

## **SURVEY OF PRESCHOOLERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT IN CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The study was survey of preschoolers with visual impairment in childhood education in Enugu State public primary schools. Descriptive survey was used for the study. The population of teachers was 13,621 in 1188 public primary schools of the state. The sample was 150 teachers drawn from 150 public primary schools through multistage sampling techniques. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire that was developed by the researcher. It was named Preschoolers with Visual Impairment Survey Questionnaire (PWVISQ). Likert response options of strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (DA) and Strongly Disagree (SD) was adopted. Mean scores and standard deviation were used. Mean scores of 2.5 and above was considered as accepted (for agreement) while mean score less than 2.5 was rejected (as disagreement) for answering the research questions which are three in number. The findings of the study revealed among others that the teachers are aware of those called preschoolers with visual impairment and no childhood education services given them. There are recommendations which include awareness campaign for parents of persons with visual impairment to send them to schools and training by the government and retraining of teachers of preschoolers with visual impairment for successful early childhood services for preschoolers with visual impairment.*

**KEYWORDS:** Preschoolers, Visual Impairment, Early Childhood Education (ECE), Survey.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Early childhood is indispensable for everybody. It is therefore apt to start it early enough. It is indeed germane for educating one at early age. Federal Republic of Nigeria (F.R.N, 2013) in one of its set of beliefs in Nigeria's Philosophy of Education disclosed that education maximizes the creative potentials and skills of the individual for self-fulfillment and general development in the society. It is proper for all children to start early childhood education. Akinware (2010) asserted that the aim of early education is to create enabling environment for the Nigerian child to thrive and develop to his/her fullest potentials in line with the nation's goal and aspiration of building a virile and healthy nation full of bright opportunities for all citizens. The above speaks volume of the impact and importance of early childhood education. This has been reiterated by Osanyim (2002) as he identified children as future leaders in the nation upon which the future of any nation depends on how well they have been groomed at childhood level for adult life.

This type of education is called pre-primary education hence it is education given to children less than five years. Federal Republic of Nigeria (F.R.N, 2013) perceived Early Childhood Care Development Education (ECCDA) as care, protection, stimulation and learning promoted in children from age 0 – 4 years in a crèche or nursery school.

The above type of education had been neglected and left in private hands hence they were initially not found in public primary schools. Ojiabor (2007) disclosed that the then Minister of State for Education (Hajiya Aisha Dukke) emphasized the need to provide Integrated Early Childhood Development Education (IECD) policy based on government resolve to pay special attention to that area of human development since it is the foundation on which developmental stages rested. The foregoing made it imperative to annex pre-schools for preschoolers in every public primary school in Nigeria.

The preschoolers here mean every child under five years to prepare them for primary level of education. Every child includes children with special needs. Among children with special needs are preschoolers who are visually impaired. They are considered eligible because F.R.N (2013) asserted that persons with special needs shall be provided with inclusive education services in schools which normal persons attend ... Among the aims of Special Needs Education (FRN, 2013) are provision of access to education for all persons in an inclusive setting, equalization of education opportunities for all and provision of adequate education for all persons with special needs. The above endorses preschoolers with visual impairment qualification for early childhood education.

They are benefits children derive from any pre-school arrangement. Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN, 2009) approved minimum standard and categories of ECD services thus; Daycare/crèche for children 0-2 years, Pre-Nursery/play groups for ages 3-4, Nursery/kindergarten for ages 3-5 years. There was approved national curriculum for training different cadres of care givers and teachers in public ECD/primary linkage schools. With the implementation of National Policy on Integrated Early Childhood Education, there is demonstration of government's commitment. There was plan of training of teachers, in adequate number to provide a pool of manpower to work as ECE specialists. National Council for Colleges of Education (NCCE in FGN, 2009) stated in a guideline that ECE centres must recruit caregivers and helpers with relevant academic and professional qualifications. It added that individuals who aspire to make careers in ECE will have a clear cut idea of his/her designation from point of entry in training and through out his practice. That means once a caregiver one should be working only in preschools. NCCE noted that training of the caregiver prepares him/her to be able to assist child to develop good eating habit, good social habit, facilitate emotional stability in the child and assist the child to develop fine and gross motor skills etc.

A caregiver equipped with the above training shall serve all children including those who are visually impaired. There are public primary schools in Enugu state where ECE are integrated. Children are found there but there is doubt of whether children with visual impairment benefit from ECE. An informal interview conducted by investigator shows that those children under five years are found in localities yet not allowed to benefit from ECE by their parents or guardians. This gave concern to the researcher and he opted for this study. The researcher felt that the above development has implication for education of these children who are supposed to benefit from early childhood education. The researcher wished to find out if teachers are aware of those children with visual impairment, find out if teachers are abreast with the services of ECE due to children under five years in the preschools and deduce from teachers whether those services are modified for children with visual impairment under 5 years (in case they are found). Encarta (2014) perceived survey as looking at something carefully. There is need to look at education of this special population at a very early age

hence choice of the topic survey of preschoolers who are visually impaired in Enugu state public primary schools.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Universal Basic Education has mandated all public primary schools to have pre-primary schools linkages. Every child including preschoolers who are visually impaired is to benefit. It therefore behoves that ECE services in Enugu state public primary schools should include preschoolers who are visually impaired.

It is very appalling that most ECE services in public primary schools do not recognize children (under five years) who are visually impaired. This development seems to suggest that these children miss the all important foundation of education inherent in pre-school programme in Enugu state.

No study available to the investigator had addressed this ugly trend. It became a serious concern to the researcher to carry out this study. This study is considered worthwhile because such gap in the education of children with visual impairment jeopardizes their future, retard their education and worsen their disability. Above all, they all shall remain perpetual liabilities to parents and the nation and defeat the idea of equalization of educational opportunity.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of the study was to carry out a survey of preschoolers with visual impairment in childhood education in Enugu state public primary schools. The study wishes to elicit from the teachers their awareness of preschoolers with visual impairment; their knowledge of E.C.E services due for preschoolers generally and ascertain from them if such services are modified for the sake of children with visual impairment in their schools.

Three research questions guided the study, thus:

1. Who are the preschoolers with visual impairment?
2. What early childhood education (E.C.E) services are due to all preschoolers?
3. How much of the ECE services are modified for the sake of the children with visual impairment in the pre-school?

### **METHODS**

Descriptive research design was used in the study. The study was carried out in Enugu State public primary schools with linkages of ECE. The state has 1188 public primary schools with 13,261 teachers in the 17 Local Government Areas of the state (Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria ESSPIN, 2013). Multistage sampling technique, simple random sampling and cluster sampling techniques were employed to draw sample of 1500 teachers. The LGAs were considered as clusters. 1000 teachers were drawn from rural areas and 500 teachers from urban/semi urban through purposive sampling as the researcher wanted to get to the hinterland.

The researcher constructed a questionnaire named Preschoolers with Visual Impairment Survey Questionnaire (PWVISQ) that was used for collecting data. The instrument had three sections with four items each with Likert response options of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The instrument was face validated by three experts from Special Education, Measurement and Evaluation and Educational Psychology. They examined the instrument critically and gave corrections that were effected for the final copy. An internal consistency reliability estimate was done by using Cronbach Alfa, 0.86, 0.82 and 0.83 of the respective these sections were deduced. Like schools in Cross River state was used to get at the foregoing. In data analysis mean and standard deviation were adopted. Any item with mean score of 2.5 and above was considered as agreed while any item with less than 2.5 was considered as disagreed.

## RESULTS

**Table 1: Preschoolers with Visual Impairment**

S/N	Items Statement	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	Dec.
1.	Children (under 5 yrs) with special need	1500	2.61	0.23	A
2.	Children (less than 5 yrs) that are blind	1500	2.5	0.13	A
3.	Children (age 0 – 4) that partially sighted	1500	2.5	0.15	A
4.	Children under 5 years with low vision	1500	2.67	0.23	A

Dec. = Decision

In Table 1, items 1 and 4 obtained means of 2.61 and 2.63 respectively. The results showed that teachers in public schools where E.C.E were linked are aware of who preschoolers with visual impairment are hence they acknowledged them as children with special needs that could be with low vision. Items 2 and 3 had mean scores of 2.5 each. These results affirmed that the teacher respondents are aware that children who are blind or partially sighted are among preschoolers with visual impairment.

**Table 2: ECE Services for the Preschoolers**

S/N	Items Statement	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	Dec.
5.	Assisting children develop good eating/health habits	1500	4.01	0.31	A
6.	Assisting children develop good moral/social habits and sense of co-operation and team spirit	1500	4.03	0.12	A
7.	Facilitating emotional stability in the children	1500	3.12	0.21	A
8.	Assisting children to develop fine and gross motor skills/teaching rudiments of numbers, shapes, letters through play	1500	3.14	0.12	A

In Table 2, items 5 and 6 had mean scores of 4.01 and 4.03 respectively. These results showed that teachers are aware of E.C.E services that should be provided all preschoolers in the preschool. These are assisting children develop good eating/health habits and moral/social habits cum sense of co-operation and team spirit. Items 7 and 8 had mean scores of 3.12 and 3.14 respectively. This implies that the respondents acknowledged that facilitating emotional stability in the children and assisting children to develop fine and gross motors are part of E.C.E services that should be given the preschoolers.

**Table 3: Extent of Modified ECE services for Preschoolers with Visual Impairment**

S/N	Items Statement	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	Dec.
9.	E.C.E services are very adequately modified for preschoolers with visual impairment.	1500	1.17	0.21	D
10.	E.C.E services are adequately modified for preschoolers with visual impairment.	1500	1.03	0.33	D
11.	E.C.E services are modified for preschoolers with visual impairment.	1500	2.20	0.24	D
12.	E.C.E services are not modified for preschoolers with visual impairment.	1500	4.51	0.12	A

In Table 3, items 9 and 10 obtained mean scores of 1.07 and 1.03 respectively. These results showed that respondents disagreed with very adequate and even adequate modified E.C.E services for the preschoolers who are visually impaired. Items II had mean scores of 2.20 with SD of 0.24. The respondents disagreed with the statement that mentioned modification of E.C.E services. Item 12 had mean score of 4.51 with standard deviation of 0.12. This result showed that E.C.E services were not modified for preschoolers who are visually impaired.

## DISCUSSION

The findings showcased in Table 1 demonstrated that teachers in public schools are aware of Early Childhood Education E.C.E. No wonder, Federal Government of Nigeria (2007) approved linkage of E.C.E in all public primary schools in Nigeria. They are also aware of children with special needs such as children with visual impairment. They acknowledged the types of visual impairment such as the blind, partially sighted and those with low vision. That shows that they may not be scared if preschoolers with visual impairment are found in Day care/crèche, pre-Nursery and nursery as categorized by FGN (2009).

In Table 2, all the ECE services due for the preschoolers are acknowledged by the respondents. These services are covered in training package for the caregivers as enlisted by NCCE (as cited in FCN, 2009) which are assisting child to develop good eating and social habit ... The FRN (2013) noted that the purpose of E.C.E include teaching rudiments of numbers, developing sense of co-operation among others.

In Table 3, there was a surprise result that out of the foregoing E.C.E services none is modified for the preschoolers with visual impairment. This means that children with visual impairment do not benefit from E.C.E services. Another interpretation could be that children with visual impairment might not be found in any of the preschool arrangement. Worse still, even if they are found they cannot benefit. This shows that the aims of special education put up by F.R.N (2013) are not relevant to persons with visual impairment. FRN stated that all persons should have access to education in inclusive setting, equal education opportunities for all persons and provision of adequate education for all persons with special needs.

Osanyin (2002) stated that the future of any nation depends on how well children are groomed for adult life. What is the future of children with visual impairment? FRN's (2013) idea of smooth transition from home to school is not for children who are visually impaired going by present development. Moreover, Ojiabor (2007) reiterated that the need to provide IECD policy was as a result of government's resolve to pay special attention to that area of



human development since it is the foundation upon which other developmental stage rested. He added that early childhood education is essential for Nigeria children to thrive and develop to their fullest potential. If every child in Integrated Early Children Education (IECE) has needs, every child (there) with visual impairment has special needs and demands more attention and services. This is saying the obvious hence FRN (2013) stated that persons with special needs shall be provided with inclusive education services in schools which normal persons attend.

One is wont to reflect on potentialities of children with visual impairment in this type of society where they are relegated. It has been stated and reiterated that disability does not mean absence of ability hence there is ability in disability.

## CONCLUSION

From this study there is belief that regular teachers in public primary schools where E.C.E are linked are aware of children with visual impairment. They are abreast of desirable services that should be accorded those children under five years in the preschools. The teachers admitted that no services or even modified services of E.C.E for persons with visual impairment. There is belief as deduced from this study that none of the children in E.C.E programme are visually impaired and even if they are there they cannot benefit.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study and conclusion drawn from the study the following recommendations are made in view of educational implications:

1. The parents and guardians of children with visual impairment should be encouraged through media by the government to allow their children and wards with visual impairment to register with E.C.E programme.
2. There should be public awareness campaign by Ministries of Education and Information on IECDE which embrace all children including those with visual impairment.
3. Colleges of Education and Institute/Faculty of Education of Nigeria Universities should start programme where the caregivers should be trained. The trainees should be equipped by the trainers on methods of imparting subject matter of E.C.E even for the preschoolers with visual impairment upon modification.
4. The Federal Government should institute National body or Ministry to take care of early childhood education in Nigeria and have representatives in states and LGAs with emphasis on inclusivity.
5. The Federal Government and Federal Ministry of Education should provide quality assurance and monitoring to ensure standard practice of E.C.E for persons with special needs especially children with visual impairment in IECDE.
6. Special educators and those in allied profession should become advocates of their field, influence made policies to a successful end hence passivity on the policy implementation cannot work.
7. Policy on paper alone, lip services by the leaders should be influenced by active participation of professionals that have something to do with patrons with visual impairment by trying to have law backing up policies.

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