

## **Examining Pre-service Training of Early Childhood Teachers and Policy Implementation in Northern Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*The study investigated the number of professionally qualified teachers that will be required to offer high quality early childhood education for children in northern Nigeria. Using information from the national population census of 2006 and statistical report of the Federal Ministry of Education as well as data collected from seven State Universal Basic Education Boards in the North, using survey research design and author-constructed questionnaire, the number of teachers was determined vis a viz the number of teachers required. The number of teachers required was worked out based on the 1:25 teacher/pupil ratio recommended by the National Policy on Education. The result show that 673,199 teachers and the same number of classroom are required to cater for an estimated population of 16,829,977 children aged 0 - 5 years in northern Nigeria. In the seven states sampled for the study, 140 teachers out of 13,302 teachers teaching in early childhood programmes are qualified. The seven states will require additional 48,000 teachers and same number of classrooms to cater for the population under five years. Massive training of qualified*

*teachers in Colleges of Education, Universities* was recommended.

## Introduction

The 2004 revised edition of the National policy on education of the Federal Republic of Nigeria [FRN, 2004] incorporated early childhood education as an integral part of public education in Nigeria. This indeed is a great breakthrough in the field of child care and development. It shows that the nation is increasingly realizing the significance of nurturing and developing its enormous human resource from the earliest beginning. Furthermore, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme included early childhood education as a section to be catered for by the unit. The UBE is a nine-year basic educational programme "to eradicate illiteracy, ignorance and poverty as well as stimulate and accelerate national development, political consciousness and national integration" FRN (2004). The implementation of the programme began in 1999 and was anchored by an enabling law tagged The Universal Basic Education Act in 2004. The Government established the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) to implement the programme. As a step down, state governments also created State Universal Educational Boards (SUBEBs) for the purpose of implementing the UBE programme in the states. To crown it all, the federal government formulated the national policy on early childhood care and development tagged Integrated Early Childhood development (IECD) in 2007 to cater for its 29,263,427 children from 0-5 years. (NPC, 2006).

This radical change by the Federal Government of Nigeria [FGN] is informed by the significance of early childhood care and education in national transformation through the need for laying a solid foundation for the education of our children and building a viable future for the country. It is expected that state universal basic education boards will implement the revised policy with the commencement of preprimary sections in

all public schools in Nigeria. It can be inferred that the establishment of early childhood programs in public schools is intended to cater for children from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds that are mostly found in rural areas and urban slums. However, one key area in the success of the implementation of the policy is the issue of qualified teachers and other staff with training background in early childhood education to effectively handle the implementation of the policy in the country. Fears are particularly entertained about the success of the implementation of the UBE [ECED] programme in Northern Nigeria considering the educational challenges facing the north. The study therefore set out to investigate the teacher training need of the region to adequately cater for preprimary education in the region.

Nigeria had a population of 140,431,970 people according to the 2006 National Population Census (NPC, 2006). Northern Nigeria came into existence in 1904 with the declaration of protectorate by the British Colonial masters and later, Northern Nigeria with the amalgamation of Southern and Northern protectorates in 1914 by Lord Lugard. The Northern part of Nigeria had a population of 75,268,721 in the 2006 census, out of this number; children aged 0-5 constituted 17,391,994. However, children enrolled in preschool programs in Northern Nigeria were 496,424 (FGN, 2009).

The history of preprimary education in Nigeria shows that it started in 1942 and had been mostly controlled by private individuals, organizations and institutions in the form of staff schools as well as religious institutions such as churches, mosques until the 2004 revised edition of National Policy on Education which brought in direct government involvement as early childhood education. The history of the implementation of the educational policies and programs such as Universal Basic Education (UBE) in Nigeria showed that the success of implementation is often frustrated by such challenges as "untrained teachers, lack of continuity in staffing, too large classes, the presence of underage children, unsatisfactory

syllabus; and inadequate supervision of schools” (Fafunwa, 1995 p.191). Olatunji (2010) reported in a study on capacity gap assessment of early childhood development found that inadequate number of educators with required qualification in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in the country constitutes challenges to preprimary education in the country.

There is compelling evidence from research showing improved long-term outcomes for disadvantaged children who participate in high quality early childhood programmes. Siraq Blatchford and Woodhead (2009) found that quality early childhood is cost effective therefore providing a case for the government to prioritize its investments in early childhood Education with the promise of returns to society. A 40 year longitudinal study show that it contributes to the development of children in childhood, and their school success, adult life better economic performance, reduced commission of adult crimes and return benefit relative to their initial cost.

## **The Problem**

The establishment of preprimary education sections in early childhood education in all public schools in Northern Nigeria will require additional number of qualified teachers with pre service training backgrounds in early childhood care and education to effectively handle the care and education of children in the region. The problem being investigated is ascertaining the number of teachers that will be required to handle early childhood education in Northern Nigeria considering the one teacher to twenty five (25) pupil ratio recommended by the National Policy on Education. The study examined the current number of teachers for the programme in Northern Nigeria made up of 19 states and number of classrooms. An attempt is also made to investigate the possibility of pupil teacher ratio, class sizes in respect of the provisions of national policies and the expectations of the policies over time. A study of this nature it is envisage will enable stakeholders

assess the strength and weaknesses of the educational foundations being laid in our country with a genuine inclination towards nation and regional integration for effective national transformation.

### Research Questions

The following research questions have therefore been formulated to guide the study;

1. What is the population, enrolment and number of children out of school among children 0-5 years in Northern Nigeria on a state by state basis?
2. How many qualified teachers with pre service training in Childhood and Early Childhood education are employed as nursery/preprimary school teachers in Northern Nigeria?
3. What will be the training projection of pre primary school teachers in Northern Nigeria to meet the teaching staff requirement of preprimary education per state?

### Methodology

The study adopted both the survey and non experimental research designs. The survey assisted in establishing the variables in the various Northern states in Nigeria while the non experimental designs assisted in establishing the direction of variables in terms of teachers, classrooms, populations and pupils registered in schools. The survey research design was adopted for the study where seven states were selected from 19 states in northern Nigeria. In each state, respondents were made up of Coordinators or Directors in charge of early childhood education in the State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEB). The instrument used for data collection comprised of an inventory and a proforma for recording data

from state ministries of education that were broken into 3 sections. Section A elicited state demographic information on education while section B elicited information of population enrollments in state UBE pre schools and Section D on pre schools infrastructure. The researchers or their research assistants visited each State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) chairperson of the board and obtained permission to collect data. The chairperson would then direct the researchers or research assistant to the coordinator/director in charge of nursery/preprimary education in the state who would liaised with officers in his/her unit to provide information by filling the instrument with the required information. The coordinators/directors were given two weeks or more as they estimated the time they would need to complete the questionnaire. The data collected was presented in tables and analyzed in percentages as presented below.

The data collected were collated and analysed using simple descriptive statistics in the form of Tables and bar graphs.

## **Result and Findings**

### **Research Question 1**

What is the population, enrolment and number of children out of school among children 0-5 years in Northern Nigeria on a state by state basis?

**Table 1:**  
Population and Enrolment of Children 0-5 Years in any  
Preschool Program

State	Estimated population of children 0-5 years	Number enrolled in preschool program	Estimated population out of any form of preschool	Percentage of enrollment (%)
BAUCHI	1,164,715	27,688	1,137,027	2.30
BENUE	978,535	34,877	943,658	3.56
GOMBE	575,611	21,930	553,681	3.80
KWARA	514,177	35,232	475,945	6.85
NIGER	982,511	25,764	956,747	2.62
PLATEAU	687,162	31,335	655,827	4.00
YOBE	548,556	9,424	539,142	1.79
TOTAL	5,451,277	186,250	5,265,027	3.42
SOURCE- Extracts from National Population Commission Figures (2006) and FGN 2009				

## Research Question 2

How many qualified teachers with pre service training in Childhood and Early Childhood education are employed as nursery/preprimary school teachers in Northern Nigeria?

**Table 2:**  
Teachers Trained in Early Childhood Education

State	Teachers in preprimary school		Population of Children 0-5	Teachers required by 1:25 teacher/pupil ratio
	Number of teachers	Teachers with ECE Training		
BAUCHI	2,053		1,164,715	46,588
BENUE	2,487		978,535	39,141
GOMBE	1,410	12	575,611	23,024
KWARA	1,718	46	514,177	20,567
NIGER	1,913	44	982,511	39,300
PLATEAU	2,566	38	687,162	27,500

YOBE	1,155		548,566	21,942
TOTAL	13,302	140	5,451,277	218062

( Blank spaces means no information was given)

The Table shows that a total of 218062 teachers are required for the implementation of IECD in the seven states sampled for the study. A total of 13,302 teachers are engaged in teaching at the preprimary level but only 140 of these teachers have received any form of training in early childhood care and education.

### Research Question 3

What will be the training projection of pre primary school teachers in Northern Nigeria to meet the teaching staff requirement of preprimary education per state?

**Table 3:**  
**Infrastructure, Play and Learning Materials in Preprimary Schools**

State	Number of preprimary schools	Number of schools with clinic	Learning and play materials		Standard toilet	Water (well, borehole and pipe borne)
			Adequate	Inadequate		
BAUCHI	391	-	15	376	109	88
BENUE	423	-	59	364	-	-
GOMBE	163	-	19	144	100	120
KWARA	423	122	42	381	69	161
NIGER	387	-	28	359	-	117
PLATEAU	428	-	84	344	-	65
YOBE	91	-	22	69	-	56



The Table showed that basic infrastructure such as the number of schools, available standard toilet, and good water supply are grossly inadequate for the populations in the schools.

## Findings and Results

From the statistics of 2006 population census and federal ministry of Education (FME, 2009) it was found that:

The estimated number of children 0-5 years old in Northern Nigeria is 17,391,944; out of this number, 562,017 representing 3.23% are enrolled in any form of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) program.

1. An estimated 16,829,977 representing 96.77% of the children in early childhood aged 0-5 years old are not involved in any form of organized childhood care and education.
2. 673,199 teachers are required by the teacher/pupil ratio of 1:25 recommended in the National Policy on Education (NPE) to meet the teachers need to early childhood care and education.
3. The same number of classrooms that is 673,199 is required to cater for children less than five years.
4. In the seven sample states only about 140 teachers have some form of training in early childhood care and education out of 13,302 teachers working in Early Childhood Education programs; while 48,062 additional teachers are required to adequately meet the teachers' demand of early childhood care and education in the sampled states.
5. As at 2010, only two universities – Usman Danfodio University and Benue state University have teacher training program for the early childhood care and education in the form of preprimary education in the North. (Jamb Brochure, 2010)

## Discussion of Findings

From the findings above, it can be concluded that the major problem of the care and education of children in early childhood in Northern Nigeria is acute shortage of professionally qualified teachers who have had training in early childhood care and education.

It is not just any teacher that can be employed to teach in early childhood care and education program as the teacher has to have a special knowledge and understanding of the developmental characteristics of the children in order to plan the environment, learning materials and curriculum that are developmentally inappropriate for caring and education of these children. Morrison (2009) stated that the early childhood professional is one who is trained to teach children from birth to eight years. Such a person is trained to work with families and community to bring high quality educational services to all children.

The professional characteristics of early childhood teachers according to him are:

1. Knowledge of child development and learning.
2. Using the knowledge of the characteristics of the child to create healthy, respectful, supportive and challenging environment for young children.
3. Implementing developmentally appropriate practice.
4. Building family and community relationship.
5. Observing, documenting and assessment to children and families.
6. Teaching and learning methods and approaches of young children.

The consequences of using unqualified teachers that are not professionally trained in early childhood education are too grievous to be ignored by any responsible government who sees its young children as assets for national transformation and sustainable development. Suleiman (2006) observed that the

higher the quality of the teacher, the higher the success of the education. He concluded that the need for teachers to be of the best quality in terms of professional competence and discipline is insurmountable; observing when competent and qualified persons are given the appropriate training, excellence is assured.

## Recommendations

1. Embarking on the rigorous training of teachers in early education. Who have adequate knowledge and skill to care and educate young children.
  - a. All colleges of education in the country should establish early childhood departments. Some of the colleges have established Early Childhood departments from the 2008/2009 as required by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE).
2. Ensure that all lecturers handling early childhood education enroll in the virtual university Victoria, Canada which is been sponsored by World Bank and coordinated by UNICEF (Olatunji, 2010). To successfully do this, College of Education administrations should ensure steady power supply and availability of computers particularly laptops to lecturers to enable them participate in the virtual university.
3. All faculties of education of Federal and State owned university should establish a department of early childhood education and their lecturers also trained through virtual university programs.
4. As an interim measure workshop and seminars should be organized for teachers handling early childhood sections in public schools. Topics for such workshop could cover developmental characteristics of children in early childhood, developmentally appropriate practice in terms of the curriculum, learning methods, learning and play

materials, improvisation of play and learning materials and the organization of the indoor and outdoor environment.

5. Colleges of Education as well as faculties of education where early childhood education is offered should start in –service training for teachers handling early childhood programs during long vacation in summer.
6. Construction of classrooms specifically meant for early childhood education program with spacious rooms and developmentally appropriate furniture

## Conclusion

From the findings of this study, the challenges facing the establishment of pre- primary sections in public school in Northern Nigeria are grossly inadequate infrastructure, play and learning materials and shortage of qualified teachers. The researcher recommended aggressive training of early childhood education teachers, improvisation of learning and play materials and the construction of classrooms that are spacious and developmentally appropriate.

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