

THE EVALUATION OF THE NATIONAL OBJECTIVES ON THE EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE EDUCATION (ECCE) PROGRAM IN GWAGWALADA AREA COUNCIL OF FCT, ABUJA, NIGERIA

ABSTRACT

The objectives of this study were to evaluate the national objectives of Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) programme in Gwagwalada Area Council of FCT, Abuja, Nigeria. The research designed method adopted for this study was descriptive survey. The method used for selecting the sample of the study was purposive random sampling technique. 200 respondents were selected for simple sampling techniques. Questionnaire was used for data collection in the study and the reliability of the instrument was determined by using split-half method. The results the research showed that the national objectives of the Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) includes; effect on a smooth transition from home to 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 farm, in the market or offices), instill the social norms, instill the spirit of inquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music, playing with toys and so on, develop a sense of cooperation and team spirit, learn good habits, especially good health habits and teach the basics of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms and so on through playing. It has been achieved to the moderate extent in all the centres of sample in Gwagwalada area, council of FCT.

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Keyword: Evaluation, (ECCE) Programme, Education.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is the giant of Africa. Every one in four Sub-Saharan people reside in Nigeria. It is Africa's most populous country. Nigeria is the seventh most populous country in the world, with estimated population of 42.5 million people at the time of independence in 1960. Presently, Nigeria's population is estimated to be 200 million people in 2020 by World-Bank. It was anticipated by the United Nations that Nigeria will become the third largest country in the world by 2050 with 399 million populations. The capital of Nigeria is Abuja with 36 states and 744 local governments in total. Nigeria practices a federal system of government. Nigeria is a multilingual country and home to more than 500 different ethnic groups. The languages of the three largest groups, the Yoruba, the Ibo, and the Hausa, are the language of instruction in the earliest years of basic instruction; they are replaced by English in Grade 4.

Education is administered by the federal, state and local governments. The Federal Ministry of Education is responsible for overall policy formation and ensuring quality control, but is primarily involved with tertiary education. School education is largely the responsibility of state (secondary) and local (elementary) governments. Nigeria's education system encompasses

three different sectors: basic education (nine years), post-basic/senior secondary education (three years), and tertiary education (four to six years, depending on the program of study).

In 1999 the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme was launched in Nigeria, with the objectives of providing “free, universal and compulsory basic education for every Nigerian child aged 6-15 years”. Due to the lack of legal support, the programme was not able to be implemented immediately in 1999. The UBE programme took off effectively with the signing of the UBE Act in April 2004. The Universal basic education was made up of three components, the component includes:

1. Children aged 3-5 years, for Early Children Care and Development Education (ECCDE);
2. Children aged 6-11+ years for primary school education;
3. Children aged 12-14+ years for junior secondary school education.

The scope of the universal basic education included the following:

- a. Programme and initiatives for Early Children Care and Development Education (ECCDE);
- b. Non-formal skills and apprenticeship training for adolescents and youth, who have not had the benefit of formal education."
- c. Out-of-school, non-formal programme for the updating of knowledge and skills for people who left school before acquiring the basics needed for lifelong learning;
- d. The Programme and initiatives for the acquisition of functional literacy, numeracy and life skills, especially for adults (persons aged 15 and above);
- e. Special programme of encouragement to all marginal groups: girls and women, nomadic populations, out-of-school youth and the Almajiris (Qur’anic student);

Early Children Care and Development Education are very important to the country because it is the first education of children will be exposed to. The Early Children Care and Development Education provides the basic education to the children. The Early Children Care and Development Education means different thing to different people. According to Eunice (2016) Early Children Care and Development Education are the care, stimulation and instruction for children between three to five years of age in a preschool with their teachers and care givers. Maduwesi (1999) viewed early childhood care education as the education offered to children who have not yet reached the statutory age of beginning primary school. He further maintained that it is a semi-formal education arrangement, usually outside home where children from about the age of 3 years are exposed through play like activities in a group setting through mental, social and physical learning suited to their developmental stages, until the mandatory age of government approved formal school. While the FRN (2004) defined that early childhood care education (pre-primary education) as an education given in an educational institution to children aged 3-5 plus prior to their enrollment in the primary school. This education is very important for the children because of their age. This period is very crucial as the first two years of their training are spent in the creation of a child’s first sense of self or the building of the first identity. It is important to note that early childhood period is a time of a remarkable brain development. According to FRN (2013) the objectives of early childhood education are as follows:

1. Effect a smooth transition from home to school
2. Prepare the child for the primary level of education
3. Provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work (on the farm, in the market or offices)
4. Instill the social norms

5. Instill the child's spirit of inquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys and so on.
6. Develop a sense of cooperation and team spirit
7. Learn good habits, especially good health habits, and
8. Teach the basics of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, and forms and so on through play.

Due to the important of early childhood care education in the education generally, many researchers have developed interest in researching on it to improve it quality worldwide. In Nigeria, some researches have been carried out on it. Ajayi (2007) in his study listed eight reasons given at these fora in supporting the provision of affordable, quality programme of early childcare that are community based, and which are linked with health care and nutrition as part of an integrated approach to meeting the needs of the young child. These reasons include:

1. From the age of six, according to research findings, children experienced rapid mental, social and physical development until the age of six, their brains would have developed to almost the size of an adult;
2. The convention on the rights of the child stipulates that children have a right to live and develop to their full capacity;
3. Moral and social values postulate that through children, societies pass on values and culture from generation to generation;
4. Supporting the development of the child physically and mentally leads to increased enrolment, improves performance and the society generally.
5. Provision of early childcare facilities and offer equal opportunities to children from both the privileged and disadvantaged homes.
6. A programme in early childhood development should be used as an entry point for other developmental activities which will benefit the entire community;
7. ECC (Early Child Care) projects should be linked with other developmental activities for women, nutrition, health, water and sanitation.
8. There is a growing demand for better ways of caring for children through an ECC project given the advancement in science and technology which now ensures the survival of many more children, thereby increasing population growth.

Eunice (2016) carried out a study to examine the extent to which instructional supervision relate to caregiver performance in, Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The research design is descriptive survey. Six Area Councils were purposively selected for the study. Stratified random sampling was adopted to select 25 centers representing 12% of the entire populations, as sample. Simple random sampling was used to select a caregiver from each center making a total of 25 caregivers as respondents. Two validated instruments tagged Instructional Supervisory Techniques Questionnaire (ISTQ), and Care-Giver effectiveness Questionnaire (CPQ) were used to collect relevant data for the study. Percentages and means were used to answer the research questions. The findings revealed that adequate supervision in the early childhood education assists caregiver in acquisition of new skills; help inexperienced caregiver to acquire new method of teaching and helps them identify children with learning impairment, though not done regularly. The researcher recommends that school headmaster encourage frequent supervision of instruction in their various schools. Teachers who are well trained and have the knowledge of the theory and practical education should be recruited.

Ishola (2016) in his article outlined the following as the characteristics of preschool sections in the public primary schools in Nigeria as of November 2015:

- a. The centres had no curriculum that guided their activities. Most of the time, the teachers either borrowed from the nearest private school (the curriculum used by the private schools is foreign-based) or relied on the experience of the teachers to decide what to teach.
- b. About 75% of the public schools in Southwest part of Nigeria did not have any of the policy documents. Therefore, the teachers were not aware of the policies guiding the implementation of ECE in the country.
- c. Children of different ages were given admission and were put into the same class in most cases. The age ranged from 2 years plus to 5 years plus. All the children were exposed to the same activities in the learning area.
- d. 'Experienced' primary school teachers were redeployed to teach at the pre-primary section. These 'experienced' teachers were those that had at least National Certificate in Education (NCE), who studied Primary Education Studies (PES) and had been teaching for many years. Government failed to employ teachers that studied ECE to handle the children.
- e. The major teaching strategy was direct instruction (teacher-centred) and the children were taught using say-after-me, songs and at times, rhymes methods to commit the content into the memory of the children. The children were only allowed to play (unguided and unplanned for) during short break (10 minutes), long break (30 minutes) and closing hour when going home.
- f. The language of instruction was the English Language which was interchangeably used with the Language of the Immediate Community (LIC) occasionally. Teaching LIC to the children was by choice; while some centres do, some do not at all.
- g. The only facilities in the learning centres were chairs, tables and chalkboard for the children and caregivers. Learning resources were either not supplied at all or grossly inadequate. Those supplied facilities were kept out of reach of children in the name of protection from being getting spoilt.
- h. The activities were mainly academic and the focus was to develop the intellectual ability of the children. The social, emotional and physical development domains of the children were ignored by the centres.
- i. About 70% of the centres visited had a single teacher working with the children. There were situations in which a teacher was meant to teach the children and one other primary class at the same time.
- j. The learning environment was generally unattractive and lacks both indoor and outdoor playing materials. There were playing grounds for the children but none of the centres had play materials; the playgrounds were not well-kept and safe for the children.

Ishola(2016) also listed the characteristics of many private low-cost preschool centres in Nigeria:

- a. Majority of the owners of these centres have no academic experience in child development; the centres are established as business ventures.
- b. Almost all the teachers working in these centres are not professionally qualified though very few might be academically qualified.
- c. The centres are known for not having playgrounds for the children.
- d. Teachers are strictly monitored to force children to learn through memorization.
- e. These schools deliberately violated age-suitability rules in an attempt to claim better quality than other competing schools.

The high cost preschools have the following characteristics as mentioned by Ishola (2016). The features of the centres are as follows:

- a. The centres run foreign-based curriculum and try to blend some local issues, such as language and few cultural practices in it.
- b. Most of these centres do not have any of the policy documents for ECE in Nigeria in their schools because their practices are guided by the foreign country where the curriculum is adopted from.
- c. Professionally and academically qualified teachers are found in these centres. When a non-professional teacher is employed, such is sent for training, most of the times, abroad to acquire the necessary skills to work with children. Besides, there are periodic in-service training for the teachers to keep them abreast of the job.
- d. The teachers adopt children-centred methods and strategies to enhance the children development.
- e. The available facilities are sufficient for children's activities and their utilization is adequate.
- f. The language of instruction is in foreign language.
- g. The learning environment is usually attractive to children and arranged strategically to stimulate children's learning and development.
- h. The shortcomings of this type of centres are: the use of foreign-based curriculum to develop Nigerian children; lack of contextual appropriateness in their practices and the high cost of education which is beyond the average of citizen could afford.

Ghana Ahmed (2014) conducted a study to provide an overview of challenges confronting early childhood education in the Winneba Municipality in the central region of Ghana. It looks at factors that might have contributed to such challenges and what measures could be put in place to address them. Using a descriptive survey research design, 17 participants consisting of early childhood educators, heads of early childhood centers, parents, and the National Coordinator of Early Childhood programme in Ghana participated in the study. Findings revealed that challenges associated with early childhood education in the Winneba municipality include: public prejudice about the relevance of early childhood educational programs to the child's education and development, lack of parental involvement and commitment to early childhood education, lack of teaching staff, infrastructure, and institutional barriers. Reasons identified for such challenges included lack of education on the part of the public about the place and relevance of early childhood education in the total educational setup. To address the identified challenges, study participants recommend increasing public sensitization, education, partnership and commitment.

Evaluation of educational programme is very important to the development of educational sector. Evaluation helps to examine the progress achieved so far. The programme has achieved the objectives that have been set. Bloom in Ali and Ndubuisi (2006) defined evaluation as making judgement about the value of concepts, methods or materials for some particular purposes. Evaluation involves the use of criteria and standards to determine the degree to which specific factors achieve accuracy, effectiveness, economy or satisfaction while Nworgu (2006) sees it in broader and more encompassing senses as a process of seeking, obtaining and quantifying data with a view of making value judgement about objects, events or their characteristics.

Ohuche and Akeju, (2007) stated that evaluation conducts the specification of objectives from several aspects of education and assessment of the extent to which these goals have been achieved. The authors stated that it strives to conduct the assessment based on the objectives and criteria as well as the evidence informed. The authors outlined the four main objectives of evaluation to be:

- a) Giving account of how far the objectives of programme have been achieved
- b) Giving guidance for the step to be taken next.
- c) Making educational decision and
- d) Making assessment.

In order to achieve the stated goals of early childhood education and to lay good educational foundation for physical, emotional, mental, moral and cognitive development of children, there must be constant evaluation early childhood education programme to measure the progress made so far in the implementation of the programme nationwide and in Gwagwalada area council of FCT specifically.

From the above literature reviewed, it is obvious that there is a research gap on the evaluation of the national objectives of early children care and development education in Nigeria and in Gwagwalada area council of FCT, Abuja, Nigeria. Based on the research gap, the objectives of this study is to evaluate the national objectives of early childhood care education (ECCE) programme in Gwagwalada Area Council of FCT, Abuja, Nigeria. Specifically, the study was intended to:

- 1) Find out the extent to which the objectives of the Early Childhood care Education (ECCE) have been achieved in Gwagwalada area, council of FCT.
- 2) Evaluate the national objectives of Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) programme in Gwagwalada Area Council of FCT, Abuja, Nigeria.

Based on the objectives of this study, the researcher developed one research question to guide the study:

- 1) To know the extent to which the objectives of the Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) have been achieved in Gwagwalada area council of FCT.

METHOD

The objective of this study was to evaluate the national objectives of early childhood care education (ECCE) programme in Gwagwalada Area Council of FCT, Abuja, Nigeria. The research designed method adopted for this study was descriptive survey. The method used for selecting the sample of the study was purposive random sampling technique. 200 school administrators and teachers were chosen from ten early childhood care education (ECCE) centres in the Gwagwalada area council of FCT, Abuja. Questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection in this study. The questionnaire was entitled "Evaluation of NECCD Questionnaire" with seven sub-item questions. The respondents filled all the items of the seven questions on a scale of four points modified by Likert rating scale with scores ranging between 1 and 4 as follow; Great Extent (GE) = 4; Moderate Extent (ME) = 3; Less Extent (LE) = 2; No Extent (NE) = 1. Two researchers in the early childhood education were given the questionnaire to check it before it was used. The instruments were tested through pilot-testing in one of the early childhood education centers, in Abaji area council, a closer area council. The reliability of the

instrument was determined using split-half method. The instruments were administered to randomly select ten (10) caregivers in the early childhood education center. Spearman Brown's formula called the coefficient of equivalence was used to determine the scores. The instrument recorded high levels of reliability 0.72 and 0.75. All research questions were answered through simple percentage, mean scores. The mean scores above 3.0 are accepted as positive while those below are negative and rejected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To find out if the national objectives of the Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) has been achieved in Gwagwalada area council of FCT.

S/N	Item	SA	A	SD	D	Mean	Decision
1	The objectives of smooth transition from home to school of ECCDE is achieved	150	29	9	13	3.57	Moderate Extent

Key: Great Extent (GE) = 4; Moderate Extent (ME) = 3; Less Extent (LE) = 2; No Extent (NE) = 1.

The data on Table 1 show that 89.5% of the respondents were in opinion that the objective of the early childhood care education (ECCE) in Gwagwalada area council of FCT was achieved while 10.5% of the respondent disagreed. The means result of 3.57 is above the cut-off points indicates that the respondents accepted that the objective of the Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) in Gwagwalada area council of FCT is achieved to a moderate extent.

S/N	Item	SA	A	SD	D	Mean	Decision
2	The objective of preparing the children for primary school is achieved.	141	29	19	11	3.54	Moderate Extent

Table 2 reveals that 85% of the respondents agreed that the objective of preparing the child for primary school of the Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) is achieved in Gwagwalada area council of FCT and 15% of the respondents were of the view that is has not been achieved. The mean result obtained was 3.54 is above the cut-off point which implies that the respondents accepted that the objective of the Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) in preparing the child for primary school is achieved in Gwagwalada area council of FCT to a moderate extent.

S/N	Item	SA	A	SD	D	Mean	Decision
3	The objective of providing adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work (on the farm, in the market, office, etc) is achieved	139	33	21	7	3.52	Moderate Extent

Table 3 reveals that 86% of respondents agreed that the objective of Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) in providing adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work (on the farm, in the market, office etc.) is achieved in Gwagwalada area council of FCT while 14% of respondents were on the opposite. The mean score obtained was 3.52 which is above the cut-off points meaning that majorities of the respondents agreed that that the early childhood care education (ECCE) objective of providing adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work (on the farm, in the market, office etc.) is achieved in Gwagwalada area council of FCT, as moderate extent.

S/N	Item	SA	A	SD	D	Mean	Decision
4	The objective of instilling social norms and values in the children is achieved.	120	39	29	12	3.46	Moderate Extent

Table 4 reveals that 79.5% of the sample of teachers and schools administrators were of the views that the goals of Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) is to instill social norms and values in children is achieved in Gwagwalada area council of FCT, while 20.5% of respondents disagreed. The mean scores obtained is 3.46, indicating that the objectives of Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) to instill social norms and values in children is achieved to moderate extent in Gwagwalada area council of FCT.

Table 5 shows that 83.5% of respondents agreed that the purpose of instilling children's spirit of inquiring and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music

S/N	Item	SA	A	SD	D	Mean	Decision
5	The objective of instilling the child's spirit of inquiring and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toy is achieved.	130	37	23	10	3.50	Moderate Extent

and playing with toy is achieved in Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) in Gwagwalada area council of FCT while 16.5% of respondents disagreed. The cut-off point is above 3.0 meaning that the Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) objectives of instilling the children's spirit of inquiring and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toy is achieved to a moderate extent in Gwagwalada area council of CFT.

S/N	Item	SA	A	SD	D	Mean	Decision
6	The objective of developing in the children's sense of cooperation and team-spirit is achieved.	170	19	5	6	3.86	Moderate Extent

Table 6 shows that 94.5% of respondents were on the opinion that the Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) objectives in developing the children’s sense of cooperation and team-spirit is achieved while 5.5% of respondents were on the opposite opinion. The cut-off point obtained is 3.86 indicating that Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) in Gwagwalada area council of FCT objectives in developing the children’s spirit in inquiring and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toy is achieved to a moderate extent.

S/N	Item	SA	A	SD	D	Mean	Decision
7	The objective of learning good habits and the basics of letters, numbers, colours, shapes and forms is achieved	162	10	18	10	3.55	Moderate Extent

Table 7 reveals that 86% of respondent agreed that Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) objectives in learning good habits and the basics of letters, numbers, colours, shapes and forms is achieved while 14% disagreed. The mean point obtained is 3.55 meaning that the Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) objectives in learning good habits and the basics of letters, numbers, colours, shapes and forms is achieved to a moderate extent.

CONCLUSION

The general objectives of this research were to evaluate the national objectives of Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) programme in Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) centres in Gwagwalada Area Council of FCT, Abuja, Nigeria. Specifically, the study was intended to:

- 1) Find out the extent to which the objectives of the Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) have been achieved in Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) centres in Gwagwalada area council of FCT.
- 2) Evaluate the national objectives of Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) programme in Gwagwalada Area Council of FCT, Abuja, Nigeria.

The data collected from the research showed that the national objectives of the Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) which includes, effect a smooth transition from home to 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 farm, in the market or offices), instill social norms, instill the child’s spirit of inquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys and so on, develop a sense of cooperation and team spirit, learn good habits, especially good health habits and teach the basics of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, and forms and so on through play has been achieved to a moderate extent in all the centres sampled in Gwagwalada area council of FCT.

Acknowledgement

I thank all the institutions and people that contributed to the project, especially the respondents and the people that supported me financially. Thank you all for your support.

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