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**AN ASSESSMENT OF INTEGRATED EARLY CHILDHOOD
DEVELOPMENT POLICY AWARENESS AND UTILIZATION IN OYO
STATE PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

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Abstract

This study determined the level of IECD policy awareness and utilization in Oyo State primary schools and ascertained the extent of the Utilisation of the IECD policy provision in the study area. These were done with a view to providing information on the level implementation of Integrated Early Childhood Education Development (IECD) Policy in Oyo State, Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This study therefore focused on assessment of implementation of the integrated early childhood development IECD policy in Oyo State. The population consisted all primary school teachers in Oyo State. The sample size consisted of 300 respondents. Multistage sampling procedure was used to select the sample for the study. From the five administrative zones in Oyo State, three were selected using simple random sampling technique. Ten primary schools were randomly selected from each of the administrative zones, making a total of 30 schools. Ten teachers were selected from each of the schools using purposive sampling technique. Three hundred teachers from the selected schools were purposively selected. Two research instruments titled, Awareness of IECD policy Questionnaire (AUIQ) and Teachers' utilisation of IECD Policy Questionnaire (TUIQ) were used to collect data for the study. Data collected were analysed using frequent counts and simple percentage. Results showed that the level of awareness and utilisation was moderate with 42.72%. Result also showed the extent of the utilisation of the IECD policy provision in the study area indicated that the teaching of the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms, among others were done through play many times as possible with a mean score of =2.90. The study concluded that the level of IECD policy awareness and its utilisation was moderate in Oyo State primary schools. Based on the findings from this study, it was recommended that Government and stakeholders should ensure effective utilisation of the policy by providing all that is needed for the policy to work and Federal

Government at the central and its components should show more interest in ECCE by providing needed quality human and materials resources to ensure the effective utilisation of the IECD policy.

Keyword: IECD, Policy implementation, Utilization, Primary School

Introduction

The impact of poverty is alarming, especially in African countries including Nigeria. Observation revealed that, parents are finding it difficult to provide basic needs for their children and this is traceable to illiteracy, unemployment and other vices affecting child raising. Reilly, and McKean, (2023) opined that the years before a child reaches kindergarten (0-8 years) are among the most critical in his or her life as it wields influence on learning. This becomes challenging to parents, teachers, and community to give children appropriate training during the early years of life. However, the early childhood education programme which is highly recognized and promoted in the Nigerian society as it is in the developed world where it gives children the opportunity to learn at home and in society Owojori, and Gbenga-Akanmu, (2021). This could work better under an established regulation.

The place of government in formulation of regulation guiding a programme is key. Ogunkoya, (2023) affirmed that over the years, the role of the Nigerian government in early childhood care and education for better development of youngest citizens tend to have gone beyond mere regulatory to supervisory, monitoring and even financial involvement. Hence, the enactment of the National Policy for Integrated Early Childcare and Development (IECD) in response to the global needs of children is one of the great landmarks to the achievement of this target. Also, the formulation of Integrated Early Childhood Education Development in Nigeria was one of the fall outs of the World Conference on Education for All(EFA) held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 (Viatonu, Olumuyiwa Usman-Abdulqadri, Taibat., & Dagunduro, 2011;Adeyemi, Adediran & Adewole, 2018).

Efforts to introduce the IECD in Nigeria were initiated as far back as 1987 by the Federal Government of Nigeria, through the United Nations National Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), as well as other agencies and partners were the machinery through which the Nigeria government is using to pursue these goals and make IECD a reality in Nigeria (Obiweluzor, 2015). Given its multisectoral approach, the IECD policy is the first of its kind in the history of education in Nigeria (Agusiobo, 2007&Yabo2023). According to Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN),(2007) document, the overarching goal of the IECD is to expand, universalise and integrate interventions from various sectors in early childhood development for effective implementation and coordination of programmes that will optimise development for children age 0-5 years in Nigeria (FRN 2007:4). Additionally, the policy aims to integrate interventions by various sectors that have been working in different ways and at various levels to achieve a better life for Nigerian children. The policy foregrounds a scientific approach to children's development, with the foreword

explicitly stating the intention to “provide interventions for cognitive, physical, social, moral and emotional development of the child” (FRN 2007).

Similarly, the IECD objectives include: the provision of care and support that will uphold the rights of children to good nutrition and health, a healthy and safe environment, psycho-social stimulation, and protection and participation; inculcating a spirit of enquiry and creativity in children through the exploration of nature, the environment, art and music, playing with toys, etcetera; the provision of adequate care and supervision for children while their parents/ guardians are at work; inculcating acceptable social and culturally appropriate norms, values and beliefs; preparing children to adapt successfully when their current context changes; and developing healthy, well-nourished and adequately stimulated children who are able to achieve their full potential. (FRN 2007:19-20). Rotshak, Muktar, and Podos,(2020), considered these objectives as laudable and necessary for child's needs recognition. Based on these objectives of the forgoing polices, it is unclear if Oyo State primary teachers who are meant to implement these polices are aware of their existence and appropriately utilize the regulations. Hence this study.

Statement of Problem

The Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) policy was introduced to primary schools with the aim of improving pre-primary. Yet there is limited information on the level of awareness and utilization of the policy. This raises questions about the extent to which the policy is known and utilized by teachers, school administrators, and parents. Therefore, the assessment of IECD policy awareness and utilization in Oyo state primary schools is needed to better understand its impact on early childhood education and development.

The gap between policy formulation and implementation has always remained wide. One of the factors responsible for this gap situation is the poor motivation and low morale of the implementers of the policy coupled with weak monitoring and evaluation mechanism leading to inconsistent policy which in turn makes the quality of management and curriculum development to be compromised (Anyaeibu, Christman, & Jinpu, 2004). The unavailability of professional or qualified caregivers to implement the programme coupled with the fact that one of the major stakeholders in child care (parents) especially mothers are not fully informed of this holistic approach to the care, growth, survival, nutrition and education of the pre-primary school child makes it an issue for grave concern (Lukong,2024). Hence, this study looked into assessment of the implementation of IECD policy on how it has been in the past years in Nigeria with respect to Oyo State.

Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to assess the implementation of the integrated early childhood education development (IECD) policy in Oyo State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are:

- i. determine the level of IECD policy awareness and utilisation amongst Oyo

- ii. State primary schools' teachers; and ascertain the extent of teacher utilisation of IECD policy provision in the study area.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population for the study comprised all public primary school teachers in Oyo State. The sample size consisted of 300 respondents. Multistage sampling procedure was used to select the sample for the study. From the five administrative zones in Oyo State, three were selected using simple random sampling technique. Ten primary schools were randomly selected from each of the administrative zones, making a total of 30 schools. Ten teachers were selected from each of the schools using purposive sampling technique. Three hundred teachers from the selected schools were purposively selected. The 10 teachers of such sampled schools made the sampled population for the study. Two research instruments were used for the study namely: Awareness and Utilisation of IECD policy Questionnaire (AUIQ) and Teachers' utilisation of IECD Policy Questionnaire (TUIQ). Data collected were stored, coded and subjected to appropriated statistical analysis. The research questions were answered using descriptive statistic of frequency counts and simple percentage.

Results

Research Question One: What is the level of IECD policy awareness and utilisation amongst Oyo State primary schools' teachers?

To answer the research question above, percentages and frequency counts of the descriptive items were collected and reported in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Level of IECD Policy Awareness in Oyo State Primary Schools

Awareness	Frequency	Percentage
High	61	20.40%
Moderate	128	42.72%
Low	85	28.30%
Not aware	26	8.58%
Total	300	100%

As shown in Table 1, the findings reveal that the level of participants' awareness of IECD policy in Oyo State primary schools ranging from High to Not Aware. The result shows that the level of awareness of the policy is high (20.40%), moderate (42.72%), low (28.30%) and 8.58% of the respondents are not aware. Based on this result, it could be concluded that the level of awareness is moderate (42.72).

Table 2: Level of IECD Policy Utilisation in Oyo State Primary Schools

Awareness	Frequency	Percentage
High	60	20.00%
Moderate	129	43.00%
Low	84	28.00%
Not aware	27	9.00%
Total	300	100%

As shown in Table 2, the findings reveal that the level of participants' utilisation of IECD policy in Oyo State primary schools ranging from High to Not Aware. The result shows that the level of utilisation of the policy is high (20.00%), moderate (43.00%), low (28.00%) and 9.00% of the respondents are not aware. Based on this result, it could be concluded that the level of utilisation is moderate (43.00).

Research Question Two: To what extent has the teachers utilised the IECD policy provision in the study area?

To answer this research question, descriptive statistics were used to generate mean scores which yielded the extent of the utilisation of the IECD policy provision in the study area alongside their ranking. x 3.00-2.50 indicates Many, x 2.49-2.20 indicates Few, x 2.19-2.00 indicates Once and 1.90-1.00 indicates Never.

Table 3: The Extent of the Utilisation of The IECD Policy Provision in The Study Area

Descriptive Items	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Ranks
Teach through play	300	1.0	4.00	2.90	Many (1st)
Stimulate in the child good habits	300	1.0	4.00	2.86	
Develop a sense of co-operation	300	1.0	4.00	2.71	
Inculcate spirit of enquiry and creativity	300	1.0	4.00	2.59	
Adequate care	300	1.0	4.00	2.48	Few (2nd)
Values and beliefs	300	1.0	4.00	2.45	
Organised teaching	300	1.0	4.00	2.42	
Holistic children development	300	1.0	4.00	2.39	
Stimulate children full potential	300	1.0	4.00	2.37	
Explore nature	300	1.0	4.00	2.35	
Constant professional development	300	1.0	4.00	2.30	

Descriptive Items	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Ranks
Enjoyed government training	300	1.0	4.00	2.19	Once (3rd)
Being training on Child's Right Act of 2003	300	1.0	4.00	2.11	
Being trained on health care programmes	300	1.000	4.000	2.08	
Trained on key household practices	300	1.0	4.00	2.08	
Special needs children training	300	1.0	4.00	2.02	

From Table 3 above, the findings show teachers utilisation of the IECD policy. The contents of the policy used are classified into four categories, namely; Always, Often, Sometime and Never. Four items of the IECD policy were always used by the teachers. These include; first the teaching of rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms, among others, through play has the highest mean score \bar{x} of 2.90. Second, the stimulation in the child good habits, which include good health habits (\bar{x} 2.86), Third, development of a sense of co-operation and team-spirit (\bar{x} 2.71); fourth, the inculcation in the child, the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and the use of toys, (\bar{x} 2.59) and so on. In addition, the finding indicate twelve items of the IECD policy were often used by the teachers namely: the provision of adequate care and supervision for children while their parents/guardians are at work (\bar{x} 2.48), inculcation of acceptable social and culturally appropriate norms, values and beliefs (\bar{x} 2.45), participants have received government training on the ways to organize teaching and learning activities for children (\bar{x} 2.42), participants have received government training on how to facilitate the cognitive, physical and socio-emotional development of children (\bar{x} 2.39), preparation of children to adapt successfully when their current context changes; and developing healthy, well-nourished and adequately stimulated children who are able to achieve their full potential (\bar{x} 2.37), the inculcation of enquiry spirit and creativity in children through the exploration of nature, the environment, art and music, playing with toys, etcetera (\bar{x} 2.35), participants have received training organized by government in which they learned how to let children enjoy their rights (\bar{x} 2.30), they have received government training on how to facilitate the cognitive, physical and socio-emotional development of children (\bar{x} 2.27). More so, the Government's training in which they were informed about the objectives and other contents of IECD policy was low (\bar{x} 2.20).

Lastly, the finding also shows six items of the IECD policy were sometimes used by the teachers namely: the respondents have had training organized by government in which they learned how to let children enjoy their rights (\bar{x} 2.19), they have received government training in which they were informed about the Child's Right Act of 2003 once (\bar{x} 2.11), the government had sent them on training in which

they earned about health care programmes available for children once (\bar{x} 2.08) the government had organized training in which they learned about key household practices once (\bar{x} 2.08), and they have been trained by government on who special needs children are and how to cater for their needs and holistic development once (\bar{x} 2.02). Based on these finding, the study concludes that teachers always utilize IECD policy to guide teaching and learning.

Discussion of Findings

This study determined the level of IECD policy awareness and utilization in Oyo State primary schools and ascertained the extent of the Utilisation of the IECD policy provision in the study area. The study found that teachers in Oyo State have moderate level of awareness and utilisation of IECD policy. Based on the organisational theory (1968) guiding this study, awareness and utilisation of IECD policy become key to implementation. In addition, the result aligns with findings of Brauckmann, Pashiardis, and Ärlestig, (2023) who found that professional development of teaching staff is a leeway to awareness creation geared towards the programme implementation. Similar findings from National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Education and Development (2014) show that some of the way to implementing the IECD policy is via active participation of different sectors/miniseries. This was evident and upholding in the rights of children to good nutrition and health, a healthy and safe environment, psycho-social stimulation, and as well as protection and participation, inculcating a spirit of enquiry and creativity in children through the exploration of nature, the environment, art and music, playing with toys, etcetera. This indicated that, the IECD policy awareness and utilisation in Oyo State primary schools is not enough but its implementation which should be plain and clear to the large society.

In addition, the findings of this current study revealed the extent of Oyo state teachers' utilisation of the IECD policy provision. The teachers used the policy in the teaching of rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms, etc., through play as done as many times as possible. In the same vein, the stimulation in the child good habits, including good health habits, development of a sense of co-operation and team-spirit and the inculcation in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and the use of toys, among others with the organisational theory (1968) guiding this study that when the coordinative activities of members/learners are maintained, they should be exposed to viable equipment. This was also supported by Skalstad, and Munkebye, (2021) who opined that children need phenomenal number of experiences at home and surrounding environments and in the school where they are able to lay their hand on as many plays equipment as possible. According to the Early Childhood Environmental Education Programs: Guidelines for Excellence (2010), children must be given the room to frequently explore opportunities to observe, and play in natural environments where they will be able to develop their intellectual and social skills the more.

Similarly, the finding of this study on the extent to which the teachers implemented IECD policy provision in the study area are that; reading materials such as cardboard book, colourful bulletin board display, colourful puzzles and games and others. Although, Brezzi, González, Nguyen, and Prats, (2021) asserted that political will and high-level government involvement, continuous advocacy of the significant of IECD at all levels of society, there is a need to be less bias and promote the actual aims and objectives of the policy. In the study of Cadima, Nata, Barros, Coelho, and Barata, (2020), Early Childhood Education Centers can only experience effectiveness if all policies need for development are observed- such is the IECD policy.

Conclusion

The results showed that the level of IECD policy awareness and utilisation in Oyo State primary schools was moderate while the extent of the utilisation of the IECD policy provision in the study area was also relatively high. The identified policy provision that have been always implemented were: reading materials such as cardboard book, colourful bulletin board display, colourful puzzles and games while It can be concluded that the prominent challenges facing IECD policy were: remuneration and awareness creation remain as main challenges militating against the full implementation of the policy promotion of key household practices, cognitive development facilitation, ensuring literacy, reduction of child's mortality rate, physical skills development facilitation and time to time training for government on how to fight malaria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings discussed above, the following recommendations are made;

1. There is need for more awareness to be made on Integrated Early Childhood Education Development (IECD) Policy for more educational stakeholders to have a good understanding of it.
2. Teachers should be carried along in the processes of Integrated Early Childhood Education Development (IECD) Policy implementation; such as involving them in curriculum development and many more.
3. There should also be up-to-date check and maintenance of facilities and equipment in the schools.
4. Public schools should be developed from time to time by the government via the provision of all needed teaching facilities.

Teachers should be exposed to more dynamic and holistic ways of teaching children through conferences, seminars, symposium, and in-service training to the three strategies with special emphasis on cooperative strategy.

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