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Pre-School Teachers' Perceived Self-Efficacy on Implementation of National Early Childhood Curriculum; Implications for the Achievement of Sustainable Development Goal on Education in Nigeria

¹Nathaniel Olujoba Ayoola, ²Moses Dele Amosun and ³Bukola Anike Ojoko

^{1,2,3}Department of Early Childhood Care and Education, Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo.

²Department of Early Childhood and Educational Foundation, University of Ibadan.

Abstract

The early years are critical in the life of every child as experiences gained during the period can have lasting effects on the child. For this reason, programmes aimed at fostering proper stimulations and holistic development of the child are usually put in place. One of such programmes is Early Childhood Education (ECE) which is guided by a curriculum in order to achieve the set objectives of the programme. For this reason, the Nigerian Government developed the National Early Childhood Education Curriculum for Ages 0-5 years. It is however not known whether pre-school teachers have the self-efficacy to effectively implement this curriculum. This study thus investigated Pre-School Teachers Perceived Self-Efficacy on Implementation of the National Early Childhood Education Curriculum for Ages 0-5 years in Ondo West Local Government Area of Ondo State. The study adopted survey research design. Purposive sampling technique was used in selecting twenty five (25) public and thirty five (35) private primary schools in the study area making a total of sixty (60) primary schools. "Questionnaire on Pre-school Teachers' Perceived Self-efficacy on Implementation of the National Early Childhood Curriculum (QPTPSNECC)" was the instrument used. Data collected were analysed using percentage, mean and standard deviation while T-test was used to test the hypothesis raised. Findings revealed that pre-service teachers self-efficacy on the implementation Childhood Curriculum for Ages 0-5 years was average. These findings have serious implications for the country's attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4.2. It was recommended that pre-school teachers should be made to regularly attend trainings that will enable them acquire necessary skills for effective implementation of the curriculum.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Self-efficacy, National Early Childhood Curriculum, Availability, Implementation

Introduction

The early years of a child's life are important in predicting ultimate success in life and this importance is now well known all over the world as there is a strong belief that what happens to children in the early years has consequences through the course of their lives. While there are many opportunities to intervene and make a difference to the lives of children, studies have suggested that intervening in early childhood is the most effective phase to impact on the future development of the child (Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth, 2006). In fact, the years from birth to age five are viewed as very critical for developing the foundations for thinking, behaving, and emotional well-being. Child development experts have affirmed that it is during these years that children develop linguistic, cognitive, social, emotional, and regulatory skills that predict their later functioning in many domains (Woolfolk & Perry, 2012; Trawick-Smith, 2014; Bakken, Brown and Downing, 2017). Research findings have also confirmed that early childhood experiences notably influence life chances for individuals, including success in education, lifetime employment and income, overall health and welfare, and social integration and this is why increasing attention is being paid to the early

childhood years as the foundation of children all-round success (Karoly, Kilburn, and Cannon, 2005; Heckman, 2006).

The recognition of the importance of the early years of a human being in constructing the basis of the personality, value and attitudes that will guide thoughts, feelings and behaviour of human beings for the rest of their lives formed the basis for early intervention through quality programmes of early childhood education. In the light of this, the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child made it mandatory for signatory states to provide Early Child Education (ECE) services for children and to this end the United Nations (UN) called on the states to develop 'institutions, facilities and services for the care of children' and to ensure that 'children have the right to benefit from child care services and facilities for which they are eligible' (Shrestha, 2006; Ige and Omotuyole, 2012). To further justify the need for early childhood education, the Jomtien World Conference on Education for All (EFA) affirmed that education begins at birth. In the same vein, the importance of the early childhood period underscores the reason for considering the issue of access to quality early childhood development, care and education for all children in one of the major outcome targets of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 (United

Nations. UN. 2015: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. UNESCO, 2016).

ECE refers to the programmes and settings that serve young children from birth through the eight year of life (Copple and Bredekamp, 2009). For others, it is a form of organized learning for age-specific competencies for children between ages 0-6 years (Ige and Omotuyole, 2012). Olowe, Kutelu and Majebi (2014) describe it as any group programme that is designed to promote children's intellectual, social, emotional, language, physical development and learning from the birth to age eight. ECE encompasses the care, protection, stimulation and learning promoted in children from the early years. It could be at home, a day care centre, play group/crèche, nursery, kindergarten and lower primary. Other terms that are often used interchangeably with "early childhood education" are "early childhood learning, (ECL), Early Child Care, (ECC), Early Childhood Development (ECD), Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), Early Child Care Development and Education (ECCDE) and "Early Education (EC). (Osanyin, 2012).

The Federal Government of Nigeria, FGN (2014) states some of the objectives of ECE as well as the strategies for achieving these objectives in the National Policy on Education (NPE). Of importance to the present study among the strategies is the development and dissemination of National Early Childhood Curriculum. The concept of curriculum has a somewhat different connotation in early childhood than in primary, secondary or higher education. In these settings outside early childhood, curriculum often refers to a course of study on a specific topic, such as curriculum in history, social studies, physics or any other subject. Thus, students typically are in the midst of several curricula, which are not necessarily connected to each other. In early childhood, curriculum tends to be viewed more holistically and all aspects of the programme are integrated and related. In fact, in early childhood, even the word curriculum is not used uniformly as some writers replace it with the word 'programme' (Essa, 2012).

For most early childhood educators, the true definition of curriculum, which lies between these two extremes, includes what is taught, how it is taught, and how it is evaluated. "What is taught" refers to the content of instruction, while "how it is taught" refers to the instructional methods teachers use to deliver the content to learners. "How it is evaluated" relates to assessment (Estes, 2004). Early childhood curriculum is the organized framework

that delineates the content that children are to learn, the process through which children achieve the identified curricular goals, what teachers do to help children achieve these goals and the context in which teaching and learning occur (National Association for the Education of Young Children, NAEYC, 2003). Barnett (2004) asserts that the aims of early childhood curriculum will include for example, health and physical development, emotional well-being curriculum and social competence, positive approaches to learning, communication skills, cognition and general knowledge. In their own view of ECE curriculum, the National Centre on Quality Teaching and Learning, NCOTL (2012) states that ECE curriculum specifies what staff and parents do to help children achieve the goals and the materials needed to support the implementation of the curriculum.

In line with the strategies for achieving the objectives of early childhood education in Nigeria, the Federal Government, through the Nigerian Education Research and Development Council (NERDC) developed the National Early Childhood Curriculum for Ages 0-5 years in 2007. The curriculum is divided into two sections based on the two age cohorts of 0-3 and 3-5 years. For each age cohort, eight themes are identified; and topics under each theme are specified. The eight themes are: physical development; affective/psychosocial development; cognitive development; food and nutrition; health and environmental sanitation; safety measures and protection issues. For children aged 0-3 years, topics under physical development include personal data, child growth, monitoring and caring, child interaction with the environment and basic rights of the child (FGN, 2007). The focus of this study is specifically on the 3-5 age cohort of the curriculum. This is because learning in this age cohort is already becoming a little more formal than in the age 0-3 years cohort and more importantly because it is the children in this category that are found the government owned pre-school sections

Several factors are important to the attainment of the objectives of ECE in Nigeria and one of the most critical among them is implementation of the National Early Childhood Curriculum. This is because the objectives of any curriculum can only be achieved when it is properly implemented by teachers who are saddled with the responsibilities to do so. This view is supported by Makewa and Ngussa (2015) that in the issue of curriculum implementation, teachers are a constant factor that performs key role. The implementation of ECE curriculum is therefore highly imperative if the objectives of ECE childhood

education must be achieved.

Recognising the importance of effective implementation ECE curriculum to the attainment of the objectives of ECE in Nigeria, studies have been conducted to ascertain the extent of implementation of the ECE curriculum since 2007 when it was developed. For instance, Ekpo, Samuel and Adigun (2016) surveyed the implementation of ECE curriculum in Owerri Education Zone I of Imo State, Nigeria and found that the extent of the use of ECE curriculum in the zone was low. Also, Adejobi, Omoare and Oyediran (2017) did a comparative assessment of the implementation of the ECE curriculum in public and private schools in Ogun State and found that implementation of the curriculum in the schools covered was low. This case of low level of implementation of this curriculum is no doubt a serious threat to the actualization of the objectives of ECE in the country.

Studies have revealed unavailability of the curriculum in most of our pre-school centres across the country as one of the reasons for its low level of implementation. In spite of the fact that one of the strategies for ensuring the achievement of the objectives of ECE in the country is development and dissemination of curriculum materials that will enhance its implementation (FGN, 2014), studies have shown that this curriculum is not available in many ECE centres across the country. For instance, studies conducted by Viatonu (2011), Amali (2012) and Okewole (2013) revealed that the ECE curriculum was not available in many schools. Also, Okewole, Iluezi-Ogbedu and Osinowo (2015) found that many schools do not have the recommended national ECE curriculum in Osun State. If the ECE curriculum is not available in pre-primary schools, teachers would not be able to have access to it to disseminate its content to support holistic development of children.

Although, some studies have attributed non-implementation of ECE curriculum to its unavailability in most pre-school centres, it is important to note that pre-school teachers' self-efficacy is also crucial in ensuring effective implementation of the curriculum. Self-efficacy is the personal belief that one is capable of performing in an appropriate and effective manner to attain certain goals (Ormrod, 2006). According to Gavora (2010), Self-efficacy exists in many domains of human functioning, including both professional and private behaviour. Specifically in educational context, teacher self-efficacy is the teachers' personal (that is, self-perceived) belief in ability to plan instruction and accomplish instructional

objectives. It is in effect the conviction the teacher has about his or her ability to teach pupils efficiently and effectively. Gavora (2010) further states that teachers' self-efficacy has been shown to be an important characteristic of the teacher that is strongly related to success in teaching and it is a self-system that controls most personal activity, including appropriate use of professional knowledge and skills.

Teachers' beliefs in their ability to perform well have been researched in a variety of settings. A study of 1,430 teachers in traditional school settings revealed teacher confidence in their ability to implement effective instructional and classroom strategies leading to positive student engagement (Klassen & Chiu, 2010). Particularly relevant to this study, teachers at the pre-school settings have been found to have stronger self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). A study conducted by Billheimer (2006) to examine the degree of perceived teacher self-efficacy between early childhood pre-service teachers and elementary education pre-service teachers revealed that early childhood education pre-service teachers reflected higher levels of efficacy in decision-making, influence on school resources, instructional efficacy, disciplinary efficacy, enlisting parent involvement, enlisting community involvement, and creating a positive school climate. Another study of early childhood teacher self-efficacy suggests that staff collaboration, student engagement, and consistent opportunities to participate in decision-making contribute to self-efficacy (Guo, Justice, Sawyer, and Tompkins, 2011). However, in a study of 48 early childhood teachers in 38 centers including Head Start and state-funded PreK, student engagement and teacher experience did not appear to contribute to teachers' self-efficacy (McGinty et al, 2008).

Self-efficacy of ECE teachers on the implementation of ECE curriculum is crucial to their ability to implement it effectively. If they have high self-efficacy concerning the curriculum, they will be able to plan, interpret and deliver its contents correctly for holistic development of children in their care. Proper planning and delivery of the contents of the curriculum for effective implementation will however be hampered greatly if pre-school teachers have low self-efficacy on the curriculum. Pre-school teachers self-efficacy on the implementation of ECE curriculum will no doubt have serious implications on the country's achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.2 which states that by 2030 countries should ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education. For this important goal on education to be achieved, ECE teachers are expected

to have high level of self-efficacy implementation of the ECE curriculum. This is because for the children to have access to quality education, pre-school teachers must be able to implement the curriculum effectively. Since studies have not confirmed whether pre-school teachers' self-efficacy is also responsible for the low level of implementation of ECE curriculum and the fact no study has been conducted in Ondo West Local Government Area of Ondo State to ascertain this, a study of this nature thus becomes imperative. This study investigated Pre-school teachers' self-efficacy on the implementation of National Early Childhood Curriculum for Ages 0-5 years in Ondo West Local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria.

Research Question

1. What is the level of self-efficacy of pre-school teachers on implementation of National Early Childhood Curriculum?

Research Hypothesis

1. There is no significant difference in the self-efficacy of public and private pre-school teachers on implementation of National Early Childhood Curriculum.

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The study population comprised all the pre-school teachers in both public and private primary schools in Ondo-West Local Government Area of Ondo State. Purposive sampling technique was used in selecting twenty five (25) public and thirty five (35) private primary schools in the study area making a total of sixty (60) primary schools. The

criteria for selection is that the schools were accessible, duly registered with the government (in case of private schools) and have pre-school teachers with at least NCE minimum qualification. All the pre-school teachers in the selected schools were used in the study. Seventy four (74) pre-school teachers from public primary schools and one hundred and twenty six (126) from private primary schools making a total of two hundred (200) pre-school teachers that were used in the study. Questionnaire on Pre-school Teachers' Perceived Self-efficacy on Implementation of the National Early Childhood Curriculum (QPTPSNECC) was the instrument used. It has two sections A and B. Section A elicited demographic information of the respondents such as gender, qualifications and years of teaching experience.

Section B of QPTPSNECC contained items that measured pre-school teachers' self-efficacy on the implementation of the Implementation of the National Early Childhood Curriculum at four levels of I don't Think So = 1, To a Little Extent = 2, To a Large Extent = 3 and To a Very Large Extent = 4. The instruments were validated by ECE experts from the Department of Early Childhood Care and Education, Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo. It was subjected to reliability test using Cronbach Alpha and a reliability coefficient of 0.72 was obtained. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics of percentage, mean and standard deviation. Inferential statistics of T-test was also used to test the hypothesis raised.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the level of Self-Efficacy of pre-school teachers on implementation of National Early Childhood Curriculum for Ages 0-5 years?

Table 1: Self-Efficacy of Pre-School Teachers on Implementation of National Early Childhood Curriculum

S/No	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I can conveniently interpret the National ECCE curriculum	1.92	.85
2	I can break the contents of the curriculum into scheme of work.	1.83	.83
3	I can successfully prepare lesson note based on the curriculum	1.45	.75
4	With ease, I can carry out the activities contained in the curriculum	1.52	.52
5	I can successfully use the evaluation guide provided in the curriculum	3.20	.73
6	Based on the curriculum content, I can plan and implement lessons to achieve objectives of the early childhood education	1.38	.74
7	I can conveniently plan lessons based on all the themes in the curriculum.	2.10	.85
Weighted Average		1.91	

Key: IDTS = I Don't Think So, TALE = To A Little Extent, TALE = To A Large Extent, TAVLE = To A Very large Extent.

Decision Value: 0.00-2.44 = Low, 2.45-4.00 = High

Table 1 above shows self-efficacy of pre-school teachers on implementation of national early childhood curriculum for ages 0-5 years. The table shows that the teachers can do the following to a little extent: conveniently interpret the curriculum ($M=1.92$), break the contents of the curriculum into scheme of work ($M=1.83$), successfully prepare lesson note based on the curriculum contents ($M=1.45$), with ease, carry out the activities contained in the curriculum ($M=1.52$) and conveniently plan lessons based on all themes in the curriculum ($M=2.10$). The table shows further that the teachers do not think that they can plan and implement lessons to achieve objectives of early childhood education based on the curriculum content ($M=1.38$). Lastly, the table shows that the teachers can successfully use the evaluation guide provided in the curriculum to a large extent ($M=3.20$). Based on the value of the weighted average (1.91 out of 4.00 maximum value that can be obtained), it can be inferred that the level of self-efficacy of pre-school teachers on implementation of national early childhood curriculum for ages 0-5 is average.

Test of the Hypothesis

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the self-efficacy of public and private pre-school teachers on Implementation of National Early Childhood Curriculum for Ages 0-5 Years.

Table 2: Summary of T-test Showing Difference in the Self-Efficacy of Public and Private Pre-School Teachers in on Implementation of National Early Childhood Curriculum for Ages 0-5 Years

	School Type	N	Mean	Std. D	df	T	sig.	Remark
SELF-EFFICACY	Public	74	13.78	2.13	198	2.192	.030	Significant
	Private	126	13.19	1.61				

Table 2 shows the difference in self-efficacy of pre-school teachers on implementation of early childhood curriculum in public and private school. The table shows that the mean score for the teachers in public schools is 13.78 while that of those in private schools is 13.19. Although the values of the mean scores do not reveal appreciable difference, the result indicates that there is significant difference in self-efficacy of pre-school teachers on implementation of early childhood curriculum in public and private schools ($df=198$; $t=2.192$; $p<0.05$). Hence, the null hypothesis 1 was rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The finding of this study revealed that pre-school teachers' self-efficacy on the implementation of the National Early Childhood Curriculum was average. This finding does not agree with some studies that reported a high level of self-efficacy among ECE teachers (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001; Billheimer, 2006). The fact that the pre-school teachers' self-efficacy on the implementation of the curriculum was average could be because of the teachers' area of specialisation. It is possible that the teachers were not professionally trained in ECE during their pre-service training programmes. This observation supports the one raised by Osho, Aliyu, Okolie, & Onifade (2014) and Olowe et al (2015) that teachers with no training in ECE are often found in private pre-primary classrooms while old female teachers with no qualification in ECE are often seconded to pre-primary classrooms in public schools. Also related to this is the fact that the pre-primary school teachers might have not been given opportunity to attend in-service training that could expose them to the ways by which they could

effectively implement the curriculum. This finding could also be linked to inadequacy of adequate educational resources which are required for proper implementation of the curriculum. This view supports the finding of Adejobi et al (2017) that pre-primary schools lacked basic facilities and instructional materials necessary for effective implementation of the curriculum.

Also, finding from the study also revealed that there is significant difference in the self-efficacy of pre-school teachers in public and private schools on implementation of the National Early Childhood Education Curriculum for Age 0-5 years. This finding could be as a result of the fact that pre-school teachers are usually exposed to in-service training and workshops that are regularly organized by relevant government agencies like Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB). This in-service training to which pre-schoolteachers in the public schools are exposed to is expected to have improved their knowledge and skills to implement the curriculum better than their counterparts in the private schools.

hence their higher level of self-efficacy. This view is in line with the submission of Gobble and Horn (2010) that whatever a person's profession is, the need for professional development is universal in order to continually enrich one's knowledge and implement research based practice.

Meanwhile, it is important to state here that findings of this study have serious implications for the achievement of SDG4.2 in Nigeria. The fact that findings of this study has revealed that pre-school teachers level of self-efficacy of the implementation of the ECE curriculum is average means that they feel that they do not have the necessary knowledge and skills for its effective implementation. This situation therefore portends serious danger because curriculum implementation is vital to achievement of SDG 4.2. The Pre-school teachers to possess the necessary skills to plan, interpret and deliver curriculum contents correctly for holistic development of children in their care. Relating the importance of ECE to the achievement of SDG 4.2, Young Lives(2016) asserts that the emphasis on 'quality' in Target 4.2 is crucial and the strongest evidence demonstrating the potential of ECD comes from well-planned and well-resourced programmes that are 'developmentally appropriate' respecting children's rights, needs, capacities, interests and ways of learning at each stage of their early lives; recognise the interdependencies between nutrition, health, care and education, from the 'first 1000 days' onwards; build on and support children's key relationships, especially with their mother, father and wider family in the specific physical, social, cultural and language contexts that are the foundation for well-being. A situation where pre-school teachers do not possess the required competence that will ensure that contents of ECE curriculum are delivered effectively has serious implications on the SDG 4.2.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that pre-school teachers' level of self-efficacy on implementation of National Early Childhood Education Curriculum for Ages 0-5 is average and this is one of the reasons for the poor implementation of the curriculum which has been reported by various researchers. This has serious implications for the countries' achievement of the objectives of ECE programme and that of SDG 4.2.

Recommendations

Based on the finding of this study, it becomes imperative to make the following recommendations.

- Pre-school teachers should be made to attend workshops and seminars where they will gain better knowledge and skills to effectively implement the National Early Childhood Education Curriculum.
- Government should make efforts to ensure that those with no professional qualifications in ECE and are teaching in the pre-school centres in both public and private schools across the country are encouraged to go for professional programmes in ECE.
- Government, parents, school owners and teachers must collaborate to ensure that the needed educational resources for effective implementation of ECE curriculum are provided.

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