

Assessment of the Level of Implementation of Early Childhood Education Policy: The Case Study of Cross River State Child Rights Act in Obubra Local Government Area

¹Ogundare, Olusegun Godwin, PhD, ²Ahmed Hussein Oloyin

¹Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council, (NERDC) Sheda, Abuja.

²Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC)
Southeast Zonal Office (SEZO), Abakaliki, Ebonyi State.

ABSTRACT

This research was carried out to assess the level of implementation of policies regarding early childhood education in Obubra Local Government as enshrined in the Cross River State Child Rights Act Policy. A sample of 300 respondents completed the questionnaire designed for the study. The 300 teachers that participated in the study were randomly selected from 30 primary schools in Obubra Local Government Area of Cross River State. The questionnaire was designed by the researcher and was validated by administering it to neutral schools that did not participate in the study, the reliability coefficient of the instrument was found to be 0.76 using Cronbach Alpha. The questionnaire sought information on the views of respondents about the implementation of early childhood education and how parents understand the concept and government efforts towards children with special needs. Data obtained from respondents were subjected to statistical analysis using percentages and means. Results showed that respondents agree that early childhood education is necessary. It was also observed that there are inadequate facilities for children with special needs. The study also revealed that many parents are not familiar with the National Policy on Education hence they are not aware of the section that prohibits children from hawking on the street or engaging in domestic house help when they are expected to be in school learning. It was therefore recommended that government should go beyond making policies but enacting a law to make it mandatory for all children to go through early childhood education.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Policy, Cross River Child Act

Introduction

Early years learning is important in the life of every child because it has to do with foundation laid on which other subsequent learning and knowledge are built, the type of care given to children between 0 – 5 years may either make or mar their physical, emotional, cognitive and language developments. It is therefore important to examine some educational policies that relate to development of children as they grow. One of such policies is Early Childhood Care and Development Education.

Early Childhood Care and Development Education (ECCDE) is the care, protection, stimulation and learning promotion of children from ages 0 – 5 years in crèche or nursery (Federal Republic of Nigeria; (FRN 2014). Studies such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children NAEYC (1998); and Vidya (2014)] explained the significance of early childhood programme. According to these studies, early childhood provides a preparatory

platform for good take-off of primary and post-primary education which in the long run translates into learners improved performance and social learning outcomes. Early childhood education enhances a seamless academic progression from a child's home to formal school and as such prepares such a child to cope with further learning processes.

Oduolowu (2011), emphasizes the need to provide children with quality early childhood education which will enhance their motor skills, adaptive skills, language development as well as cognitive domain; therefore guaranteeing children's smooth subsequent leanings and all-round development that will make them function well in the larger society.

In addition, Early Childhood Care and Development Education is a crucial component of basic education (FRN,2014) which forms the beginning and important step towards actualising the goal of Education For All (EFA)

by 2015 (FRN, 2001). However, the goals of EFA is yet to be fully achieved; and one of the ways to actualize Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, is to intensify and advocate for relatively better and qualitative Early Childhood Care and Development Education programme in Nigeria. Oduolowu (2011) specified the significance of ECCDE in the life of young ones in terms of enhancing their critical thinking and attention skills, preparing them to read and write properly in an attempt to cope with the subsequent new atmosphere of formal schooling; higher graduation and success in future endeavours. Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) therefore, stressed that ECCDE should be seen as integral component of education policy; it is therefore, imperative for government and other relevant agencies to promote early reading literacy and consciousness among children ages 0–5.

According to Melhuish, E. et al (2014), characteristics of early year's provision and child development include:

- Adult-child relations that is quick to respond, loving and promptly ready,
- Qualified and competent caregivers who are dutiful and dedicated to children's needs,
- Facilities that are secure and hygienic and reachable to parents,
- Moderate class ratios which permit caregivers to work together properly with children,
- Early childhood care that is being provided steadily,
- Caregiver capacity building that ensures continuity, constancy, and improving quality,
- A developmentally-suitable curriculum with educational content.

The above specifies some attributes and indices that are important in raising preschool children which can translate to a functional adulthood.

Moreover, for an all-round and functional society to be achieved, education and care of young ones need to be put into special

consideration.

The perpetuity of every human society is in the regeneration of its kind. And the substance of the offspring is its constant education of the young generation. In a situation where the education of the young is neglected, the society is heading for extinction. Asuquo, (2005) opined that education in a pre-literate society were to prepare the primitive man to protect himself against physical forces, secure himself against the invisible powers, and to help him acquire group characteristics. Therefore, there is need to provide adequate education at preschool level.

In the light of this trend, the Nigerian society was not left out in the education of its young ones before the advent of western and Islamic education. This is because before the coming of Western and Islamic education in Nigeria, the educational system hitherto in vogue was a reflection of the country's history and philosophy which was based on traditional education, a fulcrum on which future educational developments began. Traditional education was practically an indigenous form of education with the goal of civilization of the young through a variety of polarised apprenticeship programme meant to equip the young people for communal life (Asuquo 2005).

It is pertinent therefore to ask, is the Nigerian society still educating its younger generation? The thrust of this academic work focused on this. The concern in this academic work is to find out if the educational system meant for children has the quality and standard that is required. Also, to look at the national policy on education regarding the Nigerian child if it is properly implemented to prepare the Nigerian child for emerging challenges. More so to find out if the educational policy which its aim is to provide free education for Nigerian child is sustainable. It is against this backdrop that this academic work wishes to examine the success recorded so far. To find out whether pre- primary education is still being observed and practiced. Are children with special needs being provided for?

It is a truism that the Nigerian society was to be egalitarian as enshrined in the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This

egalitarian nature of the nation is also captured in the National Policy on Education as revised up to 2014. The Federal government in the policy directed also that educational provisions must be made for all categories of children including the gifted, physically challenged, mentally challenged and children with learning disabilities. (Ugwu 2014). In pursuance of the need for children's education, the federal government in the policy is expected to do the following:

- To avail every child of equal education opportunities without considering their disability levels and status
- To give satisfactory education to all handicapped children and adults so that they can contribute meaningfully to national development.
- To give opportunities for exceptionally-gifted children to develop at their own pace for national interest as well as economic and technological development.

It is owing to these facts as captured in the National Policy on Education and Cross River State Child's Right Act of 2003, that this study is assessing the policy if it is being implemented or not and how to improve the present situation.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To direct this study (6) six research questions were generated.

1. How does the Child Rights Act of Cross River State succeed in providing free education for all children?
2. What is the impact of the act to indigent children in Obubra L.G.A?

Results

The results of findings are presented here.

Research question 1: How does the child right act of Ccross River state succeed in providing free education for all children?

Table 1: **Response Of Respondents On Free Education**

s/n	Item	Yes	No	Total	%
1	Do you think early childhood education should be made free?	258 (86%)	42 (14%)	300	% Yes = 86 %
2	Is the national policy on education and Cross River State child right act 2003 effective?	30 (10%)	270 (90%)	100	% No = 90%

3. What is government's position with respect to children with special needs in Obubra L.G.A?
4. To what extent do parents contribute to out-of-school children in Obubra LGA?
5. How are the children with special needs provided for in Obubra L.G.A?
6. How can early childhood education be effective in Obubra LGA?

Method

A descriptive survey design was used for this study. The target population consists of all primary school teachers in primary five in all private and public primary schools in the Obubra Local Government Area of Cross River State. Out of all the schools in the local government, 10 schools were randomly selected. From each school, 30 teachers were randomly selected to make a total of 300 respondents used for the study. A total of 165 female and 135 male teachers participated in the study. The instrument used "early childhood care and education Questionnaire" was used. This instrument was self-developed which was made up of two parts. The first part has information about respondent's bio-data which includes name of the school, type of school, sex of teacher, teacher qualification. The second part contains items related to the opinion of teachers towards the status of early childhood care and education in Obubra Local Government. This comprised 24 items using dichotomous response format of "Yes or No. The reliability index gave a value of 0.76 which was calculated using Cronbach Alpha method. The questionnaires were administered to 300 teachers sampled randomly from 30 primary schools in the local government. The instrument was retrieved and analysed using simple percentages.

Table 1 indicates that Cross River State child right act 2003 has not done much in providing free education for all children which negates what the national policy on education stipulates. This table shows that greater number (86%) of respondents agree that early childhood education should be made free for children ages

0 – 5. It also shows that larger number of respondents (90%) disagree to the opinion that components of national policy of education and Cross River State child right act which directed to provide free education for all children was effective and being implemented.

Research Question 2: What is the impact of the child right act to indigent children in Obubra LGA?

Table 2: The Responses of Respondents About The Act On Indigent Children

s/n	Item	Yes	No	total	%
1.	Is the government responsible for failure of early childhood education?	276 (92%)	24 (8%)	300	% Yes = 92%
2	Do you think street hawking, domestic house help and the likes is the best alternative for children from indigent homes?	30 (10%)	270 (90%)	300	% No = 90%

Table 2 indicates low or less impact of child right act of Cross River State on indigent children in Obubra LGA. The greater number of respondents (92%) agreed to the fact that government was responsible for the failure of early childhood education and only few (8%)

disagreed to the opinion. It also shows that greater number (90%) were against street hawking, domestic house helps as best alternative for children from indigent homes. Only few (10%) of the respondents agree that street hawking, menial jobs should be an alternative for children that are indigenes.

Research Question 3: What is the government’s position with respect to children with special needs in Obubra LGA?

Table 3: Data on Responses On Government Position On Special Need Children

s/n	Item	Yes	No	total	%
1	Does government take seriously provision for children who are gifted?	24 (8%)	276 (92%)	300	% No = 92 %
2	Is the national policy on education and Cross River State child right act 2003 cater for children with special needs?	30 (10%)	270 (90%)	300	% NO = 90%

Table 3 indicates clearly the government's position with respect to children with special needs in Obubra. 92% of the respondents agreed that government does not make provision for children who are gifted. Moreover, national policy and Cross River State Child right acts

2003 do not cater for children with special needs (90%). Greater percentage of the respondents agreed that this was ineffective. This therefore implies that government's position to take care of special need children in Obubra Local Government Area of Cross River State was ineffective and non-functional.

Research Question 4: To what extent do parents contribute to the level of out of school children in Obubra LGA?

s/n	Item	Yes	No	total	%
1	Should parents be held responsible for out of school children Obubra local government?	252 (84%)	48 (16%)	300	% Yes = 84 %
2	Are you in support of punitive measure by government on parents whose children are not in school?	246 (82%)	54 (18%)	300	% Yes = 82 %

Table 4 shows the extent of parents' contribution to out of school children in Obubra LGA of Cross River State. The greater number of respondents (84%) agreed that parents should be held responsible for their children who are presently out of school due to one reason or the

other. While only few (16%) disagreed. Also, 82% of the respondents support that government should give punishment to parents who allow their children to roam the streets, hawk on the road, or engage in all sorts of house help services while they are supposed to be in school.

Research Question 5: How are the children with special needs provided for in Obubra LGA?

Table 5: Response on provision of facilities

s/n	Item	Yes	No	total	%
1	There is provision of special facilities for children with disabilities in Obubra LGA	24 (8%)	276 (92%)	300	% No = 92%

Table 5 shows that there is no adequate provision for children with special needs in Obubra LGA. The greater number of respondents (92%) disagreed to the opinion that there are provision

for children with special needs in Obubra LGA while only few (8%) agreed to the opinion. Only 5 expressed no idea about the opinion stated.

Research Question 6: How can early childhood education be effective in Obubra LGA?

Table 6: data on corrective measure

s/n	Item	Yes	No	total	%
1	Is it necessary to enact a law to enforce early childhood education?	258 (86%)	42 (14%)	300	% Yes = 86 %
2	Do you agree to the view that early childhood education is necessary?	267 (89%)	33 (11%)	300	% Yes = 89%

Table 6 shows that greater number of respondents (86%) support enactment of law by the government to make early childhood education compulsory for all children ages 0–5. While only few (14%) disagreed with this opinion. Moreover, majority of the respondents (89%) supported that it is very good for early childhood education to be a reality and functional especially in Obubra LGA of Cross River State.

Discussion of Findings

From the result presented, greater percentage of the respondents agree that free education should be given to children ages 0 – 5, though Cross River State child right act does not adequately provide for this. It is indicated in the national policy on Education that it will fund the one – year Pre – primary education. Its operation entails the availability of basic needs of man such as food, shelter, health care, security, affection, interaction and stimulation which are

crucial for survival, development and early education (Yabo 2023). The study further revealed little or low impact on the indigent children. Greater number of the respondents were against seeing indigent children hawking on the street or engage in house help services. Many of the respondents agree that government was responsible for failure of early childhood education in Obubra Local Government Area. This may be due to inability of the government to provide adequate facilities for children ages 0 – 5 including children with special needs. This is corroborated by Yabo (2017) who agreed that much of what was desired about the provisions contained in the policy was not achieved. It was only a policy enunciation, but federal government remained inert with regards to the institutionalization of the pre-primary component of the policy. Greater number of the respondents agrees that many parents do allow their children to hawk in the streets instead of being in the school. It was also confirmed that no provision in terms of facility was made

available for early childhood education especially children with disabilities. In addition, many of the respondents suggested enactment of law as a way to ensure and sustain early childhood education in Obubra Local Government Area.

Conclusion

The study provided information that attested to the level of practice and implementation of early childhood education in Obubra Local Government is still very low. The basic components of National Policy on Education which stipulates free, fair and inclusive education for all thus reflected in the Cross River State Child Rights Act Policy but not being adequately implemented. Children with special needs and the gifted are not well catered for in the act.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that government should enact a law to make early childhood education compulsory. Parents should be properly guided on the need to make their children pass through early childhood education ages 0 -5 years. Moreover, there should be collaboration and enlightenment forum between parents and government officials to discuss why early childhood care and education is important in the life of a child. Actual needs of children with special needs should be provided for by the government. Resources and facilities should be made available. General sensitization and advocacy for general public especially Obubra Local Government Area on the need for every child to attend early childhood education should be conducted.

References

Abdurrahman, Y.M. (2011). Early Childhood Care, Development and Education (

- ECCDE); A salient but Significant Component of UBE. Niger Delta Journal of Education, 3, 1 & 2, pp 153 – 160
- Akpa, G. O., Haggai, M.P. & Maina, J.M. (Eds), 2018. The Child in the Changing World. A publication of the Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, University of Jos, Nigeria
- Asuquo, P.N & Inaja, A.E, et al (2005). Historical foundations of Education .University of Calabar press.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014). National Policy on Education (4th Edition), NERDC Press, Lagos
- Melhuish, E.et al (2014). A review of Research on the Effects of Early childhood Education and care (ECEC) on child Development. download: https://ecec.care.org/fileadmin/careproject/Publications/reports/CARE_WP4_D4_1_review_of_effects_of_ecec.pdf
- Oduoluwu, E.A. & Amosun (2011). Studies of the relationship between classroom-based sociometric variables and academic achievement of Nigerian primary school pupils in Oyo state. Journal of Early childhood Association of Nigeria (ECAN). Special Edition. Vol 3, No 1, 60 -70
- Ugwu, F.A. (2004). Introduction to special Education: a diverse Approach. Heldin publishers
- Yabo, A.M. (2017). Historical Foundations of education in Nigeria. Sokoto – Nigeria; Life-line Educational Consultants
- Yabo, A.M. (2023). Implementation of Early Child Care Development and Education (ECCDE) Policy in Nigeria : An Overview. Book chapter. A publication of the department of Educational foundations, Faculty of Education, University of Benin. Pp 297 - 311