a very high proportion of learning takes place at this stage (birth to age six). It is a time when children need high quality personal care and learning experience. That is, for any meaningful learning or acquisition of skills and knowledge to take place, the environment should be provided with adequate instructional materials in addition to quality educators (Ololube et al., 2009).

Children who received quality early childhood education from qualified teachers are more likely to succeed in school and in life. Such children with richer literacy environment demonstrate higher level of reading, knowledge and skills at primary school level: Good early childhood education increases cognitive abilities, school achievement and improves classroom behavior. Hence, there is the need for careful planning and effective implementation of early childhood education programme which will have positive impact on effective completion of school for the child (Ololube et al., 2013; Ntumi, 2012).

### **Early Child Care Development and Education**

Chebet (2016) pointed out that early child care education (ECCDE) promotes brain development and has positive long term economic benefits. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, skill in early learners help prepare them for success in school and life, it can make a positive difference in young children, and that age-appropriate use of technology can enhance learning. Akinrotimi and Oluwe (2014) asserted that the most recent innovation by the federal government seem to be the new national policy on education (2014 edition) in which the programmes of ECE is brought under basic education in section 2. They further emphasized that it is now divide into two programmes namely; Early Child Care Development and education and Kindergarten Education. FRN (2014) stated that Early Child Development and Education (ECCDE) is the care projection, stimulation and learning promoted in a children from age 0-4 years in a crèche or nursery. However, what should be the objective of the ECCDE is contained in the FRN (2014) as an instrument that can assist in promoting national development. It therefore means that the mind be trained early enough to conceive self and social development.

### **Implication of Nigeria Early Childhood Education policies planning and implementation**

Ololube et al. (2009) stated that policy provision is important in a developing country like Nigeria. The achievement of the government goals is based on the extent to which the educational policy is planned. The experience of early childhood education as planned by the government was well arranged and the curricula were also developed but after some years, the level of education falls because of poor implementation.

The inability of the government to produce the necessary documents for a successful implementation of the policies and the curricula led to them to lack of availability and awareness of the policies among teachers who are supposed to implement the policies. A good example is the curriculum materials which are supposed to be implemented as a guide to the scheme of work, text materials was produced. One of the causes of poor implementation of early childhood education is the inability of the Federal Government to enforce the policies.

Consequently, the implementation of foreign culture and the neglect of the Nigeria culture as well as parading of sub-standard early childhood education (ECE) centers in the name of making profit from investment are noticed in Nigeria. The perpetrators of these acts that is the

private business owners of the early childhood centers are comfortable because the consequences of the policies are not been carried out on them by the Government.

Lack of content evaluation of early childhood education implementation across the nation has led to further deterioration of the practices at the public centers.

Again, the selection of favorite individuals for the assignment of policy making and curriculum development, without considering their experience and area of specialization and educational background led to errors, and misleading of policies which makes the policy to be complex to implement in the curricula of early childhood education centre. Many private owners of early childhood education in Nigeria today hide under the policy statement to support their harmful practices instead of adopting the provided curricula.

### **Relationship between Early Childhood Education and Academic Achievement of Pupils**

The human brain develops more rapidly between birth to age five than during any other subsequent period. The first five years of life are a time of enormous social-emotional, physical and cognitive growth. A child's ability to be attentive, focused and follow directions emerges in the early years. These early years provide a window of opportunity to "set either a sturdy or fragile stage for what follows." Structured early learning fosters these abilities for later success in school and life. Academic refers to formal education and social in a particular high learning or a scholarly organization. Academic achievement is therefore a term used in schools for a student performance in a classroom activity:

- Children who participate in high-quality Early Childhood Education develop better language skills, score higher in school-readiness tests and have better social skills and fewer behavioral problems once they enter school.
- Kindergarten teachers in Georgia, the first state with voluntary, universal pre-k for four years-olds, report that children who participated in pre-k were better prepared for kindergarten, especially in the areas of pre-reading, pre-math, and social skills. The Oklahoma universal pre-k program significantly improves children's performance in cognitive tests of pre-reading and reading skills, pre-writing and spelling skills, and math reasoning and problem-solving abilities.
- Importantly, cognitive or academic achievement of an individual is determined by either environmental or hereditary factors, though provision of quality teachers, adequate instructional materials and effective teaching methods are likely to influence academic achievement of pupils, positively or negatively depending on either the teachers or the pupils ability.

### **Relationship between Early Childhood Education and Social Behavior**

Social behavior is a term used to describe the general conduct exhibited by individuals within a society, which is essential in response to what is deemed acceptable by a person's peer group or avoiding behavior that is unacceptable. This type of human behavior primarily determines how individuals interact with one another within a group or society. While social conduct is often modeled to create a comfortable social environment, anti-social behavior such as aggression, or bullying may be defined as negative social behavior, particularly in instances where other individuals within a peer group behave well (Esse, 2011).

Similarly, positive interactions amongst individuals in a society help create a pleasant environment for citizens, activities defined by peer group to be acceptable even if harmful to selected individuals or subgroup within a society also related to social behavior. Studies of massive human rights violations have helped illustrate the extent to which harmful, but socially acceptable behaviors have persisted in some societies. Examples of widespread acceptance of negative behavior within a peer group include historical incidents of mass genocide and human enslavement.

### **The Nigeria Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) Policy**

The Nigerian National Policy on Education, which informs the IECD, describes early childhood education as the education provided to children in a pre-primary educational institution, including crèches, nursery schools and kindergarten (FRN, 2014). Despite government policies and interventions, the early childhood education sector in Nigeria is dominated by private practitioners and hence characterized by challenges ranging from inappropriate curricula and teacher training and recruitment to the provision of child-friendly facilities and environments (Ololube et al., 2010).

Early childhood centers usually operate from private homes, government-owned primary schools, industrial and business premises, and churches and mosques (Ochenga, 2015). Qualification requirements are minimal and mostly non-mandatory: teachers of 3-5 year old should “preferably be NCE (Nigerian Certificate in Education) holders with at least a senior secondary school certificate, proficiency certificate; caregivers may be anyone with basic literacy and aged not less than 21 years; and ‘helpers’ should be aged not less than 21 years, preferably having primary six or basic literacy certificate (FRN, 2014). In a survey by Ezirim (2014) of nursery school caregivers in south-eastern Nigeria, less than 20% of teachers and caregivers had obtained the NCE (the three-year, minimum professional qualification for teachers in the Nigerian education system; this basic training is recommended only for the early years in the minimum standards (FRN, 2014).

According to Ezirim (2014), many of the teachers in the study were secondary school leavers awaiting admission to tertiary institutions. Consequently, they were usually poorly remunerated and ill-motivated, resulting in a high turnover of teachers and caregivers. The implications for children were inadequate care and education, which were likely to limit their potential for development and literacy acquisition in the critical early years.

### **Enforcement of the Implementation of the Early Childhood Education Policy Pronouncement by the Federal Government of Nigeria**

Early childhood education (ECE) in Nigeria has seen policy pronouncements aimed at enhancing its quality and accessibility. The Federal Government has underscored the importance of ECE in national development, emphasizing universal access and quality standards. However, effective enforcement of these policies faces significant challenges.

One of the key policy frameworks is the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014), which highlights the role of ECE in laying the foundation for lifelong learning. According to the FRN (2014), early childhood education should be accessible to all Nigerian children, fostering their cognitive, social, and emotional development from an early age. Despite these policy pronouncements, the actual implementation of ECE policies is hindered by several factors.

Funding remains a critical issue, with budgetary allocations often insufficient to support adequate infrastructure, resources, and training for ECE educators (UNESCO, 2024). This results in disparities in ECE quality between urban and rural areas, where rural communities often lack the necessary facilities and qualified personnel (Adeyemi, 2018).

Moreover, the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for ECE implementation are often weak, leading to inconsistencies in policy execution across different states and regions (Olawoyin, 2019). There is a need for improved coordination between federal and state levels to ensure that policies are effectively translated into practice nationwide. To address these challenges, Nigeria should prioritize increased budgetary allocations for ECE, enhance training and professional development opportunities for educators, and strengthen monitoring and evaluation frameworks (UNESCO, 2024). These efforts are crucial for achieving the goals of universal access and quality in early childhood education, thereby laying a solid foundation for national development (Ololube et al., 2009).

## **CONCLUSION**

The management of early childhood education (ECE) policy and planning in Nigeria presents both significant challenges and promising opportunities. As this paper has illustrated, effective ECE is vital for the holistic development of children and the nation's future. However, systemic issues such as inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teacher training, and limited funding hinder progress. Acknowledging the roles of various stakeholders, including government, NGOs, and local communities, is essential for creating a robust ECE framework.

To enhance the quality and accessibility of early childhood education, a coordinated and inclusive approach to policy implementation is necessary. This involves engaging communities and leveraging resources to address the unique socio-economic barriers faced by rural and marginalized populations. By fostering collaboration among stakeholders, Nigeria can develop more effective strategies that not only align with global standards but also cater to local needs.

Ultimately, addressing these challenges is critical for improving educational outcomes and contributing to broader socio-economic development. The insights presented in this paper serve as a foundation for future research and policy formulation aimed at strengthening Nigeria's ECE system, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to thrive and succeed.

## **Recommendations**

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 Nigeria. As there is National University Commission (NUC) for colleges of 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 center. 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.



- There should be penalty for every early education childhood center that default the Government policy.
- The administrators of UBE, the level of education which ECEE is part of, should realize 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 as 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 Nigeria.

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