

## Assessment of Quality in Early Childhood Education in Ekiti-State Nigeria

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**Abstract:** Early child-hood Education is the bedrock upon which excellent basic and sound education is built. This study examined the concept of quality in early childhood education in Ekiti State. It is a descriptive research design of the survey type, which aimed at assessing the quality of early-child-hood education in 12 randomly selected private nursery schools in Ado-Ekiti Local Government area of Ekiti State. Data were collected using a 20-item structured questionnaire administered on 120 respondents consisting teachers and head teachers. Data were analyzed using means and percentages. Findings showed that the quality of early childhood education is averagely good specifically the learning activities were found to be fair while that of learning environment of some schools were found to be good. The qualities of academic staff have been found to be low parents participation in schools' management was also found to be low. Recommendations were made towards achieving high quality childhood education in the state.

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**Key words:** Early childhood education • Quality parent • Nursery education • Policy implementation

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### INTRODUCTION

The importance and value of education in the early years of life have been acknowledged for more than 2,000 years ago [1]. Relatively recent factors have brought early childhood education to the forefront of public awareness. Some of the factors include the fundamental changes in the economy of the country and its impact on family life. Rising cost of living, emergence of single-parent household, increased number of teenage parents decrease in the impact of the extended family and the call by many professionals who advocated for the rights of children. These recent phenomenas no doubt stressed the need for quality education at the pre-primary schools or Nursery schools.

Education is an indisputable requisite for improving the social and economic conditions in a country and early childhood education plays a crucial role in this context.

FRN [2], [3] define nursery education/early childhood education as a type of education given to children in a formal educational institution from the ages of three to five plus, prior to their entering primary schools. The early years are precious and critical in an individual's life because it is the time the foundation for adult development is being laid. As UNICEF [4] noted, attention to early childhood is a critical aspect of anti-poverty

strategies to break intergenerational cycles of chronic poor health and sub-optimal human development. It is therefore important that greater care and attention be exercised in handling the young ones during this period. It is highly desirable that young children are given the opportunity to spend some hours in the pre-school setting with many facilities and qualified staff to enrich and stimulate them socially and intellectually [5, 6].

According to the World Education Forum [7]. Quality can be viewed from various perspectives namely. In terms of input of process (curriculum process implementation and reform) and in terms of results (development status and learning of children). Quality is a relatively value-based concept that is wholly constructed and subjective, hence there is no single model of early childhood education that is effective in all settings. However there is a general acceptance that programmes that benefit young children must be of quality that is embedded within their families' cultures and values.

**The Concept of Quality in Early Childhood Education:** ESIB- European Union of students [8] observed that quality assurance is a condition that leads to achievement of transparency as it will ensure the quality of academic teaching and curriculum et c, structural buildings and provisions of courses. This will allow an objective review of their quality.

Harvey and Green [9] opined that quality assurance is about ensuring that there are mechanisms, procedures and process in place to ensure that the desired quality is achieved.

In early child-hood education, according to the Michigan Committee on Quality Component [10] quality aims for every child to be always with or closely supervised by a competent caring adult and hence recognizes that parents ideally are the most important teachers and caregivers.

Allied to this is the fact that the healthy intellectual, social and emotional development of young children require the formation of stable and loving relationships of their parents and caregivers. Quality in early child-hood education means ensuring that children are cared for in a safe and nurturing environment. Thus factors like group size, the number of children per care-giver and physical features (play ground facilities, toys e.t.c) are considered [11].

According to Melhiush [12] quality reflects what is beneficial for children's development. Studies have shown that children exposed to high quality settings exhibit better language and mathematical skills better cognitive and social skills and better relationships with classmates than do children exposed to lower quality care. [11].

Evans [13] also noted that children learn faster during the first three years than they will ever learn again in their lives. It is therefore imperative to provide quality learning environment for the young children in their schools.

Indices of quality in early childhood education include those that relate directly to the children and curriculum content. This category includes learning activities, physical environment and evaluation of children's progress.

Indicators that relate to staff i.e. staff qualification, their performances and feelings about their work and indicators that relate to the parents.

Assessments of these indicators are very important in order to determine the quality of education being provided for the young ones. According to Curtis [14] assessment of quality is an essential part of any educational programme. It helps to determine cost effectiveness and to know whether the teaching programme is effective in helping children to achieve the desired learning outcomes. It has however been observed that there are many pre – schools located in various places and buildings, church premises, private homes while some are set up mainly in cities as full-fledged nursery and primary schools with their own buildings and premises. The physical structures vary in terms of quality

and aesthetics. So do the facilities and equipment. Mainly private individuals for monetary gains own these nursery schools. Hence some of them lack the qualities stipulated by Federal Government on early childhood Education. Although the National Policy on Education prescribes that the child in the pre-primary schools should be involved in active learning, the document detailing guidelines on provision and management of pre-primary education is silent on the curriculum content of such an institution [15]. In the absence of such guidelines on curriculum content for pre-primary education, proprietors of nursery schools resort to curricular of their choices without proper supervision from the Inspectorate Division of the Ministry of Education. It is against this background that this study aimed at examining the quality of early child-hood education provided for children in Ekiti-State. Indicators of quality to be examined are School environment, Quality of teachers, Quality of Adult/Parent child interaction, Learning activities and learning outcomes.

**Statement of the Problem:** The problem of this study is the observed absence of quality in early- childhood education provided for children in Ekiti-State, Nigeria. The perceived absence might not be unconnected with inadequate control measures for quality learning and learning outcome, poor quality of teaching staff, inadequate physical facilities and non-commitment of the parents. In addressing the problems of this study the following questions were raised:

- What is the quality of learning activities in the nursery schools in Ekiti State?
- What is the quality of teaching staff in the nursery schools?
- To what extent have the proprietors/proprietresses of the nursery schools provided conducive environments for teaching and learning?
- What is the quality of learning outcomes in the nursery schools?
- To What extent have the parents been participating in the education of their children for quality assurance in the State.

**Method:** A descriptive survey research method was used to elicit information from 120 randomly selected respondents which comprises of teachers and head teachers of the twelve pre-schools selected in Ado – Ekiti. The selection of the school was by stratified random sampling and criteria for selection include size of the school and approval by government.

**Instruments:** The instrument tagged Quality Assessment Questionnaire (QAQ) was used. A 20- item structured questionnaire with “agree” and “disagree” responses. The items were designed to elicit information on the various indices of quality identified by the researcher. The instrument was validated and found to have construct validity and with 0.76 internal consistency (co – efficient alpha) reliability.

The Quality Assessment Questionnaire (QAQ) surveyed the perceptions of teachers and head teachers. The instrument was in five parts. Part A, sought information on learning activities in the schools selected. Part B- on school environment Part C. on quality of staff.

Part D- Assessment of learning outcomes and Part E. on parents participation. The researcher personally administered the questionnaires. A total of 120 respondents were involved. Data were collected and analyzed using descriptive statistics. The agree scores (Yes) indicate high quality while (No) disagree scores indicate low quality.

## RESULTS

Question 1, what is the quality of learning activities in the pre-primary schools in Ekiti State? In addressing this question, data were collected and analyzed using percentages. The finding was indicated in Table1.

The findings from Table 1 showed that learning activities in the pre-primary schools selected was averagely high. The individual scores of the items

related to learning activities revealed high quality in developing linguistic skills (79.2%). Learn rudiment of numbers through play (75%) and developing good health habit (66.7%) are both high. However low quality was recorded in the use of mother- tongue (4.2%) and opportunity to develop artistic and creative skills. (35%)

**Question 2:** What is the quality of Teaching staff in the pre-schools?

As indicated in Table 2, the view of the respondents regarding quality of Staff in the pre-school were highlighted. Indicator of quality of staff was found to be of low quality (19%). Having a good knowledge of children development was (39.2%). Opportunities for re-training and self-development was very low (20.8%). Interest in teaching the young ones (30.8%) was low. Remuneration in terms of salary for teachers was revealed to be very low (26.7%)

**Question 3:** Provision of conducive environment by the proprietor/proprietress?

Table 3 revealed that the learning environment of the pre-schools using the subscale scores is fairly good (62.5.%) and provision of adequate classroom space/ Ventilation ( 60%) was found to be average. Low quality was however found in respect of provision of water (29.2%).

Table 1: The Quality of Learning activities in Pre-Primary Schools.

No of Respondent-120						
NO	Variables	YES	%	NO	%	N
1	Children are encouraged to use mother-tongue	5	4.2	115	95.8	120
2	Children have opportunities to develop linguistic skills	95	79.2	25	20.8	120
3	Children are encouraged to develop the spirit of inquiry artistic and creative skills	42	35	78	65	120
4	Learn good health habits	80	66.7	40	33.3	120
5	Learn the rudiment of numbers, letters, colours through play.	90	75	30	25	120

Table 2: Quality of Teaching Staff

NO	Variables	YES	%	NO	%	N
1	Staff are professionally qualified	23	19.2	97	80.8	120
2	Have good knowledge of child development	47	39.2	73	60.8	120
3	Have opportunities for training and individual development	25	20.8	95	79.2	120
4	Have interest in teaching the young ones	34	30.8	86	69.2	120
5	Adequately remunerated	32	26.7	88	73.7	120

Table 3: Environment

Respondent- N= 120					
	Variables	Yes	%	No	%
1	Surroundings are safe and aesthetically good	75	62.5	45	37.5
2.	Playground equipment and materials are provided	60	50	60	50
3.	Classrooms are spacious and well-ventilated	72	60	48	40
4.	Provision of basic sanitation	78	65	42	35
5.	Provision of portable water	35	29.2	85	70.8

Table 4: Learning outcomes

Respondent N=120					
	Variables	Yes	%	No	%
1	Continuous assessment are conducted regularly in the school	75	62.5	45	37.5
2.	Assessment recorded are well kept	87	72.5	33	27.5
3.	Parents have access to their children's learning outcome	98	81.7	22	18.3
4.	Assessment covers a broad range of children's activities and abilities	58	48.3	62	51.7
5.	Children are rewarded for good performance	88	73.3	32	26.7

Table 5: Parents participation

Respondents N= 120					
S/N	Variables	Yes	%	No	%
1	Parents are involved in management of the school/Day Care	49	40.8	71	59.2
2.	Parents are given adequate information about their children	62	51.7	58	48.3
3.	Parents are involved in academic activities of their children (Field trips, Execution, etc)	48	40	72	60
4.	Parents support the school financially	35	29.2	85	70.8
5.	Parents forum are organized regularly in the school	67	55.8	53	44.2

#### Question 4: Assessment of learning Outcomes

Findings from Table 4 revealed that the quality of learning outcomes is averagely high with aspects of assessment continuous assessment (62.5%). Records keeping (72.5%) parents having access to learning outcome (81.7%).

Assessment covering a broad range of children's activities (48.3%) while rewarding for good performance recorded high score (73.3%).

#### Question 5: Parents' participation in the education of their children.

Table 5, revealed that parents' involvement in the management of the pre-school was very low (40.8%). Parents given adequate information about their children was average while parents involvement in academic activities such as field trips, etc was low (40%). Organization of parents forum score was average (55.8%) while parents financial support for the school was low (29.2%).

#### DISCUSSION

The quality of learning activities in the pre-primary schools selected for the study was found to be average. This was consistent with established National Policy on Education for pre-primary institutions. High quality was found in some aspects of the children's learning activities such as developing linguistic and physical skills. Much more time is devoted to the learning of alphabets, play, rhymes, songs, drama, poems and memorization of facts. However the use of mother-tongue was low. Developing the spirit of inquiry and creative skills was average.

The general quality of teaching staff was very low. Some of the teachers employed were not trained to teach in the nursery school. Opportunities for development were not available for these teachers. The remuneration and benefits of the qualified teachers in selected schools were found to be inadequate and not comparable to those of other teachers with similar qualifications in the public schools. The ultimate effect of this is poor quality education for the young children.

The learning environment of the pre-schools selected was found to be average. Buildings and general surroundings of the schools were safe and conducive for learning and teaching. Many of the pre-schools lack portable water and adequate playgrounds for the children.

The quality of learning-outcome was good. Continuous assessment was regularly conducted in the schools. The children are assessed fairly regularly and such assessment was recorded. Rewards were given for good performance. This in essence motivate the children to work harder.

On parents participation, the level of parents participation in their children's education was fair. Parents forum are regularly organized in the schools selected. However parents' involvement in the management in terms of advisory councils was very low. The school proprietors control the school since the pre-schools is for private individual and mainly for commercial purposes.

### CONCLUSION

Considering the findings of this study, it was concluded that the quality of early childhood education in Ekiti State was average. The quality of learning activities was fair in the selected schools. The environment of the schools was averagely good. The quality of learning outcomes was fair. However there was the neglect of the use of mother-tongue. The quality of staff and parental involvement in the management of the school was found to be low.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Since early childhood has a positive influence on educational development of children in later life, it is therefore imperative that it should be based on sound foundations, Barnett [16]. Rolnick and Grunewald [17] asserted that investing in it can yield high returns. Based on the findings of the study it was recommended that:

- There is need to employ well trained teachers in the pre-schools
- In-service training should be regularly organized for these teachers.
- Effective control should be exercised over the establishment of nursery schools in the state.
- Facilities in the schools should be regularly monitored and inspected by the Ministry of Education Officials to enhance quality of education programmes.

- Parents and community should be given opportunities to participate in some of the school special programmes.

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