

## Implementation of Early Childhood Curriculum in Nigeria: Problems and Way Forward

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**Abstract:** Curriculum planning, design and implementation are key to the realization of education objectives. In Nigeria, the early child curriculum is facing many implementation challenges. This paper is aimed to examine the challenges facing the early child education curriculum in Nigeria. To do this, hard and soft resources on early child education programme in Nigeria were consulted for data gathering. Primary and secondary data were used to provide empirical support to the various points raised in the paper. The paper revealed Inadequate funding, shortage of caregiver, inadequate infrastructural facilities, shortage of instruction materials, poor supervision, insecurity, poor capacity development programme and poor implementation of Early Childhood Education will be considered as the challenges facing the implementation of the early child curriculum in Nigeria. To address the problems of curriculum implementation in the early child education programme in Nigeria, the following have been suggested: Government should increase the funding of the early child education programme. This will help for effective administration and implementation of the programme. More professional care giver should be employed and deployed to the various early education centers across the country. This will help to aid effective implementation of the programme. The government should provide more infrastructural facilities in all the public early child education centers and more instructional materials should be provided in all public early child education centers across the country etc.

**Keywords:** Curriculum, Early Child Education, Implementation, Problems.

### 1.0 Introduction

The Basic Education is the education given to children aged 0-15 years. It encompasses the Early Child Care and Development Education (0-4) and 10 years of formal schooling. Early Child Care and Development Education however is segmented into ages 0-4 years, situated in daycare or crèches, fully in the hands of the private sector and social development services, whilst ages 5-6 are within the formal education sector. The early child education is a sub-component of the Basic Education. The Early Child Education is an organized education designed to prepare the children for Basic Education. Early Child Education is the first education children receives as formal. The contribution of the early child education to the social economic, political and technology advancement cannot be underestimated. Salami (2014) observed that ECCDE is an important component of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) accommodating all forms of pre-primary education. The terms preschool education and kindergarten emphasize education around the ages of 2 to 5+ or 6years in the case of Nigeria (NPE, 2013). For Maduewesi (1999) early childhood care education as the education offered to children who have not yet reached the statutory age of beginning primary school. He further maintained that it is a semi-formal education arrangement, usually outside home where by young children from about the age of 3 years are exposed through play like activities in a group setting through mental, social and physical learning suited to their developmental stages, until the mandatory age of government approved formal schooling while Nakpodia (2011) observed that the foundation of education of the child is the pre-schools education which forms an integral part of his or her early education which may be formal or informal, which is given in an educational institution to children aged 1 to 5+ prior to their entering the primary school. Nakpodia (2003) opines that the educational level of the child provides for the physical, motor, health, nutritional, intellectual, aesthetic, emotional and social development of the pre-school child. If child education can provide these vital necessities which are fundamental in human life, it is not therefore unlikely to have an important and strong relationship with the pupils' performance at the primary school level and perhaps at the secondary and tertiary levels. National policy on education (2013) defined early childhood care education (preprimary education) is an education given in an educational institution to children aged 3-5 plus prior to their enrollment in the primary school. National policy on education (2013) outlined the following as the objectives of early childhood care education:

ISSN 2792-3991 (online), Published under Volume: 1 Issue: 5 in October -2021

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Effecting a smooth transition from home to the school, Preparing the child for the primary level of education, Providing adequate care and supervision for the children while their parent are at work (on the farm, in the market, office e.t.c), Inculcating social norms and values, Inculcating in the child the spirit of inquiring and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys. e.t.c., Developing in the children a sense of cooperation and team-spirit and Learning good habits and the rudiments of letters, numbers, colours, shapes and forms e.t.c. The achievement of the stated objectives of Early Childhood Education and Care in Nigeria is brought about via the following means: Government shall:

- a. Set and monitor minimum standard for ECCDE centres;
- b. develop and disseminate curriculum materials such as the Integrated Early Child Care Development policies (IECD), National Minimum Standard for the establishment of Early Child Care Education Centers, IECD Curriculum, IECD Implementation Guidelines and all other materials that will enhance the implementation of ECCDE;
- c. encourage both community and private efforts in the establishment of ECCDE centres based on set standards;
- d. make provision in teacher education programmes for specialization in early child care and education, and for retraining of teachers;
- e. ensure that the curriculum of teacher education is oriented towards play-way method;
- f. ensure that ECCDE Centres adopt the following caregiver infant ratios: (i) Crèche shall be 1:10; (ii) Nursery 1:25;
- g. develop suitable ECCDE curriculum for nationwide implementation;
- h. supervise and control quality of ECCDE centres;
- i. make provision for the production and effective utilization of learning and instructional materials in adequate numbers; and
- j. ensure that the medium of instruction is principally the mother- tongue or the language of the immediate community; and to this end will:
  - develop the orthography of more Nigerian languages; and
  - produce textbooks, supplementary readers and other instructional materials in Nigerian languages.

In pursuance of these stated objectives, Government shall; Set and monitor standard for Pre-Primary Education; develop and disseminate curriculum materials: Policy, National Minimum Standards, Curriculum, Implementation Guidelines and other materials that will enhance the implementation of Pre-Primary Education in Nigeria.

The Nigerian Government have designed many policies towards the development of the Early Child Education in Nigeria. Among such policies includes, National Minimum Standard for Early Child Care Centres in Nigeria (NMSECCC). This was produced by Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) with support from United Nation Children's Fund (UNICEF) and was first published in the year 2007 (Salami, 2016). NMSECCC contains the rationale behind the setting of the minimum standards, the objectives, the strategy to be adopted, the prescribed minimum standards (which cover types of centre, location, ownership and characteristics of an effective centre), stakeholders involvement, supervision, human resources, health care and materials, protection issues and stakeholders' roles. Salami, (2016) Submitted that Between 2004 and 2007 when the government of Nigeria started to provide one-year pre-primary education in the existing public Primary Schools, the idea of Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) came into being and the curriculum for preschool education for ages 0 to 5 years plus was reviewed to bring in other key factors for a holistic development such as health and protection issues, water and environmental sanitation, food and nutrition and safety measures. The implementation of the Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) necessitated the provision of National Policy for a successful integration of the developmental factors. The curriculum for preschool education for ages 0 to 5 years is one of the best policy document that gave direction for instruction in the Early Child Education in Nigeria. Since the formulation of preschool education for ages 0 to 5 years for implementation in the all the public early child centres in Nigeria, the curriculum for preschool education for ages 0 to 5 years plus have been facing challenges of implementation. This paper intends to discuss the challenges facing the implementation of the early child education curriculum in Nigeria.

## 2.0 Concept of Curriculum Implementation

There are many definitions of Curriculum. For Chikumbi & Makamure (2000), Curriculum entails putting into practice the officially prescribed courses of study, syllabuses and subjects while Garba (2004) views curriculum implementation as putting the curriculum into work for the achievement of the goals for which the curriculum is designed. Onyeachu (2008) sees "Curriculum implementation as the process of putting all that have been planned as a curriculum document into practice in the classroom through the combined efforts of teachers, learners, school administrators, parents as well as interaction with physical facilities, instructional materials, psychological and social environments". Curriculum implementation as the task of translating the curriculum document into the operating curriculum by the combined efforts of the students, teachers and others concerned, that is, curriculum implementation demands concerted efforts of end-users of the curriculum for its effective implementation at all levels in order to achieve the desired goals.

Okebukola (2004) defined curriculum implementation as the transition of the objectives of the curriculum from paper to practice. That is, only effective curriculum implementation ensures achievement of the objectives for which the curriculum was designed to attain. Ivowi (2004) supported the definition by defining curriculum implementation as the translation of theory into practice, or proposal into action. Obanya (2004) defined implementation of curriculum as day-to-day activities which school management and classroom teachers undertake in the pursuit of the objective of any given curriculum.

Jamoh, & Aminu, (2021) submitted that putting the curriculum into operation requires an implementation agent. The teacher is identified as the agent in the curriculum implementation process. Curriculum implementation therefore refers to how the planned or officially designed course of study is translated by the teacher into syllabus, scheme of work and lessons to be delivered to students. The above definitions show that effective curriculum implementation involves interaction within the teachers, learners and other stakeholders in education geared towards achieving the objectives of education. Obanya (2007) contends that effective curriculum is the one that reflects what "the learner" eventually takes away from an educational experience. Obanya (2004) noted that in many cases, there would be gap between the intended curriculum and the learned curriculum and defined effective curriculum implementation as concerned with narrowing such a gap as much as possible.

## 2.0 Problem facing Implementation of Early Childhood Curriculum in Nigeria

There are many challenges facing the implementation of the early child curriculum in Nigeria. Inadequate funding, shortage of professional caregiver, inadequate infrastructural facilities, shortage of instruction materials, poor supervision, insecurity, poor capacity development programme and poor implementation of Early Childhood Education will be considered as the challenges facing the implementation of the early child curriculum in Nigeria.

### 2.1 Inadequate Funding

Inadequate funding is a major problem facing the implementation of early childhood curriculum in Nigeria. The budgetary allocation for the administration and management of early child education is inadequate. Jamoh, & Aminu, (2021) and Nwagwu (2012), observed that one impressive feature of educational institutions in Nigeria since independence has been the phenomenal increase in number of students and students' population. For this magnitude of expansion and development to be effective, there must be massive investment of resources in the form of funds. Unfortunately, all indicators point to a chronic gross under-funding at the school system. This is a serious issue in curriculum implementation in the early child education. Ogunode & Christopher, (2021) submitted that adequate funding is very important in the management of educational programme especially the early child education programme. The development of the early child education programme depends on the amount of funds allocated for the administration and management of the programme. In Nigeria, inadequate funding have been a major problem facing the management of education especially the early child education programme. The Early child education programme drives its budget from the ministry of education both at the federal, state and local government authority. Ogunode & Christopher, (2021) cited Ogunode (2020) who observed that the annual allocation for the administration of education in Nigeria is inadequate and it is below the recommendation of the UNESCO 26% for developing countries like Nigeria. Ogunode & Christopher, (2021) and Ogunode, Jegede, & Ajape (2021) submits that inadequate funding is one major challenge facing the implementation of the early child education policies in Nigeria. The budgetary allocation for education in Nigeria is inadequate to implement the entire educational policies successfully, including the early child education.

### 2.2 Shortage of Professional Caregiver

Caregivers are crucial in implementing the Early Childhood Education programme curriculum. For any programme of the curriculum to be properly implemented, the implementer must be adequately qualified. Caregivers are key element

to proper development of the child and consequently they are needed in greater number in all the Early Child Education programme. Teachers are the cornerstone or the hub of any educational system. Jamoh, & Aminu, (2021) submitted that the importance of teacher in curriculum planning, development and most importantly implementation cannot be overemphasized. Teachers most at times are not involved during policy formulation even though they are expected to implement this curriculum. Ogunode, Jegede, & Ajape (2021) lamented that inadequate professional teacher is a big problem preventing the implementation of Early Child Education Policy in Nigeria. There are limited professional teachers available in the country that specialized in Early Child Educational Program. Professional teachers are needed in large number to successfully implement the educational programme relating to teaching and learning. While Ogunode & Christopher (2021) observed that shortage of professional teachers (caregivers) is a major problem affecting the management of the Early Child Education Programme in Nigeria. Care-giver are professionals teachers trained to handle children. These caregivers are in short supply in many public early education centers. A report by independent Newspapers (2019) submitted that there was a deficit of 135,319 teachers at the Early Childhood Care Development Education, 139,772 deficit in Primary Schools, and 2,446 shortage in Junior Secondary School across the nation. Several challenges have been identified as clogs in the realization of good access, equity and quality of education in Nigeria. Amugo (2007) therefore concluded that quality and quantity of teachers in Nigerian schools significantly affect the implementation of curriculum in Nigeria schools, especially at the secondary school level.

### 2.3 Inadequate Infrastructural Facilities

Inadequate infrastructural facilities are among the problems preventing the implementation of the early child educational curriculum in Nigeria. Infrastructural facilities are vital resources in the implementation of school curriculum Ogunode & Christopher observed that inadequate infrastructural facilities are another big challenge preventing effective management of the early child education in Nigeria. The infrastructural facilities require for the management of the early child education programme is not adequate. Infrastructural facilities refers to classrooms, offices, playgrounds, libraries, water, light, internet services, good road network, chairs, tables, desks, whiteboard, electronic set etc. Infrastructural facilities support delivering of quality education. Infrastructural facilities makes learning environment conducive. Anyakogu (2002) opined that a relationship did exist between the availability of school facilities and implementation of school curriculum. As he puts it, without the availability of functional infrastructures in the schools, the skill-based curriculum will not be effectively implemented in Nigeria, and youth would lack skill acquisition and economic empowerment. This is because, youth lack the ability to carry out some meaningful work due to lack of acquisition of basic skills that promote effective work performance. Amadi, (2013) lamented that in many public early child center facilities in use are uncompleted buildings, makes shifts and car garages that are poorly ventilated most of which have only mats as furniture. This situation can never guarantee effective teaching and learning of these *tender lings* whose lives are further jeopardized. Inadequate infrastructural facility is one major problem preventing effective implementation of educational policies in Nigeria. No meaningful teaching and learning can take place without adequate infrastructural facilities available (Ogunode, Jegede, & Ajape 2021).

### 2.4 Shortage of Instruction Materials

Shortage of instructional materials is another problem affecting implementation of early child education programme curriculum in Nigeria. Many care giver in public early child education centres do not have adequate instructional materials like picture, charts, diagrams and toys for the implementation of the curriculum. Instructional material resources are educational aids that helps the teachers to teach well and learners learn well. Adenike & Peter (2016) submits that when resources are available for ECE 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 while Chukwbikem (2013), acknowledge that 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. Ogunode & Christopher, (2021) opines that inadequate instructional materials is another problem facing the management of early child education programme in Nigeria. Also, Adenike & Peter (2016) noted that in spite of the fact that resources are critical to successful implementation of ECE programme, they are not found in many Nigerian preprimary schools, especially in the pre-primary section of public primary schools that belong to the government. Ogunode (2021) and Amadi, (2013) states that in many pre-school, Teaching aids like toys, diagrams, charts, pictorials e.t.c are invaluable instructional requirements that are lacking in most of the ECCE schools presently.

### 2.5 Poor Supervision

Poor supervision of Early Child Education curriculum is a very big challenge to the effective implementation of the programme in Nigeria. Curriculum needs effective supervision to realize it objectives. Curriculum not supervised cannot achieve its objectives. Ogunode, Akinsua-Ajape & Jegede, (2021); Adenike & Peter (2016) and Awino (2014) noted that supervision in Early Child Care Development (ECD) 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 all those involved. Adenike & Peter (2016) observes that despite the immense benefits that supervision offers the early child education, the Nigerian early child education at preprimary school level is not provided with these benefits, as it is usually left unsupervised. This cannot allow effective implementation of early child education programmes at pre-primary school level in Nigeria. Also, Ogunode & Christopher, (2021) opines that poor supervision of early child education is another challenge to the effective management of the programme while Ibhaze (2016) observed that no educational plan however excellent it may be can be effectively implemented if the school supervision is ineffective. Supervision is vital in implementing early childhood care and education in Nigeria if success is to be attained. Ogunode, Akinsua-Ajape & Jegede (2021) submitted that supervision of the early child education programme in Nigeria faces the following problems and the problems include inadequate funding of supervision, inadequate professional supervisors, inadequate supervision materials, lack of transportation facilities, poor capacity development of supervisors, insecurity and distance. Poor funding is one major problem facing the supervision of the early child education programme in Nigeria. Supervision of education in Nigeria is under-funded, and this is affecting the quality of education, especially the early child education. Ogunode, etal, (2021) went further and observed that poor funding of supervision of education is one of the major factors responsible for the poor quality of supervision of the early child education programme. The budgetary allocation devoted to education has been considered to be grossly inadequate considering the phenomenon of increase in students' enrolment and increasing cost, which has been aggravated by inflation. A serious problem confronting Nigerian public education today is that of a scarcity of fund. Government financial policies on education have therefore been subjected to constant review, intending to allocate more resources to public education.

## 2.6 Insecurity Problem

Insecurity is another problem preventing effective implementation of the early child education programme in Nigeria. The insecurity in the Northern part of Nigeria is preventing implementation of early child education curriculum in that area. Ogunode, Akinsua-Ajape & Jegede, (2021) observed that many students, teachers, school administrators and supervisors have lost their lives due to insecurity challenges in the Northern part of Nigeria. Insecurity in Northeast part of Nigeria has led to the destruction of lives and properties. The insecurity challenges have led to school closure and suspension of academic calendar in all both early child education centres, basic education, secondary schools and higher institutions. No any meaningful development can take place in any educational institutions amidst insecurity. The insecurity in Northern part of Nigeria is hampering the development of education reducing enrolment rate, retention rate and transition rate within the basic education and other forms of education.

## 2.7 Poor Capacity Development Programme

Poor capacity development of care giver in public early child education centers is another problem responsible for poor implementation of the early child education curriculum in many public early child centers across the country. Capacity development is very important for care giver, school administrators and supervisors due to the facts they are all stakeholders in the administration and management of early child education programme. Curriculum implementer at the level of early child education needs constant training and retraining since they are handling children. The early child education curriculum is one of the complex and difficult curriculum to implement in the classroom or playroom. Care giver need to upgrade their knowledge and skills regularly to be able to implement the curriculum. Care giver should attend conferences, training and workshops to improve their capacity for instruction delivery. Research has it those supervisors that constantly going for training and retraining programme perform better than those who are not going for training and retraining programme.

## 2.8 Poor implementation of Early Childhood Education

Poor implementation of early child education policies in Nigeria is also affecting the implementation of the early child curriculum. Educational policies when fully implemented path ways for smooth administration of schools. When formulated policies that are supposed to ensure quality education are not implement it affects curriculum implementation. Policies like teacher-students ratio, funding policies and teachers' qualification policies. Salami, (2016) observed that the inability of the Federal Government of Nigeria to produce the necessary documents for the successful implementation of the policies and the curricula and promulgate them at all public centres in the country led to lack of availability and awareness of the policies and the curricula among the teachers who are supposed to implement them. For instance, none of the curriculum materials that should enhance its implementation like guide to scheme of work, text materials and appropriate instructional resources that would have upheld the curriculum was produced. The one that was produced – Nigerian National Manual for Toy making was never distributed to the schools as and when due. This could be the cause of about 80% of the schools visited in the southwestern part of the country

not being aware of its existence and in consequence, not possessing it. Those very few ones that had it did through the extra efforts of the school management.

### 3.0 Way Forward

To address the problems of curriculum implementation in the early child education programme in Nigeria, the following have been suggested:

1. Government should increase the funding of the early child education programme. This will help for effective administration and implementation of the programme.
2. More professional care giver should be employed and deployed to the various early education centers across the country. This will help to aid effective implementation of the programme.
3. The government should provide more infrastructural facilities in all the public early child education centers.
4. More instructional materials should be provided in all public early child education centers across the country.
5. The government should improve the supervision of the early child education programme across the country. This will help aid the realization of quality assurance and full implementation of policies.
6. The government should provide adequate security in all the early child education centers in the country.
7. The government should ensure that constant training and retraining programme be organized for the care giver in all public early child education.

### 4.0 Conclusion

The Early Child Education programme is very important to the attainment of educational goals in Nigeria. Early Child Education is an education meant to prepare the children for basic education. In order to realize the objective of the Early Child Education programme in Nigeria, the government formulated many policies and document on the implementation of the programme. Among the documents is the curriculum of the Early Child Education. The Early Child Education curriculum was formulate and designed to give direction to an effective instructional delivery at the centers. However, the implementation of the Early Child curriculum is faced with many challenges of implementation. This paper discussed the challenges facing the implementation of the early child education curriculum. The paper identified inadequate funding, shortage of caregiver, inadequate infrastructural facilities, shortage of instruction materials, poor supervision, insecurity, poor capacity development programme and poor implementation of Early Childhood Education as the challenges facing the implementation of the Early Child curriculum in Nigeria. To address the problems of curriculum implementation in the Early Child Education programme in Nigeria, the following have been suggested: Government should increase the funding of the early child education programme. This will help for effective administration and implementation of the programme. More professional care giver should be employed and deployed to the various early education centers across the country. This will help to aid effective implementation of the programme. The government should provide more infrastructural facilities in all the public Early Child Education centers and more instructional materials should be provided in all public Early Child Education centers across the country etc.

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