

# The Challenges of Pre-Primary Education in Enugu State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

This study investigated the challenges of pre-primary education in Enugu State, Nigeria. The population comprised all 584 teachers in pre-primary schools in the State. A sample of 108 pre-primary school teachers was taken; all the male teachers and 10 percent of the female teachers, selected through random sampling technique. A 24 item questionnaire developed by the researcher was used to collect the data. The data collected was analyzed using mean, standard deviation and t-test. Results revealed that all the items except item 24 were all challenges to pre-primary education in Enugu State. There was no significant difference in the mean rating scores of male and female teachers in respect of the challenges of pre-primary education in Enugu State. It was recommended that government should show more commitment in the implementation of pre-primary education.

**Keywords:** pre-primary, education, challenges, implementation

## 1. Introduction

Education is an agent of national development. Its importance cannot be overemphasized. Education is believed to enhance the quality of living of individuals and to some extent narrow the gap between social classes. To this extent many nations have given it a priority. In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, the right to education is one of the basic issues discussed. Article 26 of that declaration stated thus:

- a. Everyone has a right to education. This shall be free at least in the elementary and primary stages.
- b. Elementary education shall be compulsory while technical and professional education shall be made generally available.
- c. Higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
- d. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children (Nwangwu 2003, p.6-7)

It is against this background that the early childhood education has become imperative. Early childhood is a critically important stage in life. It is often referred to as the building blocks of brain development. Mustard (2010) opined that the basic architecture and function of the brain are established at this period. The essential healthy, physical, emotional and natural developments of a child occur at this period. Foundation of successful learning is also believed to be laid at this critical stage. Nakpodia (2012) posited that the child begins to initiate, imitate and develop certain important habits that will be used throughout later schooling.

Early childhood/pre-primary education forms part of the educational programme in Nigeria. The National Policy on Education (2013) defined pre-primary education as the education given in an educational institution to children prior to their entering primary schools. It includes among others crèche, the nursery and kindergarten. Pre-primary education is the education given to children from ages 0-6 years before admitting them formally into the primary school system. Scientists allude that the brain develops rapidly at this stage in life. Adequate and careful attention is, therefore, needed to channel appropriate learning experiences.

Stimulation and learning opportunities are better provided in formal setting than most parents can individually do. As some of these parents are uneducated, they will be unable to prepare their children adequately for school. Therefore, the education of young children needs to be effectively organized since the nature of education a child receives in the first few years of life can be critical to his overall development and later life chances. Pre-primary education according to Hague (2003) helps cognitive development of children at the early grades of primary education and has a strong bearing on attendance and participation of children once they enter primary school. This level of education is considered as the ultimate foundation stone upon which other tiers of education are built as this will help develop the child as a confident citizen to face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The world over, the trend towards single parenthood seems to be on the increase. More importantly, the involvement of more women in the economy demands the need for where working class mothers can keep their children. The role of women as home builders and first teachers is declining. This has given rise to a situation where the pre-school child is left in the care of house helps who are not as committed as the mothers over the development of the child. More over incidences of abuse by this group of care givers also comes to the fore. The child may therefore be safer in an organized school system.

Global commitment to early childhood education is evident in the world forum to education held in Dakar in 2000 (UNESCO, World Education Press releases). The international community made commitment in expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education and stipulated that learning begins from birth. Pre-primary education is an integral part of the Nigerian education system. It is the realization of its relevance to the overall development of the child that the federal government gave it official recognition in her

educational policy document with lefty goals. Steps set by government in achieving these goals are commendable. However, the extent to which these statements are matched with appropriate actions are debatable. There seems to be a gap between the stated goals and the actual implementation.

Pre-primary education as currently being implemented seems to be haphazardly done. This could be attributed to some issues. Several authors have observed that the quality of teachers who are employed to handle this critical level of education is low. Nwangwu (2012) in his study found a low quality of teaching personnel. In the same vein, Nakpodia and Achugbue (2012) revealed a lack and inadequacy of competent teachers while Sooter (2013) and Kayode(2014) observed that the teacher quality is generally low. Osho, Aliyu, Okolie & Onifade (2014) in a study on the implementation of early childhood education in Chanchanga Local Government Area of Niger State, Nigeria, regrettably found out that a third of the teachers are not specialized in early childhood education. This is in line with the findings of Uchem and Onuh (2014), which revealed that the dominant academic qualification of pre-primary school teachers in Nigeria are the West African School Certificate (WASC) and Teachers Grade II (TC II) Certificate. There is a popular saying that you cannot give what you do not have and this is affirmed by the National Policy on Education (2013) in the statement that no education rises above the quality of its teachers. Since the pre-primary age is the period of rapid brain development and impressionable too, it behooves on the government to employ qualified teachers who have the capacity so as to get it right from the beginning.

Penfield as quoted in Nakpodia and Achugbue (2012) argued that the early age is the best age for learning second and third languages in nursery and primary institutions. Fortunately, the National Policy on Education (2013) recognizes this and in realization of the importance of the mother tongue in education clearly stated that the medium of the instruction of the pre-primary level of education will be principally the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community. Still laying credence to the vital importance of the mother tongue, Akindele & Adegbite as cited in Oyetunde (2012) asserted that using the mother tongue at the nursery school will complement children's acquisition of the language at home and this helps them to further learn in their environments socio-cultural norms –which is one of the goals of pre-primary education. Regrettably, the use of mother tongue is not the case as Oyetunde (2012) stated that this position only exists on paper. Nakpodia & Achugbue (2012) equally found out that mother tongue was not being used as a medium of instruction in pre-primary schools. The much hue and cry over the mother tongue disability of a typical Nigerian child might be addressed at this stage and level of schooling. In addition to this, students' poor performance and lack of understanding of basic concepts in science could also be tackled if the mother tongue policy is implemented at this early age. This assumption is in tandem with Ritcher as cited in Aghedo (2012) who stated that the mother tongue has an inestimable pedagogic value.

Quality of pre-primary education according to Hassan (2007) refers to features of a pre-primary school environment and children's experiences in this environment which are beneficial to their growth, development and welfare. Observations have revealed that the environment under which learning takes place in many pre-primary institutions in Enugu state is appalling. Available records from the Ministry of Education, Enugu State (2014) reveal lack in the number of classrooms. The available classrooms need major repairs. The tale of woe continues as there is no pipe borne water in many schools and more than half the number of schools have no toilet. This might give a glimpse of the picture of the situation in the pre-primary schools since they are attached to the primary schools.

This goes to authenticate the findings of Nakpodia & Achugbue (2012) where they found out that facilities at this level of education are inadequate. Amali, Bello & Okafor (2012) found classroom to be inadequate, teachers – pupil ratio not adequate and the provision of first aid materials to handle emergence cases in the school not adequate as well. Uchem & Onuh (2014) surprisingly found facilities to be adequate in pre-primary schools in Nigeria.

Learning at the pre-primary school as stipulated by the National policy should be through play. Play requires a lot of facilities such as toys, so that children can explore. Socialization occurs mainly through interaction with mates through play. Unfortunately, Kayode (2014) observed that facilities for play are not available. Osho et.al (2014) discovered that playing equipment are almost completely not available in any of the schools he studied. Under this circumstance, learning to socialize at this period in order to benefit maximally in later life adjustment is in jeopardy.

The curriculum content of pre-primary education is yet to be clearly spelt out in policy document (FME 1987). This can pose problem of uniformity and standards because different pre-primary schools will operate and teach what they deem fit. UNICEF cited by Nwangwu (2012) observed that national curriculum for pre-primary education is not yet widely operational. This is in line with Ejeih (2006) who also observed the absence of a national curriculum on pre-primary education. Amalie et.al (2014) also asserted that there is no official curriculum dictating subjects and materials that could be used in the teaching and learning process of pre-primary school children in Kwara State, Nigeria.

There seems to be lack of interest as government's attitude towards the implementation of pre-primary

education leaves much to be desired. The promise to make provision for teacher education programmes, ensure the use of mother tongue, produce textbooks in Nigerian languages, ensure that the main method of teaching at this level shall be through play (NPE 2013) among others is yet to be seen. Ejeih (2006) noted that both state and federal governments are unable to exercise effective control on the establishment and running of pre-primary schools. He further observed that there is lack of supervision to ensure maintenance of standards. He equally observed that there is no provision in public or private teacher training institution in the country for the production of specialist teachers. Omenyi & Enemu (2014) also observed the lack of supervision to ensure maintenance of standards.

The above scenario explains the relevance of this study with particular reference to Enugu state. The gap that this study intends to fill is to determine the challenges of pre-primary education in Enugu State.

### **1.1. Research Questions**

1. What are the challenges of pre-primary education in Enugu state?

#### **1.1.1. Hypothesis**

H<sub>01</sub> There is no significant difference between the mean rating scores of male and female teachers of pre-primary schools on the challenges of pre-primary education in Enugu state.

#### **1.1.2. Methodology**

The study adopted descriptive survey design. In survey method, a group of people is studied by collecting and analyzing data from only a few people deemed to be representative of the entire group. (Nworgu 2006)

The study area is Enugu state. This is one of the states in the South East geo-political zone of Nigeria. Enugu state is made up of six education zones. There are a total of 584 teachers in the pre-primary schools in the state. (55 males and 529 females) source: Ministry of Education, Enugu State. (2014).

The population for the study consisted of all the teachers in the government owned pre-primary schools as at the 2015/2016 academic session. The sample consisted of all the male teachers and 10% of the female teachers i.e 53. In other - words 108 teachers constituted the sample size of the study.

A 24 item self - designed Likert type questionnaire on the “Challenges of pre-primary Education” (CPPE) in Enugu State was used to elicit data from the respondents. It has two sections A and B. Section A elicits personal data of the respondents while section B elicits information on challenges of pre-primary education in Enugu state. The response made to the items is a four- point rating scale of Strongly Agree-4point, Agree-3 points, disagree – 2 point and Strongly Disagree – 1 point. The instrument was validated by two experts in Educational management and one in Measurement and Evaluation all from the Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu. Their observations and input formed the final draft of the instrument. Reliability of 0.81 of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha statistics after trial testing on 20 pre-primary school teachers (10males and 10 females) who are not part of the study. The researches employed the help of four research assistants.

#### **1.1.3. Results and Discussion**

The results of the study are presented in Tables 1 -2

**Table 1: Mean Responses of male and female teachers on challenges of the pre-primary education in Enugu state.**

S/N	Items	X	Male Teachers n=55			Female Teachers n=53		
			SD <sub>1</sub>	Deci.		X <sub>2</sub>	SD <sub>2</sub>	Deci.
	<b>What are the challenges of pre-primary education in Enugu state, Nigeria</b>							
1	Inadequate classrooms	3.32	0.58	A	3.02	1.10	A	
2	Poorly ventilated classrooms	3.12	0.74	A	2.87	1.07	A	
3	Inadequate seals	3.27	0.73	A	3.19	1.03	A	
4	Lack of spacious play ground	2.71	0.99	A	2.74	1.21	A	
5	Lack of equipment on play ground	2.93	1.00	A	3.38	0.84	A	
6	Poor toilet facilities	2.90	0.80	A	2.98	1.10	A	
7	Lack of appropriate teaching aids	3.44	0.50	A	3.17	1.05	A	
8	Lack of appropriate textbooks	3.35	0.48	A	3.04	1.13	A	
9	Lack of textbooks written in local language	3.33	0.55	A	2.94	1.06	A	
10	Use of English as a medium of instruction	3.07	0.84	A	2.91	1.04	A	
11	Lack of appropriate toys for learning	3.15	0.56	A	3.09	1.02	A	
12	Inappropriate curriculum	2.84	0.66	A	3.01	1.01	A	
13	Inadequate teaching personnel	2.84	0.90	A	2.47	1.10	D	
14	Inexperienced teaching personnel	2.76	0.92	A	2.21	1.18	D	
15	Unqualified teaching personnel	2.76	0.86	A	2.25	1.14	D	
16	Unmotivated teaching personnel	2.93	0.69	A	2.47	1.19	D	
17	Poor attitude to work by teachers	2.23	0.74	D	2.28	1.25	D	
18	Lack of training and retraining of teachers	2.02	0.80	D	2.55	1.19	A	
19	Government not showing enough interest in pre-primary education.	3.80	0.49	SA	3.42	0.91	A	
20	The government is usually to fund pre-primary education.	3.73	0.45	SA	3.36	0.96	A	
21	Ministry of education dose not monitor what is going on in pre-primary schools.	3.40	0.49	A	3.00	0.92	A	
22	Government does not implement what the national policy on education stipulates on pre-primary education.	3.24	0.67	A	3.08	1.05	A	
23	Government does not enforce pre-primary school regulations as laid down by the national policy on education.	3.15	0.78	A	2.96	1.16	A	
24	Government trains and retrain teachers.	2.25	1.06	D	2.42	1.12	D	
	$\sum x$		<b>2.87</b>	<b>1.09</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>3.02</b>	<b>0.72</b>	

The Table 1 above shows that the mean of the items ranges from 2.02 to 3.80 for the male teachers while for female teachers it is from 2.28 to 3.38. Items 13,14,15,16,17 and 24 have mean below the set bench mark of 2.50 for female teachers and items17, 18 and 24 for the male teachers below the benchmark of 2.50. This therefore shows that the respondents agree these are not challenges to pre-primary education in Enugu state. The mean of all the others are above the mean benchmark of 2.50. The grand mean is also above the 2.50 benchmark.

#### 1.1.4. Hypothesis

There is no significant difference between the mean rating scores of male and female teachers of pre-primary schools on the challenges of pre-primary education in Enugu state.

Table 2: Result of Null Hypothesis 1 ( $H_{01}$ ).

Gender of Teach	Mean $\bar{x}$	SD	N	df	Standard Error	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Male	3.02	0.72	55	106	0.031	0.85	1.96	Accept
Female	2.87	1.09	53					

The data on Table 2 shows that t-cal is less than the t-critical, therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted indicating that there is no significant difference in the mean rating scores of male and female teachers in respect of the challenges of pre-primary school in Enugu state. The null hypothesis is therefore, accepted.

#### 1.1.5. Discussion

The challenges of pre-primary education are revealed by the result in Table 1 and the corresponding hypothesis. There is agreement in the responses of both male and female teachers that the listed item are all challenges of pre-primary education in Enugu state except items 13,14,15 16 17 and 24 for female teachers and items 17,18 and 24 for male teachers. This is in consonance with Nakpodia & Achugbue (2012), and Amali et.al (2014).

From the analysis of the hypothesis, both male and female teachers agreed that all the items are challenges to pre-primary education in Enugu State.

#### 1.1.6. Conclusion

The study revealed the challenges of pre-primary education in Enugu state. Pre-primary education is a very important stage in the inculcation of basic learning in children. In order to get the desired out come in our education system, care should be taken in the implementation of this level of education.

#### Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that: -

1. Government should be sincere in the implementation of pre-primary education considering the impact it has on the development of children at this critical stage of their development.
2. Government should endeavor to provide appropriate facilities to make schools more child friendly especially as the children are having their first time experience in school.

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