IMPLEMENTATION ANALYSIS OF THE NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN BADE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, YOBE STATE.

ABUBAKAR SULEIMAN
Department of Early Childhood Education,
Umar Suleimann College of Education Gashua Yobe State

*Corresponding Author Information:-
E-Mail: ***abkayala*** @gmail.com
Phone: +2348020590593

ABSTRACT

This study is an evaluation of the implementation of the National Policy on Education's provisions for Early Childhood Education (ECE) within Bade Local Government Area, Yobe State State, Nigeria. The research aimed to assess the extent to which the policy's guidelines are being implemented in the local ECE centers. It utilized a survey methodology, gathering data through the Early Childhood Education Performance Evaluation Questionnaire (ECEPEQ) from a sample of 97 educators and 11 principals across 20 institutions. The study was conducted against the backdrop of a growing global focus on ECE and its impact on children's development, readiness for school, and long-term outcomes. The research is particularly relevant in the context of Nigeria, where the formal recognition of ECE began in 1977 with the National Policy on Education, which has since been revised multiple times to improve the quality of education provided to young children. The outcomes of the study indicated that while there exists a policy framework for Early Childhood Education overseen by the Local Government Area, there are significant gaps in the monitoring and application of these policies such as the inconsistent Application of the Play-way Approach and lack of integration of the local language. Although the teaching staffs are adequately qualified with the National Policy on Education curriculum duly followed, the play-way approach to teaching was not uniformly applied as suggested. Additionally, integration of the local language into the classroom setting was found to be lacking. Consequently, it is advised that the government should implement robust monitoring systems and foster ongoing dialogue to guarantee the successful execution of the National Policy on ECE throughout the State.

Keywords: *Cross River State, Early Childhood Education, Education Policy, Education Implementation, National Policy on Education, Policy Analysis.*

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education is the provision of care and education to a child beginning from birth to the required primary school age through a regulated arrangement. It is commonly used as a term that describes any formal care and teaching of toddlers and children provided by professionals or persons who most times are not related to them or/and occurring in settings that exist outside their homes. As defined by the NPE (2004), Early Childhood or Pre- primary Education refers to the type of education that a child receives from an educational institution before attending a formal primary school. This includes creche, nursery school, and kindergarten. ECE involves taking care of a child and ensuring development from when they are born until 6 years of age (Maduewesi, 2005). The U.S. National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in 2010 defined ECE using a

"developmental definition' as the education received by a child from birth until the age of eight. Although many other scholars and resources postulate that early childhood education typically spans from birth to the formal pre- primary education age (Sacks & Ruzzi, 2006). It is considered the stage when a child learns to walk, talk, build self-esteem, world vision; develop their morals and values. Harkonen (2002), states that child development is considered the foundation of human development because there is a connection between dignified living and the achievement of a life of quality. Social behaviour, intelligence, and personality are built in these early years of development and are therefore critical to the outcome of the child. The learning potential may be adversely affected if these foundational capabilities are not consciously and intentionally instilled from the beginning. In recent times, the focus on Early Childhood Education (ECE) for young children before they reach primary school age has grown significantly worldwide. While the concept of early ECE has old historical roots within traditional systems, the pre-primary education recognized in the modern Western school system emerged in the 19th century. This development was a result of compassionate and voluntary initiatives by a handful of philanthropists in Britain. The major aim was to offer education that was high in quality to children coming from underprivileged backgrounds and families. In America, one notable early childhood educational initiative is the program called "Head Start". Launched in 1965 by the government, its purpose was to offer quality education to children from low-income families. The program, which has a nationwide scope, has proven successful, as research documents its long-term positive impact on the children who have benefited from it (Hyson, 2003). The evolution of ECE in Nigeria was not a result of governmental initiative or educational philosophy. Instead, it originated from the voluntary endeavors of missionaries. The formal education of young children was first introduced during the colonial

period of the 20th century, primarily to serve the offspring of colonial officials. Following Nigeria's independence, the number of schools dedicated to early childhood education grew to serve the children of expatriates and Nigerian professionals. The rise of privately owned early childhood centers paralleled a growing recognition of the significance of nursery education and the increasing involvement of women in the workforce (Oduolowu, 2001). It was not until 1977 that the Nigerian government formally acknowledged ECE following the creation and release of the National Policy on Education (NPE), which was subsequently updated in 1981, 1998, and 2004. During this time, developing guidelines was emphasized for the creation and operation of ECE centers by individuals and private entities (Oduolowu, 2001). The Early Child Care Development and Education (ECCDE) program was launched by the Nigerian Research and Development Council (NERDC) in 1981 in 5 pilot LGAs across Nigeria. The year 2002 saw the early childhood program being initiated across public and government primary schools in Yobe State and expanded to various local governments, including Potiskum and Nguru, that same year. Bade Local Government Area hosted more than 20 public primary schools, all of which offer programs in childhood education.

Policymakers are now recognizing the significance of providing equal opportunity in access to quality early childhood education as an essential tool to enhance the basis for lifelong learning and address the social and educational requirements of families. Quality childhood education should encompass rich learning experiences and nurturing care that is capable of stimulating a child's development in various aspects; physical, emotional, social, linguistic, and cognitive (Hyson, 2003). The global community now strongly supports the numerous advantages that early childhood education offers, recognizing the significance of guaranteeing every child equal access to attend at a minimum of one year of preschool learning activities. Research by Sacks and Ruzzi (2005) has demonstrated that participation in a preschool program of high quality not only improves a child's readiness for formal school but also has long-term positive effects on their academic performance and social outcomes.

Teachers play a crucial role in a quality preschool, and well-trained and qualified early childhood educators are vital in shaping the perception of preschool education. Careful recruitment and training policies are necessary for both teachers and administrators of children's programs. Early childhood education is valuable for educational purposes as well as children’s welfare and, as the learning environment fosters social interaction, a love for learning, and curiosity.

The use of the local community language or mother tongue is recommended as the instructional

medium in early childhood education centers. The Nigerian Government aims to enhance the Nigerian language orthography and manufacture books and study materials in local languages to enable the policy's effective implementation. The NPE promotes the play approach to foster language development in children, recognizing play as a vital component of learning and development due to its absorbing and concentrated nature. Despite the growth in the number of schools, there is a concern that educational standards may be declining. Therefore, it is crucial to regularly assess the implementation of policies and performance standards in preschools to ensure adherence to government-set standards.

Evans (2000) stresses that for pre-primary or ECE to achieve its objectives, such as easing the shift from home care to formal school as well as getting children ready for early formal education, it requires careful supervision, adequate staffing, proper equipment, sufficient financing, and coordination. This policy demands transparency, determination, steadfastness, political will, accountability, and direct collaboration between the formulation and implementation of policy at the early childhood education level. Despite the government's efforts in establishing and owning ECCD centers in public primary schools nationwide, there have been noted deficiencies in Cross River State regarding facilities, curriculum integration, environment, instructional methods (play-way approach), staffing, and language of instruction. Consequently, it is necessary to examine and analyze NPE implementation regarding the ECCD program in the state. This study aims to determine the extent of implementation of the policy on early childhood education outlined in the NPE in government and public ECCD centers in Bade LGA of Yobe State.

Research Questions

- What is the level of implementing the policy that promotes the use of the local community language or mother tongue as an instructional medium in pre-primary schools within the Bade local government area?
- How thoroughly is the policy on instructional methods in ECE centers adhered to within the Bade local government area?
- In what ways do ECE centers within the LGAs make use of the Integrated Early Development Curriculum generated by policymakers (NERDC)?
- How closely do the ECE centers established in Bade follow the National Policy standards concerning: (a) Facilities, (b) Staffing, and (c) Environment?

Research Method

Design

This research utilized a descriptive survey design to examine the National Policy on Education's provisions for early childhood education within Bade LGA of Yobe State. The descriptive survey design is appropriate for this study because it allows for the systematic collection of data from a representative sample, providing a snapshot of the current state of policy implementation in early childhood education. This method enables the identification of specific gaps and areas for improvement, facilitates comparison and benchmarking against policy standards, supports evidence-based decision-making, and is generally efficient and cost-effective.

Sampling

The study's population included every head teacher and ECE teacher in Bade Local Government Area. From a total of 20 pre-primary schools in the area, a sample of 108 participants, consisting of 11 head teachers and 97 teachers, was drawn for the study. The validated instrument used showed a 0.7 reliability coefficient, as determined by Cronbach's Alpha. Validation was further enhanced using content and face validity, ensuring that the Early Childhood Education Performance Evaluation Questionnaire (ECEPEQ) instrument covered all the relevant aspects of the policy implementation that needed to be assessed. This involved a thorough review of the policy document to identify key components that should be reflected in the survey questions. The survey instrument was evaluated by experts in early childhood education and research to ensure that the questions appeared to be measuring what they were intended to measure. This helped in establishing the instrument's credibility.

Method of Data Analysis

The method of data analysis for the study involved examining the data gathered through interviews and questionnaires using simple percentages and frequency counts. Descriptive statistics, including standard deviation and mean, were calculated to summarize the data and identify patterns or trends. The significance level for the analysis was set at 0.05. This approach allowed the researchers to quantify the responses and evaluate the extent to which the policy provisions were being implemented in the early childhood education centers within the Bade Local Government Area.

RESULTS

Data gathered through interviews and questionnaires was examined using simple

percentages and frequency counts. Descriptive statistics like mean and standard deviation were calculated with a significance level set at 0.05.

Research Question 1:

What is the level of effectiveness in implementing the policy that promotes the use of the local community language or mother tongue as an instructional medium in pre-primary schools within Bade LGA?

Table 1: Instruction Language in Akpabuyo Preschools

S / N	Question	Yes	No
1	Are pupils instructed in the language of their immediate community or their mother tongue?	55 50.90%	50 46.30%
2	Are pupils encouraged to speak, write, and read in the language of their immediate community or their mother tongue?	22 20.40%	83 76.90%
3	Are the study materials and textbooks used by pupils written in Bade or Hausa language?	4 3.70%	101 93.50%

According to Table 1, more than half of the respondents (50.90%) instruct their students in their mother tongue (Bade), while a comparable number (46.30%) do not. A substantial majority (76.90%) of the respondents do not promote reading, speaking, or writing in their mother tongue among their students, although a minority (20.40%) do. Additionally, an overwhelming majority (93.50%) of the respondents indicated that the textbooks used in their classes are not in the mother tongue (Bade), with only a small fraction (3.70%) mentioning the availability of textbooks in Hausa in the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) centers. Therefore, this implies that the application of the mother tongue policy (immediate environment languages)

as the instructional language in pre-primary schools is ineffective in the LGA, and there is a lack of resource materials or textbooks in the local language.

Research Question 2.

How thoroughly is the policy on instructional methods in ECE centers adhered to within Bade local government area?

Table 2: Instructional method for classroom (a)

S / N	Questions	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly (4)	A g r e e	Strongly Disagree (1)	MEAN	ST. D

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1	The Montessori approach is considered to be among the most effective methods utilized in pre-primary classes	39	46	13	7	3.03	1
2	The Montessori method is implemented by my school	28	52	12	13	2.82	1.07
3	In the classes, audiovisual aids and toys are employed to enrich the learning experience	50	23	14	18	2.92	1.5
4	Do you agree that involving students in small group learning promotes affective and cognitive development?	62	42	1	0	3.48	0.6

S / N **Questions**

Table 3: Instructional Method (b)

S/N	ITEMS	Yes	No	To a small extent	To a very great extent	To a great extent	Hard to say
1	Are you aware of the pay-way teaching method?	101	4				
		93.50%	3.70%				
2	Do you utilize the play-way teaching method in your classes?	73	24	0		8	
		67.60%	22.20%			7.40%	

According to Table 2, the participants agreed that the Montessori method is employed in pre-primary classes

(mean = 3.03), and audiovisual aids and toys are used for teaching (mean = 2.92). They also acknowledged involving students in small groups encourages affective and cognitive development (mean = 3.48).

Furthermore, based on Table 3, the majority of the participants (93.50%) are familiar with the play-way

method

of teaching, while a small percentage (3.7%) are unaware of it. The majority (89.4%) of the respondents stated

that they extensively utilize the play-way method in their classes, with only a few (7.40%) using it in limited

cases. All teachers expressed a definitive stance on their use of the method. Consequently, we may deduce that

the implementation of the play-way technique, as outlined in the NPE, is practiced in the observed Early

Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) centers.

Research Question 3.

In what ways do ECE centers within the LGAs make use of the Integrated Early Development Curriculum generated by policy makers (NERDC)?

Table 4: Use of the Curriculum of Early Childhood Development generated by NERDC policy makers

Strongly Agree (4)	**Agree (3)**	**Disagree (2)**	**Strongly Disagree (1)**	**MEAN**	**STD**

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1	My school's implemented curriculum aligns with the guidelines of the National Policy on Education	38	58	6	3	3.16	0.86

According to Table 4, the participants indicated their agreement that the curriculum used in their respective schools adheres to the guidelines for Early Childhood Education of the NPE (mean = 3.16). Consequently, we can deduce that the local government ECCD centers largely adhere to the standard for using the ECD curriculum. However, it is worth mentioning that a small percentage (8%) of centers did not utilize the prescribed curriculum.

Research Question 4A:

How closely do the ECE centers established in the LGAs follow the National Policy standards concerning Staffing?

Table 5: ECE Staff Training and Qualification

SN	ITEMS	OPTIONS	FREQUENCIES	PERCENTAGES %
1	Staff Qualification			
	WAEC		3	2.7
	TTCert		5	4.6
	NCE		74	68.5
	B.ED		13	12
	B.A / BSc		10	9.2
	PGDE		3	2.8
	SUM		108	100
2	Are the staff in charge of the ECCD centers in Bade LGA trained specialist?	S.A	15	13.9
		A	54	50

D	13	12
S.D	20	18.5
No response	6	5.5
Total	108	100

According to Table 5, the findings indicate that 68.5% of the teachers held NCE qualifications, 21% had a first degree in education, and 2.8% possessed PGDE credentials. These degrees align with the National Policy on Education's requirements for teachers at this level, making up 93% of the participants. Additionally, 64% of the participants acknowledged the presence of well-trained and qualified specialists managing the affairs of the ECCD centers within the Local Government Area. Overall, it is safe to infer that the recruitment standards outlined in the National Policy on Education for ECCD centers are generally followed in Bade Local Government. However, it is worth noting that a small percentage (7%) of staff members employed did not meet the qualification requirements.

Research Question 4B:

How closely do the ECE centers established in the LGAs follow the National Policy standards concerning the Environment?

Table 6: ECCD Environment in the LGA

S/N	Questions	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	MEAN	ST. D
1	The ECCD centers in the primary schools of Bade are well-equipped and properly planned.	8	19	52	23	2	0.95

2	The ECCD centers in Bade provide a conducive environment 6 that fosters the learning process.	30	42	24	2.06	0.97

According to Table 6, the participants expressed disagreement regarding the presence of properly planned and well-equipped ECCD centers in the Primary schools within Bade (x = 2). Similarly, they did not agree that the Early Childhood Education Centers in Bade provide a suitable environment that encourages the process of learning (x = 2.06). These findings suggest that the ECCD centers were not established following the recommendations of the National Policy concerning school environments.

Research Question 4C:

How closely do the ECE centers established in the LGAs follow the National Policy standards concerning Facilities?

Table 7: ECE Centres Facilities in the LGA

S / N	Questions	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	MEAN	ST. D
1	The ECCD centers B a d e LGA have adequate learning 7 facilities.	15	48	32		1.86	0.95
2	The textbooks utilized align with the ECE National Policy in the 46 LGA.	44	11	1		3.14	1.02
3	In the classes, Audio Visual aids and Toys are employed to						

enrich 34 the learning experience.		42	16	13	2.84	1.08
4	Do you agree that engaging in outdoor games is important for the 72 holistic development of a child?	31	1	1	3.6	0.8
5	Using pertinent visual aids like colorful pictures and educational toys fosters the intellectual development of pupils.	67	34	2		

According to Table 7, the participants expressed disagreement regarding the adequacy of learning facilities in the ECCD centers in the LGA (mean = 1.86). However, they concurred that the study materials utilized are in accordance with NPE (mean: 3.14). Additionally, they recognized the importance of audiovisual aids and toys in contributing to the holistic development of children (mean: 3.14). They also affirmed that the intellectual capacities of pupils are nurtured through the use of pertinent visual aids like colorful images and educational toys.

From this data, it can be deduced that the pre-primary schools in the LGA generally adhere to the facilities standards set forth by the National Policy on Education. Nevertheless, it was noted that the majority of the visual aids and toys were meticulously kept in the office of head teachers.

DISCUSSION

The study on the implementation of the National Policy on Education's provisions for Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Bade Local Government Area, Yobe State, Nigeria, yielded findings that

provide insights into the effectiveness of policy execution at the local level. The research addressed four main questions, each of which is discussed below with supporting literature.

The study found that there is a lack of effective implementation of the policy regarding the use of the local community language or mother tongue as the medium of instruction. Only about 50.9% of respondents reported using the local language as an instructional medium, and an overwhelming majority (93.5%) indicated that textbooks were not available in the mother tongue. Evans (2000) stresses the importance of the mother tongue in the cognitive and social development of young children. He emphasizes that children learn better when taught in their native language, particularly in the early years, as this enhances comprehension and retention. The findings from the study align with this literature, showing that while some schools attempt to implement this aspect of the policy, there is a significant gap due to the lack of resources. Additionally, there is a lack of resource materials or textbooks in the local language. The literature emphasizes the importance of using the mother tongue in early education for cognitive development and language acquisition.

The research revealed that the policy on instructional methods, particularly the play-way approach, is significantly practiced in the observed ECCD centers, with 93.5% of respondents affirming its use in their classrooms. Moreover, the use of the Montessori method was also reported, with 89.4% of respondents employing this approach to some extent. Hyson (2003) highlights that early childhood education should emphasize active learning, where children engage in hands-on activities like those found in the play-way and Montessori methods. These approaches are known to foster cognitive, social, and emotional development. The study's findings indicate a broad awareness and use of these methods, consistent with global standards for ECE.

The results show that the majority of schools adhered to the guidelines of the National

Policy on Education, with 88.9% of respondents agreeing that the implemented curriculum aligned with policy standards. However, there were a few instances (8%) where schools did not fully adopt the recommended curriculum. Sacks and Ruzzi (2005) found that a well-implemented curriculum significantly impacts children's school readiness and long-term academic success. The findings support the idea that the curriculum provided by policymakers is largely being implemented effectively, which is essential for the development of children in the region..

Regarding staffing, the study found that 93% of educators met the qualification standards set by the National Policy on Education, with most holding a National Certificate in Education (NCE) or higher. However, a small percentage (7%) did not meet these requirements. Maduewesi (2005) emphasizes the need for well-trained educators in ECE, noting that qualified teachers are essential for the proper cognitive and emotional development of children during their early years. The study's findings align with this literature, as the majority of teachers in Bade LGA meet the policy's qualification standards, which is critical for the effective delivery of ECE programs.

Additionally, the reviewed preschools lacked adequate and well-prepared environments, which is essential for the total development of children during this crucial phase. Play equipment, as well as indoor and outdoor facilities were found to be grossly inadequate. To foster creativity among teachers and spontaneity among learners, effective and functional early childhood centers must have spacious environments, well-designed infrastructures, instructional materials, and functional health facilities.

Although the policy mandates using the language of their immediate community or the mother tongue as the instructional language, it was noted that all the public preschools under review mainly used English as the instructional language, with intermittent use of Bade or Hausa for clarifications when necessary. Only 20.4% of the respondents indicated using the Bade and hausa language. Notwithstanding the various

justifications for this deviation, the National policy highlights the significance of using the mother tongue up to the third grade of primary school. It is commonly recognized that children's early educational development is bolstered when they are instructed in their mothe tongue during the initial 6 years of their lives (Oduolowu 2011).

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study's recommendations are as follows:

- The government should take a more proactive approach to implementing its programs.
- Effective communication channels should be set up between early childhood centers and the ministry.
- Educational resources in the mother tongue should be supplied, and educators should receive training in the usage of the mother tongue through periodic workshops and professional development sessions.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals a mixture of successes and challenges in the implementation of the National Policy on Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Bade Local Government Area (LGA) of Yobe State. One of the key findings is that the use of local languages, such as Bade, as a medium of instruction has not been fully realized. Although the policy aims to integrate local languages into the early years of education, the lack of instructional materials, particularly textbooks in the mother tongue, has hindered its effectiveness. This shortfall underscores the necessity for government intervention in providing adequate resources, as the ability to learn in one's mother tongue is critical for improving comprehension, cognitive development, and cultural identity among young learners. Despite this, the study found that the play-way and Montessori approaches, both recommended by the policy, have been widely embraced by educators. These methods, which focus on child-centered, experiential learning, are recognized for promoting cognitive, social, and emotional development in early childhood. The broad application of these instructional methods indicates that many

schools are aligning with international standards of early education, fostering an environment where children can actively engage and learn.

In terms of curriculum implementation, the majority of schools adhered to the Integrated Early Childhood Development Curriculum outlined in the national policy. This alignment reflects a commendable level of policy compliance, which is vital for ensuring that children receive a standardized and high-quality education across different schools. However, there are still instances where the curriculum is not fully adopted, revealing the need for continued monitoring and support to ensure consistent implementation. The study also highlighted the importance of having qualified educators in the early childhood sector. It found that a significant proportion of teachers meet the qualification standards set by the National Policy on Education, with most holding the requisite National Certificate in Education (NCE) or higher qualifications. This is a positive outcome, as the presence of well-trained teachers is essential for the cognitive and emotional development of children during their formative years. However, a small percentage of teachers do not meet these standards, suggesting the need for additional professional development programs to address this gap.

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