

# Assessing Early Childhood Education for Sustainable Development Towards Poverty Reduction in Lagos State

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**Abstract:** The study sought to assess the place of Early Childhood Education for sustainable development towards poverty reduction in Lagos State. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design where questionnaire was used to acquire necessary data for the research work. Population comprises of all teachers in Ibeju Lekki local government in Lagos State. Simple random sampling technique was used to select ten (ten) primary schools in which ten (10) teachers each were randomly chosen from the selected primary schools to make a total of one hundred ( 100) respondents for the study. Two (2) research hypotheses were formulated and tested in this study. Reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha and data collected was analyzed using Chi-Square statistical tool. Findings revealed that the hypotheses constructed for the purpose of the study was rejected which means that there was significant impact on the challenges facing the effectiveness of Early Childhood Education in Nigeria and there was significant influence on the availability of teachers' experience/qualification in handling the Early Childhood Care and Education and it was recommended that the level of government commitment to ECCE 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 ECCE in Nigeria. 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 ECCE is meant to be community based education.

**Keywords:** Early Childhood Education, Quality, UBE, Commitment, Regulatory

## I. INTRODUCTION

Early years in life are widely accepted as the most important period during which children experience cognitive, language, perceptual, socio-emotional and motor development which they will need for future achievements and social functioning. This informs the reason why the periods of the early years need to be handled with all special and detailed attention (Akinrotimi & Olowe 2016). Early years are therefore remarkable periods of growth and development in the lives of children. In their submission, Oduolowu and Olowe in Akinrotimi & Olowe (2016) noted that the early years of children are years of extreme vulnerability and tremendous potentials, during which adequate protection, care and stimulation are essential to provide the foundation for well-being and development. In

providing this foundation during the early years, Early Childhood Education becomes a key actor. Over the years there has been a lot of intervention by different governments but despite all these interventions and the efforts of the government, it is evident that the implementation of Early Childhood Education programme is still affected by many challenges.

Generally, ECCE is aimed at promoting holistic development of children from birth to age 8. According to Olowe, Kutelu, and Majebi (2014), ECE is any group programme that is designed to promote children's intellectual development, socio-emotional development, language development, physical development and learning from birth to age. Sooter (2013) agreed with Mahuta (2007) by stating the aims of ECE to include fostering proper development of children, identifying and addressing their problems, harnessing their potentials, molding their characters, enhancing their learning and equipping them for life so that their actions are channeled towards positive personal, communal and global development. It is pertinent to note that all ECE activities and programmes are geared towards giving positive early experiences to children. This further underscores the importance of early years. The paramount importance of the early years is widely acclaimed in various international documents and developmental goals such as UN Convention on the Right of the Child, African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA) goals among others. The government of Nigeria is among the member states that ratified these documents and goals, and this has made the government to come up with various interventions which are geared towards providing quality ECE for Nigerian children.

As part of the interventions of the government in ECCE, there was enactment of UBE Act (2004) which has an expanded scope that includes programmes and initiatives for early childhood education and development (UNESCO-IBE, 2006). The UBE programme made provision for every public primary school to have a preprimary school linkage to cater for children, and this resulted in increased government ownership and participation in ECE provisions (UNESCO-IBE, 2006). Osanyin (2012) noted that there was the

development of National Minimum Standard for Early Child Care Centers in Nigeria. In the same vein, Oguntuashe (2010) reported the development of curriculum for in-service teacher training and IECD caregiver training manual. Another notable intervention is the development of a policy referred to as National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Development that integrates interventions from various sectors to promote an integrated holistic approach to the development of the child (FGN, 2007). One other intervention that is worth mentioning is the development of a unified early childhood education curriculum which was all encompassing and divided into two sections to cater for age 0-3 and 3-5 years respectively. Again, the federal government included ECCE programmes in curriculum of colleges of education. The most recent innovation seem to be the new National Policy on Education (2013 edition) in which the programme of ECE is brought under Basic Education in Section 2. It is now divided into two programmes namely Early Childhood Care, Development and Education (ECCDE) and Kindergarten Education.

Early Childhood Education (ECE - Nursery Education) is a branch of education theory which relates to the teaching of young children (formally and informally) up until the age of about eight (Wikipedia, 2017). In recent years, early childhood education has become a prevalent global issue, as many countries have come to realize the importance of educating their citizens from the earliest age possible. Early Childhood Education is more than a preparatory stage assisting the child's transition to formal schooling. It places emphasis on developing the whole child - attending to his or her social, emotional, cognitive and physical needs - to establish a solid and broad foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing and it is during this period that a child goes through the most rapid phase of growth and development: Their brains develop faster than at any other point in their lives, so these years are critical. The foundations for their social skills, self-esteem, perception of the world and moral outlook are also established during these years, as well as the development of cognitive skills.

The five developmental domains of childhood development include:

- *Physical:* The development of biological and physical functions, including motor skills
- *Social:* Development of children understands of their responsibilities and rights as members of families and communities, as well as an ability to relate to and work with others.
- *Emotional:* Development of self-confidence and emotional connections through relating to other people and sharing feelings.
- *Language:* Development of communication skills, including how to present feelings and emotions, both to other people and to themselves.
- *Cognitive skills:* Development of skills needed to acquire process, retain and organize information.

Cognitive skills include problem solving, creativity, imagination and memory (Wikipedia, 2017).

Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016) highlighted some challenges of Early Childhood Education in Nigeria. They include: Professionally Qualified Caregivers/Teachers: According to them, it is widely acknowledged that early childhood educators with required professional preparation provide more developmentally appropriate, nurturing, and responsive care and education experiences for young children (National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), (2007). In the Nigerian education sector, it is evidently a shortage of qualified staff especially in Early Childhood Education. More also, when resources are available for Early Childhood Education programme at pre-primary school level, it helps the caregiver/teacher to nurture and support the development of young children, and to successfully implement curriculum. According to Chukwbikem in Akinrotim and Olowe (2016), the quantity and quality of resources available for any educational programme would determine schools systems capacity for the implementation of the type of educational programme. What this implies is that resources are critical to successful implementation of any ECCE programme but these resources are not readily available thereby making learning less effective.

To ensure effective implementation of any educational enterprise, supervision must be given adequate attention. In regards to ECCE, Awino (2014) noted that, it is important to supervise in order to gather information from children, caregivers, parents, communities, and general ECE environment. Supervision of ECE can be used to correct errors, modify practices where necessary and motivate as well as encourage all involved in its implementation (Awino, 2014). Usually, the changes that result from supervision of ECE programme can strengthen the implementation of such ECE programme. Supervision in ECE leads to the holistic development of children, enables efficient implementation of curriculum, checks whether the objectives of the programmes have been achieved, promotes maintenance of basic standards, identifies problems and constraints, motivates, enriches and promote personal as well as professional growth of all those involved (Awino, 2014). Despite the immense benefits that supervision has to offer the ECE, the Nigerian ECE at pre-primary school level is not provided with these benefits as it is usually left unsupervised. This cannot allow effective implementation of ECE programmes at pre-primary school level in Nigeria. Researchers have consistently lamented this lack of supervision in ECE (e.g., Osakwe, 2011; Nakpodia, 2011; Sooter, 2013).

Early Childhood Curriculum is what and how of any educational enterprise. It is the vehicle through which any educational programme can be successfully implemented. The Early Childhood Education curriculum is an important written plan that includes goals for children's development and learning, experiences through which they will achieve the

goals, what staff and parents do to help children achieve the goals and, the materials needed to support the implementation of the curriculum (National Centre on Quality Teaching and Learning (NCQTL), 2012 in Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016). The unfortunate thing, however, according to Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016) is that this curriculum, since it was launched, is not found in almost all pre- primary schools in Nigeria. This is particularly true of privately owned schools. The teacher holds the key to successful implementation of any educational enterprise.

This is why the federal government of Nigeria stated in NPE (2013) that no education system may rise above the quality of its teachers (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 2013). Jibril in Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016) has submitted that whatever input is made into an educational system in respect of management, resources, facilities and array of instructional materials, will be of little avail if the teacher is unskilled, poorly trained or even ignorant. This is to say that whatever intervention the federal government of Nigeria makes to improve Early Childhood Education will be of little effect if preprimary school teachers are not given constant trainings.

Poverty level in Nigeria remains significant despite high economic growth. Nigeria has one of the world's economic growth rates (averaging 7.4% over the last decade), with a promising economy and plenty of natural resources such as oil, yet retains a high level of poverty, with 63% living on less than one hundred and fifty Naira (N 150) per day which implies a decline in equality (Akintola & Yusuff, 2001). Poverty is caused by several factors in most developing countries including Nigeria. According to Ugwu (2003), the chief causes of poverty in Nigeria are war, persecution, drought, oppression, accidents, sickness, the death of a breadwinner, laziness, drunkenness, gambling and various forms of bad habits. Poverty leads to homelessness, sickness, robbery, kidnapping, terrorism, prostitution, trafficking and malnutrition which can sometimes lead to death hence the need for poverty alleviation initiatives and projects.

Empowering children at early stage with education plays crucial roles in reducing poverty for better economy of any country towards industry revolution. Irrespective of the above roles children education played, there are some factors that hinder children education empowerment in rural areas in Ogun state and such factors according to Lijadu and Adediran, (2020) include; illiteracy, cultural factors, economic factors, biological characteristics inferiority complex among others which equally militate against some strategies that could enhance the empowerment of child education for poverty reduction in rural areas. Contributing to the strategies for early child education empowerment and poverty reduction, Ndu (2002) asserted that education for children is a veritable instrument in bringing about positive changes in the pattern of life of the people in the society. Buttressing further, Ndu (2002) noted that investment in Early Childhood Education does not only improve their wellbeing but improves their

human capital stock thereby enhancing individual and national productivity and income. It is an important element for poverty alleviation. This is because improving the productive of labour through investment in education, health and improved nutrition are key components of strategies to alleviate poverty. Obstacles to child education economic empowerment are as follows; Lack of Fund, facilities, personnel etc.

Education for children plays a key role in sustainable development and equips one with skills necessary in life. However, the early years of life are crucial and a growing child needs an enriched environment to develop academic skills through activities and direct instruction. Early childhood (education) provides a solid foundation for the holistic development of the child. 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. Some of the challenges facing are inadequate trained teachers and care givers, high fees, overcrowded classes and low motivation for teachers and care givers were among the top challenges revealed from the study while overcrowded classes, lack of motivation for teachers and care-givers were seen to be the challenges with the most negative effect on the effectiveness of Early childhood Education in Nigeria.

#### *Objectives of the Study*

The purpose of this research work is to assess the place of Early Childhood Education for sustainable development towards poverty reducing in Lagos State. Specifically; the objectives of this study are to:

- i. Identify the challenges facing the effectiveness of Early Childhood Education towards poverty reduction in Lagos State
- ii. Examine the availability of teachers' experience/qualification in handling the Early Childhood Care and Education in reducing poverty in Lagos State

#### *Hypotheses*

- i. There is no significant impact on the challenges facing the effectiveness of Early Childhood Education towards poverty reduction in Lagos State
- ii. There is no significant influence on the availability of teachers' experience/qualification in handling the Early Childhood Care and Education in reducing poverty in Lagos State.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design where questionnaire was used to acquire necessary data for the research work. Population comprises of all teachers in Ibeju Lekki local government in Lagos State. Simple random sampling technique was used to select ten(ten) primary schools in which ten(10) teachers each were randomly chosen from the selected primary schools to make a total of one hundred ( 100) respondents for the study. Two (2) research hypotheses were formulated and tested in this study. A self-developed questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. The questionnaire contained items on the main title of the study. The instrument was given to experts for construct and content validation. Reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha. Data collected was analyzed using chi-square statistical tool statistical tool.

III. PRESENTATION OF DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Research Hypothesis One: There is no significant impact on the challenges facing the effectiveness of Early Childhood Education in reducing poverty in Lagos State.

Table 1: Contingency table on the significant impact on the challenges facing the effectiveness of Early Childhood Education in reducing poverty in Lagos State.

Respondents	N	Cal Val (x <sup>2</sup> )	Df	Tab. Val. (x <sup>2</sup> )	Level of Significance	Decision
SA + A - 83	100	87.3	3	7.812	0.05	Rejected
D + SD - 17						

Table shows that the calculated chi-square value of 87.3 at a degree of freedom of 3 is greater than the critical value of 7.812 at 0.05 alpha level of significance. Hence, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant impact on the challenges facing the effectiveness of Early Childhood Education in reducing poverty in Lagos State was rejected.

Research Hypothesis Two: There is no significant influence on the availabilities of teachers’ experience/qualification in handling the Early Childhood Care and Education in reducing poverty in Lagos State

Table 2 Contingency table on the significant influence on the availabilities of teachers’ experience/qualification in handling the Early Childhood Care and Education in reducing poverty in Lagos State

Respondents	N	Cal. Val. (x <sup>2</sup> )	Df	Tab Val (x <sup>2</sup> )	Level of significance	Decision
SA + A - 89	100	83.7	3	7.812	0.05	Rejected
D + SD - 11						

Table shows that the calculated chi-square value of 83.7 at a degree of freedom of 3 is greater than the critical value of 7.812 at 0.05 alpha level of significance. Hence, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant influence on the availabilities of teachers’

experience/qualification in handling the Early Childhood Care and Education in reducing poverty in Lagos State was rejected.

IV. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Research Hypothesis one which states that there is no significant impact on the challenges facing the effectiveness of Early Childhood Education in reducing poverty in Lagos State was rejected. Hence, the null hypothesis revealed that there was significant impact on the challenges facing the effectiveness of Early Childhood Education in reducing poverty in Lagos State. This was supported with the statement that, early years are therefore remarkable periods of growth and development in the lives of children. In their submission, Oduolowu and Olowe in Akinrotimi & Olowe (2016) noted that the early years of children are years of extreme vulnerability and tremendous potentials, during which adequate protection, care and stimulation are essential to provide the foundation for well-being and development.

Research hypothesis two which states that there is no significant influence on the availability of teachers’ experience/qualification in handling the Early Childhood Care and Education in reducing poverty in Lagos State was rejected. Hence, the null hypothesis revealed that there was significant influence on the availabilities of teachers’ experience/qualification in handling the Early Childhood Care and Education in reducing poverty in Lagos State. The finding supported by Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016), highlighted some challenges of Early Childhood Education in Lagos State. They include: Professionally Qualified Caregivers/Teachers: According to them, it is widely acknowledged that early childhood educators with required professional preparation provide more developmentally appropriate, nurturing, and responsive care and education experiences for young children (National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), (2007). In the Nigerian education sector that is evidently a shortage of qualified staff especially in Early Childhood Education.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, the researcher hereby concludes as follows:

- i. There is no significant impact on the challenges facing the effectiveness of Early Childhood Education in reducing poverty in Lagos State. However, it was discovered from the research work that there was significant impact on the challenges facing the effectiveness of Early Childhood Education in reducing poverty in Lagos State.
- ii. There is no significant influence on the availabilities of teachers’ experience/qualification in handling the Early Childhood Care and Education in reducing poverty in Lagos State. It was discovered that there was significant influence on the availability of teachers’ experience/qualification in handling the

Early Childhood Care and Education in reducing Lagos State.

#### VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

- The level of government commitment to ECCE should be increased 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 ECCE in Nigeria. 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 ECCE is meant to be community based.
- The administrators of Universal Basic Education, the level of education which ECCE 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.
- The federal government should send ECCE scholars and practitioners to countries with well-established ECCE 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.
- Finally, since ECCE at pre-primary school level is under the control of UBEC, the body should organize seminars for all pre-primary school caregivers/teachers, including those in private schools, to equip them with knowledge and skills needed for successful implementation of ECE programme. Such training should be handled by ECCE experts. Apart from this, UBEC should see to it that more professionally qualified teachers with ECCE certificates are employed to guide children's learning and development in pre-primary schools. This should also be made mandatory for privately owned schools.

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