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An Assessment of Implementation Strategies of Integrated Early Childcare and Development (IECD) in Epe Local Government Area of Lagos State (Pp. 501-510)

Viatonu, Olumuyiwa A. - School of Education, Michael Otedola College of Primary Education, Noforija-Epe, Lagos State, Nigeria

E-mail: oluviat@yahoo.com

Phone: +2348023051674

Usman-Abdulqadri, Taibat - School of Education, Michael Otedola College of Primary Education, Noforija-Epe, Lagos State, Nigeria

Phone: +2347025874873

&

Dagunduro, O. M. - School of Education, Michael Otedola College of Primary Education, Noforija-Epe, Lagos State, Nigeria

Phone: +2348053024571

Abstract

The study investigated implementation strategies of integrated Early Childcare and Development (IECD) in Epe Local Government Area of Lagos State. The sample for the study comprises 53 headteachers and 89 care givers using purposive sampling techniques. The instrument used was a two-part questionnaire. Simple percentages and chi-square (χ^2) were used to analyse the data. The result showed that major stakeholders in implementation of IECD were yet to be given proper in-service training. The study also revealed non-availability of IECD curriculum and

instructional/play materials in some schools/centres. Recommendations on how to properly implement the IECD curriculum were made.

Key words: Childcare, implementation, IECD, Caregivers.

Introduction

Over the years, the role of the Nigerian government in early child care and education for better development of youngest citizens tend to have gone beyond mere regulatory to supervisory, monitoring and even financial involvement hence the enactment of the National Policy for integrated Early Childcare and Development (IECD) in response to the global needs of children. The formulation of this policy (IECD) was one of the fall outs of the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990. Efforts to introduce the IECD in Nigeria were initiated as far back as 1987 by the Federal Government, the United Nations National Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), and other agencies and partners.

These efforts, however, paid off with the development and production of National Early Childhood Curriculum for children aged 0-5years by the NERDC, with the support of UNICEF and were launched in 2007. This is an indication of the readiness of the government in providing comprehensive early child care services and education for proper and better development and orientation of youngest citizens of Nigeria at their crucial and formative years of development. The implementation of this (IECD) policy involves some strategies. A closer look at the implementation strategies of the IECD as contained in the policy document suggests compartmentalization of services relating to child care and development into various areas such as health, nutrition, education, environment and sanitation, psycho-social to mention but a few. This compartmentalization is however at variance with the belief of the early childhood community which sees a child's development as holistic, interwoven and simultaneous and therefore, cannot be compartmentalized (Evans, 2000).

Since no national policy on education can be formulated without identifying with the overall philosophy and goals of the nation. To this end, section 2 of the National Policy on Education (2004) has given prominence to Early Childhood/Pre-primary Education. This is given more prominence under the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme which has classified early childhood education under basic education and is therefore free, compulsory and universal.

However, since the development and introduction of the curriculum (which addresses virtually all the critical areas of early childhood care), only schools in the urban areas were provided with the curriculum. This has revealed a situation in the education sector where there is a disparity between production and distribution of relevant policy document to the actual implementers of policies (UNESCO, 2007).

In a report of a national case study on the delivery of early childhood services in Nigeria, it was observed that there was a major geographical disparity in access to information and curriculum about early child care development between urban (37%) and rural (12%) areas (UNESCO 2000). This is because the problems of education in Nigeria in general and early childhood care in particular are more acute in the rural than the urban areas as the former is faced with lack of curriculum and other relevant instructional materials (Anyaegbu, et al 2004).

It is saddening to note that since the production, approval and launching of the National Policy for Integrated Early Childcare Education and Development in 2007, no noticeable intervention has been recorded. The impact of national, state and local consultative and co-ordinating committees as spelt out in the policy is yet to be felt. This is because one of the key initiatives spelt out in the report of the education sector of the National Technical Working group for Nigeria's vision 20:20:20 programme for achieving the objectives of the Early Childcare Development and Education is the training of teachers and care givers many of whom are not even aware of early child care and education programme in Nigerian Colleges of Education (Usman-Abdulqadri, 2009).

Also of concern is the training of head teachers and caregivers in public primary schools who are expected to have received training for proper implementation strategies of the curriculum and to equip them to cope with the demanding and restless nature of this category of children. However, studies have shown that headteachers and caregivers have not been properly and adequately trained on the implementation of the curriculum and most of the available care givers are not even qualified to be so called as they are improvised from clerks, cleaners, etc (Agusiobo 2003; Usman-Abdulqadri, 2009).

This, among other problems, prompted the present study which attempted to assess the implementation strategies of Integrated Early Childcare and

Development (IECD) in Epe Local Government Area of Lagos State, South-West Nigeria.

It is quite obvious that the role of government in early childcare and education for better development of its youngest citizens has shifted from mere regulatory to policy formulation and financial involvement hence the enactment of National Policy for Integrated Early Childcare and Development (IECD) in response to current global needs of children and keeping with current trends in developed societies all over the world. Ideally, policy guidelines are supposed to form the basis of action by implementers like headteachers and caregivers.

In reality however, the gap between policy formulation and implementation has always remained wide. One of the factors responsible for this ugly situation is the poor motivation and low moral of the implementers of the policy coupled with weak monitoring and evaluation mechanism leading to incoherent and inconsistent policy which in turn makes the quality of management and curriculum development to be compromised (Anyaeibu, et al 2004).

The unavailability of professional or qualified caregivers to implement the programme coupled with the fact that one of the major stakeholders in child care (parents) especially mothers are not fully informed of this holistic approach to the care, growth, survival, nutrition and education of the pre-primary school child makes it an issue for grave concern.

Specifically, this study will determine:

- ❖ Whether there is a difference in the in-service training received by head teachers and caregivers on the implementation of Early Childcare and Education curriculum.
- ❖ Whether location of public Early childcare and education centres will create difference in availability of instructional/play materials.

The investigators are optimistic that the outcome of this study would shed more light on whether the government has fully prepared the implementers of the curriculum for proper service delivery or is just paying lip service towards its implementation.

In light of the above, the following hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There will be no significant difference between in-service training received by headteachers and caregivers in the implementation of IECD curriculum.
2. There will be no significant difference in provision of instructional/play materials between rural and urban ECCE centres for the implementation of IECD curriculum.

Methodology

The descriptive research design was adopted for the study. This was done in order to collect adequate and detailed information that describe existing phenomenon, identify problem areas and justify relationship between policy formulation and implementation and make future plans and decisions.

All headteachers and caregivers of children of pre-primary school age in all public primary schools in Epe Local Government Area of Lagos State, South-West Nigeria constituted the population for the study.

The sample comprised all the fifty-three (53) head teachers of schools with classes for children of pre-primary school age and eighty-nine (89) caregivers which is the stream of linkage classes available in the study area. They were all easily accessible. Purposive sampling technique was used.

The instrument used for the study was a two-part Assessing Implementation Strategies of Early Childcare and Education Curriculum Questionnaire (AISECCECQ) designed and validated by the researchers. It has been used in a previous study by one of the researchers (Usman-Abdulqadri, 2009).

Section A consisted of items seeking general information from the respondents such as sex, name of school, name of town/village to determine whether urban or rural location. Section B consisted of items dealing with information on implementation strategies of early childcare and education curriculum using a 4-point Likert-scale.

A test-retest method was used. A correlation coefficient of 0.87 was got when administered to selected subjects in private nursery schools in the same study area. This indicated strong relationship between the selected subjects and the actual respondents. The researchers gave one week interval before the same instrument was administered to the same group of respondents to compare their responses. The instrument was found reliable.

The researchers personally administered the questionnaire to the respondents in their respective schools. Administration and collection of information was quite easy, after the researchers introduced themselves and their mission to the heads of schools. Fifty-three (53) questionnaires were distributed to headteachers of schools with ECCE classes. Also, all the eighty-nine (89) caregivers in the area of study were given questionnaire in their various classes. The questionnaires were collected the same day and this ensured one hundred percent (100%) returns.

Simple percentages was used to present/analyse the gender of the respondents (table 1), while chi-square (χ^2) was used to test the 2 hypotheses stated in the study (see tables 2 and 3).

Table 1 shows that out of the 53 head teachers 18 (33.96%) were male while 35 (66.04%) were female. For the caregivers, 10(11.24%) were male, 79(89.76%) were female.

Table 2 shows that there is no significant difference between in-service training received by head teachers and caregivers on implementation of Early Childcare and Education (ECCE) curriculum. The calculated X^2 value (5.08) is less than the critical value (9.49) at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, H_{01} is accepted.

Table 3 reveals a significant difference in the provision of instructional/play materials between rural and urban ECCE centres. The calculated X^2 value (17.2) is greater than the table value (9.49) at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, H_{02} is rejected.

Discussion

The results of the study have shown that the key implementers of the ECCE curriculum have not been adequately trained to take up the challenge of caring for and rearing of the youngest citizens of the country. The implication of this is that there is still a wide gap between policy formulation and implementation. This finding is in line with the UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report (2007) and the Nigerian National Consultative Committee on Early Childcare Education(NCCEE 2006) which observed lack of professional training for caregivers which has resulted in low level of knowledge and skills of personnel handling children at this critical stage of development and pointed out that further attention is required in relation to initial and on-going professional development of care givers.

The study further revealed that most ECCE centres particularly those in the rural areas were not provided or equipped with necessary and adequate instructional/play materials. Most of the classes were found dull and drab due to lack of play materials hence children were either found to remain unusually silent or were asked by their teachers to rest their heads on the table. In schools/centres where instructional/play materials were available, they were found in the custody of headteachers who deprived the children the use of the materials on the flimsy excuse that only few of such materials were provided and would not want them to be destroyed/spoiled by the children. This situation deprived children the opportunity to interact with their peers through play, and play has been found to be essential to young children's health, advancement in their cognitive development and increases the probability that children will engage in conversation and interaction with one another thereby practicing the roles they will assume later in life (Santrock, 1999).

This finding is in line with the outcome of a National Inventorisation Survey on ECC models, facilities and practices in Nigeria carried out by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) (2003) in conjunction with UNICEF which reported that there were inadequacies in learning environments/instructional/play materials, teaching personnel and rearing practices. The little or no impact of the IECD policy on the rural areas as revealed in this study agrees with earlier studies (Agusiobo, 2003, Anyaegbu et al (2004) which stated that education policies or reforms in Nigeria have had little impact on education in the rural areas. This is confirmed by the fact that the standard of education in most rural communities in Nigeria remains poor. This may not be unconnected with lack of relevant learning materials in most rural schools.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has revealed that the major implementers of the ECCE curriculum have not been properly trained on the implementation of the curriculum. The study has also revealed the non-availability of ECCE curriculum in most schools/centres used for the study especially in the rural areas and where it was available, it was not implemented by the schools/centres. It was further revealed that there was lack of or inadequate instructional/play materials in the ECCE classes. As a result of this, children in those classes were inactive. Furthermore, it was revealed that unqualified and unskilled adults such as typists, cleaners and office assistants are charged with the responsibility of caring for the children.

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that government should as a matter of urgency, make available ECCE curriculum to both public and private schools catering for children of pre-primary school age across the country particularly in the rural areas.

Since children at this level of education (pre-primary) learn mostly through play, government should provide relevant and adequate instructional/play materials to ECCE schools both in the urban and rural areas; with the latter treated as priority. Other stakeholders in the education sector such as parents and donor agencies like UNICEF and UNESCO could further assist the government in this area.

Government should as a matter of priority organize regular intensive training and retraining in terms of seminars, workshops and conferences for headteachers and caregivers on proper implementation of ECCE curriculum.

If children are to fully benefit from good and qualitative care and learning opportunities in their early years, government should endeavour to allocate adequate resources for provision of infrastructural facilities, equipment and other materials required for all-round development of the child and for proper implementation of the ECCE curriculum.

Also, not only must policies actions on education generally and ECCE in particular be developed, they must be properly co-ordinated, rigorously monitored and regularly updated as may be necessary for proper policy implementation.

Finally, the present study was carried out in only one local government area (Epe) of Lagos State. It will therefore require more empirical evidence from more local government areas before a wider generalization can be made. Consequently, it is hereby suggested that a similar but more elaborate study be carried out on the impact of the implementation strategies of Integrated Early Childcare and Development (IECD) on curriculum development in Lagos State, Nigeria.

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Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by gender

Gender	Headteachers		Care givers	
	No	%	No	%
Male	18	33.96	10	11.24
Female	35	66.04	79	88.76
Total	53	100	89	100

Table 2: Chi-square (χ^2) analysis of in-service training of headteachers and caregivers in implementation of ECCE curriculum

	Responses				Total	Rem
	SA	A	D	SD		
Head teacher					53	NS
Care givers	18(0) (10.45)E	9(0) (9.33)E	15(0) (10.08)E	21(0) (23.14)E		
Caregivers	20(0) (17.55)E	16(0) (15.67)E	12(0) (16.92)E	41(0) (38.86)E	89	
Total	28	25	27	62		

Key: 0 = Observed frequency E= Expected frequency NS= Not significant

Table 3: chi-square (χ^2) analysis on non-availability of instructional materials in rural and urban areas

Group	Responses				Total	Rem
	SA	A	D	SD		
Rural school/centre	16(0) (10.79)E	6(0) (3.92)E	2(0) (2.94)E	2(0) (8.34)E	26	*S
Urban school/centre	15(0) (8.66)E	6(0) (11.21)E	2(0) (4.08)E	4(0) (3.06)E		
Total	31	12	4	6	53	

Key: 0= Observed frequency E= Expected frequency
*S=Significant