



Evaluation of the Implementation of Pre-Primary Education in the South-East Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Pre-primary education is globally recognized as important stage in the life of a growing child. This is because experiences at this stage have far-reaching effects on the behaviour of the child as adult member of the society. This study is an evaluation research which focused on the implementation of pre-primary education using policy stipulations as the standards. It is also a survey study because the researchers went to the field to meet the things on the ground with instruments that enable data collection and reports are presented as seen without manipulations. The area of the study is Imo State in the South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The population of teachers in the four hundred and seventy three pre-primary schools in the State is Five Hundred and Forty One. The sample size is One Hundred and seventy eight teachers in 38 pre-primary schools drawn using proportionate cluster random sampling techniques. This is to achieve a good spread across the three education zones of the state and each zone was represented in the sample according to its school population. Instruments for data collection were school records, interview and observation

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checklists and a proforma for abstracting the teachers qualifications. Four research questions guided the study. Findings include that 93.26% of the teachers were not trained to teach in the pre-primary education level, teaching and learning materials were far inadequate, and the teachers focused more on getting the pupils learn to carry out written works, thus maintaining strict academic work and strong discipline as opposed to independent activities that boost initiatives and creativity. It was recommended that teachers should be sponsored to go back to school and get training in the early childhood education among other recommendations.

Keywords: Childhood; education; evaluation; implementation; origin; pre-primary; theories.

1. INTRODUCTION

Pre-primary education consists of education and care given to persons who have not attained primary school age. It is the first stage of education an individual receives outside the home, under educational institution. Pre-primary education is a broad term that covers all forms of education and care given to persons of different ages within the childhood stage. Pre-primary education is globally recognized. It is known as early childhood education or pre-school education programmes in some climes. The age differs according to societies and cultures. In United States of America, childhood ranges from 0-8 years. The National Association for the Education of the Young Children (NEAYC) held that early childhood is from birth through to the age of 8. Yet others view childhood as a period of human life that spans between infancy and early adolescence, starting from age 1-2 to 12-13. Five stages were identified as (1) new born (2) infant (3) toddler (4) preschool and (5) school age (<https://www.britanica.com/science>). In Nigeria pre-primary education is classified under Basic Education and it is meant for children aged 0-5 years. The Basic Education encompasses the Early Child Care and Development Education (ECCDE), 0-4 years and age 5-6 years, pre-primary. Thus, in this study pre-primary is used in generic form to include; Crèche/day care (0-2 years), Nursery/play group (2-4 years), Kindergarten (5-6 years). However, the focus is more on nursery and kindergarten level.

Pre-primary education is mandated through the National Policy on Education [1] as the education and care given in an educational institution to children prior to their entry into primary school. The official age for entry into primary school in Nigeria is six years. The objectives include among others;

- i. To prepare the child for the primary level of education

- ii. To effect a smooth transition from home to school
- iii. Provide adequate care and supervision for children while their parents are at work
- iv. Inculcate social norms
- v. Inculcate in the child the spirit of inquiry and creativity through exploration of nature and environment, art, music and the use of toys to learn.
- vi. Develop sense of cooperation and team spirit
- vii. Stimulate in the child good habits including good health habits
- viii. Teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms etc. through play (P:7). The document, FRN, 2013 further stated that government should monitor minimum standard for the ECCDE centres, develop and disseminate curriculum materials and implementation guidelines for the establishment and proper running of the pre-primary schools as well as other materials necessary to enhance implementation. The government should make provision in teacher education programme for specialization in early child care and Education. In addition, government was to;
- ix. Encourage both community and private efforts in the establishment of ECCDE centres based on standards
- x. Ensure the curriculum of teacher education is oriented towards play-way method
- xi. Ensure that the ECCDE centres adopt the following caregiver/enfant ratio of (1) crèche 1:10 (ii) Nursery 1:25
- xii. Make provision for the production and effective utilization of learning and instructional materials in adequate numbers.

In addition to the aforementioned operational guidelines stipulated in the National Policy on Education [1] the National Universities Commission (NUC), a body that regulates and sets standards for universities' programmes in

Nigeria equally listed out the relevant courses which undergraduate students in early childhood education programmes should undergo. These courses are contained in the NUC'S Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards for undergraduates in Nigerian Universities (BMAS EDUCATION, 2018). The courses which are described as core courses border mainly on communication, creative arts, science, plays, and drama, music, mathematics, simulation, games, and reading. A cursory look at the objectives and methods of teaching at the pre-primary centres as contained in the National Policy alongside the BMAS courses reveals sufficient similarities. The BMAS courses are actually based on the National Educational Policies. These stipulations are the standards or criteria upon which evaluation of pre-primary schools was undertaken in this study.

It is important to evaluate pre-primary education to ascertain congruency between the plan and implementation. Taking cognisance of the views of human developmental psychologist such as Jerome Brunner, Jean Piaget, and Erik Erikson as used in this study, that it is at this stage in the life of child that adequate foundation should be laid in the cognitive, emotional and physical development, it is important to carry out routine assessment of their education at this level. Moreover it has been argued that what a child becomes as adult is traceable to the experiences and education received at this level. This is because the child at this stage goes through rapid growth and development, the brain develops faster than at any other stage in his/her life [2] UNESCO pointed out that the child's quality contribution to the society as an adult is traceable to his/her experiences during pre-primary school period [3]. For these reasons, it is imperative to undertake regular evaluation of pre-primary education to forestall lapses that would thwart the expected results. Often times, attention is focused more on the higher levels of education and little or no attention is given to this foundation stage. The results of this study will draw the relevant attention to pre-primary education by exposing the situation on ground alongside policy stipulations. Areas of weaknesses and strengths of the programme would be explored. Thus, it is possible to collect data on current status of the implementation and compare them with the standards to see if objectives are being achieved or not.

Perhaps, it is worthy to present here a short review of the ideas that inform the practice of

pre-primary education to enable useful comparisons across climes. The foremost ideas were credited to Jean Jacques Rousseau as cited by Seefeldt and Barbour [4] as having held the opinion that children's education should begin from birth and should be based on the children's nature and not on adult's notion of what children are like or should be like. The ideas included that there should not be strict lessons and strong discipline. These ideals influenced the thinking about the nature of children and their education. Other discoveries were made about the nature and education of infants and some educators began to experiment. In 1839 Friedrich Froebel was said to have opened a school for children and called it kindergarten-a German word that means children's garden [5,6,4]. The concept of nursery school was attributed to McMillian Sisters of London who opened their school in Deptford Slums in 1910. The term 'Nursery' was chosen to represent love, nurture and physical care children would receive in their school and the word 'School' to acknowledge that it is a place where children learn as well as experience love. As time went on, it became difficult to separate childcare from kindergarten school and many of the childcare programmes followed either the kindergarten or nursery school programmes or both. The kindergarten (KG) was designed for 5 years old and the programme was either for half or full day. The aim is not to provide total care alone for the child or to offer comprehensive services but to offer children opportunities for academic, intellectual, social, emotional and physical growth through well rounded programme of activities [5,4]. These activities included ones that enable self-expression, creativity, plays, perception and harmonious living with one another. Children were to be presented with things like balls, blocks, cubes, and were expected to carry out activities such as paper folding, stringing beads and weaving and building shapes and so on. Others were dances, songs, games, and movements. KG flourished in Germany and spread to Europe and America and other parts of the globe including Nigeria. More studies in the early childhood education had given rise to a number of psychological theories that provided effective methods and strategies of teaching and learnings of children at each stage. This paper focused on the Nursery and Kindergarten children (2-5year olds) and not Day Care because Day Care is meant to provide comprehensive care, significant activities might not necessarily take place to warrant obvious school engagements.

This paper is anchored on some developmental theories on childhood education.

The children at the Nursery and KG belong to the iconic (2-3 years) stage in the Jerome Brunner's theory of intellectual development and pre-operational stages of Jean Piaget's cognitive development which put forward that children at these stages learn through interaction and manipulation of symbolic objects, in form of images, pictures and tangible things. They can draw, paint, fix, build images of things they form in their minds and develop sense of initiative as opposed to sense of guilt and low self-concept as pointed out by Erik Erikson Theory of Social Development. Their moral development is at the stage of pre-conditional morality in which the good or bad of any action is dependent on the consequence of the action, rewarded or punished by the perceived authority as Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development argued [7,8]. To this end, the children require honesty, patience, dedication, and sensitivity on the part of the teacher. Childhood is a time of dependence, the teachers need to be fast on their feet and come up with ways to guide them through their early learnings (<https://blog.wheelock.edu>). The writer went this far to explain childhood education programmes for proper understanding of original ideas, objectives and contents of pre-primary education which serve as standards for judging implementation as appropriate or inappropriate.

Evaluation is a check-back mechanism aimed at ascertaining how well a programme has been carried out, the extent the results tally with the expectation, whether improvement is needed in some or all aspects of the programme or to maintain the status quo. It entails collecting information about a programme and based on the available information determine the degree of conformity or disparity between what is on ground and what is expected. This helps in making informed decisions about the programme. Thus, the term evaluation means determination of the worth, value or worthlessness of something in the light of evidence [9]. The idea of evaluating actions to ensure objectives are achieved began at the time of creation as narrated in Holy Bible Genesis Chapter 1 verses 4, 12, 18 and 31. During the process of creating all that exist, God stopped at regular intervals to check what He has created, whether they met His standard or not. When He saw that they were good, He continued. Since man was created to resemble God in

functionalities, man imbibed the character of evaluating his actions for quality. In this study, the researcher went to the field to ascertain the level of implementation of pre-primary education in the areas of; (1) provision of learning materials (2) teacher qualification (3) class size and (4) contents taught. This would provide impetus to the functionality of pre-primary schools which are feeder schools to higher education levels [10].

1.1 Research Questions

1. How many teachers teaching in public and private pre-primary schools possess qualifications in early childhood education
2. What is the average class size in the public and private pre-primary schools?
3. What activities were the learners exposed to?
4. What is the adequacy level of the teaching and learning materials?

2. METHODS

This is evaluation research study because data collected on the implementation of the programme were compared with the policy stipulations in order to guide decision-making about the programme. It is also a survey study because the researchers went to the field with instruments to see things in their natural settings, asked questions and took notes and reported things as they were seen. In this study, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected thereby making it a mixed approach. The area of the study covered 5 states of the south east namely Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States, situated east of the River Niger. The people are mainly the Ibos whose language is Igbo. They are enterprising and adventurous. They like education hence there are many schools in the area. Their major industry is education hence the states are not counted as part of educationally disadvantaged states in Nigeria. The Ibos claim close ties with the Jews of the present Israel because of observed similarities in their cultures and traditions. This study was carried out in one out of the five states. The state was Imo which had twenty-seven local government areas. There is pre-primary section in each of the one hundred and seventy two government-owned primary schools in the state. At the time of this study there were three hundred and one registered private pre-primary schools in the state [11]. The study covered thirty eight pre-primary schools in eight Local Government Areas of the state. Three

research assistant were trained and used to collect information from three local government areas. The researchers covered the remaining five local governments, giving a total of eight local government areas visited. The covering of eight local government areas was meant to achieve a good spread in proportionately covering the three education zones of the state (Owerri zone, Orlu zone and Okigwe zone) as well as to capture schools in urban and rural areas. Instruments for data collection included school documentaries, observations and interview schedules and a rating scale which was given to teachers to rate the level of adequacy of provision of learning materials [12].

3. RESULTS

Research Question One: How many teachers teaching in public and private pre-primary schools possess qualifications in early childhood education.

The data in table one show that teachers teaching in the 15 public pre-primary schools were fifty-one out of which three (3) (5.88%) possessed qualification in the early child hood

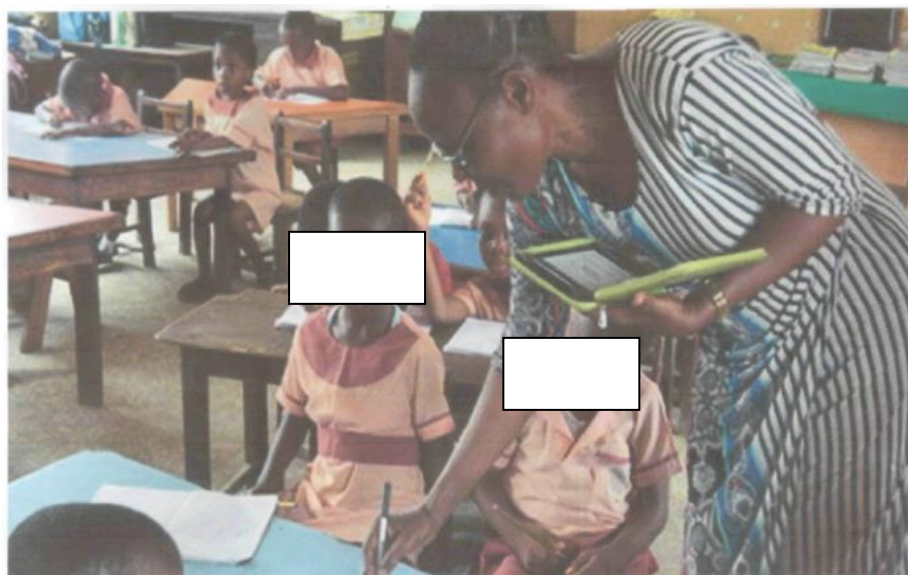
education. In the private pre-primary schools, the teachers in the twenty-three (23) schools were one hundred and twenty seven with only nine (9) (7.09%) having teaching qualification in the early childhood education. These imply that 94.12% of the teachers teaching in the public pre-primary schools and 92.91% of teachers teaching in the private pre-primary schools did not have training to teach at this level.

Research Question Two: What is the average class size in the public and private pre-primary schools?

Data obtained through observation showed that class size differ according to school location. Those in the rural had more pupils in public schools than in the private while in the urban centres private school had more pupils than there were in public schools. On the average the class size for public schools was 1:10 that is one teacher to ten (10) pupils while in private schools there was a class size of 1:15, that is one teacher per class of fifteen (15) pupils. These can be seen in pictures of Pic 1-4 for public schools and Pic 5-7 for private schools [13].

Table 1. Summaries of frequencies and percentages of teachers who possess early childhood teacher qualification. figures in parentheses are %

School type ↓	Number of Schools	Number of teachers	Possession of early childhood certificate	Non-possession of early childhood certificate
Public	15	51	3 (5.88)	48 (94.12)
Private	23	127	9 (7.09)	118 (92.91)



Pic (1). Pupils in public school in a village



Pic (2). Pupils in public school in the town



Pic (3). Pupils in public school in a village



Pic(4). Pupils in public school in the town



Pic (5). Pupils in private school in the village town



Pic (6). Pupils in private pre-primary school in urban town



Pic (7). Pupils in private pre-primary school in urban town
N.B: The pictures used in this research work are all gotten from field data

Research Question Three: What activities were the learners exposed to?

From the class time table of lessons the following subjects/activities were contained; Language Development (English), Number Work (Mathematic), Rhymes and poem, songs, storytelling, games, writing, science and creative arts. The pupils' writing and learning materials

were equally observed. The pupils recited rhymes, poems and sang songs,. Other activities were mainly written as could be seen in the pictures. Apart from English and mathematics another written works were creative arts. creative arts were done in form of drawing and colouring of pictures of objects. For instance the following pictures in Fig 1-3 were works of a 5 year old who was in kindergarten class.

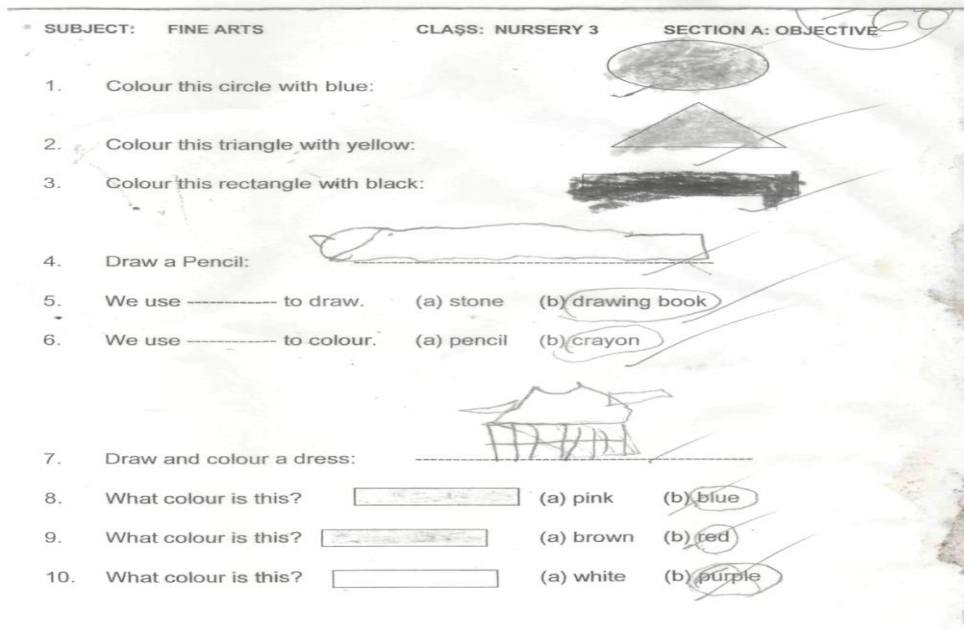


Fig. 1. colouring work by a five-year old child

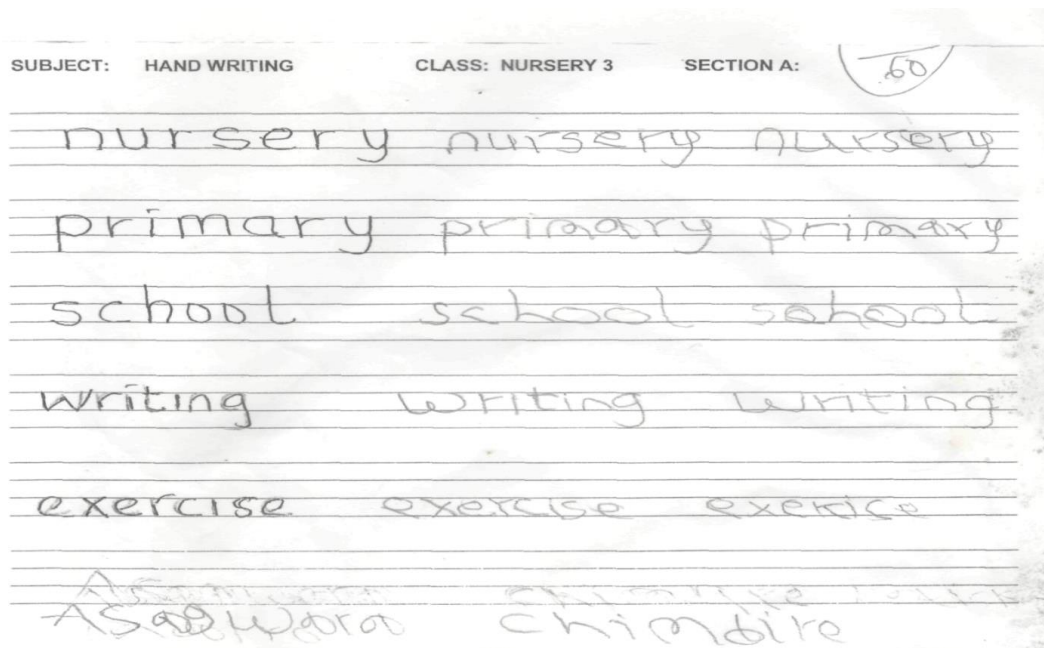


Fig. 2. Hand writing work by a five-year old child

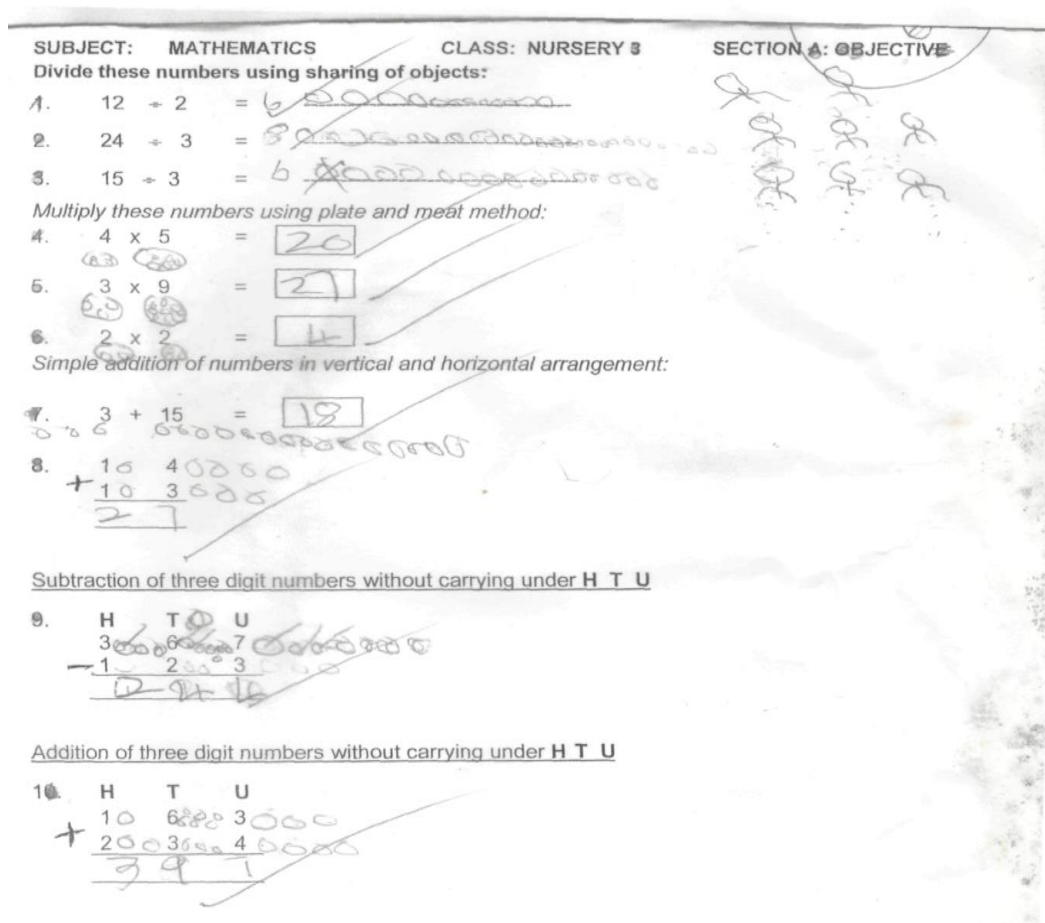


Fig. 3. Mathematics work by a five-year old child

Table 2. Adequacy level of teaching and learning materials

s/n	Item statement	Public schools (PU) N=51		Private schools (PR) N=127	
		X	S	X	S
	Indicate the extent the following materials were provided for teaching and learning				
1	Creative Arts Material	2.0	1.05	2.37	2.60
2	Science and native materials	1.80	0.80	2.50	1.66
3	Play and drama materials	2.20	1.10	2.58	2.56
4	Reading and communication materials	1.70	2.40	2.54	2.20
5	writing materials	2.35	2.30	3.10	1.50
6	Games materials	1.92	1.28	2.51	2.50
7	simulation materials	1.56	0.82	1.94	1.32
8	Number work materials	2.40	0.78	2.68	1.10
9	Story telling material	2.15	1.96	2.45	3.10
10	Music and songs materials	1.88	2.20	1.88	2.90
11	Recreational materials	1.66	1.36	2.55	1.30
12	Curriculum documents	2.51	2.45	2.48	3.20
13	cluster total	24.14	18.5	29.58	25.94

PU=Average mean score = 2.01
 PU= Average standard deviation score = 1.54
 PR= Average mean score = 2.47
 PR= Average standard deviation = 2.16

Research Question Four: What is the adequacy level of the teaching and learning materials?

The data in Table 2 are the mean and standard deviation scores of responses of teachers in public (PU) and private (PR) schools. The responses were based on a four-point rating scale. Given that a 4-point rating scale has a mean score of 2.50, maximum score of 4 and minimum score of 1 score per item, the mean score is used here as standard to judge the level of provision and adequacy of teaching and learning materials. For the public schools only item number twelve (12) curriculum materials were marginally adequate whereas the provision was not adequate private schools where the mean score is 2.48. In private schools almost all the items made the average mean score of 2.50 and above except simulation and storytelling materials which made 1.94 and 2.45 respectively. Writing materials were adequate to a reasonably extent with the mean score of 3.10. The standard deviation scores are generally low particularly for teachers in public schools showing that conditions operated equally amongst public schools. The standard deviation scores for private school are higher indicating more variations in their responses. This is not unexpected as the schools are owned and run by different individuals of different capabilities. However, the cluster mean score (29.58) and average mean score (2.47) for private schools are higher than that of public schools, 24.14 and 2.01 for cluster and average mean scores respectively.

4. DISCUSSION

Following from the answer to research question one it was discovered that out of the one hundred and seventy-eight (51+127) teachers in the 38 schools only 14 representing 6.74% possessed qualifications in the early childhood education. This means that 93.26% of the teachers teaching in public and private pre-primary schools in the state were not trained to teach at this level of education. This raises doubts to quality of teaching and learning going on in this foundation level of education. One can only give what one has, the teachers concentrated more on written works. Records show that most of the teachers specialized in different subjects taught at secondary and primary levels. In some private schools the teachers were school certificate holders who did not possess teaching qualifications at all.

Information gathered through interview showed that basic education was introduced to incorporate pre-primary without first checking the availability of human resources. This situation differ from the plan which has it that government should make provision in teacher education for specialization in early childhood care and education.

The class size is below the stipulated range of 1:25 for nursery and 1:10 for crèche. This should have been a good condition to lay a very good quality foundation of social norms, spirit of enquiry and creativity if the teachers handling them were experts.

Findings show that activities the learners were exposed to were mainly written works as shown by pictures in Fig. 1 to 3 of research question three. Since the teachers are not experts, all they could do is to give learners something to write in order to keep them busy most times. Experts have variously accused Nigeria Education system as being bookish. This is the starting point of the bookish education. According to UNESCO as cited in Oduntan [3] a child's quality contribution to the society as an adult is traceable to his/her experiences during pre-primary school period. The reason is at this stage the brain develops faster than any other stage in his/her life [2]. In addition to the teacher's lack of relevant qualifications, teaching and learning material were not adequate. If for instance, samples of materials for storytelling, drama, plays, simulations, music and songs etc were not provided, a teacher who was not trained to teach in this level of education will not know what to do and how to do it well. The plan which stated that government should make provision for the production and effective utilization of learning and instructional materials in adequate numbers has been proved to be a wishful thinking. In private schools, the parents pay for the learning materials of their wards. And those who could not pay the exorbitant fees charged in private schools enrol their wards in public schools. Actually no teacher was employed in public schools to teach at the pre-primary sections. The teachers teaching in the pre-primary sections were posted to teach there from primary section by the Head teacher of the school.

Meanwhile, checking what is on ground alongside the original idea of nursery education one detects disparities. Seefeldt and Barbour [4]

has it that the activities the children should be presented with should be the ones that enable self expression, perception, creativity and harmonious living with one another. And a hall should be provided with working tools such as blocks, cubes, stringing beads, folding paper, weaving threads, crayon etc, but in both public and private pre-primary schools visited there was no place designated and equipped for free activities that encouraged initiatives. Self-expression activities are the ones initiated by the child which is different from the ones the teacher showed the child what to do and how to do them. This enables the teacher to understand the child's line of thoughts and area of strengths and weaknesses as the child learns to explore. The difference is obvious. There was preponderance use of expository methods which has spread to other higher levels Education. Psychological theorists mentioned in the study pointed out that children at this stage build images they formed in their minds and through their actions they are understood and guided properly. Educational system that does not provide opportunity for such self expression can hardly give adequate guidance. Jean Jacques Rousseau who was said to be the first to conceive the idea of pre-primary education warned against strict lessons and strong discipline as he favoured training children according to their nature and not according to the notion of adults about them [4].

5. CONCLUSION

In the midst of all these, findings of this study revealed that 93.26% of the teachers lack relevant qualification and competence. In addition, the curriculum materials were not readily available especially in private schools. Teaching and learning materials were not sufficiently provided. Consequent upon these, the activities the pupils were exposed to, were more of book work which rarely facilitates independent thinking and creativity. Perhaps, this is the reason it has been difficult for Nigeria to advance beyond being a consumer country. Apart from student-teacher ratio which tallied with policy stipulations probably because of private participation, every other plan is at variant with implementation, there were disparities between what is expected and what is being done and objectives can hardly be sufficiently achieved. This preponderant use of writing bookwork probably is the foundation of unethical practices that reduce the validity of examinations as being witnessed in the system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Government should employ teachers who specialize in Early childhood education to teach in both public and private pre-primary education schools. If possible existing teachers should be sponsored to an in-service training in early childhood education. The moment government insists on this the private schools will join in employing only the qualified teachers.

1. The class size of 25 pupils per teacher and teacher aid should be maintained.
2. The planned activities at the pre-primary schools are adequate if necessary materials can be provided for their implementation. Government and school proprietors should provide learning materials for the pupils to enable them freedom of expression of their skills. Qualified teachers should be employed to handle teaching and learning processes.
3. Written work should not be stressed at the expense of free activities that enable exhibition of potentials.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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