



Implementation Of Early Childhood Education Programme For Quality Education Delivery In Rivers State Public Schools

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to assess the implementation of early childhood education programme in public schools in Rivers State. Four research questions and two hypotheses were formulated to guide the study in line with stated specific objectives. Descriptive research design was adopted and the population of the study comprised all 533 early child care centres/pre-primary schools and the 1580 teaching staff (caregivers) in public school Rivers State. The sample for the study consisted of 48 schools and 590 (caregivers) respondents drawn using simple random sampling techniques. The study used two instruments for data collection. Document analysis index on school facilities, instructional material and staff specification, and a researcher-designed questionnaire tagged “Implementation of Early Childhood Education Programme Questionnaire (IECEPQ)” were used to gather information. The instrument was validated by experts and the reliability coefficient of 0.87 was obtained using Cronbach Alpha. Simple percentage, mean and standard deviation and rank order statistics were used to answer the research questions while z-test statistic was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that most school adhered to the prescribed national minimum standard specifications in facilities such as playground, classroom with good ventilation, head teacher’s office, tables and chairs for teachers, disposal of refuse and administrative office. Findings also revealed that early childhood education programme in public primary schools in Rivers State adhere to specifications on staffing in the programme. The study concluded that public schools in Rivers State did not adhere strictly to the prescribed specifications of NERDC’s National Minimum Standard, therefore, ECE programme is not properly implemented in Rivers State public pre-primary schools. There is need for complete adherence to the specification for proper implementation to be achieved. The study therefore recommended the following amongst others that; federal government should make early childhood education centres/preprimary schools stand alone and be separated from existing public primary schools., also, there should be reasonable increment to the budgetary allocation to the education sector so as to increase the funds available to this level of education.

Keywords: Education, Early child education, Pre-primary school, Quality education delivery, Rivers State

INTRODUCTION

The growth and sustainable development of any economy hinge greatly on the strength of its human resources and there is no better way to develop the human resources of a nation than through quality education. For this reason, the educational system world-wide keeps undergoing various reforms to tackle both the present and the future problems of its nation. This is quite evident in the Nigerian educational sector, considering the transformation it has undergone over the centuries. Education comprises all of man’s experiences from birth to school age.

These experiences are drawn first from parents' unsystematic curriculum and the more organized setting of the school. The early years of a child's life are crucial for his affective, cognitive and physical development. This is between the ages of 0-6 years. The education received during this period, whether formal or informal is referred to as Early Childhood Education (ECE). The origin of Early Childhood Education in Nigeria could be traced to the gathering of pre-school age children by the wives of the missionaries during Sunday schools in the 19th century (Akinbote, Osuji & Salawu, 2014). This was in the colonial era, when the education sector was solely managed by the missionaries.

When the colonial administration eventually intervened in the educational sector, infant classes were included in the re-organized public primary education. The infant classes were preparatory classes for the junior primary, but they were not properly regulated. With the introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1955 in the Western region, the infant classes were eliminated from the public primary schools. Primary education was reduced to six (6) years as against the former eight (8) years. The regional government probably did not see the need to introduced formal education to pre-school age children. This made the preparatory schools run by private individuals and groups to expand. Early Child Education therefore, became an exclusive of the private sector till 1999, when Universal Basic Education (UBE) was introduced.

In 2004, the UBE programme included children of pre-school age in the primary level of education which was formally referred to as Early Childhood Care Development Education (ECCDE) programme or Pre-Primary Education. It was saddled with the care and developmental changes in children below the official school age (6yrs). Early Childhood Care is divided into stages namely:

- Daycare, Creche or Playgroup 0-3 years (Home based or Centre based).
- Nursery school 3-5 years
- The kindergarten 5-6 years (Akinbote, et al. 2014).

The primary objective of Early Childhood Care Development Education programme (ECCDE) is to promote childhood learning and development. The process will also help identify health challenges in children as well as monitor behavioural problems. Assessing the implementation of ECCDE programme involves taking a close look at all efforts directed towards the achievement of goals of the programme by stakeholders.

Universal Basic Education is the Nigerian government's intervention for the actualization of Education for All (EFA). Education for All is a UNESCO international initiative, launched at Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 to guarantee Universal Basic Education to every citizen irrespective of nationality, race, sex, age, status or disabilities (Aja, Eze & Nick, 2014). One of the goals of EFA programme is to expand early childhood care and education for the most vulnerable children. The goals were set in the year 2000, for 2015. Only a third of the countries that made the declaration at Jomtien achieved all of the goals. Nigeria was not one of them (key findings of the Global Monitoring Report GMR, UNESCO 2015).

Rivers State, like other Nigerian states is not left out in the efforts to achieve the EFA goals. ECCDE programme was established in the state by UNICEF in 1997 with 17 centres across the state, although, most of the centres have folded up due to dilapidated structures and poor maintenance. In 2008, ECCDE was launched by the wife of the then governor, Dame Judith Amaechi through a Non-governmental Organization, called the Empowerment Support Initiative (ESI). With the introduction of UBE, several early childhood education centres sprang up, especially those run by private individuals or groups. Pre-primary classes were also established in already existing public primary schools. Presently, the educational system in Nigeria is structured into:

- Early child care and development aged 0-4 years;
- Basic education aged 5-15 years. It encompasses pre-primary 1 year, 6 years of primary education and 3 years of Junior Secondary Education;
- Post-Basic Education of 3 years.
- Secondary schools and Technical Colleges; and
- Tertiary Education provided in colleges of education, monotechnics, polytechnics and the universities (FRN, 2013)

The basic education, (1 year pre-primary inclusive), to be provided by the government shall be compulsory, free, universal and qualitative. The objectives of the 1-year pre-primary education include a smooth transition from home to the school; and to provide adequate care for the child while the parents are at work. In order to enhance the successful implementation of the ECE programme, National Minimum Standards curriculum and guidelines were developed. They will serve as benchmarks for measuring improvements and used to resolve issues relating to quality. It is imperative to note that when specifications to standards are not strictly adhered to, attainment of the goals and objectives of educational programme will become impossible.

The National Minimum Standard has been prescribed by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) in collaboration with United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). Adherence to the Minimum Standard will ensure adequate physical facilities that are in good condition, the use of appropriate instructional materials; the right staffing, in quality and quantity and effective school supervision. In addition to the aforementioned, there will be constant need to address challenges that may arise in the process of implementation. It is in the light of these that this study is concerned with the assessment of the implementation of policies and guidelines on ECE in public schools in Rivers State, thereby assessing the efforts of all stakeholders of ECE.

Statement of the Problem

The Nigerian educational system is often rated below world class. It has been described by many as being mediocre. This has greatly reduced the value of our human resources. Little wonder, Nigeria fell among the 'E9' countries. These are countries of the world with very high population and with a large percentage of their population being illiterate adults. This is a reflection of the quality of education in our schools. To have a high percentage of our adults, termed 'illiterate' i.e., inability to read or write, is an indication of the poor outcome of our Early Childcare development and basic level of education, since these are where the rudiments of reading and writing are learned. By mere observation, one can tell the deplorable state of some public schools, where basic facilities are either not available or in bad state. Effective teaching and learning are difficult to achieve when the environment is not conducive and educational resources are lacking. Again, in spite of the free education and the down turn in the economy in recent time, the patronage to private schools, especially regarding early childhood education (ECE) is still very high. However, the government and other education stakeholders are clearly no mediocre in formulating goals and objectives. It is the implementation of these laudable goals that seems to be a herculean task. The achievement of well laid down educational objectives entails careful planning. In the planning process, the implementation phase is most vital in actualizing set goals. Difficulty in achieving set goals usually arises when there is a wide gap between policy formulation and policy implementation. The assessment of the implementation of guidelines on ECE, such as availability of physical resources, teacher qualification, staffing, supervision, teacher/pupil ratio, etc. will help ascertain the possibility of achieving the laudable policies of ECE in Rivers State. Assessing the implementation of early childhood education programme in public schools in Rivers State is therefore the thrust of this study.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study was aimed at assessing the implementation of early childhood education programme in public schools in Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to achieve the following objectives;

1. To find out the extent of adherence to specifications with the physical facilities available for the implementation of ECE in public schools in Rivers State
2. To investigate the extent of adherence to specifications concerning staffing in Rivers State public schools with ECCDE centres.
3. To find out the frequency of supervision for the implementation of Early Childhood Education programme in public schools in Rivers State.
4. To examine the challenges impeding the implementation of ECCDE programme in public schools in Rivers State

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study.

1. To what extent are the physical facilities available for the implementation of ECCDE programme in public schools in Rivers State?
2. To what extent do public schools in Rivers State adhere to specifications concerning staffing in ECCDE programme?
3. To what extent are ECCDE centres in Rivers State public schools supervised for quality assurance?
4. What are the challenges impeding the implementation of ECCDE programme in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide this study and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female caregivers in the supervision of schools in Rivers State for quality assurance.
2. There is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female caregivers in the challenges impeding the implementation of ECCDE programme in Rivers State.

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive research design was adopted for this study. The population comprised all 533 early child care centres/pre-primary schools and the 1580 teaching staff (caregivers) in public school Rivers State. The 1580 teaching staff served as the respondents. The sample size for the study consisted of 48 schools and 590 (caregivers) respondents. Using the simple random sampling technique, three (3) local government areas were selected and 48 schools were drawn from these local government areas. The study used two instruments for data collection. Document analysis index on school facilities, instructional material and staff specification, and a researcher-designed questionnaire tagged Implementation of Early Childhood Education Programme Questionnaire (IECEPQ) were used to gather information. The instrument was structured on a modified four (4) point Likert type scale of Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE), and Very Low Extent (VLE) with ratings of 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively. The instrument was validated by three experts in Educational Management and measurement and evaluation in Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling Departments University of Port Harcourt. Cronbach Alpha test retest was used to determine the internal consistency of the instrument yielding the reliability coefficient index of 0.87. The researcher administered the instrument with assistance of two trained research assistants. They were trained on how to administer the instruments. The total number of questionnaires administered were 590, and same retrieved manually by the researcher with the two researcher assistants helping. Percentages, mean, standard deviation and rank order were conducted to answer research questions while the null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 significant level, using z-test. The mean of 2.50 was used as a criterion mean. Therefore, mean of 2.50 and above was accepted, while below 2.50 was rejected as implementation of early childhood education programme in public schools in Rivers State

RESULTS

The results of the data analysis are shown in tables 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 according to research questions and hypotheses.

Research Question 1. *To what extent are the physical facilities available for the implementation of ECCDE programme in public schools in Rivers State?*

Table 1: Frequency and percentage representation on the extent physical facilities are available for the implementation of early childhood education programme in public schools in Rivers State

S/N	Availability of physical facilities	Available 48 (%)	Not Available 48 (%)
1	Well fenced school compound	30(62.5%)	18(37.5%)
2	A play ground with grass or sand	45(93.8%)	3(6.2%)
3	Standard classroom with built in shelves or cupboard	30(62.5%)	18(37.5%)
4	Well ventilated classroom	38(79.2%)	10(20.8%)
5	Suitable tables for 25 children	32(66.7%)	16(33.3%)
6	Suitable chairs for 25 children	30(62.5%)	18(37.5%)
7	Playground with merry-go round	19(39.6%)	29(60.4%)
8	Playground with swing and slides	20(41.7%).	28(58.3%)
9	A hard surface to wheel toy safe for pupils	30(62.5%)	18(37.5%)
10	Head teacher's office	45(93.8%)	3(6.2%)
11	Table with drawers and chairs for teachers	40(83.3%)	8(16.7%)
12	Good source of water	30(62.5%)	18(37.5%)
13	Good source of electricity supply	32(66.7%)	16(33.3%)
14	Cistern toilet with hand wash basin	34(70.8%)	14(29.2%)
15	A good point for disposing refuse with well covered bins	40(83.3%)	8(16.7%)
16	Administrative offices	40(83.3%)	8(16.7%)
17	Sick Bay with first aid equipment	20(41.7%)	28(58.3%)
Grand Average		32.65(68%)	15.35(32%)

Table 1 showed the physical facilities available to implement early childhood education programme in public schools in Rivers State. These include; well fenced school compound (62.5%), a playground with grass or sand (43.8%), standard classroom with built in shelves or cupboard (62.5%), well ventilated classroom (79.2%), suitable table for 25 children (66.7%), suitable chairs for 25 children (62.5%), playground with merry-go round (39.6%), playground with swing and slides (41.7%), a hard surface to wheel toy safe for pupils (62.5%), head teacher's office (93.8%), table with drawers and chairs for teachers (83.3%), good source of water (62.5%), good source of electricity supply (66.7%), cistern toilet with washing hand basin (70.8%), a good point for disposing refuse with well covered bin (83.3%), administrative office (83.3%), and sick bay with first aid equipment (20%). The aggregate percentage showed that physical facilities are available to a moderate extent (Available: 68%), this implies that physical facilities are moderately available for the implementation of early childhood education

programme in Rivers State. It was also observed that some facilities like swings, slides where available were being shared with pupils of the primary level. This does not give the pupils of ECE ample time with playground equipment.

Research Question 2. *To what extent do public schools in Rivers State adhere to specifications concerning staffing in ECCDE programme?*

Table 2: Frequency and percentage representation on specification for staffing in the implementation of early childhood education programme in public schools in Rivers State

S/N	Specification concerning staffing in ECCDE programme	Available 48(%)	Not Available 48(%)
18	One caregiver per 25 children	38(79.2%)	10(20.8%)
19	One helper per 25 children	38(79.2%)	10(20.8%)
20	Fit security personnel	32(66.7%)	16(33.3%)
21	Qualified head teacher	40(83.3%)	8(16.7%)
22	Staff movement register	42(87.5%)	6(12.5%)
Grand Average		38(79.2%)	10(20.8%)

Table 2 has shown that early childhood education programme in public primary schools in Rivers State adhere to specification concerning staffing. These include; one caregiver and one helper per 25 children of 0-3years (79.2), one caregiver and one helper per 25 children of 3-5years (79.2), fit security personnel (66.7%), head teacher (83.3%), and staff movement register (87.5%). The aggregate percentage of 79.2% (Available) showed that early childhood programme in public primary schools in Rivers State adhere to specification concerning staffing, against 20.8% (Not Available).

Research Question 3. *To what extent are ECCDE centres in Rivers State public schools supervised for quality assurance?*

Table 3: Weighted mean and standard deviation scores of male and female teaching staff of early childhood education on the extent to which school supervision for quality assurance helps in the implementation of early childhood education programme in public schools in Rivers State.

S/N	The number of times ECCDE centres are supervised for quality assurance	Male = 98		Female = 492		$X_1 + X_2$	Rank Order	Decision
		\bar{X}_1	SD ₁	\bar{X}_2	SD ₂			
23	Head teachers carry out supervision daily.	3.4	0.98	3.38	0.89	3.39	3rd	VHE
24	Time book is available and being checked by head teacher	3.3	1.16	3.51	0.73	3.41	2 nd	VHE
25	Regular visit from external supervisors	3.41	0.84	3.19	0.79	3.30	4 th	VHE
26	Inspection report available and in use	3.63	0.89	3.38	0.55	3.51	1 st	VHE
27	Seminar/workshop are organized for teachers	3.19	0.81	3.32	0.59	3.26	5 th	VHE
28	Regular Up to date Training required for ECCDE teachers	3.16	0.74	3.12	0.80	3.14	6 th	HE
Grand Average		3.35	0.90	3.32	0.73	3.34		VHE

Table 3 showed that the items 23-28 have their various mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. It was therefore agreed by both male and female respondents that the schools are often visited for supervision for quality assurance. In the following order: Inspection reports are available and in use; time book is available and being checked by head teacher; Head teachers carry out supervision daily; regular visits by external supervisors; seminars/workshops are organized for teachers; and regular up to date training are required for ECE teachers. Since the grand mean of 3.34 is clearly above the criterion, the result therefore indicates that ECCDE centres in public schools in Rivers State are supervised for quality assurance to a very high extent.

Research Question 4. *What are the challenges impeding the implementation of ECCDE programme in Rivers State?*

Table 4: Weighted mean and standard deviation scores of male and female teaching staff of early childhood education on challenges impeding the implementation of early childhood education programme in public schools in Rivers State

S/N	Challenges of implementing ECE programme	Male = 98		Female = 492		$X_1 + X_2$	Rank Order	Decision
		\bar{X}_1	SD ₁	\bar{X}_2	SD ₂			
29	The supply of finance (funding) is inadequate.	2.94	1.21	2.93	1.02	2.94	7 th	Agree
30	Teachers' remuneration is poor	3.32	0.62	3.04	1.07	3.18	3 rd	Agree
31	Planning for ECE programme is poor	3.38	0.62	2.63	1.01	3.01	5 th	Agree
32	Bribery is a problem	3.07	1.12	2.93	1.01	3.00	6 th	Agree
33	There is corruption in the system	3.30	1.16	3.19	0.79	3.25	2 nd	Agree
34	Facilities are not well maintained	3.16	0.74	3.12	0.89	3.14	4 th	Agree
35	There are no accurate statistical data	3.63	0.89	3.38	0.89	3.51	1 st	Strongly Agree
Grand Average		3.26	0.96	3.03	0.95	3.15		Agree

Table 4 showed that items 29-35 have their mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. Therefore, the items listed were agreed by respondents as challenges impeding the implementation of early childhood education programme in public primary schools in Rivers State. In summary, the challenges faced by head teachers in the implementation of early childhood education programme in public primary schools in Rivers State, include: The supply of finance (funding) is inadequate, teachers decry poor remuneration, planning for ECE programme is poor, bribery is a problem, there is corruption in the system, facilities are not well maintained, and there are no accurate statistical data.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female caregivers in the supervision of schools in Rivers State for quality assurance.

Table 5: Z-test statistics of male and female teaching staff of early childhood education on supervision of schools in the state for quality assurance

Category	N	\bar{X}	SD	Df	Level of sig.	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
Male teaching staff	98	3.35	0.90	588	0.05	0.31	1.96	Retained
Female teach staff	492	3.32	0.73					

Table 5 revealed that male teaching staff of early childhood education have their mean scores and standard deviation of 3.35 and 0.90 respectively, while the female teaching staff have the mean and standard deviation of 3.32 and 0.73 respectively. With the degree of freedom of 588, the calculated z-test value is 0.31, which is less than the critical value of 1.96. Therefore, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis. By implication, there is no significant difference between the mean scores of the opinions of male and female teaching staff of early childhood education on supervision of schools in the state for quality assurance.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female caregivers in the challenges impeding the implementation of ECCDE programme in Rivers State.

Table 6: Z-test statistics of male and female teaching staff of early childhood education on challenges faced by school heads in the implementation of early childhood education in public primary schools in Rivers State.

Category	N	\bar{X}	SD	Df	Level of sig.	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
Male teaching staff	98	3.26	0.96	588	0.05	2.17	1.96	Rejected
Female teaching staff	492	3.03	0.95					

Table 6 showed that male teaching staff of early childhood education have their mean score of 3.26 and a standard deviation of 0.96 respectively, while the female teaching staff have 3.03 and 0.95 respectively. With a degree of freedom of 588, the calculated Z-value obtained was 2.17, greater than the critical value of 1.96. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that, there is a significant difference between the mean scores of male and female teaching staff on challenges faced by school heads in the implementation of early childhood education programme in public primary schools in Rivers State.

DISCUSSION OF FINDING

The result revealed that most school adhered to the prescribed national minimum standard specifications in facilities such as playground, classroom with good ventilation, head teacher's office, tables and chairs for teachers, disposal of refuse and administrative office. Also revealed was the fact that facilities such as compound with good fence, standard classroom with built-in shelves of cupboard, chairs and tables for pupils, surface to wheel toys safely, good source of water, electricity, and cistern toilets, the adhere to the minimum standard was in over 50% of the sampled schools. Other facilities like merry-go-round, swings and slides, and well-equipped sick bay were only available in less than half of the sampled schools. The result showed that the schools did not totally adhere to the specifications of the National Minimum Standard in physical facilities. They were available in schools by a total average of 68% and not available in schools by 32%. Since the prescribed standard is the minimum specification, it is therefore required for compliance to specification to be 100% (full) in order to have an optimal implementation of the

programme in schools. The finding of this result is closely related to Udeh (2014), even by percentage. Udeh (2014) assessed the implementation of ECCDE programme were not available. It is however contrary to some of the findings of Adikom (2015) which revealed that 67% of the schools in the state lack good source of water. The current research revealed that 62.5% of the sampled schools have good source of water. The research findings are in line with the work of Ibanga (2010) and Osiobe (2010), where both researchers indicated inadequacy in the supply of facilities to schools. In early childhood education, the adequate provision of playground with facilities such as merry-go-rounds, swings and slides can never be over emphasized. The pupils are at this level are at their developmental stage and need to interact with such facilities for their healthy physical development and psychomotor.

The study also revealed that early childhood education programme in public primary schools in Rivers State adhere to specifications on staffing in the programme. The specifications include: One caregiver and one helper per 25 children of 0-3years, one care-giver and one helper per 35 children of 3-5 years, fit security personnel, head teacher, and staff movement register. These specifications are in line with the minimum standards for staffing as provided by NERDC (2004). The findings revealed that 79.2% of the sampled schools adhered to the specification of NERDC in staffing. Also, noteworthy is the fact that the remaining 20.8% of the sampled schools that were non-compliant were mostly schools in the rural areas. This is not in full agreement with the findings of Awani (2008) on teaching manpower requirements for the implementation of UBE in Rivers State. The findings revealed inadequacy in the supply of teachers for the UBE scheme. This research finding is not in agreement with those of Daniel-Bassey (2012) and Udeh (2014). However, in some schools, the classes were merged into one i.e., having the day care/crèche pupils in same classroom with the kindergarten pupils.

The study further showed that early childhood education programme in public primary schools in Rivers State are supervised for quality assurance. The measures for quality assurance include: Head teachers carry out supervision daily, time book is available and being checked by head teacher, visits from the external supervisors, inspection reports are available and in use, seminar/workshops are organized for teachers however, up to date training programmes are required for teachers/head teachers regularly by the government. The investigation of this research is in high agreement with the study of Igbinedion, et al. (2016) regarding school supervision. Both studies are in agreement on daily supervision by head teachers being carried out and regular visits from external supervision. This study has unearthed that seminar/workshop are organize regularly for teachers by the government as a way of improving quality assurance for the implementation of early childhood education in public primary schools in Rivers State. However, up to date trainings are required regularly to keep abreast of developments in early childhood education.

Finally, the study has shown that challenges in the implementation early childhood education programme in public primary schools in Rivers State include: The supply of finance (funding) is inadequate and invariably affect remuneration of teachers, planning for ECE programme is poor, bribery is a problem, there is corruption in the system, facilities are not well maintained, and there are no accurate statistical data. Funding is the livewire of any organisation. It plays a pivotal role in the functioning of any organisation. However, the finding of this study unraveled that it is a challenge in the implementation of early childhood education programme in public primary schools in Rivers State. In a concerted effort, Igbinedion, Abraham, and Nwogu (2016) asserted that there have been low allocations to education over the years in Rivers State, and this has affected early childhood education facilities status, and where available, are poorly maintained. The demographic data section of the questionnaire revealed that over 85% of the teachers in the sampled schools possess the requisite qualification for ECCDE Staffing. Also, revealed from the questionnaire is the need for up-to-date training of teachers for ECCDE programme. This brings to the conclusion that most of the teachers are well qualified but require adequate up to date training for the effective implementation of the programme. Udeh (2014) and Igbinedion, et al.; (2016) in their studies decried the lack of training and retraining of the teaching and non-teaching staff of Early Childhood Education as a problem in the state and Nigeria in general. Bribery is one of the challenges facing the implementation of early childhood education programme in public schools in Rivers State. This is in agreement with the work of Ejiogu cited in Okoroma (2006). The study revealed that facilities in

early childhood education in Rivers State are not well maintained. In the light of the foregoing, Odiagbe (2014), and Adiakom (2015), revealed in their studies that facilities and infrastructure in pre-primary and primary schools are poorly maintained.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study it was concluded that public schools in Rivers State did not adhere strictly to the prescribed specifications of NERDC's National Minimum Standard, therefore, ECE programme is not properly implemented in Rivers State public pre-primary schools. There is need for complete adherence to the specification for proper implementation to be achieved.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with findings of this study, the following recommendations were stated:

1. The federal government should make early childhood education centres/preprimary schools stand alone and be separated from existing public primary schools. This will enable them not to be perceived as another class of primary school as was observed. This way, this level of education will get the needed attention to develop to full capacity. It may require a structural change in the education system, but the benefit will be enormous to the development of early childhood education.
2. There should be reasonable increment to the budgetary allocation to the education sector so as to increase the funds available to this level of education. The researcher recommends that, at least 20% of the total budget should go to the education sector.
3. There is need to organize regular up to date training programmes for the teachers of Early Childhood Education in the state. This will affect a better implementation for the programme and also keep teachers abreast of development in Early Childhood Education worldwide.
4. Government should ensure that facilities are well maintained and the needed ones are provided in order to facilitate learning.

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