

Investigating the Implementation of the Policy on Literacy Instruction in Early Childhood Education in Ekiti State Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated the implementation of the policy on literacy instruction on early childhood education in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The early childhood education as used in the study is the education received by children prior to their entering the primary school. Hence, the focus is the nursery and kindergarten excluding the crèche. The design of the study is a descriptive study of the survey type. The population is all the teachers in the early childhood sections of the primary schools in Ekiti State of Nigeria. The instrument for the study is a set of questionnaire which elicits information from the teaching practices in the early childhood education, specifically the following variables were investigated, frequent reading of books, activities of drawing, painting and writing, play with open ended materials, unstructured make believe play, storytelling, basic reading and phonological awareness. The data collected was subjected to inferential statistics specifically t. test statistics. The findings from the study shows that the kindergarten pupils from ages 3 to 4 were able to associate letters of the alphabet with objects, read conveniently numbers from 1 to 30, name primary colours and shapes, write some two and five letter words. As a result of the findings from the study it was recommended that private schools should have adequate space for the children to play while the public schools should make provision for equipments like DVD and television.

Keywords: Sensory Skills, Visual, Auditory, Numeracy, Literacy Instruction, Private School.

Introduction

Education is basic to socialization and civilization. The need to lay solid foundations for the younger generation led to the formation of early childhood literacy policy in Nigeria. The

early childhood education as referred to in the National Policy on Education (2009) is the training given in an educational institution to the children prior to their entering primary school. Such education includes: the crèche, the nursery and the kindergarten. The early childhood education is divided into three namely:

- a. Day care/Creche groups Ages: 0—3 years
- b. Pre-Nursery/Play groups Ages: 3—4 years
- c. Nursery/Kindergarten Ages: 3—5 years

The focus of this study is the category (b) and(c), that is ages 3-5 years.

The philosophy of early years learning and development is firmly rooted in the national philosophy on education which is premised on the development of the individual into a sound and attractive citizen and the need for quality of educational opportunities to all Nigerian children irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities. (NPE, 2009; p. 2).

The objectives of the early childhood education are to:

- (a) effect a smooth transition from the home to the school;
- (b) prepare the child for the primary level of education;
- (c) provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work (on the farms, in the markets, offices industries etc);
- (d) inculcate social norms;
- (e) Inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, the art, music and playing with toys ;
- (f) develop a sense of cooperation and team spirit;
- (g) learn good habits especially good health habits; and teach rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes ,etc through play NPE.pg.11

The need for the access to early childhood education by Nigerian children is justified in the National policy on education which identified the fact that the Nigerian child suffers deprivation from lack of good social services in terms of poor nutrition, healthcare, and access to safe water, sanitation, general protection from environmental hazard and security.

The situation is as a result of the following; (a) Class struggle (high crave for wealth) leading to decadent in moral values. (b) Increased participation of workers in paid employment outside the home. (c) Reduced community participation in child rearing and support. (d) Breakdown of the extended family system due to urbanization and its quest for individual survival in the light of increasing economic pressure. (e) Low participation of males in the child rearing (NPE 2009 pg.4). A critical observation of the above will reveal that most Nigerian parents rarely have time for their children as some will leave home early in the morning to get back late in the evening. Many women are now employed in the offices and some are engaged in political activities thereby having little or no time for their children. In the traditional society, when extended family thrived, the grandmothers were usually taking care of their grand children. They told the children stories and folklores with moral lessons. The trend has been broken by urbanization and mass movement of people from towns and villages to cities. In this situation, children are denied the opportunity to interact with their grandparents. The above problems definitely have negative effect on the attainment of literacy by Nigerian children. With this scenario issues of literacy constitute serious problems to education and government in Nigeria. It is envisaged that the nursery and kindergarten sections would teach the pupils the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours and shapes through plays therefore a solid foundation for the latter literacy would be laid. This may mean that pupils have had lots of experience with prints and even book reading. The pupils with their knowledge of letter names and ability to combine them to form words may have a lot of vocabularies in their memory. This will reduce reading problem in latter life. Many studies

point to the fact that vocabulary has a strong relationship with reading (Snow in McCarty and Philip, 2004). The foundations of literary learning according to Cooper and Kiger (2006), are oral language, prior knowledge and background experience. Literacy can be promoted in the area of learning in a second language by following these steps as highlighted by Machado (1999): i. Activities that develop sensory skills visual, auditory and tactile (touch) as well as discriminating, and sequential abilities. ii. Activities that facilitate problem solving and concept development classifying, organisation and association. iii. Activities that deal with language arts and vocabularies and comprehension development, listening, speaking, printing words and using symbolised forms.

It is important to note that children should be made to learn through play. Teachers should therefore prepare to lead children to learn through play with peers. Pupils who lack oral skills may miss out on peer play interaction. This can have tremendous input on both the development and oral skills. Also through play and its resultant conversations, peers may become teachers. Teachers according to Machado (1999), should encourage children to learn by playing with toys, and other accessories, conversation and art materials to symbolise language. Teachers should interact with the children; provide growing opportunities and activities based on background experiences of the children. Knowledge of child study will give a teacher insight into children learning behaviour. A closer study of children communication needs will help the teacher on teaching literacy among the children. Stake holders are complaining about the implementation of the literacy instruction in early childhood education section. It is observed that both private and public schools are engaging in the implementation of childhood literacy instruction programmes in Ekiti State. It has been observed that many parents, teachers and government officials sent their children to the private schools. It therefore appears that most children between ages 3 to 5 years are in the private schools. This study therefore investigated the implementation of the policy on literacy instruction in early childhood education in Ekiti State Nigeria. In order to carry out the study, the following research questions were raised.

Research Questions

- i. Will there be any difference in implementation of the policy on literacy instruction in childhood education in Ekiti State between private and public schools in the area of provision of activities and materials that can promote sensory, auditory, and tactile as well as discriminatory skills?
- ii. Will there be any difference in the implementation of literacy instruction between public and private primary schools in Ekiti State in the area of providing activities that deal with problem solving, classifying, organisation and association?
- iii. Will there be any difference in the implementation of literacy instruction between public and private schools on the implementation of literacy instruction in the area of providing activities that deals in language art, develop vocabulary ,printing words and using symbolic forms and numeracy.

As a result of the research questions raised above, the following hypotheses were generated:

- i. There is no significant difference in the implementation of literacy instruction in childhood education in Ekiti State between private and public schools in the area of provision of activities and materials that can promote sensory, auditory and discriminatory skills.
- ii. There is no significant difference in the implementation of literacy instruction in childhood education in Ekiti State between private and public schools in the areas of provision of activities, in the area of problem solving ,classifying and association skills.

- iii. There is no significant difference in the private and public schools in the area of implementation of literacy instruction, in the area of provision of activities that deals with language arts in vocabulary, in the area of primary words and using symbolic forms and numeracy.

Method of Study

The study is a descriptive research which employs survey and case study. The study involves all the private and public secondary schools in Ekiti State. There are 465 public and private schools in Ekiti State. The study drew 150 samples, 75 from private and 75 from public schools through multistage random sampling technique. A total number of 150 primary school teachers were involved in the study.

Research Instrument

The research instrument for the study is a set of questionnaire which elicit information on the provision of materials and the activities in the following areas, sensory skills, visual, auditory, tactile, discriminatory, problem solving, classifying, organisation and association activities that deal with language arts, numeracy, vocabulary, printing words and symbols forms. The study also involved observation using the same questionnaire.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

The content and face validity of the instrument was established by lecturers in the Department of Curriculum Studies, Ekiti State University. The reliability was established through administration of the questionnaire on 50 teachers who were not taking part in the experiment. The method used was test and retest method. The data collected was subjected to Pearson product moment correlation and the result obtained was 0.65 correlation coefficient which was adjudged as good enough for the study.

Administration of Instrument

The instrument was administered on the 150 subjects by research assistants who were trained for the purpose. The research assistants collected the questionnaire after they were completed. The data collected were analysed using inferential statistics specifically t-test statistics.

Results

The first hypothesis stated that there is no significant difference between the implementation of literacy instruction in childhood education policy between public and private schools in Ekiti State Nigeria in the provision of activities and materials that can promote sensory, auditory and discriminatory skills.

Table I: Provision of materials and activities that promote sensory, auditory skills

Source of Variation	N	Mean	SD	Df	t. cal	t. table	Remark
Private schools	75	71.40	4.70	74	2.79	1.96	Significant
Public schools	75	68.86	6.18				

The table above shows that t-calculated is 2.79 while t-table is 1.96. This implies that there is significant difference between the way the private and public primary schools implement the policy on early childhood education.

Hypothesis two states that there is no significant difference between the implementation of the policy on literacy instruction in early childhood education in the area of problem solving, classifying and organisational skills.

Table II: Problem solving classifying and organisational skills

Source of Variation	N	Mean	SD	Df	t. cal	t. table	Remark
Private schools	75	64.16	4.92	74	-1.706	1.96	Not Significant
Public schools	75	65.30	2.95				

Table II shows that the t-calculated is -1.706 while the table value is 1.96. This implies that there is no significant difference between the implementation of the literacy instruction policy on early childhood education in Ekiti State in the area of problem solving skills.

Hypothesis III states that there is no significant difference in the implementation of literacy policy on early childhood education in the area of language arts vocabulary building, use of symbolic forms and numeracy.

Table III: Vocabulary building, use of Symbolic forms and numeracy

Source of Variation	N	Mean	SD	Df	t. cal	t. table	Remark
Private schools	75	61.73	5.35	74	2.50	1.96	Significant
Public schools	75	63.65	3.65				

The table above shows that the t-calculated is 2.50 while the table value is 1.96. This implies that there is significant difference between the implementation of literacy instruction policy on early childhood education by public and private schools in Ekiti State in the area of vocabulary building and use of symbolic forms.

Discussion

This study investigated the implementation on literacy instruction in early childhood education in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The first hypothesis investigated the implementation of literacy policy in early childhood education in the area of provision of materials and activities that promote sensory skills.

The data analysed shows that there is no significant difference in the implementation of activities that promote the use of sensory skills between the private and public schools. The study reveals that both private and public primary schools teach pupils through play way method using toys, picture books, painting of objects with labels, music, storytelling, video and television, tape recording, plastic numbers, plastic alphabets, plastic shapes and synthetic models of animals and flora.

It was also observed that most private schools were fenced with walls which were painted and each letter of the alphabets was written on the wall with a picture where the sound appears. Most of the public primary schools in Ekiti State did not teach their pupils through the use of painting. The activities of both private and public primary schools corroborates the suggestion made by Machado (1999) that language teaching can be taught through activities that promote sensory skills such as auditory and tactile.

The second hypothesis which investigated the implementation of literacy instruction by private and public schools found that there was difference in the implementation in the area of problem solving.

From the data and observation during the investigation, the private schools involved the pupils in the activities in problem solving using toys, plastic numbers, shapes, plastic alphabets, plastic of assorted colours to solve problem of classifying, organizing and association. Further observation shows that both private and public schools were involved in similar activities using picture books without label, books with label, story books reading book and materials that were improvised by teachers to solve reading problems. This again corroborates the views of Machado (1999) that literacy instruction has to lead to problem solving by the pupils. The study also corroborates the view of Cooper (2006), that the foundations of literacy learning are oral language, prior knowledge and background experience. These are things provided for by these schools. It was discovered that there was significant difference in the implementation of literacy instruction by private and public schools in the area of provision and use of materials such as picture books, reading books, mathematical shapes, tape recorder/CD, DVD video player, plastic alphabets for spelling and word building.

A close observation of the classroom interaction revealed that pupils in few private schools have the opportunity to listen to stories, songs through CD/DVD player but none of the public schools has such provision. In all, it was discovered that the implementation of literacy instruction was adequate and followed the recommendation of the National Policy on Education (2009) and National Research Council (1998) specifically a four year old child can recognise book by their cover, knows how to hold it upright, listen to readings, understand pictures in books, can recite alphabets and recognise several letters read and write two and five letter words. A five year old child from these schools can spell some simple words, answer questions on story heard or read to them, write simple words, and match pictures with names. This finding corroborates the view of Macarty and Philip (2004) that vocabulary building has strong relationship with reading and later literacy. It was discovered that most private schools have insufficient space for playing unlike the public schools that have adequate spaces for playing. The study discovered that both private and public schools in Ekiti State Nigeria were implementing the national policy on literacy instruction in early childhood education according to the objectives and contents of the programmes. Both schools provided materials and activities that could lay proper foundations for later literacy and effect a successful transitions from pre-primary and primary schools.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concluded that both the public and private primary schools were working towards the realization of the objectives stated in the National Policy on Education. As a result of the findings of the study, it is recommended that private schools should have adequate space for playing while the public schools should make provision for equipment like video/ DVD player, toys and plastic shapes.

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