

**QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
CENTRES IN BENIN CITY.**

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ABSTRACT

Early childhood Education is most paramount in all aspect of life and it is the foundation where other forms of schooling are laid. This study examines the concept of quality in early childhood education in 30 selected government and private Nursery schools in Benin City, Edo State. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population consists of all public and private Nursery schools in Benin City, the simple random sampling technique was used to select 30 schools and 250 respondents which include teachers, head-teachers and researchers. Data were collected using a questionnaire and checklist administered by the researcher. Six research questions guided the study. Data collected were analyzed using mean and percentages. Findings show that the quality of learning environment, the quality of academic staff, parents' participation were high in the school and government involvement was found to be high in Edo State. The paper concluded that the importance of early childhood education cannot be wished away, rather it should be given due attention by all stakeholders. It recommended among others that government should increase funding to early childhood education which will improve standard of education generally.

Key words: *Early Childhood Education, Quality Assessment.*

Introduction

Education is paramount in every nation especially the early years of education which is the “artery” that carries the “blood” that flows to other levels of education. Early years of education was recently brought to awareness and fore front in the public because of the vital role it plays in the nation’s economy and family life. Most parents, professional workers and public servants who go about their normal duties every day are worried about where their children will stay and be catered for and this gave rise to the spring up of early childhood education centers in Nigeria.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) in the National Policy on Education gave recognition to early childhood education as that type of education given to children between the ages of 0 – 5years and above, prior to their entering primary schools. The early childhood education is a critical and intensive years in an individual life because it is the bedrock where adulthood development is laid. The United Nations International Children Education Fund (UNICEF, 2007) noted that attention should be given to early childhood education in order to break intergenerational cycles of chronic, poverty, poor health and sub optional human development. It is of importance that greater care and attention should be given to early childhood education. Taking into consideration the time the children spend in these centers and environment; these will enhance the enrichment of the children’s ability in social development, psychological development and their intellectual ability.

In pursuance of quality in early childhood education, the Federal Government of Nigeria set up a minimum standard to be attained in all schools/centers with regards to staffing, facilities, library, instructional material, teaching and learning activities, quality control, curriculum standard, assessment of instructional materials, co-curricular activities among others (FRN 2013) and this necessitated the researchers to find out if quality is maintained in early childhood education school/centers in Benin metropolis of Edo State.

The Concept of Quality.

Education can only act as an empowerment tools when the quality is such that will improve the ability of the citizenry to compete effectively in the world at large. According to oxford advance learner's dictionary, quality can be defined as standard, something that is of good standard. The (FRN, 2013) noted that in pursuance of early childhood education that standard should be maintained. Quality can be seen as the level of value in a product or a level of achievement, a standard against which to judge. Ijaiya (2001) viewed quality as something every one considered good and wants to have. Tahir (2006) explained quality to mean three interconnected factors: Efficiency (better use of available resources), Relevance (need and contexts) and something more (to journey a little further than mere efficiency on relevance). Maduewesi and Onyeachu (2010) viewed quality as something that is relevant, which every member of the society considers good and strives to possess for effective utilization. Quality can be viewed from various perspective, in terms of input of process (curriculum process implementation and reforms) and in terms of results (development status and learning of children (World Education Forum, 2000)).

From the definitions by different authors, one can say that quality is something that is proved to be high standard in terms of its efficiency and effective utilization. European Union of students (2005), observed that quality assurance is a condition that leads to the achievement of transparency as it affects the quality of academics, teaching and curriculum development, and provision of course and facilities. Obiweluzor and Alonge, (2013) defined quality assurance as a process that enables standards to be maintained in the educational system in terms of inputs (students – knowledge – information – results) and output (graduates that are useful to the nation) to achieve a desired objective. Harvey and Green (1993) opined that quality assurance is about

ensuring that there are mechanisms, procedures and process in a place to ensure that the desired quality aims at every child to be closely supervised by a competent caring adult and hence recognizes that parents are the most important teachers and caregivers. Quality reflects what is beneficial to children development because children learn better in an environment that is safe and well equipped in terms of (cognitive development, psychomotor development and effective development (emotions)).

This implies that quality standards can only be attained in education through careful planning, administration and effective supervision of instruction using the best practices models. The quality of early childhood education includes the curriculum content that is relevant to children. The physical environment, and evaluation of the children's progress and abilities in solving abstract and concrete task. The quality of teachers (teachers' qualification), their performance and their relationship with children and parents. Quality Assessment is very important in order to determine if quality is adhered to/assured in the early childhood education. Curtis (2000) noted that assessment of quality is an essential part of any educational programme, because it helps in determining cost effectiveness, to know how effective teaching programme is in assisting children to achieve the desired learning out comes.

Most Early Childhood Education Centers are located in various places such as church premises, private homes, and in cities they are located in schools. They are usually known as nursery school or 'creche', these schools usually are in their permanent structure. Some are in the make shift structures and all these structures vary in terms of their physical size, aesthetics and quality of teaching and learning environment.

Government in order to eradicate illiteracy and poverty amongst Nigeria children also encouraged private individual in the participation of early childhood education. Government do

not financially support these private individual and this may have adverse effect on the quality that may be obtained from such schools, because most of the private schools are conscious of the monetary benefit instead of the quality of teaching and learning, quality of teachers and learning environment. In the absence of such guidelines on the management and provision of pre-primary education, government was salient on the curriculum content of private institutions and these private resort to their own curriculum and without proper supervision and inspection from the inspectorate division of the Ministry of Education. It is on this note that this study aimed at assessing the following quality standard such as:

(A) Location of school site: it should be spacious, permanent site, free from noise, pollution, erosion, high tension lines, threat to security of children staff and school properties.

Facilities to be provided

i. General requirements

a. Classrooms: it must have cross ventilation with at least four windows 800m standard size 7.3m by 9.2m (24” by 30”) and ceiled with asbestos sheet.

b. Toilet and other facilities: toilet for 40 pupils, good water supply, electricity supply, fire fighting equipment, first aid kit and a bank account.

c. Chalkboard: ideal chalkboard should be provided it should be 1.2m by 2.4m (4ft by 8ft in size).

d. Entrance doors: it should be designed to open outwards.

e. Corridors: the corridors or circulation space should be wide and should not be less than 1.2m (4ft) there must be no dead – end corridors.

f. Walls and floors: all walls should be plastered and floors screened and damp free.

- ii. Specific requirements
 - a. A sick bay
 - a. A store
 - b. An office
 - c. A book corner
- A. Play facilities
 - a. Merry-go-round
 - b. Swings
 - c. Slide-see-saw
 - d. Sand train
 - e. Balls
 - f. A large play ground
 - g. Toys
- B. Furniture's
 - a. Seats with back rest and suitable to the size of the pupils in terms of height.
 - b. Wall clock
 - c. Cupboards
 - d. Television
- C. In a classroom there should be two teachers, 2 tables wash hand basin with towels and detergent.

Then the qualification of the teaching staff (quality of teachers), the learning of the children because it is stated in the National Policy on Education (FRN 2013) that children should be able

to learn rudiments of numbers, letters and colours, shapes, forms and also parents teachers' participation in early childhood education. It is on this background that this paper was discussed.

Statement of Problem

In recent times schools are springing up everyday because of the importance of education in the nation and Edo state in particular, in order to meet the global target for the eradication of illiteracy. In as much as education is important the quality of education offered to children should be put into consideration, because it is the foundation for effective learning and the question that will arise in our minds are: Do these schools meet quality standards? And if they do, do they have qualified teaching staff/personnel? What is the state of their learning environment? Before now, government paid little or no attention to the early childhood education, so it was left in the hands of private operators, but recently, government realized the importance of this level of education to the overall development of her citizenry, and decided to invest on it as part of basic education, hence the need to assess the quality of education at this level cannot be over emphasized.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to find out:

- If quality is being maintained in these early childhood education centers.
- If the environment is conducive, free from threat for teaching and learning.
- If the learning outcome are desirable.
- If parents are involved in decision/assistance in the school growth.
- The qualification of the teachers in these early childhood education centers.
- Extent of government involvement in early childhood education in Edo State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What is the quality of the learning activities in the early childhood education centers in Benin City?
2. To what extent does the school provide conducive, free threat and security learning environment for teaching and learning activities in early childhood education centres.
3. What is the quality of the learning outcomes in these early childhood education centres?
4. To what extent do parents participate in the education of their children in these early childhood education centres?
5. What is the qualification of the teaching staff in the early childhood education centres in Benin City?
6. To what extent do government assist in maintain quality of early childhood education centers in Benin City.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. Two Hundred and Fifty (250) teacher were randomly selected from private and government pre-primary schools in Benin metropolis. The Selection of the school was by stratified Random Sampling and the criteria for selection include the size of the school and Government approval.

The Questionnaire titled “Questionnaire on Quality Assessment (QQA)” and a checklist. It was made up of two sections, Section A was used to collect demographic data of the respondents. Section B was used to find out the Learning activities, quality of teaching staff, government involvement, parents participation and the checklist was for the learning environment and learning outcomes. The Head teachers, teachers and the researcher were on ground to get the information for the Quality Assessment of Early Childhood Education in Benin City.

The instrument was validated and found to have content validity and 0.76 internal consistency (co-efficient alpha) reliability. The Questionnaire on Quality Assessment (QQA) surveyed the perception of teachers and head teachers and the researcher. The instrument was in five parts. Part A, sought information on Demographic data of the qualification of the teachers in Early Childhood Education Centres. Part B was on quality of learning activities, parents’ participation, learning environment (checklist) learning outcomes and government involvement. Accounting for 96.4% these were the ones that were used for analysis. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean, & standard deviation). Items that are higher than the cut-off mean were accepted as good, adequate, conducive as applicable to each of the research questions.

Results

Research Question 1. What is the Quality of learning activities in the early childhood education centres in Benin City?

Table 1: Descriptive of quality of learning activities in mean and Standard deviation

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Cut-off mean	Decision
Quality of learning activities	241	3.27	1.27	2.5	High learning activities

Table 1 showed that a total (N) of 241 respondents, with a mean value of 3.27 and standard deviation (SD) of 1.27. The cut-off mean value is 2.5, comparing the mean of 3.27 with the cut-off mean of 2.5. It is concluded that the learning activities in the early childhood centres are high because the mean is greater than the cut-off mean.

Research Question 2: To what extent do they provide conducive, threat free and secured learning environment for teaching and learning in early childhood education centre?

Table 2: Descriptive of learning environment in mean and Standard deviation

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Cut-off mean	Decision
Conducive, threat free and secured environment	241	3.0	1.12	2.5	Learning environment secured

Table 2 showed that a total (N) of 241 respondents with a mean value of 3.0 and standard deviation (SD) of 1.12. The cut of mean value of 2.5, comparing the mean of 3.0 with the cut off mean is 2.5. It is concluded that the learning environment for teaching and learning in early childhood education centres are high because the mean is greater than the cut off mean.

Research Question 3: What is the quality of the learning outcomes in these early childhood education centres.

Table 3: Descriptive of learning outcome

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Cut-off mean	Decision
Learning outcome	241	3.83	1.57	2.5	High learning activities

Table 3 showed that a total (N) of 241 respondents with a mean value of 3.83 and standard deviation (SD) of 1.57. The cut off mean is 2.5. It is concluded that the quality of learning outcomes in early childhood education centre is high because the mean is greater than the cut off mean.

Research Question 4: To what extent do parents participate in the education of their children in these early childhood centres?

Table 4

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Cut-off mean	Decision
Parents participation	241	3.12	1.23	2.5	Parents participation is high

Table 4 showed that the total (N) of 241 respondents with a mean value of 3.12 and standard deviation (SD) of 1.23. The average cut off mean is 2.5. It is concluded that the quality of learning outcomes in early childhood education centres is high because the mean is greater than the cut off mean.

Research Question 5: What is the qualification of the teaching staff in the early childhood education centres in Benin City?

Table 5

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
Grade II	14	5.9	5.9
WAEC	10	4.2	10.0
OND	79	33.1	43.1
HND/BED	113	47.3	90.4
PGDE	4	1.7	92.1
Masters	19	7.9	100.0
Total	239	100.0	

From the demographic data, it shows that the qualification of the teaching staff was high and they have qualified teaching staff in early childhood education centres in Benin City metropolis. The number of teachers with Grade II is 5.9%, WAEC is 4.2%, OND is 33.1%, HND/B.ED is 47.3%, PGDE is 1.7%, Master's Degree is 7.9%.

Research Question 6: To what extent do government assist in maintaining quality of early childhood education centres in Benin City.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Cut-off mean	Decision
Government involvement	241	3.76	1.62	2.5	Government involvement is high.

Table 6 showed that a total (N) of 241 respondents with a mean value of 3.76 and standard deviation (SD) of 1.62. The cut off mean is 2.5. It is concluded that the government participation in maintaining quality in Early childhood education centres in Benin City is high because the mean is greater than the cut off mean.

Discussion

The quality of learning activities in the early childhood education centres in Benin metropolis was found to be high. This in line with the establishment of early childhood education according to the national policy on education (FRN, 2013). This shows children are taught in their mother tongue, they learn positive healthy habit. They have the opportunity to develop in their language skills, children are encouraged to develop the spirit of inquiry, creative art skills and learn the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours and they learn through play.

The learning environment of the Early Childhood education Centres in Benin City Metropolis was found to be good, the playground is of good standard as noted by Ministry of Education and the fencing was good for protection from threat, the office accommodation was adequate the classrooms is very conducive for learning activities, toilet facilities and furniture are adequate.

On the part of parent's participation, the level of parents' involvement in the management decision was high. The parents-teachers' association is regularly held, parents support the school financially, they are also involved in academic activities of their children/wards/lad; from the decision taking, it was found that parents' participation is high.

The quality of the learning outcomes was high, continuous assessment was regularly given to the children to check their performance and rate of assimilation, parents have access to their children's performance during open day and the children's academic report are kept safe with all indication. It shows that children are able to recite poems and children are able to recite numbers, paint and differentiate colours as specified in the national policy on education and it shows that the goals, and objectives of early childhood education is achieved.

From the research the qualification of the teaching staff in the early childhood education centres in Benin City metropolis, from the demographic study it shows that early childhood education centres have qualified teaching staff and they are education professionals. This finding is in disagreement with Ajayi (2008), who found out that teacher factor was a problem to early childhood education, she states that the teaming population of students in most Nigerian colleges of Education are trained for primary education, therefore not adequate for early childhood education. From this study, it also shows that government involvement was high, this means that government contributes towards the funding of early childhood centres, provision of infrastructures, training of teachers, provision of personnel, supervision and monitoring of the centres, provision of instructional materials and also gives license for the operation of early childhood education centres. This shows that the policy document reflects the objectives and goals for establishing early childhood education centres in Benin City metropolis. This finding is in agreement with Ogunsaju (2006) who posits that supervision is an indispensable management key component of any organizational programme for attainment of desired goals.

Conclusion

From this study, it was concluded that the quality of early childhood education centre in Benin City was high, the quality of learning activities is also high. The quality of the learning environment is also high; parents' involvement in Early Childhood education is also high. It also shows that the qualification of the teaching staff is high, government involvement was found to be high. It is therefore pertinent to state that the importance of early childhood education cannot be wished away, rather it should be given due attention by all stakeholders to ensure its sustainability.

Recommendations

Early Childhood education is the foundation upon which other levels of education is laid, so there is need for sound foundation. Rolnick and Grunewald (2003) noted that investing in early childhood education can yield high returns. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that:

- Government should allocate adequate fund in early childhood education
- There should be constant monitoring and supervision of early childhood education centres for the improvement of quality.
- There should be effective control in the establishment of Early Childhood Education Centres
- Government should provide adequate facilities in Early Childhood education centre to enhance teaching and learning.
- Government should encourage teachers to upgrade themselves in terms of academic qualification, and government should organize workshops, seminars to improve teaching and learning in early childhood education centres.

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