

The National Minimum Standard on Early Child Care Centers (ECCC) in Nigeria and the Status of Pre-Primary Education in Uhumwode Local Government Area of Edo State

ODIAGBE Sunny Ighalo*

Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) P.M.B. 91 Garki, Abuja

*Corresponding author: sodiagbe@yahoo.com

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Abstract Pre-Primary Education Programme has been shown to bring critical gains to children's social, emotional and cognitive development. The study therefore, Evaluates public Pre-Primary Education in Uhumwode Local Government Area of Edo state: to find out whether the directive given by the Federal Government to Ministry of Education across the federation to establish PPE in all public primary schools in 2009 has been obeyed and to determine the extent to which they meet the guidelines as spelt out in the National Minimum Standard on Early Child Care Centers (ECCC) of 2007. Six research questions were raised to get the study. The study employed a descriptive survey research. A purposive sampling Techniques of (20) Twenty Pre-primary schools were selected from the 71 public schools with pre-primary school in Uhumwode Local Government Area of Edo state. One instrument that was used, is a check list based on the contents of the environment models of the Pre-Primary Education as spelt out in the National Minimum Standard for ECCC in Nigeria. The data shows that the Standard of Pre-Primary Education fall short of the expectation that will help Nigeria to attain the desired position among nations of the world. Recommendations were made to the government to; build more classrooms, provide early childhood education curriculum for teachers and provide play facilities in these public pre-primary schools in Uhumwode Local Government Area to enhance the intellectual, emotional, physical and healthy growth of the children.

Keywords: *standard, pre-primary education, ECCE and Evaluation*

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1. Introduction

The National minimum standard for Early Child Care Centers (ECCC) in Nigeria was developed in 2007 to address the gaps and serves as guideline for operators and stakeholders so that both the practice and operation of pre-primary education will become standardized across Nigeria. With this, [1] He asserted that the Early Childhood Care and Development in Nigeria, has adopted an integrated and wholistic approach for the care and support given to children from birth to five years. For quite a long time the pre-primary education were left in the hand of private sectors without any major policy regulating this important system of education.

The terms Pre -Primary Education and kindergarten emphasize education around the ages of three to six years. Pre-Primary Education Programme has been shown to bring critical gains to children's social, emotional and cognitive development. [2] He stated that the years between birth and age five are the foundation upon which successful (or otherwise) lives are built. [3] The first five

years is critical for a child's overall development and later life chances. It is a period of rapid learning.

There is clear evidence that early-year experiences have a significant influence on the all-round development and the later lives of any child. The influence, which may be either positive or negative, has been emphasized across inter-disciplinary research. This beholds on all stakeholder to consider the quality of education in the early childhood a serious issue [4]. Child development is the basis of human development. It is connected with living with dignity and achieving quality of life. The early years of life are critical to the development of intelligence, personality and social behavior. [5] Pre-school age corresponds to a critical period of rapid physical, cognitive and psychosocial development of the child. The quality and intensity of care, nutrition and stimulation a child receives during this period determines to a large extent the level of physical and cognitive development a child can attain [6].

According to [3] all the information a child gained, language skills acquired and habits formed at this early formative years of life framed the personality of an

individual. At the global level, this fact is recognized and every nation is working assiduously towards providing quality early years education and care for the very youngest children.

Sometimes, confusion tends to come on the right name for Pre- Primary Education. But he [7] clarifies this confusion, to it one commonly used name, Early Childhood Education (ECE) is favored by education authorities or others who are inclined to see early childhood from an educational point of view. Learning is central to this tradition. The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is an expansion of ECE, with the care component added. Or the other can be changed to the Early Childhood Education Care (ECEC) to keep the emphasis on education. Then there is The Early Childhood Care (ECC) without the education component. [8] Further definition on the Early Childhood Education Scheme; according to it, ECE provides a free year of early childhood care and education for children of pre-school age. In general, children are eligible for the ECCE scheme if they are aged between 3 years 2 months and 4 years 7 months on 1 September of the year that they will be starting. The upper age limit can be extended in some cases.

He [9] asserted that ECE is the term commonly used to describe the formal teaching and care of young children by people other than their family or in settings outside of the home. Early childhood education spans the human life from birth to age eight. However, typically early childhood education covers the period from birth to when a child starts school and this can be as early as five years of age. Early childhood has been defined as a period of life between 0 to 8 years of age. This is the period of greatest growth and development, when the brain develops most rapidly, almost at its fullest. It is a period when walking, talking, self-esteem, vision of the world and moral foundations are established. According [5] to research on brain development attests to the importance of key mental, physical and social capabilities. If these fundamental capabilities are not well established from the start, and especially if neurological damage occurs, the learning potential is adversely affected. Childhood education often focuses on children learning through play.

[10] early childhood is defined as the period from birth to 8 years old. A time of remarkable brain development, these years laid the foundation for subsequent learning. Early childhood education is the care and education given to children age 0-5 years prior to commencing primary education [11,12] Care and education given to child from birth to eight years. The terms preschool education and kindergarten emphasize education around the ages of 3-6 years. The terms "early childhood learning," "early care," and "early education" are comparable with *early* childhood education. The terms Day care and Childcare do not embrace the educational aspects. Many childcare centers are now using more educational approaches. [9] The distinction between childcare centers being for care and kindergartens being for education, for programming purposes, it has been decided to extend the concept of early childhood to about 8 years of age. This age range provides the opportunity to reinforce the view of the development as a continuum. It will facilitate the interaction between the pre and initial school years. The concept of basic education calls for the inclusion of early

childhood and the key "survival" grades, that is, the first two or three grades of primary education.

[13] It was highlighted that while this can uplift the overall quality of children's learning a primary purpose of all early childhood programmes is nevertheless to provide a high standard of care and nurturance due to the young age and emotional and physical needs of children. Researchers in the field and early childhood education both view the parents as an integral part of the early childhood education process. Often educators refer to parents as the child's first and best teacher. Early childhood education takes many forms depending on the beliefs of the educator or parent. Much of the first two years of life are spent in the creation of a child's first "sense of self" or the building of a first identity. This is a crucial part of children's makeup—how they first see themselves, how they think they should function, how they expect others to function in relation to them. For this reason, early care must ensure that in addition to employing carefully selected and trained caretakers, program policy must emphasize links with family, home culture, and home language, meaning caregivers must uniquely care for each child. Emphasis, on the importance of ECE was further made by UNESCO [14] preschool education programme have been shown to bring critical gains to children's social, emotional and cognitive development.

If a young child doesn't receive sufficient nurturing, nutrition, parental/caregiver interaction, and stimulus during this crucial period, the child may be left with a developmental deficit that hampers his or her success in preschool, kindergarten, and beyond. In 2000, a World Education Forum was held in Dakar, Senegal. 164 countries, including Nigeria pledged to a global commitment to provide quality basic education for all children, youths and adults by 2015. They are expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children ensuring that all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities have access to complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality, ensuring that learning needs of all young people and adult are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life- skills programme.

In line with the National Policy on Education (2004) on Early Childhood Education, the objectives of ECE were stated as follows:

- a) effecting a smooth transition from the home to the school.
- b) preparing the child for the primary level of education.
- c) providing adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work.
- d) creating individuals who are responsible citizens.
- e) inculcating in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the
- f) exploration of nature and the local environment, playing with toys, artistic and musical activities, etc.
- g) teaching cooperation and team spirit.
- h) teaching the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes forms, etc., through play.
- i) teaching of good habits, especially good health habits.

He [9] asserted that evaluation involves assessing the strengths and weaknesses of programs, policies, personnel,

products, and organizations to improve their effectiveness. Evaluation is a complex concept. Inherent in the idea of evaluation is "value." When we evaluate, what we are doing is engaging in some process that is designed to provide information that will help us make a judgment about a given situation. Generally, any evaluation process requires information about the situation in question. A situation is an umbrella term that takes into account such ideas as objectives, goals, standards, procedures, and so on. When we evaluate, we are saying that the process will yield information regarding the worthiness, appropriateness, goodness, validity and legality of something for which a reliable measurement or assessment has been made [15].

[16,17] Evaluation is part and parcel of education. To be informal educators we are constantly called upon to make judgments, to make theory, and to discern whether what is happening is for the good. The above view was corroborated and defined evaluation as the appraisal of the worth or value of a thing or action and evaluation involves the collection of data and the use of such data to assess the effectiveness of quality of a programme or performance. Programme evaluation is a systematic method for collecting, analyzing, and using information to answer questions about projects, policies and particularly about their effectiveness and efficiency. In both the public and private sectors, stakeholders will want to know if the programs they are funding, implementing, voting for, receiving or objecting to are actually having the intended effect, and answering this question is the job of an evaluator. [18] Program evaluation is NOT the same as research although they share many characteristics.

2. Statement of Problem

Research evidence abounds from many field of study that the care and support received by a child in terms of good health, nutrition and psychological care and protection are crucial in the formation and development of intelligence, personality and social behavior. Nigeria had early childhood education prior to this period but it was left to the private sector, which either provided sub-standard services or charged very high fees, thereby making this educational provision inaccessible to every child. Despite the fact that, early child care in Nigeria was still largely in the hands of private operators, a disturbing gap was the absence of adequate guidance for operators. It is therefore a welcome development that the minimum standard prescription has now been produced [19].

In 2000, Nigeria along with other 164 countries at World Education Forum held in Dakar, Senegal pledged to a global commitment to provide quality basic education for all children, youths and adults by 2015. However, observations indicate that not much has been done in the area of pre-primary education in Nigeria despite the global commitment [20].

In appreciation of the above views, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) in 2009 conducted a survey on ECCDE, which reported a wide disparity between the expected and actual enrolments. The expected enrolment in ECCDE was 22 million based on the population of 2006 but the actual enrollment was 2.02 million, leaving 19.98 million out of school [21]. From the foregoing, it

was obvious that, this 2.02 million enrolment was what the private schools could absorb. Based on this obvious gap, a directive was given to State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs) to established pre-primary schools in each of the public primary schools in their respective states, this decision, was in line with the UBE acts of 2004 (FGN, 2009). Moreover, five percent of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) intervention fund was set aside for provision of pre primary education in Nigeria (UBE Act, 2004). With this, the Government is now directly responsible for pre-primary education. This constitutes a major step in the right direction in the provision of good early childhood education to all Nigerian Children.

However, the concern is how effective the programmes that are being implemented at the grass root. Proper and effective educational programme evaluation must be carried out to determine the predetermine objectives of programmes. Proper and effective educational programme evaluation must be carried out to determine the predetermine objectives of programmes. This paper was therefore, set out to critically evaluate public pre primary schools in Uhumwode Local Government Area, Edo state, to determine the extent it is fulfilling its goals as spelt out in the National Minimum Standard for Early Childhood Care Center (ECCCC) in Nigeria [21]. This is with a view of coming up with appropriate data that help to improve the standard of Pre-Primary Education in Nigeria.

3. Research Questions

3.1. Six (6) Research Questions were Raised to Guide the Study are as Follows

1. What is the level of response in terms of enrolment in public pre primary schools in Uhumwode L.G.A?
2. Do the classrooms and playground facilities meet the standard recommended by the federal government for pre primary education in Uhumwode L.G.A of Edo State?
3. Does the classrooms furniture meet the standard set by federal government?
4. Do the Teachers qualifications meet the standard set by federal government?
5. Is the recommended Curriculum for Pre Primary Education available in schools?
6. Do the instructional materials meet the standard recommended for pre primary School in Uhumwode L.G.A?

3.2. Method

The survey research design is adopted for the study because not all the pupils and teachers in Uhumwode will be used for the study, rather, a number of them will be considered as a representative sample for the entire population which the conclusion reached will be generalized.

The population of this study consists of Head Teachers and Teachers of all the Public Primary Schools with Pre-Primary Education classes in Uhumwode Local government Area. Uhumwode L.G.A has eighty seven (87) public primary schools. Seventy-one (71) out of these

87 public primary schools have Pre-Primary Education established. A purposively sampling Techniques of (20) Twenty Pre-primary schools were selected among the public schools, and therefore, the respondents for the study were chosen from the targeted sample.

The instrument that was used, is a check list based on the contents of the environment models of the Pre-Primary Education as spelt out in the National Minimum Standard for ECCC in Nigeria (FGN, 2007). The instrument contains two sections, A and B, section A asked questions on organizational information and section B had nine items on the implementation of Pre - Primary Education. The items were grouped under nine (9) major headings. They are as follows; (i) level of enrollment (ii) classrooms (iii) play ground facilities (iv) classrooms furniture (v) teacher qualifications (vi) Availability of the Curriculum (vii) Instructional materials (viii) school records, (ix) Teachers pupils' ratio.

Instrument was administered by the Researcher in each of these twenty schools selected for the study. The researcher met with the Head Teacher or their representatives informed him or her of the purpose of investigation. There was general cooperation from the

teachers in all the schools visited. The Head Teacher and Teachers also answered some oral questions and completed a questionnaire in line with the objectives of the research.

The Data Analysis done was purely descriptive statistics process; frequency counts and percentage results. The entire environmental models that are spelt out in the National Minimum Standard for ECCC in Nigeria [22] were written in column one. The observed environmental conditions were recorded in column two while the third column for decisions on the availability or otherwise of the observed environmental features. Availability in this context mean the environment is in line with the guidelines while in availability means that there is falls short of the standard set in the guidelines. The schools sampled were coded with the observed features in each schools recorded in the code given.

3.3. Research Question One

What are the enrolment records for public primary schools in Uhumwode L.G.A?

Table 1. Shows level of enrolment in Pre-Primary Education in Uhumwode L.G.A.

	Sampled Schools	Crèche	Nursery I	Nursery II	Nursery III	Remark
1	Adesagbon primary school, Oba.		17	21	28	The school has the three arms
2	Akenzua Primary School, Ahor.			28		All pupils were in one class
3	Amufi Primary School, Ikhueni.		22	14		All pupils were in one class
4	Aruosa Primary School, Azagba.		18	25		All pupils were in one class
5	ASE Primary School, Idunmwungha.	-	-	-	41	All pupils were in one class
6	Egba Primary School, Egba		11	23	15	All pupils were in one class
7	Ekose Primary School, Ekose		22	25		Have two classes
8	Eyean Primary School, Benin City.		34	43	46	All pupils were in one class
9	Ewaure Primary School, Idokpa.		20	13	15	Have two classes
10	Idia Primary School, Oke.		17	28		All pupils were in one class
11	Igieduma Primary School, Igieduma.		15	17		All pupils were in one class
12	Iguosuka Primary School, Iguosuka.		15	12		All pupils were in one class
13	Obadan Primary School, Obadan.		32			All pupils were in one class
14	Obasogie Primary Sch. Iguovbiobo		15	14	20	All pupils are in one class
15	Osaretin Primary School, Uzala		36			Have two classes
16	Osaro Primary School, Iru.		19	18		Have two classes
17	Udeni Primary School, Udeni.		15	24		All pupils were in one class
18	Umokpe Primary School, Umokpe.		15	11		All pupils were in one class
19	Urhukuosanowa Primary School		12	22		All pupils were in one class
20	Uwa Model Primary School, Ikhueni		(1a) 37 (1b) 35	(2a) 37 (2b) 41	-	Have two classes

The result of the test shows that the enrollment figure for PPE in Uhumwode local Government Area is very high; most schools have enrolment of more than twenty five pupils in a class. The directive given by the federal government to Ministry of Education and SUBEB to establish pre- primary education in all public primary

schools has been strictly adhered to. Out of the eighty six public primary schools in Uhumwode seventy one schools already have PPE.

3.4. Research Question Two

Table 2. Shows classrooms and playground facilities in Pre Primary Education

Fed. Gov. guidelines on pre-primary education	Observation check list	Decision
Class size 12x6.5 m to accommodate 25 children	All the schools visited have classroom measuring 12 X 6.5 m	Classrooms meet the national standard but were overcrowded with nursery one and two combined together in one class.
Each classroom should be cross ventilated and well lighted.	All schools visited have cross ventilation	Meet the national standard
Each classroom must have two doorways.	Most the schools visited have two access doors except school 8 and 15	Partly meet the Standard.
Each classroom must have veranda equipment on either side.	All the sampled schools have veranda on one side	Do not meet standard
Each classroom must have cupboard for teaching equipment.	None of the schools have cupboard.	Do not meet standard.
There must be toilet and wash- hand basin of appropriate height.	All schools have no toilet facilities and wash hand basin	Do not meet standard
First aid unit, the provision of two or four beds per class.	All the schools have no first – aid unit and no beds, only schools 5 and 15 have evidence of such stored in a white transparent rubber bucket.	Do not meet standard

Table 2A. Shows Play Ground Facilities

A well fenced – in play ground.	All the schools visited have no fenced play ground except school 20	Do not meet standard.
Play ground grassed and installed with facilities such as: swing slide sea-saw sand box merry –go-round beam	None. “ “ “ “ “ “	Do not meet standard.
A tract of hard surface for pushing along wheeled toys. Facilities provided should ensure safety of children.	“ “	Do not meet standard.

Table 3. Shows class Furniture

Provision of chairs and tables suitable for different ages and carry no sharp edges.	Most schools visited have no chairs and tables except schools 5 with 6 long chairs and table for 43 children, Schools 5 have 6 long chairs and table for 28 children, Schools 9 have 3 long chairs and table for 48 children, School 15 have 4 long chairs and table for 36 children. Most children were sitting on the floor.	Do not meet standard.
Large tables with drawers for teachers’ use	Most schools have no table and chairs for teachers except schools 8,5, and 20	Do not meet standard.

Do the classrooms and playground facilities meet the standard recommended by the federal government for pre primary education?

3.5. Research Question Three

Does the classrooms furniture meet the standard set by federal government?

The result of the test shows that the size of the classrooms was measuring 12 X 6.5 m. And the classrooms have cross ventilation in all the schools visited but it was not adequate for the enrolled pupils. There were no plays facilities in all the schools visited, that will prepare the children for primary education. The walls were not painted to look attractive to the children. The words sufficient and adequate are over statement compared to the standard set by the government.

3.6. Research Question Four

Do the Teachers qualifications meet the standard set by federal government?

Table 4. Shows Teachers Qualifications

NCE is the least qualification recommended for pre-primary education.	All the schools have qualified Head Teachers and Teachers with at least National Certificate of Education	Meet standard.
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The result shows that the teachers in pre- primary education have at least the National Certificate in Education (NCE)

3.7. Research Question Five

Is the recommended Curriculum for Pre Primary Education available in schools?

Table 5. Shows Availability of the Curriculum

Have you seen a copy of the ECCE curriculum?	In all the schools visited no teacher has seen a copy of the ECCE curriculum neither do any have a copy	Do not meet standard
Do you have access to it?		
Do you have a copy?		

The result of the research question three shows that teachers in pre- primary education have not seen a copy of the ECCE curriculum neither do they have a copy of the

curriculum in the school. I therefore wonder what meaningful teaching a teacher can gives when she does not have the curriculum that suppose to serve as a guide

3.8. Research Question Six

Do the instructional materials meet the standard recommended for pre primary School in Uhumwode L.G.A.?

Table 6. shows the availability of instructional materials

Pictures roll	In all the schools visited no school has a pictures roll, toys or television.	Do not meet standard.
Toys		
Television		
Time and visitor book.	All the schools have time book and visitors books	Meet standard
Etc.		

The results revealed that in all the schools visited that there were no picture roll, toys, television. However, time and visitor book were all available in all the schools visited.

4. Discussion of Results

The directive given by The Federal Government to Ministry of Education to establish pre- primary education in all public primary schools has been strictly adhered to. Out of the eighty six public primary schools in Uhumwode seventy one schools already have PPE and the enrollment in all these schools is very high. As to whether the schools’ building meets the guideline? None of the schools visited meet the standard. Most of the schools, nursery 1 and 11 were grouped together in one class. In some schools nursery 1 and 11 were combined with primary one because of lack of classrooms, specifically Eyeam, Uwa, Ase, Akenzua primary schools the classrooms were over crowded. The guidelines were not met.

In most of the schools visited the pupils were sitting on the floor, as there were no chairs and table for the children. Some schools have two or three long table and chairs; some schools had no one at all. In some schools the teachers were sitting on long benches, I was told the teacher provided it for themselves. In this aspect guild line were not met. T his study is in agreement with the studies earlier carried out by [23] and [25]. [26] It was also

reported that the school/classroom environment is far from being child –friendly.

According to the guideline on ECCC, the schools' buildings were supposed to have two verandas, one on either side of the classrooms. To compound the problem, the two doors way was provided, but it was only one that is opened, the other one is permanently blocked and the key is not made available to the teachers. In all the sampled schools, play facilities were not provided. The use of play facilities is a very important aspect of children development. Any attempt to deprive the children of these important facilities will have a negative effect on the children. This is a period to acquire some basic skills and physical development that will help the child throughout his life time.[3] It was reported that all the information a child gained, language skills acquired and habits formed at this early formative years of life framed the personality of an individual.

In all the sampled schools, the walls were not coloured to make it attractive to the children. [21] points out that an attractive setting is important and this means lots of colours and texture should be carefully used in a school environment, so many things are involved, these include site, building and basic equipment. In the early days of life the child's immediate environment presents a very high level of challenges. Findings in this research question have shown that the qualities of public pre-primary schools environment in Uhumwode fall short of the FGN standard.

The head teachers and teachers in Uhumwode have the needed qualification of NCE, which is the least qualification recommended for PPE. It can be said that Uhumwode Local Government Area met the standard on teachers' qualification. Teachers' qualification is also an important aspect of education, as no one can give what he or she does not have. This is in agreement to [26] that the quality of teachers education cannot be over emphasized because lack of it can result in the production of low quality skilled manpower and this will have adverse effect on the development of the nation. This study contradicts the report of [23] who asserted that a good proportion of the teachers are yet to have the minimum teaching qualification, the NCE certificate. On the contrary, this study was in agreement with [23] in terms of instructional materials in schools, there were no instructional materials in all the sampled schools. Toys, picture rolls, and other instructional materials like curriculum were not available in all these schools.

Finding revealed that the environments of the public pre- primary schools Uhumwode cannot be said to be very suitable for meaningful instruction and development. The environments of the schools need serious improvements. It was discovered that most of the schools were deficient in provisions of play facilities. The play facilities that are available in the private schools were grossly absent in the government own schools. Research has shown that children of this stage need many and varied facilities to play with. Staving them of these facilities will definitely have a negative impact in their development.

The building were also found not to be suitable and so do not meet the national standard, in some schools nursery 1 and 11 were parked together in one class with a population of more than sixty pupils and most children

were sitting on the floor. Although two teachers were usually attached to this combined class, the noise from the overcrowded classroom was something else. The staffing positions in the schools were adequate and they meet the national standard. Most of the teachers are qualified and with good experience. The only major problem observed was that the teachers have no copy of the curriculum for ECCE that was supposed to serve as a guide to teachers. No one gives what he does not have.

5. Conclusions

It was discovered that most of the schools were deficient in provisions of classrooms and play facilities. The play facilities that are available in the private schools were grossly absent in the government own schools. The environments of the schools need serious improvements.

Recommendations

1. The appropriate government should built more classrooms as well provide furniture for the public pre-primary schools in Uhumwode Local Government Area.
2. The government should also provide play facilities in these public pre-primary schools in Uhumwode Local Government Area to enhance the intellectual, emotional, physical and healthy growth of the child.
3. The government should also purchase the new ECCE curriculum developed by the NERDC and make them available to the teachers.

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