

ASSESSMENT OF THE MINIMUM STANDARD POLICY COMPLIANCE RATE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE EDUCATION IN THE TWO IKA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS OF DELTA STATE.

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Abstract

Children are the most tangible assets of any Nation as they are the future and hope for their nation. In realizing this, the Federal Government of Nigeria in the National Policy on Education stipulated that ECCE will be given all necessary attention to realize the defined goals. Therefore, this study focused on assessing the compliance rate in five major cohorts of the National Minimum Standard Policy on ECCE in two selected Local Government Areas in Delta State. Twenty-three public ECCE Centres in existing Primary Schools were purposively selected from the two Local Government Areas. The Minimum Standards Policy

Compliance checklist for Early Childhood Education was used to collect data from the different ECCE centres. The collected data was analyzed using descriptive analysis. The results indicated a moderate compliance rate on staff qualification and supervision. The study revealed a very poor compliance rate on record keeping and Instructional materials. Though 20 schools claimed to have some of the required Instructional materials, these materials were not sighted. Based on these findings, it was recommended that the government be more committed to implementing the stipulated Policy, particularly in public schools.

Keywords: Assessment, Minimum Standard, Education, Early Childhood and Policy.

Introduction

Education all over the World is considered as a strong weapon of change, the bedrock of National Development and an instrument for social reconstruction (Alade, 2006). It is the sum of all processes of learning from cradle to death. A solid foundation in Education equips the child for future challenges in life. Early Childhood Education is the bedrock of knowledge acquisition; as such, it becomes imperative that the appropriate information or idea is supplied to the child early in life to ensure that they will be able to cope with life challenges.

Early Childhood Education is the education given to the child during the earliest phase of childhood, which begins from birth (0 years) to the period before entry into primary school. It includes a variety of formal or non-formal programmes that vary in names, applications, designs, provisions, accessibility, and quality. Early Childhood education is called by words such as Infant school, Daycare, Crèches, material school, kindergarten etc. It is generally recognised as an Early Childhood Programme with different nomenclatures such as Early Child Care (ECE), Early Childhood Education (ECE), Early Child Development (ECD), Early Child Care Development (ECCD), Early Child Care Education (ECCE), and Early Child Care Development and Education (ECCDE).

Ajayi (2008) opined that the years between birth and age five are the foundation for successful lives. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO

2006) noted that Early Childhood Education helps build the psychological foundation for children to undertake abstract learning later in Primary school.

Policies and objectives guide early childhood education in most parts of the world. Nigeria is not left out. The goals of ECCDE, as stipulated in the National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004), are:

- Effect a smooth transition from the home to the school;
- Prepare the child for the primary level of education;
- Provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work (on the farms, in the market, in offices etc);
- Inculcate social norms;
- Inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through exploring nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys etc.
- Develop a sense of co-operation and team spirit;
- Learn good habits, especially good health habits; and
- Teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms, etc through play.

These objectives are meant to lay a solid foundation for building other subsequent levels of education. The Government also came up with a policy on the Minimum Standards of what should be on the ground and operational in an ECCE Centre (NERDC, 2004). The concern of stakeholders is not just a Nation's Minimum Standard policy but what is the compliance rate after some years. Some of the concerns bother on.

- Government contributing towards the attainment of the goals of ECCDE and the Minimum Standard
- Adequacy of the facilities in the ECCE Centres for effective implementation of ECCDE policy
- Qualification of the teachers/caregivers to implement the ECCDE Curriculum.

There is a paucity of literature and few studies in Nigeria on the Minimum Standard compliance rate. However, Chenube et al. (2012) studied some ECCE centres in Delta State on the availability of learning materials and toys. They found that most of the centres they studied did not have adequate learning materials. Also, Ariyibi (2015) conducted a similar study on the compliance rate on the Minimum Standard in Lagos State Education District 5. In some thematic areas, she found a moderate compliance rate on the ECCE Minimum Standard. Therefore, the outcome of this study will boost the literature for further research.

Objectives of the study

This study investigated the rate of compliance in some major thematic areas of the Minimum Standard:

- Availability of Instructional materials in
- Government Involvement in ECCE Centres
- Qualification for caregivers of staff

- Rate of Supervision
- Record keeping

Research Questions

Based on the objectives of the study, the following research questions guided the study:

1. Are appropriate records being kept in the centres?
2. Do available instructional materials meet the recommended standards?
3. What is the level of Government's involvement in meeting up with set standards?
4. Are there enough qualified teachers and caregivers in the centres?
5. To what extent are the centres supervised in Compliance with the minimum standards?

Methods

This study is a survey in two Local Government Areas of Delta State: Ika South and Ika North East. ECCE centres run by the Government are established in existing public primary schools across the State; 23 ECCE Centres were purposively selected from the 2 LGA for the study; 12 from Ika Northeast and 11 from Ika South. This sampling technique was used because its sample subjects fit the current research. The instrument used for data collection is the Minimum Standards Policy Compliance Checklist (IECD-MSPCC) for Early Childhood Care and Education. The instrument was developed by the Early Childhood Education Development and Training Institute (ECDTI) in collaboration with UNICEF. The study focused on five thematic areas of the instrument. The sections are on: Records, Instructional Materials, Government Involvement, Basic Qualifications for Staff, which is a minimum of NCE Certificate, especially those that read ECCE and Rate of Internal /External Supervision. It also showed the compliance rating: High Compliance, Average /Low Compliance, and No Compliance on Records and Instructional Materials, the researcher indicated whether the listed materials were Sighted, Claimed but Not Sighted, Not Sighted Not Claimed. The researcher stated items in other subsections with Evident, Evident but Inadequate and Not Evident. The researcher worked with one research expert and assistant to collect data. The expert had worked on a similar project, so the expertise was brought on board while the research assistant was trained on using observation and questioning skills to obtain data for some days. Data was obtained from teachers and caregivers in the various centres. The data collected were analysed using a descriptive statistical tool to get the percentage of responses from respondents.

Results

Table 1

Level and Types of Records Kept by Centres

Records	Ika North LGA	Ika South LGA	Total
Not sighted, not claimed	9(75%)	6(54.5%)	15(65.2%)
Claimed, not sighted	3(25%)	5(45.5%)	8(34.8%)
Total	12(100%)	11(100%)	23(100%)

Table 1 shows that 8 (34.8%) of the 23 centres claimed to have records but were not sighted, three of which are in Ika North-East while the remaining five are in Ika South. The remaining 15 (65.2%) institutes did not have any sighted or claimed records – nine of which areas in Ika North and six in Ika South LGA.

Table 2

Level of Availability of Instructional Materials in The Centres

Instructional Materials	Ika North LGA	Ika South LGA	Total
Not sighted, not claimed	2 (16.7%)	1 (9.1%)	3 (13%)
Claimed, not sighted	10 (83.3%)	10 (90.9%)	20 (87%)
Total	12 (100%)	11 (100%)	23 (100%)

Table 2 shows that 20 (87.0%) out of the twenty-three institutes surveyed claimed to have instructional materials, but these were not sighted. Ten of these are in Ika North and another ten in Ika South. Also, the remaining 23(13.0%) institutes did not have any sighted or claimed instructional materials, two of which are in Ika North and 1 in Ika South LGA.

Table 3

Level of Government in Meeting with Set Standards in The Centres

Government Involvement	Ika North LGA	Ike South LGA	Total
Not done at all	4(33.3%)	3(27.3%)	7(30.4%)
Done, but not adequate	6(50%)	3(27.3%)	9(39.1%)
Done adequate	2(16.7%)	5(45.5%)	7(30.4%)
Total	12(100%)	11(100%)	23(100%)

Table 3 shows that government involvement was adequately done in only 7(30.4%) out of 23 institutes surveyed, 2 of which are Ika North East LGA, while the remaining five are in Ika South LGA. Also, those done in 9(39.1%) other institutes were regarded as being inadequate six are in Ika North, while three are in Ika South LGA. However, governmental involvement was not done at all in the remaining 7(30.4%) institutes, four of which are in Ika North and 3 in Ika South LGA.

Table 4

Level of Teachers / Caregivers Qualifications

Basic Qualification for Caregivers/Teachers	Ika North LGA	Ike South LGA	Total
Minimally qualified	4(33.3%)	7(63.6%)	11(47.8%)
Amplly qualified	8(66.7%)	4(36.4%)	12(52.2%)
Total	12(100%)	11(100%)	23(100%)

Table 4 shows that caregivers in 12(52.2%) out of the 23 institutes surveyed are amply qualified; 8 are in Ika Northeast, while four are in Ika South LGA. Also, caregivers in the remaining 11(47.8%) institutes surveyed are only minimally qualified; four are in Ika North, while the other seven are in Ika South LGA.

Table 5

Qualifications of Other Staff in The ECCE Centers

Qualification	Ika North LGA	Ike South LGA	Total
Not qualified	2(16.7%)	5(45.5%)	7(30.4%)
Minimally qualified	3(25%)	0(0%)	3(13%)
Amply qualified	7(58.3%)	6(54.5%)	13(56.5%)
Total	12(100%)	11(100%)	23(100%)

Table 5 shows that other categories of staff in most surveyed institutes, about 13 (56.5%) out of the 23 centres, are amply qualified; seven are in Ika North while six are in Ika South LGA. Only 3 (13.0%) have minimally qualified staff, all three institutes. However, about 7(30.4%) of the surveyed centres have "other staff" that are not qualified; two are in Ika North, while the remaining five are in Ika South LGA.

Table 6

The extent of Supervision of ECCE Centers

Supervision	Ika North LGA	Ike South LGA	Total
Done, but no adequate	2(16.7%)	1(9.1%)	3(13%)
Done	10(83.3%)	10(90.9%)	20(87%)
Total	12(100%)	11(100%)	23(100%)

Table 6 shows that supervision (both internal and external) was done in all 23 surveyed institutes. The result indicates that the supervision carried out in all 23 surveyed institutes was not adequately done in 3(13.0%) institutes; 2 are in Ika North, while one is in Ika South. However, it was adequately carried out in the remaining 20(87.0%) institutes, ten in each area in Ika Northeast and Ika South LGAs.

Discussion

The study results showed the actual compliance rate on the Minimum Standard requirement for ECCE centres in two LGAs in Delta State. Most centres have records of children's potential information and other necessary documents. The centre is expected to keep some basic documents like children's files/jackets that will have forms containing their biodata, immunisation records of children, etc. The document should serve as the child's information bank for future reference. But most Centres do not have any documented information about the children. Even those who claimed to have their records could not produce for sighting. This aligns with Ariyibi (2015) findings that 33.3% of the schools studied claimed they had records, but those records were not available for sighting.

On the issue of instructional materials, though, 20 out of the 23 schools claimed they have instructional materials but could not produce them for sightings. An ideal ECCE centre should be adorned beautifully with visual instructional materials that should be eye-catching when one enters a child's learning environment. Claiming that the materials are available and not visible might indicate that they are unavailable. This is a serious issue that should interest stakeholders in Early childhood Education. Federal Ministry of Education (FME, 2009), Chenube et al. (2012) and Ariyibi (2015) all indicated a lack of sufficient learning materials in the various ECCE centres they studied.

The result of the study indicated inadequate Government involvement in the running of the Centres. This is contrary to Ariyibi (2015) in her research of ECCE centres in Lagos Education District 5, where she found adequate Government involvement. It is clear from the result that the Government has not been actively involved in implementing the Minimum Standard Policy. The Government, both the State Government through State Universal Basic Education (SUBEB) and the Federal Government, has much to contribute to the implementation process. The Government can make provisions in the budget for basic teaching materials for the ECCE Centres, retrain the teachers and do more intensive monitoring.

Despite the deficiencies in implementing some of the thematic areas, some thematic areas of the Minimum Standard have received moderate attention. Most of the caregivers/teachers and other staff are amply qualified. The plausible explanation may be because the Government directly employ and pay staff in public schools, unlike what is prevalent in private schools. It is common knowledge in Nigeria that most private schools do not use qualified personnel in teaching. It is expected that those who teach and care for children at the ECCE level should have a minimum of NCE. For this reason, the Government, through the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), started the ECCE Programme at the NCE level in all Colleges of Education across the country. Though most of the teachers at the present ECCE centres were drawn from the pool of existing teachers in the Primary section, they need to retrain them on early years pedagogy constantly.

Finally, the result of this study showed adequate internal and external supervision of the ECCE centres. This is encouraging, but the supervision should be more result-driven. Supervising without adequate facilities will not yield any productive results.

Conclusion

The study of the two LGAs in Delta State on implementing the Minimum Standard policy in ECCE centres showed adequate policy implementation in most centres on the qualification of caregivers/teachers and the supervision. Yet there is still much to be done on record keeping, instructional materials and Government involvement.

Recommendations

The findings of this study necessitate the following recommendation

1. The Government should make adequate plans and provisions beyond policy formulation to implementation. There should be budgetary allocation to effectively provide basic facilities needed to run the ECCE centres in public schools across Delta State.
2. Supervisory agencies should be trained on indices to look out for during supervision.
3. Relevant agencies should enforce appropriate record-keeping in all ECCE Centres
4. Teachers should be trained on the improvisation of learning materials.

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