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COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CURRICULUM IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN RURAL AREAS OF OGUN STATE NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *Early years are remarkable period of growth and development in the lives of children. Early Childhood Education (ECE) is therefore an important educational activity geared towards giving early positive experiences to children. In achieving this, Curriculum of Early Childhood Education becomes a key factor. It is however worrisome that the implementation of this curriculum in Nigerian pre-primary school is too low despite its importance. This study was therefore conducted to compare ECE curriculum implementation in private and public schools in the rural areas of Ogun State, Nigeria. Multi stage sampling technique was used to select 240 educational instructors as the sample size for this study. Data were collected with the aid of questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics, chi-square, and t-test. Result of the study showed that majority (66.6%) of the respondents was between 21 – 40 years and the mean age was 36.6 years. Most (91.2%) of the respondents were female, married (78.8%), and had National Certificate in Education (48.8%) and Bachelor of Education (16.7%). The mean year of teaching experience was 12.4years. Most schools in the study area has teacher-pupil ratio of 1:35. Old curriculum was available (94.2%) and always used (78.8%) for teaching. Also, English Language (79.6%) constituted major means of communication and teaching of the children. Results of chi-square showed that significant association existed between ECE availability and ECE curriculum implementation in public and private schools ($\chi^2 = 13.86$, $df = 3$, $p = 0.03$) at $p < 0.05$ level. t-test analysis revealed that significant difference existed in the ECE curriculum implementation in private and public primary schools ($t = 15.2$, $p = 0.00$). The study established that implementation of ECE curriculum was generally low as most schools especially public primary schools lack basic school facilities and instructional materials and had no current edition of ECE curriculum. The study recommends that instructional materials should be adequately provided by the government, school management, individual proprietors and other stakeholders in the education sector, and Ministry of Education should ensure that new curriculum is in circulation and encourage its utilization for teaching in the study area.*

KEYWORDS: Implementation, Early Childhood Education, Curriculum, Public, Private Schools

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INTRODUCTION

Education is increasingly attracting more attention all over the world as the bedrock of national development and the provision of adequate care and stimulation for the child's development right from birth is now recognized as the best way to guarantee a good start in life. Early childhood education is very important for the development of young children before they enter formal school (Kaul, 2002). It helps in cognitive development of children at the early stage of primary education and it has strong bearing on attendance and participation of children once they enter primary school. It is considered to be very important for the child as it is the first step towards entering the world of knowledge as well as a healthy and purposeful life. This education system helps children become more independent and confident as well as promoting the all-round development of the children (Ramchandran, 2003). Research reports have confirmed that children from conception to six years of age undergo radical mental and physical development. In addition, those children, if given good care during early childhood, are more likely to benefit from later education and other social services, and become more productive, healthy, and law abiding citizens (Ogunsaju, 2006). In spite of the benefits of the ECE, it is glaring that the implementation of ECE Curriculum is still affected by many challenges both at early childhood/ pre-primary school level and up to the tertiary level. These challenges relate to professional qualification of caregivers/teachers, resources, early childhood curriculum, professional development training, staff-child ratio and funding. There is no doubt that the implementation of Early Childhood Education requires the collaborative effort of all stakeholders, including the government, parents/guardians, and school authorities. While the government is expected to provide necessary teaching and learning resources, the availability of relevant curriculum in primary schools and its implementation is very paramount to the pre-primary educational delivery and development there are so many ill-equipped, sub-standard kindergarten and nursery institutions scattered all over the urban centers and some in the rural centres of Nigeria. Standards or quality is an anathema to most of these early childhood education institutions. The effect of poor infrastructure and non-implementation of early childhood education up to the recommended have resulted to degeneration and declining in educational standard from primary, secondary and tertiary level and even the obvious low academic performance of students in the national examinations such as WAEC, NECO and JAMB. Implementation of the early childhood education curriculum is therefore a necessary intervention for the success of primary education and entire education sector in Nigeria.

There is no doubt that the implementation of Early Childhood Education requires the collaborative effort of all stakeholders, including the government, parents/guardians, and school authorities. While the government is expected to provide necessary teaching and learning resources, the availability of relevant curriculum in primary schools and its implementation is very paramount to the pre-primary educational delivery and development. It is worth noting that there are scanty researches and literature on curriculum implementation in rural areas of Ogun State despite the high number of primary schools provided by the government and individuals in these areas. This study therefore finds it very important to bridge this gap with the ultimate aim of promoting Early Childhood Education by establishing the status of curriculum implementation in the state through fact and findings and proffer possible way out. Based on this background, the broad objective of this study is to compare ECE curriculum implementation in private and public schools in the rural areas of Ogun State, Nigeria.

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Specific objectives are to:

i. assess quality and quantity of personnel, that is, teacher-pupil ratio in the study area

ii. examine adequacy of instructional materials in the study area

iii. ascertain availability of pre-primary curriculum in the primary schools in the study area

iv. assess the prevailing methods of communication between the teachers and pupils in the study area

v. compare the expected curriculum with the one available in the private and public primary schools in the study area

Hypotheses of the study are:

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between teachers' qualification and staff strength and ECE curriculum implementation in public and private schools in the study area

H_{02}: There is no significant difference between ECE curriculum implementation in private and public primary schools in the study area

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Description of study area

This study was carried out Ogun State, Nigeria. The state is situated among the Southwestern states of Nigeria, with a landmass of 16,409.26 square kilometers. The study area has 20 Local Government Areas, with a total of 4,054,272 (National Population Commission (NPC), 2006). Ogun State is heterogeneous state, inhabited predominantly by the Egba, Yewa, Ijebu, Remo, Awori and Egun who belong to the Yoruba ethnic group on the Africa Continent. The estimated population of males in Ogun State is 1,847,243 while the population of female is 1,880,855 according to Nigeria Population Census final population release (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2009). The state is approximately covering 1.9 percent (i.e. 16,762km^2) of Nigeria 923,219km^2 land areas. The State has bimodal rainfall pattern which reaches its peak in July and September and it comprises of mostly agrarian communities which engage in farming activities for both males and females, in cash crops and food crops in order to meet the livelihood needs of the farmer, in addition to earning foreign exchange. Most of the crops grown in Ogun State include cassava, rice, maize, melon, cotton, cocoyam, cocoa, yam, and cowpea. The emphasis on traditional agriculture in Ogun State is more on crops, while the livestock raised is supplementary.

Multistage sampling technique and sample size

In stage 1, simple random sampling technique was used to select 1 Local Government Area (LGA) from each Z.E.O. listing zone. This gave rise to 3 LGAs namely, Yewa North, Odeda and Ikenne selected for this study. Stage 2, stratified sampling technique was used to select 6 private and 6 public primary schools from each of the selected LGAs making 36 primary schools. Purposive sampling technique was used in stage 3 to select 5 teachers that are in

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charge of early childhood classes from each school and 8 head teachers/assistants from each LGAs, making a total of 216 teachers and 24 head teachers/assistants selected. This gave a total of 240 educational instructors as the sample size for this study.

Validity and Reliability test

The instrument used for the data collection was subjected to face and content validity by consulting experts in the field of early childhood education studies. Test re-test was carried out at interval of two weeks with thirty teachers (30) in charge of early childhood education who are not part of this study to ascertain the reliability of the instrument. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to estimate reliability coefficient. The result of 0.75 and above is termed reliable for the instrument.

Measurement of variables

Age of teachers, household size and number of pupils in each classroom were measured at ratio level while gender, qualification status, ethnicity, religion, adequacy of instructional materials and availability were measured at nominal level. Resources and school facilities, and rate of inspectorate visit to the primary schools were measured at ratio level. Challenges facing full implementation of pre-primary curriculum were measured on a 3-point rating scale as Very serious (3), Serious (2) and Not serious (1). The aggregate scores were estimated while the average score and standard deviation was calculated. Values above mean score were termed as serious challenge while values below mean score were not a challenge.

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, mean and standard deviation were used for the objectives while inferential statistics such as chi-square, t-test were used to test the hypotheses of the study

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Personal characteristics of the respondents

Teacher is an important component of a school system through which knowledge is transmitted to the learners for positive change in behaviour and human development. Fullan (2001) emphasizes the importance of the teacher as a central change agent, as the teacher is the one who is primarily responsible for the successful implementation of a new curriculum. The result in Table 1 showed that majority (66.6%) of the respondents were between 21 – 40 years of age while only very few (3.3%) were below 20 years of age. Meanwhile, thirty percent of the respondents were above 40 years of age. The average age of the respondents was 36.6 years. Also, most (91.2%) of the respondents were female which indicates the dominance of female in teaching profession. Women are charged with the responsibility of caring and nurturing young children, provision of right nutrition and health care at a tender age (Markauskate, 2006 cited in Koech *et al*. 2016). Most of the respondents had National Certificate in Education (48.8%) and Bachelor of Education (16.7%). This implies that the respondents had a prerequisite qualification for the teaching job. This finding against the assertion of Ibhaze (2016) that in Nigerian early childhood institutions the teacher quality is general low. However, only few had OND (7.1%), HND (5.0%) and BSc (8.3%). These are

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the graduates employed to augment the inadequate seasoned teachers on early childhood in both public and private schools. Oyewumi *et al*. (2010) have reported that only very rich schools can afford to engage the services of University graduates and holders of Nigerian Certificate in Education qualifications. This could form the basis of having lesser proportion of B.Ed and BSc holders when compare to the NCE holders in the pre-primary schools. Majority (78.8%) of the respondents were married while 18.8% were single. Marriage will confer some level of responsibilities on the teachers and they will also be committed to the work and showed caring to children. Result showed that thirty-five percent of the respondents have spent less than 5 years, 16.2% spent 6 – 10 years, and 14.2% spent 11 – 15 years in teaching profession. However, many (34.6%) of the respondents have engaged in teaching for more than 15 years. The mean year of teaching experience was 12.4 years. This is an indication that the respondents have been in teaching profession for quite a long time and they have acquired wealth of experience over time. Results indicated that 36.7% of the respondents had 1 – 35 pupils in their class while 24.6% had 1 – 20 pupils. It shows that the teacher-pupils ratio is moderate. Pupil/teacher ratios are often regarded as measures of school quality (Onyango, 2015). The pupil/teacher ratio is an indicator for planning and implementation of ECE. A low pupil/teacher ratio gives a pupil a better chance of getting closer to the teacher hence better (quality) teaching or learning process is achieved. However, a lower pupil/teacher ratio has cost implication as it increases the unit cost of education, since teachers' salaries and benefits constitute a large proportion of the total cost of schooling. The pupil teacher ratio gives an indication of the utilization of teachers as to whether teachers are over-utilized or underutilized in a school system. This implies that teachers are not over-utilized in the study area. But, Tassoni *et al*. (2005) canvassed for a ratio 1:4 for ages 0 – 3 and ratio 1:8 for ages 4 – 6 as providing opportunities for adequate individual attention to every child in the class and contributing to optimal development of the children. Areas of specialization of the respondents were Primary Education Studies (48.3%), Early Childhood Education (16.2%), Arts and Humanity (16.2%) and Science related course (10.0%). The class taught were KG I (54.2%) and KG II (30.8%). This is possible because the study focused on children between 0 – 5 years of age. Area of specialization of the respondents is line with the learning requirement for this category of pupils. According to Morrison *et al*. (2005) cited in Onyango (2015) the teacher's pedagogy, classroom management strategies, and interactions with students at classroom level can determine how much is learned.

Table 1: Distribution based on personal characteristics of the respondents (n = 240)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Std. Dev.
Age (yrs.)				
Less than 20	08	3.3		
21 – 30	85	35.4		
31 – 40	75	31.2	36.6	10.5
Above 40	72	30.0		
Gender				
Male	21	8.8		
Female	219	91.2		
Educational qualification				
SSCE	34	14.2		
NCE	117	48.8		
OND	17	7.1		
HND	12	5.0		

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BSc	20	8.3		
B.Ed	40	16.7		
Marital status				
Single	45	18.8		
Married	189	78.8		
Widowed/divorced	06	2.4		
Teaching experience (yrs.)				
Less than 5	84	35.0		
6 – 10	39	16.2		
11 – 15	34	14.2	12.4	8.9
Above 15	83	34.6		
Teacher pupils ratio				
1 – 15	51	21.2		
1 – 20	59	24.6		
1 – 35	88	36.7		
Above 35	42	17.5		
Area of specialization				
Primary Education Studies	116	48.3		
Early Childhood Education	39	16.2		
Arts and Humanity	39	16.2		
Science related course	24	10.0		
Vocational/Technical	22	9.2		
Class taught				
KG1	130	54.2		
KGII	74	30.8		
Nursery 1	19	7.9		
Nursery 2	17	7.1		

Source: Field survey, 2017

Availability and adequacy of instructional materials

Teaching and learning materials are critical ingredients in learning, and the ECE cannot be easily implemented without them. For curriculum to be fully implemented as per plan, schools should be supplied with adequate materials such as textbooks, teaching aids and stationery in order to enable teachers and learners to play their role satisfactorily in the curriculum implementation process (Ball and Cohen, 1996 cited in Onyango, 2015). Materials used by the teachers are important because they help teachers prepare schemes of work and lesson notes which guide them in the course of teaching. They include the syllabi, the teachers' guides, chalkboard, maps, globe, flash cards, cut-outs, plasticizes, charts and pictures among others. According to most of the respondents the instructional materials that are currently available for use in the schools are posters and charts (87.5%), balls and blocks (75.4%), paint/crayon (77.5%), funnels, spoons (75.8%), nursery books (77.1%), pair of scissors (66.7%), television and CD player (52.9%), and toys (59.6%). However, all the instructional materials were inadequate (53.8%) despite the fact that teacher is the central organizer of learning process; hence the teacher's use of instructional materials is paramount. The best way of organizing teaching and learning is to use a variety of instructional methods. Wolery (2005) explained that children learn well through a variety of materials and toys. These materials help in sustaining interest and attention of young children. Photographs and

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posters are necessary since visual learning is critical for young learners to handle and manipulate as they learn well by doing using their senses (Cheruiyot and Kosgei, 2008).

Table 2: Distribution based on availability and adequacy of instructional materials (n=240)

Instructional materials	Availability		Adequacy		
	Available	Not available	Very adequate	Adequate	Inadequate
Marker board	132(55.0)	108(45.0)	35(14.6)	76(31.7)	129(53.8)
Posters and Charts of numbers, letters, shapes	210(87.5)	30(12.5)	63(26.2)	31(12.9)	146(60.8)
Balls, blocks, counters	181(75.4)	59(24.6)	75(31.2)	56(23.3)	109(45.4)
Tape player	104(43.3)	136(56.7)	41(17.1)	95(3.6)	104(43.3)
Pair of scissors	160(66.7)	80(33.3)	50(20.8)	81(33.8)	109(45.4)
Toys	143(59.6)	97(40.4)	53(22.1)	76(31.7)	111(46.2)
Corners (nature, science, etc)	149(62.1)	91(37.9)	55(22.9)	83(34.6)	102(42.6)
Television and CD player	127(52.9)	113(47.1)	67(27.9)	89(37.1)	84(35.0)
Nursery books	185(77.1)	55(22.9)	95(39.6)	50 (20.8)	95(39.6)
Sand pit/tray	130(54.2)	110(45.8)	50(20.8)	86(35.8)	104(43.3)
Paint/crayon	186(77.5)	54(22.5)	71(29.6)	48(20.0)	121(50.4)
Funnels, spoons, cups	182(75.8)	58(24.2)	71(29.6)	47(19.6)	122(50.8)

Source: Field survey, 2017

Values in parenthesis in percentages

Availability and Utilization of Pre-primary curriculum

Instruction related factors have been identified as influencing the process of curriculum implementation and the learning environment (Wasiche, 2006). So, it is very crucial that instructional materials are available and adequate in the primary schools in the study area. According to National Centre on Quality Teaching and Learning (NCQTL) (2012), ECE curriculum is an important written plan that includes goals for children's development and learning, experiences through which they will achieve the goals, what staff and parents do to help children achieve goals and materials needed to support the implementation of the curriculum. It is an indispensable material in implementing of ECE programme in Nigeria. Almost all the respondents reported that old curriculum was available (94.2%) and always utilized (78.8%) for teaching in the study area. Meanwhile, the new curriculum was not made available and as such it has never been used for teaching in the in study area. The finding of this study is in line with that of Amali *et al*. (2012) and Okewole *et al*. (2013) that almost all pre-primary schools in Nigeria have no ECE curriculum since it was launched in 2007.

Table 3: Distribution based on availability and utilization of Pre-primary curriculum (n=240)

Pre-primary curriculum	Availability		Utilization		
	Available	Not available	Always	Occasionally	Never
Old	226(94.2)	14(5.8)	189(78.8)	51(21.2)	0(0.0)
New	05(2.1)	235(97.9)	0(0.0)	09(3.7)	231(96.3)

Source: Field survey, 2017; Values in parenthesis in percentages

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Methods of communication between teaching and pupils

Communication is a vehicle for teaching and learning process in the classrooms. Knowledge and skills are transferred to the pupils through a proper and effective communication system. Results in Table 4 revealed that English Language (79.6%) was predominantly used by the respondents for teaching in the study area. This development is contrary to the guidelines and recommendations in the ECE that indigenous Language should be used. But, 23.8% reported that they always used Yoruba Language for effective communication in the Kinder Girtin classes. This study considers Yoruba Language as the mother tongue being the dominant Language in Southwest, Nigeria. This result is in tandem with findings of similar research conducted in another African country (rural areas of Kenya) that most teachers do not use the recommended medium of instruction (mother tongue) in ECDE centres, which inhibits implementation of ECDE Curriculum (Republic of Kenya, 2008). Result further showed that Hausa (96.7%) and Igbo (86.2%) Languages were never used in the study area. This may not be unconnected with the fact that the research was conducted in the Yoruba speaking region.

Table 4: Methods of communication between teaching and pupils (n = 240)

Means of communication	Always	Occasionally	Never
Mother tongue (Yoruba)	57 (23.8)	173 (72.1)	10 (4.2)
English Language	191 (79.6)	38 (15.8)	11 (4.6)
Igbo	04 (1.7)	29 (12.1)	207(86.2)
Hausa	0 (0.0)	08 (3.3)	232 (96.7)

Source: Field survey, 2017

Values in parenthesis in percentages

Expected curriculum

Result in Table 5 showed that old edition of ECE was found in use in the private school (50.8) and public school (49.2%). Only very few (2.4%) of private schools used current edition (6th edition). These responses support the findings of Kibera and Kimokoti, (2007) in Onyango (2015) who also reported that most of the privately owned institutions are financed by their proprietors and as such looked for the curriculum.

Table 5: Distribution based on expected curriculum (n = 240)

Expected curriculum	Private School		Public School	
	Used	Not used	Used	Not used
Old edition (4th edition)	120(50.8)	0(0.0)	118(49.2)	02(0.8)
Current edition (6th Edition)	06(2.4)	114(47.6)	(0.0)	120(50.0)

Source: Field survey, 2017

Values in parenthesis in percentages

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Hypotheses testing

Association between respondent's personal characteristics and ECE curriculum implementation in public and private schools

The results of chi-square analysis in Table 6 showed that age (χ^2 = 17.42, df = 8, p = 0.03), educational qualification (χ^2 = 30.85, df = 10, p = 0.01), teaching experience (χ^2 = 12.95, df = 6, p = 0.04), teacher pupils ratio (χ^2 = 20.35, df = 6, p = 0.02) and area of specialization (χ^2 = 25.49, df = 2, p = 0.00) were significant to ECE curriculum implementation at $p < 0.05$ level of significance. Gender (χ^2 = 0.52, df = 2, p = 0.77) and class taught (χ^2 = 3.27, df = 6, p = 0.77) were not significant to ECE curriculum implementation at $p < 0.05$ level of significance. This implies that significant relationships existed between personal characteristics of the respondents and ECE curriculum implementation since these form indispensable resources in the school system. Personal characteristics variables such as age, educational qualification, teaching experience, teacher-pupils ratio, and area of specialization have influence on ECE curriculum implementation in public and private schools. Therefore, the null hypothesis that *"personal characteristics of the respondents have no significant association with ECE curriculum implementation in public and private schools"* is rejected.

Table 6: Association between respondent's personal characteristics and ECE curriculum implementation in public and private schools

Variables	χ^2	df	p-value	Decision
Age	17.42	8	0.03	S
Gender	0.52	2	0.77	NS
Educational qualification	30.85	10	0.01	S
Marital status	9.43	6	0.15	NS
Teaching experience (yrs.)	12.94	6	0.04	S
Teacher pupils ratio	20.35	6	0.02	S
Area of specialization	25.49	8	0.00	S
Class taught	3.27	6	0.77	NS

Source: Field survey, 2017

Significant at $p < 0.05$ level of significance

df – degree of freedom

Difference between ECE curriculum implementation in private and public primary schools

Results of the t-test showed that there was significant difference in the ECE curriculum implementation in private and public primary schools (t = 15.2, p = 0.00). It implies that ECE curriculum implementation in private and public primary schools are different. The differences in ECE implementation in private and public primary schools is attributed to variation in funding as most private schools invested much funds in providing instructional materials and school facilities. Therefore, the null hypothesis that "*there no is significant difference in ECE curriculum implementation in private and public primary schools*" is accepted.

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Table 7: t-test result of significant difference between ECE curriculum implementation in private and public primary schools

Variables	Sample size	df	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Mean Error	Mean diff.	t	p-value	Decision
Public	120	199	0.49	0.50	0.03	0.49	15.2	0.00	S
Private	120	199	0.00	0.00	0.00				

Source: Field survey, 2017

Significant at $p < 0.05$ level of significance

df – degree of freedom

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, this study established that:

Majority of the respondents were between 21 – 40 years of age, female, married, and had National Certificate in Education and Bachelor of Education with average teaching experience of 12.4 years. Teacher-pupil ratio was 1:35. Areas of specialization were Primary Education Studies, Early Childhood Education and Arts and Humanity. The instructional materials that are currently available in the schools are posters and charts, balls and blocks, paint/crayon, funnels, spoons, nursery books, pair of scissors, television and CD player, and toys. But, all the instructional materials were grossly inadequate. Old curriculum was available and always utilized for teaching in the study area. English Language was predominantly used by the respondents for teaching in the study area and this practice violated the use of mother tongue as written in ECE curriculum. Hypotheses test indicated that personal characteristics of the respondents have significant association with ECE curriculum implementation in public and private schools. Also, there was significant difference in the ECE curriculum implementation in private and public primary schools in the study area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made based on the outcomes of this study:

1. Instructional materials should be adequately provided by the government, school management, individual proprietors and other stakeholders in the education sector.
2. Ministry of Education should ensure that new curriculum is in circulation and encourage its utilization for teaching in the study area.
3. Teachers and parents should be sensitized and encouraged to value Yoruba Language (mother tongue) as the only right medium of instruction to be used in ECE to facilitate rapid learning and development of the children.

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