

ASSESSMENT OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL POLICY OF EDUCATION ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN ABIA STATE

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Abstract

The pre-primary education is the ultimate foundation stone needed by the child to smoothly transit to the formal school system at the primary level. Any faulty foundation laid at this level will naturally affect other levels. Consequently, the study assessed the implementation of the National Policy on Early Childhood Education in Private Schools in Umuahia Education Zone of Abia State. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The design of the study was a descriptive survey. The population for the study consists of all pre-primary private school teachers in the Zone. The sample comprised 100 pre-primary private school teachers randomly selected from private schools the study area. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire developed by the researchers. The questionnaire was validated by three experts in Psychology and Counselling, Administration and Planning and Measurement and Evaluation. The questionnaire was administered to the respondents and was collected immediately to avoid loss. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while t-test analysis was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The result of the study revealed that government participated in the implementation of NPE on early childhood education in private school at a low extent. The study also revealed that the level of compliance by private schools in the implementation of NPE on pre-primary schools in the zone is at high level in the urban schools and at low level in rural areas. Based on the findings, it was recommended that effective measures should be taken by both state and federal government to ensure effective monitoring and regular inspection of pre-primary private schools in zone in order to enforce compliance in the implementation of NPE on early childhood education.

Keywords: National Policy on Education, Early Childhood, Implementation, Private Schools

Introduction

Early childhood stage is often referred to as the pre-school age or nursery/kindergarten age. It is a period between 2 to 5 years. These children are usually found in nursery schools. Early childhood stage is a period when the child moves from hopelessness to being useful to himself (Kadurumba, 2010). At this stage, dependency on parents, siblings, nannies, caregivers and other caretakers becomes limited.

In this period, a child establishes his pattern of physical, intellectual, emotional and social development. Formative development of this period is both quantitative and qualitative. In this respect, a child in early childhood can learn effectively.

In most educational systems, pre-school age is from 3 to 5 years but in most cases here in Nigeria, pre-school begins even much earlier. Actually, this education should take place at home but due to the socio-economic needs of parents, the child is introduced to early childhood education earlier than is necessary. Many parents also believe that the first years of their children's lives are so important that this education should be exposed to their children (Udouchukwu, 2012). However, if the wish of these parents are achieved is yet to be established.

Before independence in 1960, education was in the hands of missionary bodies who devoted the establishment of their schools to just perpetuate their doctrines. After the Nigerian civil war, the Federal Government of Nigeria took over schools with the intention of reducing cost and providing education for all citizens and to have unique and quality curriculum for all nations schools. In this regard, the curriculum conference of the nation in 1969 gave birth to the National Policy on Education in 1977. However, as more states are created, this affected grossly the carrying capacity of states of which many of them cannot fund the schools. This led to the handing over of schools to their founding fathers and equally led to the privatization of education industry in the country. Onyiuke in Tabotndip (2010) lamented that privatization of educational system is always constituting problem for the nations advancement despite the competition it tends to establish among schools.

According to Federal Republic Nigeria (FRN, 2014, P.8) on its National Policy on Education (NPE), the purpose of pre-primary education includes; facilitating a smooth transition from home to school; providing adequate care and supervision for children while their parents are to work,

preparing the child for primary education; inculcating social norms, spirit of inquiry; creativity, playing with toys, teaching rudiments of numbers among others. The NPE further stated that Government shall make provisions in the Teacher Training Colleges for students who want to specialize in pre-primary education and further stated that the medium of instruction shall be the Mother tongue. Regrettably, it has been observed that most of the measures and proposals made in the NPE are mere paper formalities. The conspicuous omission of policy statements relating to pre-primary school education, according to Adesina in Oyeyemi (2014) was attributed to the inadequate understanding of the whole concept of pre-school education by the government.

In developed countries that have good educational system, governments and people give educational priority to pre-school education. The pre-primary education is the ultimate foundation stone needed by the child to smoothly transit to the formal school system at the primary level.

This malleable age is one in which children can learn basic habits which will last them a life time and mark the direction of their behavior (Udchukwu, 2012). Any faulty foundation laid at this stage will naturally affect other levels. The pre-school programme should therefore have a stimulating educational programmes run by expert educators of young children.

Udchukwu (2012) observed that most pre-schools are owned by private individual and organizations while only 34% are owned by government. This has been the trend all these years. Most of these private schools operate in residential houses (buildings), unfinished buildings especially in rural areas have no equipment or facilities that a school at a pre-primary level should need. There are no ample space where children should play to exhibit their physical and social skills. They also operate varied curriculum. For staffing purpose, they employ the services of retired teachers and unqualified teachers.

The NPE emphasized the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction on pre-school education. In many nursery schools, the medium of instruction and communication is English language. Most of these unqualified teachers cannot even speak correct English language and as such it affects the foundation of the English language which is the medium of instruction in other higher education. This also may affect the use of mother tongue by the children. Most private schools are not interested on the qualifications and

performance of most of their teachers rather they are interested in collected high school fees from their pupils and students. Most of these privately owned schools are run on a commercial fee paying basis. The fees charged depend on the type of facilities provided by the school.

Most of these centres/schools are opened without adequate planning. What we have on ground are more of “Piggery”, the aftermath being a systematic maladjustment of our young ones. Where even standard ones exist, they are relatively few and concentrated within the urban centres and later become elitist.

The researchers observed that all around our residential areas, many creche and nursery schools are opened. These children are enclosed in two or three bedroom houses. This brings to doubt if these schools are government approved and more importantly if the NPE on pre-school education are effectively implemented. This is the concern of the researchers.

No doubt, there exist some control measures by the Federal and State governments to check the operational levels of these schools. It seems these control measures in most states are not effectively carried out and this has led to abuse in the system. The government is not so much interested in pre-primary school activities and as such may not ready to enforce the implementation of the NPE on the proprietors/proprietress. The effective implementation of the NPE should start right from pre-primary level. This is because this level of education provided the desired solid foundation for other levels to succeed.

It is against this background that it becomes imperative to assess the implementation of the National Policy on Early childhood education in private schools in Umuahia Education Zone of Abia State.

This study is considered significant when you consider the low standard of education at this level and non-compliance of minimum standard for establishing pre-primary schools which is responsible for the proliferation of sub-standard pre-schools in the country. The goodnews, however, is that recently on the 20th of August, 2018, the Broadcasting Corporative of Abia State announced that the state governor has constituted a committee to re-evaluate private schools in the state. This is a good development. We hope there will be a total re-evaluation of the system including the implementation of NPE in full.

According to Minimum Standard for Establishment of Schools (2005) in Nigeria, the location of these pre-schools are rural, semi-urban and Urban.

The ownership of early childhood education and pre-primary schools are the proprietors/proprietress of private schools, individual or social organizations, missionaries, communities and government. Everybody is therefore involved, so all hands must be on deck so that we shall achieve our educational goals. According to FRN (2005), “the divergent Guidelines on minimum standards for the establishment of schools from Federal and State Ministries of Education have been repeatedly labeled as being responsible for the proliferation of sub-standard schools. Consequently who is to be blamed for the lapses in the implementation of NPE on childhood education. Specifically the study sought to:

- Determine the extent of government participation in the implementation of the NPE on early childhood education in private schools in Umuahia Education Zone of Abia State.
- Find out the level of compliance by private schools in the implementation of the NPE on early childhood education in private schools in Umuahia Education Zone of Abia State.

The following research questions and hypothesis were posed to guide the study.

- To what extent do government participate in the implementation of the NPE on Early Childhood Education in private schools in Umuahia Education Zone of Abia State?
- What is the level of compliance by private schools in the implementation of NPE on Early Childhood Education in Umuahia Education Zone of Abia State?
- There is no significant difference between the government level of implementation of NPE on Early Childhood Education in private schools in the Urban and Rural areas in Umuahia Education Zone of Abia State.
- There is no significant difference between the level of compliance by private schools in the urban and rural areas in the implementation of NPE on early childhood in Umuahia Education Zone of Abia State.

Method

The survey research design was used to carryout this study. Simple random sampling technique was used in selecting 100 pre-primary private

school teachers (80 from Urban and 20 from Rural areas) from a population of 621 pre-primary school teachers in Umuahia Education Zone of Abia State (Annual School Census Planning and Research Statistics, Ministry of Education, 2015-2016). Umuahia Education Zone is made up of four Local Government Areas, namely: Umuahia North, Umuahia South, Ikwuano and Bende.

The instrument for data collection was a researchers' constructed questionnaire titled "Implementation of the National Policy on Education on Early Childhood Education In Private Schools" (INECEPSQ). The INPECEPSQ has three sections viz: A, B and C. Section A elicits demographic data from the participants. Section B is made up of 11 items on the extent of government participation on the implementation of NPE on Early Childhood Education while section C elicits information on the level of compliance in the implementation of NPE of Early Childhood Education by Private Schools in the zone. Section C was made up of 22 items.

The questionnaire adopted a modified four point type scale which was validated by three experts in Guidance and Counselling, Administration and Planning and Measurement and Evaluation for both face and content validity. The copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents by the researchers and were retrieved after completion to avoid losses.

The value for the four-point scale is 4 for Very High Extent, 3 for High Extent, 2 for Low Extent and 1 for Very Low Extent. Any item with a mean of 2.50 and above was accepted while those below 2.50 were rejected as a decision rule. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while t-test statistic was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Table 1: The mean ratings of the Respondents from Urban and Rural Areas on the extent government participate in the implementation of the NPE in Early Childhood Education

S/N	ITEMS	Urban		Remarks	Rural		Remarks
		\bar{X}	S.D		\bar{X}	S.D	
1.	The inspectors from state ministry of education visits our school regularly	2.58	0.84	High extent	1.70	0.88	Low extent
2.	The inspectors enforce the students to keep to the government standards	3.08	0.46	High extent	2.70	0.87	High extent
3.	Government provides qualified teachers	1.86	0.79	Low extent	1.30	0.83	Low extent
4.	Government regulate and control the operations of the schools	3.08	0.51	High extent	3.27	0.68	Low extent
5.	Government assists by providing equipment and infrastructural facilities	2.06	0.93	Low extent	1.07	0.86	Low extent
6.	Private schools pay government registration fees every year	3.61	0.53	High extent	3.61	0.48	High extent
7.	Government provides current curriculum for use for private schools	3.62	0.78	High extent	3.22	0.86	High extent
8.	Government provides in-service training for private teachers.	2.17	0.83	Low extent	1.65	0.79	Low extent
9.	Government ensure that the medium of instruction in pre-primary is the mother tongue	2.20	0.78	Low extent	2.02	0.85	Low extent
10.	Government maintain pupil ratio of 1;25	3.25	0.51	High extent	3.33	0.62	Higextent
11.	Government ensures that the proprietor/proprietress is educationally qualified to run the schools.	2.34	0.85	Low extent	3.22	0.54	Low extent
Grand Total		2.71	0.71		2.46	0.67	

The results in table 1 above showed that items 2, 6, 7, 10 indicated high extent for both urban and rural area with mean values above 2.50 while item 3, 5, 8, 9, 11 were at low extent. However item 1 and 4 indicated high extent for urban areas and low extent for rural areas. The grand mean (2.71) however showed that government participated in the implementation of NPE on early childhood education. 271 is within the real limits of 2.50 – 3.49 of a 4 point scale which is regarded as high extent.

Table 2: Mean ratings of the Respondents on the level of compliance by private schools in the implementation of NPE on Early Childhood Education

S/N	ITEMS	Urban		Rural		Remarks	
		\bar{X}	S.D	\bar{X}	S. D		
1	The number of teachers in the school are enough for preprimary school children	2.76	0.83	High extent	2.20	0.71	High extent
2	The school have enough toilets facilities	2.76	0.62	High extent	3.20	0.54	High extent
3	The schools have enough playground for the children	2.38	0.92	Low extent	1.80	0.83	Low extent
4	The schools have enough playing materials(e.g Toys e.t.c) for children use	1.89	0.83	Low extent	1.67	0.88	Low extent
5	The schools have enough playing equipment's(ladder, lops, swings e.t.c)	2.12	0.78	Low extent	2.10	0.81	Low extent
6	The schools complies with government minimum standards for establishing pre schools	2.72	0.94	High extent	3.52	0.73	High extent
7	The buildings are enough	2.80	0.91	High extent	2.95	0.84	High extent
8	The teacher uses Igbo Language as a medium of teaching the children	2.14	0.79	Low exten	1.83	0.93	Low extent
9	Teachers use English language as a more than Igbo language in the teaching and learning process	3.26	0.53	High extent	2.57	0.84	High extent
10	The students have teachers who specializes in preprimary education	2.42	0.73	Low extent	2.00	0.91	Low extent
11	The teachers in the school teach through the play method only.	3.17	0.67	High extent	3.20	0.73	High extent
12	Parents are involved in the administration of the schools.	2.60	0.89	High extent	1.95	0.81	High extent
13	The schools teach more of English ,	2.55	0.93	High extent	3.15	0.47	High extent

	writing rhymes than any other subjects				
14	The schools use their own curriculum to teach their own children	2.74	0.73	High extent	2.55 0.66 High extent
15	The classroom accommodation is enough for the children	2.38	0.85	Low extent	2.05 0.92 Low extent
16	The school uses video and instructional materials as a means of teaching	2.32	0.82	Low extent	1.74 0.86 Low extent
17	The schools have science exhibition(nature corner)	2.63	0.75	High extent	2.80 1.12 High extent
18	The salary of teachers are good enough	2.37	0.88	Low extent	1.58 0.79 Low extent
19	Teachers are given other incentives to motivate them	2.56	0.77	High extent	2.20 0.69 Low extent
20	The school fees charges are high (exhorbitant)	3.26	0.71	High extent	3.40 0.64 High extent
21	The school have a functional parents teachers association(PTA).	2.51	0.98	High extent	2.62 0.73 High extent
22	Teachers are given enough teaching materials for teaching	2.48	0.76	Low extent	2.32 0.82 Low extent
Grand Total		2.59	0.80		2.43 0.78

The result of table 2 showed that out of the 22 items on the table, 12 items were accepted by the respondents to a high extent, 9 items indicates low extent while item 19 indicates high extent for urban and low extent for rural areas. However, the grand mean (2.59) showed a high level of compliance by private school but not very high extent.

Table 3. The t-test analysis of the difference between the mean responses of the respondents on the level of implementation of NPE on Early Childhood Education in the urban and rural areas in Umuahia Education Zone

Groups		Mean	S.D	df	t.Cal	P.Value	Decision
Urban	160	2.59					Not Significant
			0.80	198	1.14	0.257	
Rural	40	2.43					

The data on Table 3 show a t-calculated value of 1.14 with a P. value of 0.257 which is greater than 0.05 at 0.05 level of significance. This implies that the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant difference between the mean responses of the respondents on the level of implementation on NPE on early childhood in the urban and rural areas in Umuahia Education Zone of Abia State was retained. Hence, there is no significant difference between the mean responses of the respondents on the level of implementation on NPE on early childhood in the urban and rural areas in Umuahia Education Zone of Abia State

Table 4: The t-test analysis of the difference between the mean response of the respondents on the level of compliance by private schools in the Urban and Rural Areas in the implementation of NPE on Early Childhood Education in Umuahia Education Zone

Groups	Mean	S.D	df	t.Cal	P.Value	Decision
Urban	160	2.71				Not Significant
		0.71	198	2.01	0.045	
Rural	40	2.46	0.67			

The data on Table 4 show a t-calculated value of 2.01 with a P. value of 0.045 which is greater than 0.05 at 0.05 level of significance. This implies that the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant difference between the mean responses on the level of compliance by private schools in the Urban and Rural Areas in the implementation of NPE on early childhood education in Umuahia Education Zone was retained. Hence, there is no significant difference between the mean responses on the level of compliance by private schools in the Urban and Rural Areas in the implementation of NPE on early childhood education in Umuahia Education Zone.

Discussion

The findings of the study indicated that government participated in the implementation of the NPE on early childhood education positively but not at very high extent based on the ranges of 2.59 and 2.43 in both urban and rural areas in Abia State. The findings also indicated that most of the private school do not have enough playground, playing materials, playing equipment and their teachers do not use mother tongue as a medium of instruction. Findings showed that there are no specialized teachers in pre-primary schools and the

lack enough classroom accommodation among others. This findings showed that government do not participate effectively in the implementation of NPE on childhood education in Umuahia Education Zone of Abia State. The result also showed that there is no significant difference between mean responses of the respondents on the level of implementation on NPE on early childhood education in both urban and rural areas. This findings is in-line with Tabotndip (2010) study which reviewed that there exist some control measures by the state and federal government to check the operational levels of these schools. He further pointed out that these control measures in some states are ineffective and have led to abuse in the system.

This findings also established that the level of compliance by private pre-primary schools in both urban and rural areas in the implementation of NPE on early childhood education ranges from 2.59 and 2.43 respectively, this shows that the level of compliance is more in urban (2.59) than rural (2.43) areas. Further, the result of hypotheses two indicated there is no significant difference between the mean responses of the respondents on the level of compliance by private schools in the urban and rural areas in the implementation of NPE on early childhood education.

Conclusion

Effective implication of NPE on childhood education is an issue and a challenge in the attainment of the objectives and goals of childhood education. The findings of the study showed that the Federal, state and local government participated in the implementation of the NPE on early childhood education but not of higher extent. It is therefore necessary that more efforts should be taken by the state and local government in Abia State in particular to enforce compliance on the minimum standard for establishing schools especially pre-primary schools. The state and local governments should also enforce strict compliance measures in the implementation of NPE on early childhood education in both urban and rural areas. This is very important because this level of education is the foundation for all other levels of education.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendation were made:

1. The federal, state and local government, should ensure that relevant and adequate facilities are provided in both urban and rural areas in order to make early childhood education functional.
2. The Federal Ministry of Education through State Ministry of Education and State Education Management Board should ensure proper

compliance to enforce minimum standards for establishment of childhood education.

3. Private schools should be encouraged to employ teachers who specialized in pre-primary education. This will enhance the level of pre-primary education in the state.
4. The state and local governments should ensure effective monitoring and regular inspection of pre-primary schools in both urban and rural areas in order to enforce compliance in the teaching of mother tongue which is a stepping stone of pupils/children English language development.

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