

SUB-TITLE: TEACHING IN A CHANGING AFRICA

TITLE OF THE PAPER: REVOLUTIONIZING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AS A VEHICLE FOR ENSURING THE HIGHEST QUALITY EDUCATION.

IGBAFE EUCHARIA C.; EMAIL: igbafeeucharia@gmail.com

ABSTRACT:

Early Childhood education is widely acknowledged as the most critical area of intervention in education. By creating effective early childhood programs, society can ensure that children have a solid foundation. Studies have also shown that a vital and productive society with a prosperous and sustainable future is built on a foundation of a healthy child development. Positive experience provides a foundation for sturdy brain architecture and a broad range of skills and learning capacities (Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University, 2010).The quality of early childhood education may be the future determinant of persistence and graduation. This study therefore examined early childhood education with special focus on 0-3years. The study investigated programme and material in use at early childhood education schools, age of entry and departure, qualifications of their teachers and providers, seminars, conferences and workshops attended by these teachers and providers for continuing professional development, the impact of the continuing professional development on programs and materials in use in the schools. The sample of the study consisted of six purposively selected schools and two Day Care Centers in South-South Nigeria. Questionnaire, in-depth interview, critical review of existing records, documentary analysis, and incident report was the instrument for data collection. The analysis of data showed that early childhood education is at the poorest state presently. The author therefore argues that if illiteracy is to be eradicated, high rate of drop-out reduce, out-of-school eliminated and lifelong education promoted, early childhood education must be revolutionized as the main vehicle for ensuring the highest possible quality education in a changing Africa.

KeyWords: Revolutionizing, Early childhood, Education, Care (ECEC), Infants/Toddlers, Brain, Experience, Teacher, Programme, Vehicle, Quality.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is the eighth most populous country in the world, and even conservative estimates conclude that more than 20% of the world's black population lives in Nigeria (Country Profile-Nigeria, 2008). Nigeria has diverse ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. The major ethnic groups in the country are the Hausa/Fulani in the North, the Yoruba in the South-West, Igbo in the South-East and Ijaw in the South-South. In-between these big ethnic groups are some 250 other smaller but very important ethnic groups speaking more than 300 languages and dialects. (NMEC, 2008). The recent population of Nigeria was estimated at about 140 million and the age structure breakdown shows that 0-14years: 40.9% (male 32, 476,681/female 31,064,539); the figure may not include children delivered in regions with difficult terrain and by traditional birth attendants in rural-rural areas. The age structure of a population determines the wheel of its investment, but this is not the reality in Nigeria as education receives low funding. The quality of basic education in Nigeria is extremely poor, leading to low demand and unacceptably low academic performance. There are 30 million primary school-aged children in the country, of whom about seven million are not enrolled in school. Of those currently in primary school, less than one third will attend junior secondary schools and even fewer will proceed to senior secondary. Nigeria has a massive number of out-of-school children and young adults with limited literacy and numeracy skills who have little hope of ever joining the formal workforce (USAID, 2011). Using these statistics of age structure and present poor quality report, it is very clear that Nigeria needs investment in the education of her children. The question remains at what stage; the study is proposing 0-3years, which is the very foundation of educational process and general referred to as critical period due to their continuing brain development. Unfortunately majority of them are presently left in the hands of untrained caregivers/teachers due to increased demand of changing society.

Looking back historically in Nigerian socio-culturally environment, early childhood education was communal effort, then there was a tightly knit family, where everybody is a contributor to its survival. At tender age, children were taught honesty in dealing, both in public and private life, respect for property, temperance in eating and drinking, chastity, hard work, self-confidence, self-sacrifice, humility, truthfulness were greatly emphasized. Recreational activities involve dancing, drumming, racing and wrestling etc and cognition was developed through the stories of local history, geography, plants and animals, legends, poetry, reasoning, riddles, proverbs, and storytelling. Emotions were developed through musical languages and tones and stories of great heroes, who were fearless and shows no sign of weaklings. The transformation from

industrial revolution to globalization has an immense impact on the life of older adults and children, bringing radical changes in the world of education and work, these changes transformed personal and social expectation, raised the standard of living and forced women in workforce. It also changed context of childhood, many families have fewer children. This means that, in effect, many families have only one child especially in a family where both parents work. It means that many children are in effect only, lonely children and it makes imperative the provision of good systems, so that the child can have what might be appropriate term pseudo-siblings; put simply, the chance to develop, share, and play with companions (Gammage, 2008).With both parents at work, high divorce rate, it means that many child have to be involved in systems of care, be it in family Centers, Day Care, child-care institutions, kindergartens, crèches and nurseries and so on. This marked a great move from informal to non-formal and formal early childhood education and care. Formal early childhood education and care is a term commonly used to describe the formal teaching and caring of young children by people other than their family or settings outside of the home (NAEYC, 2010). The early childhood period describes the period from birth to 8years. In different countries, different terms are used to classify an array of services that provides care and education for the young children before they start in the school (ChildForum, 2010)

In Nigeria, the Universal Basic Education Commission is in charge of early childhood education. ACT. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme is a nine (9) year basic educational programme, which was launched and executed by the government and people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to eradicate illiteracy, ignorance and poverty as well as stimulate and accelerate national development, political consciousness and national integration. The UBE Programme is Nigeria's strategy for the achievement of Education for All (EFA) and the education-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It is also one of the strategies for realizing the nation's economic agenda as enunciated by the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) (UBEC, 2010).The implementation process of the programme has been on since 1999, the UBE Act 2004 makes provision for basic education comprising of Early Childhood Care and Education, Primary and Junior Secondary Education. The financing of basic education is the responsibility of States and Local Governments (UBEC, 2010). To promote quality of its education, the UBE Act (2004) has an expanded scope which includes early childhood education and development. The UBE programme has made provision for every public school linkage to cater for children age 3-5years, the act is silent on early childhood education and development in the age group 0-3years (UNESCO, 2007).

This study focuses just on children under age 0-3years, although this is a decision that is controversial, because development is continuous, categories based on age can be artificial and misleading (Bruer, 1999). This is basically because “childhood is the most fragile and impressionable period of human development. During childhood we are more dependent on others than at any other time in our lives, yet this vulnerable period of development provides the foundation for our entire human journey. Our experiences in childhood shape our attitudes and behaviours, our likes and dislikes, our passion and interests, our personalities, and our moral character. Childhood is an essential time of life when we establish the direction for who and what will become. The long-term effects of an unhealthy childhood will weaken a world that needs creative and compassionate individuals who offer mature insights in order to solve complex human problems (Association for Childhood Education International, 2011).

Nevertheless, the “under- threes” have been singled out in recent years. Sparked by the Carnegie Corporation’s Starting Points report in 1994 (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1994), and spurred by newly popularized research on brain development (Shore, 1997), media attention to infants and toddlers surged during the 1990s (Newsweek, 2000). This renewed interest in early childhood education stems, in part, from highly publicized research showing both short-term and long-term benefits (Lazar & Darlington, 1982; Campbell & Ramey, 1994; Schweinhart, Weikart, & Lamer, 1986). Early childhood education and care has also been gaining recognition as a very important factor in influencing lifelong human development and outcomes (Janus & Brinkman, 2010). The exposure to rich learning opportunities, or negative influences, such as environmental toxins or stressful life circumstances, leaves a chemical “signature” on the genes. These signatures can be temporary or permanent, and both types affect how easily the genes are switched on or off (Kaminsky, Tang, Wang, Ptak, Wong, & Petronis, 2009). The signature may be positively or negatively expressed depending on the nature of the environmental experiences, the child is exposed to.

1.1: POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

The exposure to positive environment enables the child to develop superior communication skills need in adult life and an increased cognitive and effective educational balance (Feeney, Christen, and Morevick, 1987; Anderson, 2002). Healthy development in the earliest years of life builds the foundations of successful adaptation, and effective learning that lead to better outcomes in academic achievement, responsible citizenship, lifelong health, economic and human development (Shonkoff, 2010). So, Children who receive sensitive, responsive care from

their parents and other caregivers in the first years of life enjoy an important head start toward success in their lives. The secure relationships they develop with the important adults in their lives lay the foundation for emotional development and help protect them from the many stresses they may face as they grow. Researchers who have examined the life histories of children who have succeeded despite many challenges in their lives consistently found that these people have had at least one stable, supportive relationship with an adult (usually a parent, relative, or teacher) beginning early in life (Starting Smart, 2010; Werner & Smith, 1992). It is clearly obvious that young children's learning and development takes place in the context of relationships, and that a positive, nurturing, predictable relationship with a caregiver helps an infant to form a secure attachment(VITSN,2009).When relationships with family and caregivers are responsive, nurturing, and consistent, children will be both better prepared for school and more resilient. These relationships can even have a mitigating effect on adverse health and environmental issues. Research shows that staff knowledge and skills are among the most important determinants of the impact of early childhood programs (Gormley, Gayer, Phillips, & Dawson, 2005; Early, D.M., Maxwell, Burchinal, Alva, Bender, Bryant, et. al.2007).

1:2: NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES

In a parallel fashion, exposure to damaging levels of stress early in life can lead to long lasting epigenetic changes in brain cells that direct how our bodies respond to adversity throughout the lifespan (Shonkoff, Boyce & McEwen, 2009).Injurious experiences, such as malnutrition, exposure to chemical toxins or drugs and toxic stress before birth or in early children are not "forgotten" but rather are built into the architecture of the developing brain through the epigenome (NSCDC, 2010).Negative early experiences can profoundly affect the development of the brain, unfortunately, child abuse and neglect are pervasive social problems. Maltreatment increases a child's risk of developing depression, self-destructive behavior, eating disorders, attention deficit disorders, drug and alcohol problems, sexual promiscuity, and delinquency. Many researchers believe that these effects can be partly explained by understanding how chaotic, stressful, and traumatic experiences affect brain development. However, this is a new area of study, with much more that we need to learn (Starting Smart, 2010). The children whose earliest years are blighted by hunger or diseases or whose mind are not stimulated by appropriate interaction with adults and their environment pay for these early deficits throughout their lives- and so does society. Such children are far more likely than their more fortunate peers to do poorly in school, to dropout early, to be functionally illiterate, and to be only marginally employable in today's increasingly high technology world. Collectively, these children who have

been deprived in early life therefore affect labor productively and national economic prosperity (Chloksi, 1996). Parents who are preoccupied with a daily struggle to ensure that their children have enough to eat and are safe from harm may not have the resources, information, or time they need to provide the stimulating experiences that foster optimal brain development. Infants and children who are rarely spoken to, who are exposed to few toys, and who have little opportunity to explore and experiment with their environment may fail to fully develop the neural connections and pathways that facilitate later learning ((Starting Smart, 2010). Clearly, however, the costs (in human suffering, loss of potential, and real money) of trying to repair, remediate, or heal these children is far greater than the costs of preventing these problems by promoting healthy development of the brain during the first few years of life.

In recognition that zero to three children have the same right to care, education and protection as all other children, the 1990 Jomtien Declaration for Education for All, stated that learning begins at birth. A decade later, the 2000 Dakar framework for Action reaffirmed the importance of early childhood by including the development of early childhood education as the first of its six main goals. Participating countries committed themselves to expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education (UNESCO, 2011). Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandaqou, (2010) is of the view that we must respond urgently with new approaches and strategies capable of bringing quality education within the reach of all, including the poor, the remote and those with special educational needs of specific populations and based upon the best available expertise and technology. Usually when the term "Education for All" is used, the word "all" means "everyone", so it is interesting that the report states that there is an urgent need to respond in a manner that promotes quality for all Children and then qualifies the term "all" by stating "including the poor, those in remote locations and those with special educational needs because "all" should have covered each and everyone. All cannot mean some and not others.

Ensuring quality education for children is crucial in meeting the EFA goals; yet the educational needs of zero to three years in Nigeria appears not to have received the required attention. Ensuring quality also entails providing quality learning environment for quality experience to build motivation and love for learning. Their education in most cases is regarded as a privilege not a right, their educational needs are rarely addressed despite the evidence that these children suffer serious educational disadvantage (Barrett et al., 2007). Providing quality developmentally appropriate education for these children does not only require teachers that are well trained, well equipped and well motivated but more importantly teachers who are

emotionally intelligent to provide good teaching and good learning in a supportive environment (Bassey, 2006). This is basically because; teachers have the most significant role to play in achievement of quality education for these children. But, although many teachers are said to be produced through the NTI programmes (Grade II and NCE), regular NCE, and even Pivotal Teacher Training Programmes (PTTP), which are mainly organized for the take-off of the UBE scheme, there are no qualified teachers on the ground to work in the early childhood care education centres in schools. So far this has occurred in both the public and private sectors. The percentage of institutions offering the course and the number of students taking up the course cannot satisfy the demand from the teeming population of over 12.73 million preschoolers in Nigeria (Basic Education Statistics & Trends in Nigeria, 1998) in Ajayi, (2008). The children are therefore being taken care of in centres by untrained caregivers/teachers, but the major concern about such centres is that many of them are not registered with the appropriate government agencies. In fact; the level of hygiene of many of them particularly those in private residential buildings is poor.

Given this situation, millions of Nigeria children are presently out-of-school, many dropped out and too many conflicts, anxieties, frustrations, aggressions, angers, fears, hostilities is characteristics of many learning environment due to lack of motivation and solid foundation. Thus, despite numerous conferences and agreements and re-affirmation of commitment for education of birth to three, the three tiers of government in Nigeria has failed to recognize that 'humanity cannot and will not progress if the state of childhood is left unaddressed (Association for Childhood Education International, 2011). Based on the context stated above this study explored the revolutionizing of early childhood education as a vehicle for ensuring the highest quality education in Nigeria.

RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The rationale for the study is based on the search for a solution to findings from an exploration on the state of education in south-south, Nigeria. The following issue was typical of the education of the region; in primary, low enrolment rates, high dropout rates, inadequate facilities, poor teaching/ learning, irrelevant curriculum. Poor literacy enrollment rates in adult education; high dropout rates linked to both economic problems which force adult learners to abandon classes in favour of income-generating activities and to problems relating directly to the adult literacy programme such as lack of relevance, funding issues and low morale among adult literacy instructors; Literacy instructors not properly trained in facilitation skills and gender

awareness; The exclusion of women from adult education programmes; higher drop-out rates among women due to irrelevant curricula and competing demands; Poor access to adult education for “hard” to reach communities, such as nomads, fishermen and pastoralists; Failure to sustain literacy rates due to poor resources, including equipment, material and teachers, donor dependency, and a negative perceived value of education; A poor literate environment that means that literacy skills are not maintained in the long term(Fasokun & Pwol, n.d.).

The researcher realized that there is a great urgent need for revolutionizing education in Nigeria to curb these kinds of challenges occurring in future. The revolutionizing must be root based education and of highest quality with strategies for quality assurance and enhancement. It must be available to all-not only a handful of people-and take place in various settings, including families and communities. They must begin in early childhood, as the values, attitudes, behaviours and skills acquired in this period may have a long-lasting impact in later life” (Samuelsson& Kaga, 2008). This is also because ECEC is about laying a sound intellectual, psychological, emotional, social and physical foundation for development and lifelong learning and it has an enormous potential in fostering wise use of resources, cultural diversity, gender equality and democracy (Samuelsson& Kaga, 2008). The focus on zero to three years in this study is based on the recognition that ECEC zero to three years is a critical period due to the brain development and early childhood experiences forms the foundation of an individual's lifelong learning capacities and social behaviours. While positive relationship between early childhood education and care quality and virtually every facet of children's development that has been studied is one of the most consistent findings in developmental science (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2002). Again, presently in Nigeria ECEC zero to three years (Infants and Toddlers) are under serious neglect. Extending the benefits to ECEC all children irrespective of family income, geographical location, vulnerability and diversity in physical condition is the first step to ensuring quality education in any nation.

In the context of the scenario I have spelt out above, the study explored ways of promoting and improving quality education for early childhood (0-3years- infants/Toddlers) in Nigeria. Specifically, the study explored the state of ECEC with special focus on what is on ground and how the promotion ECEC could generate new ideas and knowledge relating to quality education that will enable the Ministry of Education improves existing education programmes. The study hoped to help in drawing a comprehensive response to meeting their educational needs, care and support without discrimination (UNESCO, 2008).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) What is the state of early childhood education and care in Nigeria?
- 2) What are their implications to ensuring highest quality education for ECEC?
- 3) Are there any evidence-based findings for revolutionizing ECEC?

PROBLEM STATEMENT

There is extensive literature on benefits early child education and care but very little exists in the context of infants/toddlers (0-3years). None of the few existing literature on early childhood education focus on the revolutionizing early childhood education as a vehicle for ensuring the highest possible quality education in Nigeria. The departure point of this study therefore lied in its focus on revolutionizing early childhood education and within the context of ensuring the highest quality education .This is one of the least developed areas in the agenda of the three tiers of Government in Nigeria: The early childhood education 0-3years is still an unexplored terrain in Nigeria. The significant question remains how Nigeria as a nation can salvage itself from the poor quality education when it's very educational foundation is shredded in culture of silence. This basically because any definition of quality is to an extent transitory; understands quality and arriving at quality is an indication of a dynamic and continuous process of reconciling the emphasis of different interest groups (Mestre and Penne, 1990). Some critical questions therefore arise which need evidence-based answers. How can we ensure the highest possible education in a changing society like Nigeria, without focusing attention on infant /toddlers? How can we improve and ensure quality care and learning, develop a more qualified workforce, educate the parents and the public about child learning and development, align the nations infant-toddler policies and practices with those older children and across system components (Petersen, Jones & McGinley with Scott-Little, Sharon Lynn Kagan, Stebbins Frelow, Reid, 2009).It is questions such as these that have urged the researcher on to explore revolutionizing early childhood education as a vehicle for ensuring the highest quality education.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design is Mixed method research; an approach to inquiry that combines or associates both qualitative and quantitative forms. It is more than simply collecting and analyzing both kinds of data. It also involves the use of both approaches in tandem, so that the overall strength of the study is greater than either qualitative or quantitative research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).Quantitative method was utilized to produce numerical findings in the

project and also ensure consistency of administration of so that data may be coded and responses compared. While qualitative data collection method was utilized to produce descriptive information and Focus group interview was an ideal ways to collect qualitative data. It allows researcher to interact directly with participants, obtain large amount of data in respondents own words and further question responses and build own answers for further discussion (Stewart and Shamolasami 1990). The combined use of qualitative and quantitative to derive data provides opportunity to look at many approaches for collecting and analyzing data rather than subscribing to only one way. It will provide a better understanding of the problem and ...opens the door to multiple methods, different worldviews, and different assumptions, as well as different forms of data collection and analysis (Cherryholmes, 1992: Morgan, 2007; Creswell, 2009).

RESEARCH METHODS

The population of the study comprises of 240 schools that provide preschool education, 40 schools was randomly selected and Six schools and two Day Care Centers were purposively sampled in South-South Nigeria, and 64 participants responded to the study (Criteria for school selection was based on age and popularity). The instrument for this study was open-ended and closed-ended questions, observations, and individual interviews, critical review of existing records, documentary analysis, and incident report. Analysis of these documents helped the researcher to generate variables for research. The instrument was first explored generally (in 240 schools) to learn what variables to study then studied those variables with a large sample of schools (Creswell, 2009) before using the instrument on participant school. Simple frequency was used to analyze the data.

RESULTS

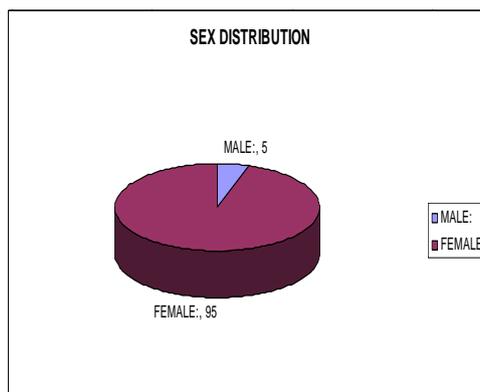
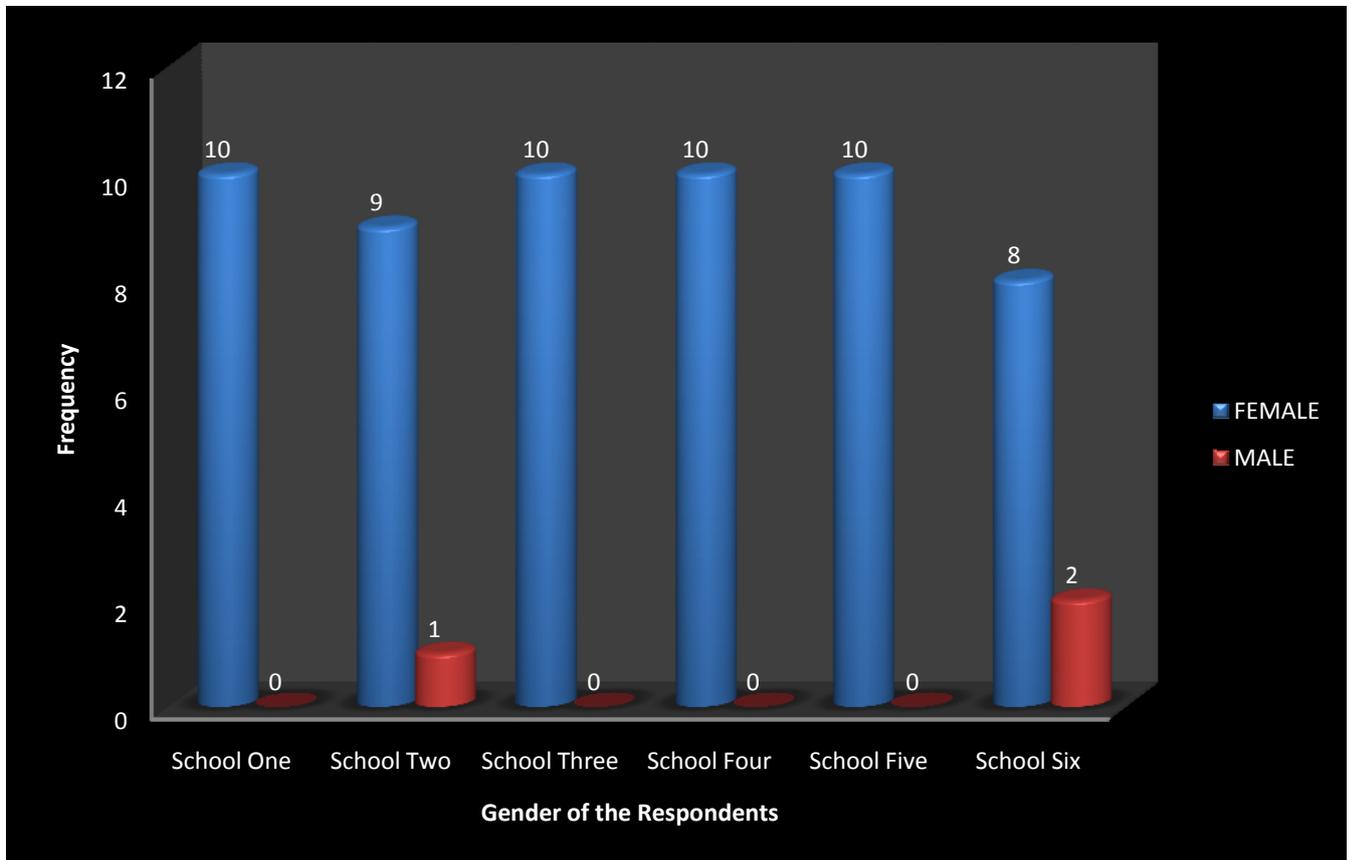


FIGURE 1

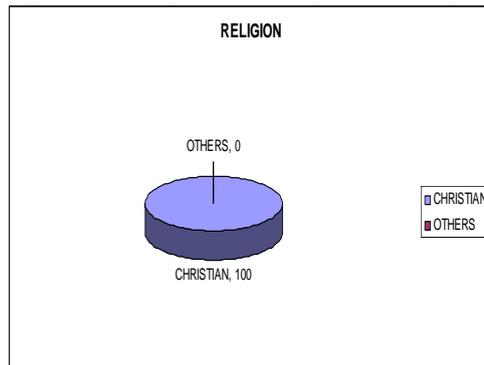
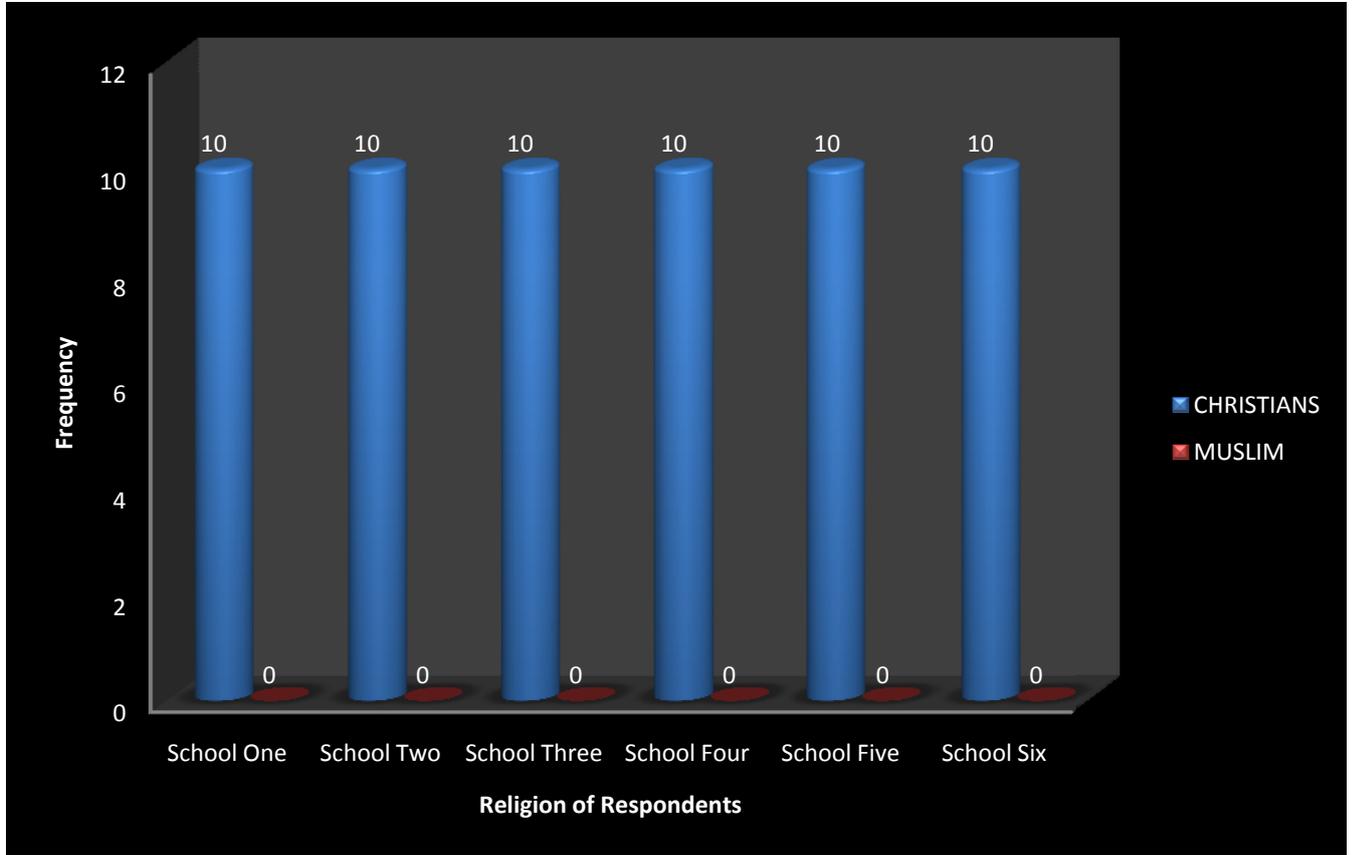


FIGURE 2

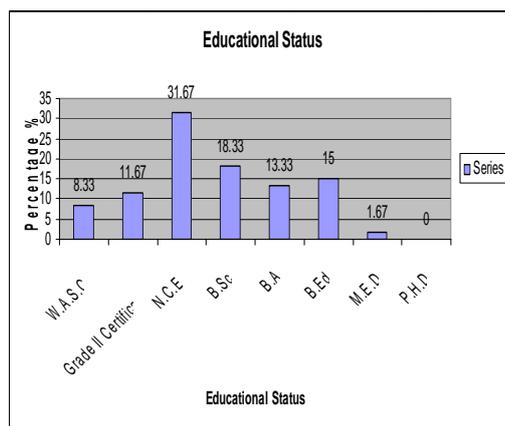
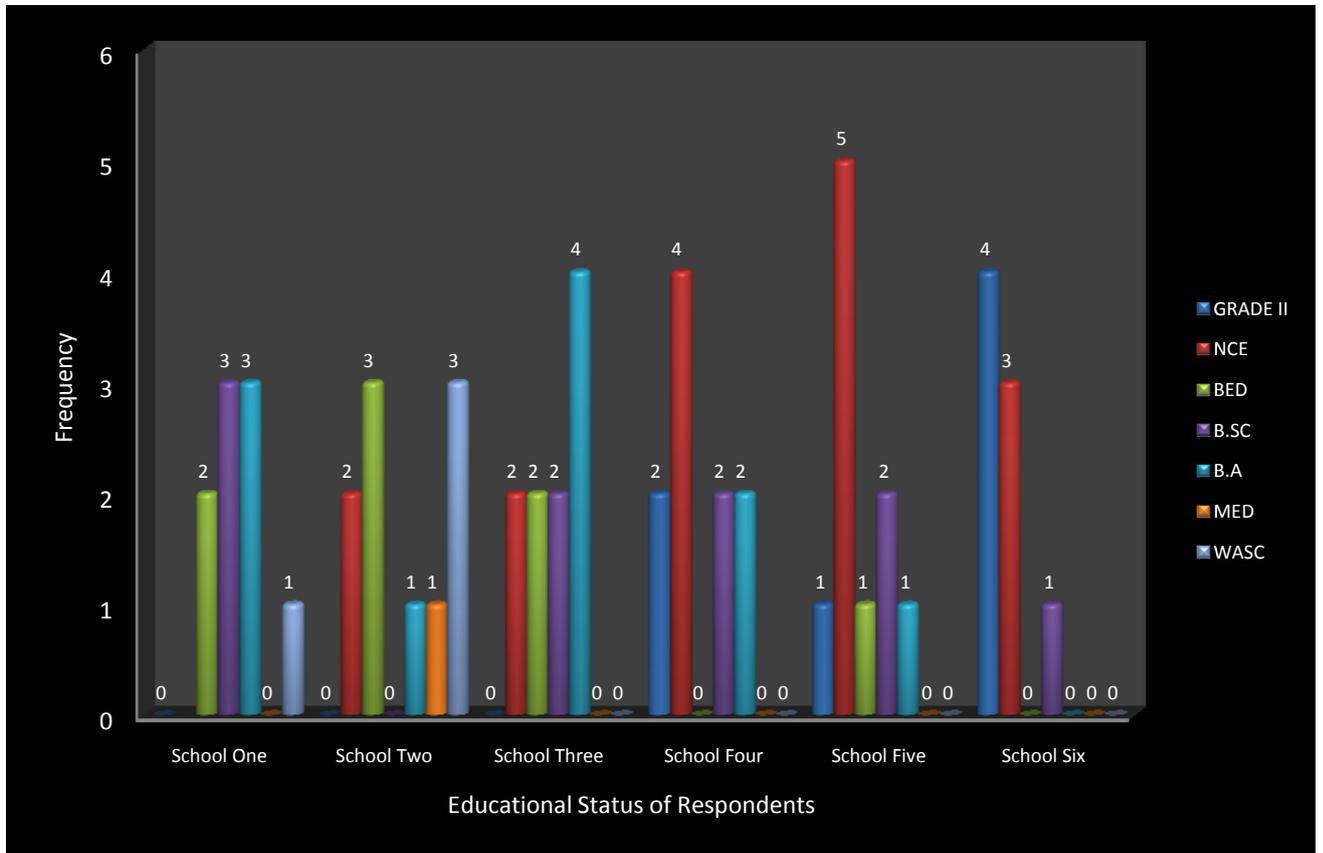
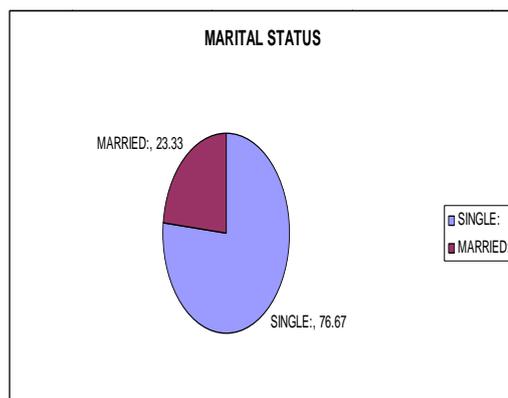
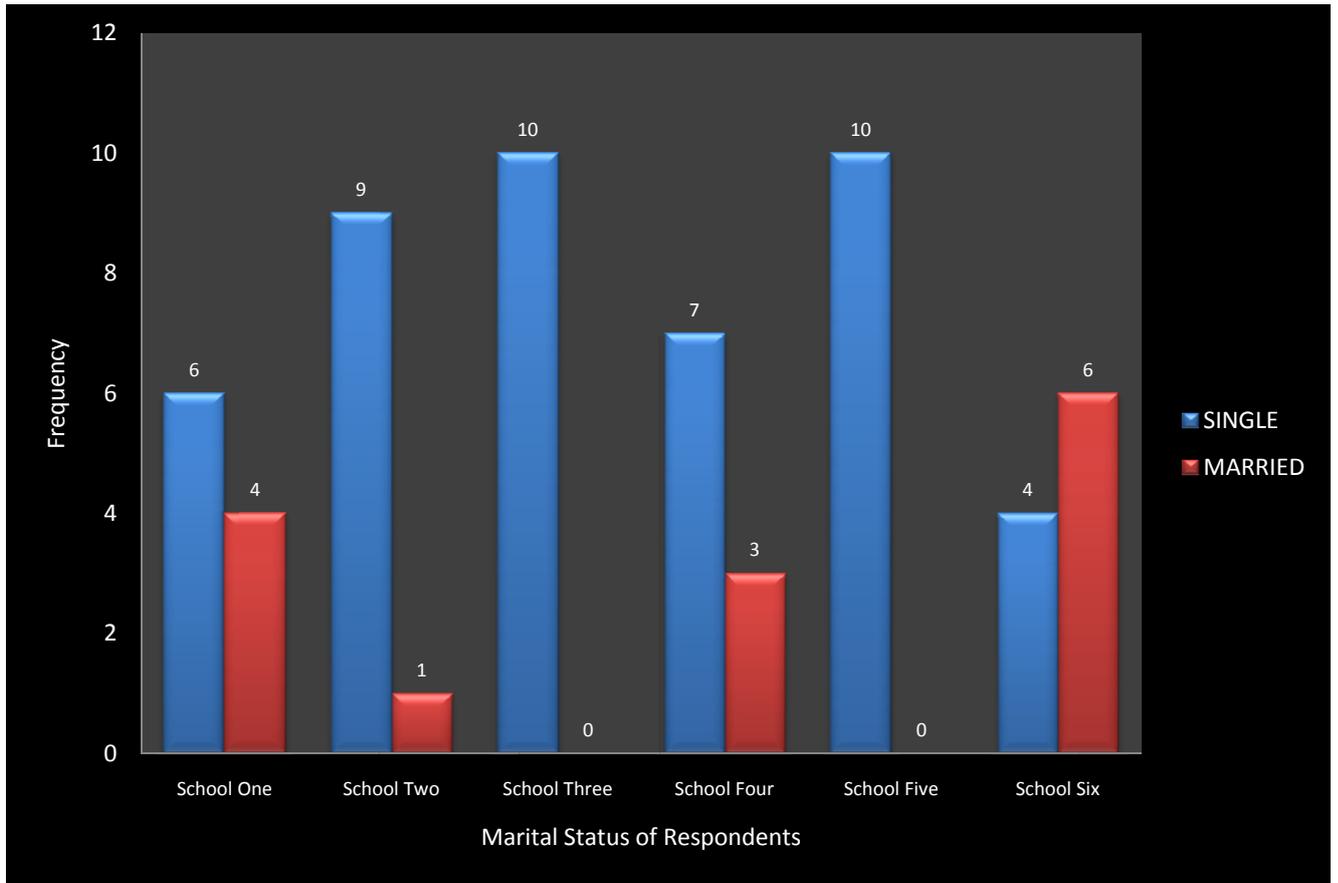
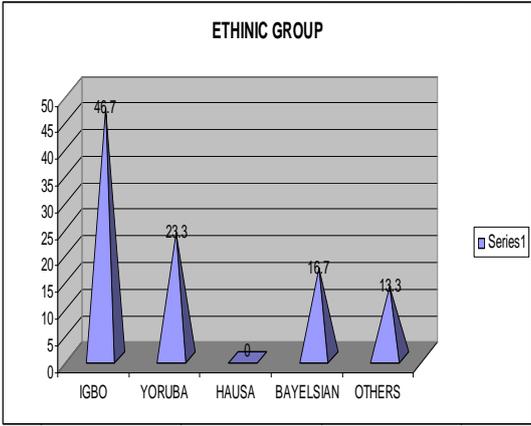
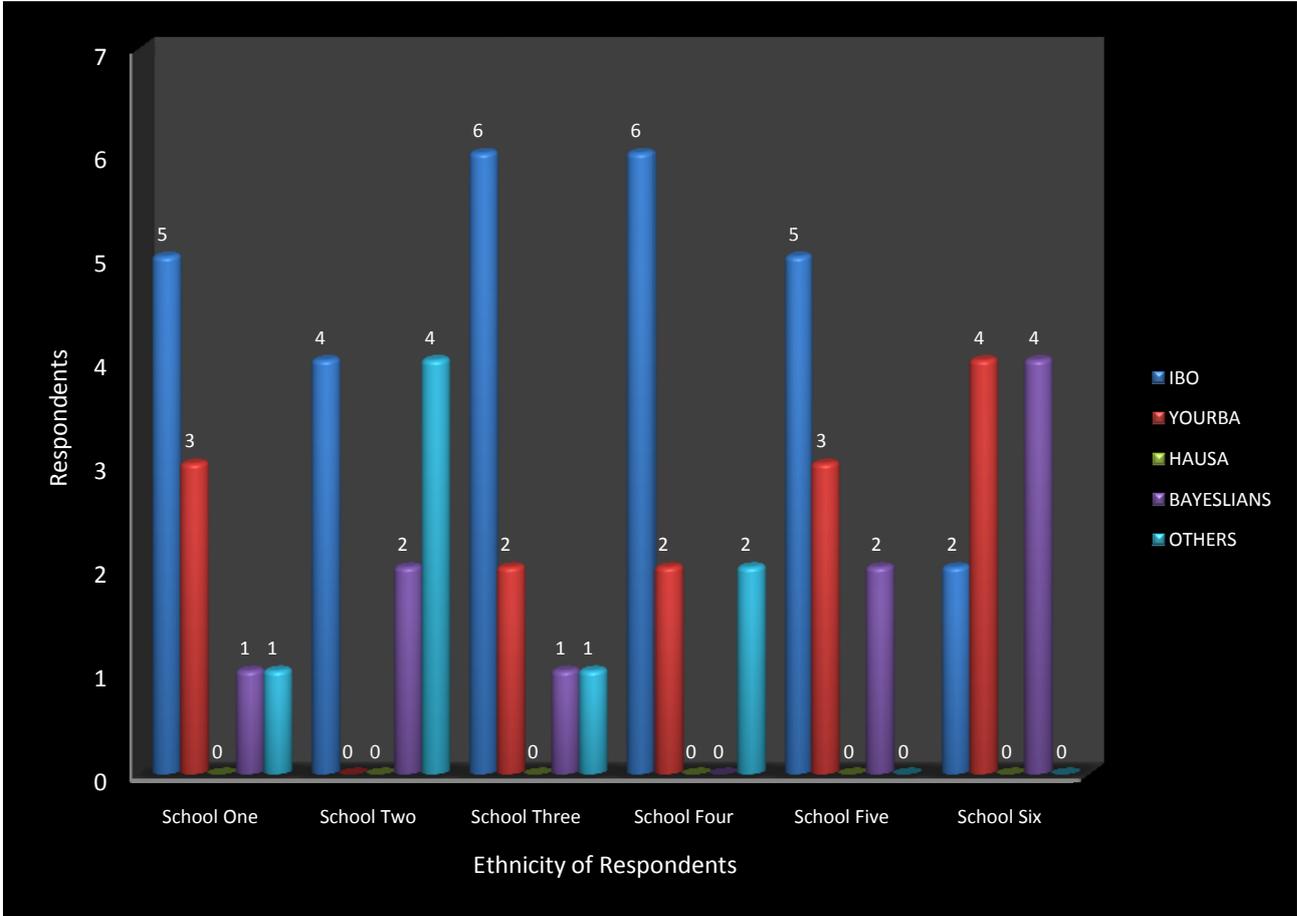
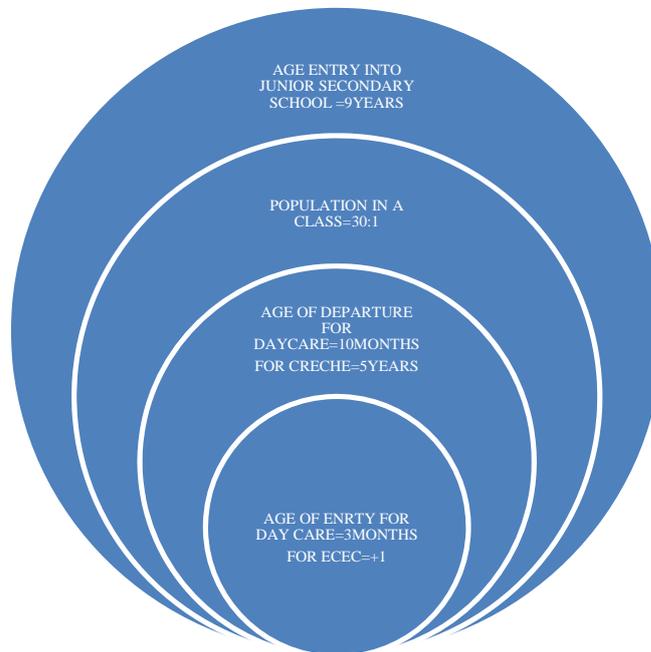


FIGURE 3





AGE OF ENTRY AND DEPARTURE



DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The results on educational qualification and continuing professional development of teachers showed that participant teachers are not qualified in ECEC, although 60% are trained as teachers and 40% are not. Even within the participants schools findings showed great variation in qualification, some school are poorly qualified while others have trained teachers but not in ECEC. This finding negates NSCDC, (2010) assertion that the success of programs depends critically on the development and retention of a skilled early childhood workforce, workforce that is skilled and well trained. The major finding showed that there is generally lack of qualified teacher/caregivers and continuing professional development in ECEC. Based on the findings quality early childhood workforce is lacking, so there is a critical need to develop strategies to recruit and retain a qualified and diverse, mixed-gender workforce and to ensure that a career in ECEC is satisfying, respected and financially viable (OECD, 2001).

PROGRAMME AND MATERIAL

The findings showed that the schools offer different programmes. So this lack of national consistency in child care regulatory matters flows through into the curriculum or program used to guide children's development when they participate in ECEC (EAP, 2009). Literacy skills take the form of pre-school/primary curriculum; children have very limited access to toys because they are costly and limited. Kindergarten play time conforms to school rule of normal break hours but thirty minutes before the primary school break period teachers cannot create environments that are more playful and less stressful by themselves. In focus group discussion

with purposively selected parents and teachers, two topics were chosen: program content and teaching children with Mother-tongue to enhance understanding. In programme content, 90% of the parents complained the subject content is not developmentally appropriate, so they are tasking to complete. While teachers claimed that Parents are simply being lazy, they have no time for their children and they want teachers to do everything for them. They should be happy, we are bring them close to their children with the homework and making transition to primary easy for their children by teaching them ahead.

On teaching with mother tongue, the following views of parents was documented unedited.

- *What is mother-tongue, where will the children use it, just tell us. There is no country; no examination; school or job and office that uses mother tongue. **Mrs. Lucy.***
- *Mother tongue as a core subject in secondary school is annoying. How can you force a child to learn a language that he/she does not like? Now they want to teach infants/toddlers with mother tongue. Whose language are they going to teach with and which one are they going to drop? Do you know the number of language we have here? They should stop building cultural inferiority complex in children, have the government wondered the psychological harm associated with it. Do they think of how children whose language belong to minority feel? Do they know what we as parents feel? My language is my root, my identity, so they cannot put it behind. **Mr. Monday***
- *The mother tongue is not my issue but the harm these children go through in these daycares. How can a teacher take care of 31 infants/toddlers? My child was in daycare, they drug him, he sleeps all the time and always sick. I withdraw him, increased his age to get him into crèche. Sometimes I feel very guilty, my mother took care of me but I cannot take care of my own because of money. **Mrs. Janet.***

SEX, MARITAL STATUS, ETHNICITY, AND RELIGION

The finding showed that 76.67percent of the respondents are single and 23.33% married, this could be as a result of the level of unemployment in Nigeria. The singles can migrate to any state in search for job opportunities and this may also explain the ethnic variation of teachers and the qualification of teachers. The findings showed on religion may provide answer to why there is no teacher from Hausa culture, this also collaborates with the report of NOUN (2006) that play group/daycare centre are located within the church/mosque premises and unfortunately mosque schools were not included in this study. A decision that is not deliberate.

REVOLUTIONIZING TO ENSURE THE HIGHEST QUALITY EDUCATION

Revolution is about radical educational change, a total reform, which is to be delivered on the ground that it is imperative that the way for it be prepared with unwavering sense of purpose. It is a movement and not a few disjointed cosmetics adjustments. From a total vision of the envisaged reorientation, various parts of the vehicle of learning have to be redesigned making sure that the deficiencies of the previous model if any are rectified. It is like paddling a boat from one side of a river to the other. Even the most earnest and frenetic strokes will not take it forward unless the boat is unfettered. Unfurling the panoply of an altered orientation without clearing the road blocks of the old, may not yield the desired result (NCERT, 2006).

Revolution is about quality production and quality is a process from quality ECEC, primary, secondary, to higher institution. The major findings of this study showed that quality of education is at lowest level, even judging with Nigeria's context of quality as stated by Federal Ministry of Education,(2008): Quality in Nigeria context implied an enriched, functional, flexible and innovative curriculum; well-trained, motivated, reflective and adaptable teachers and school administration; appropriate and medium sized classrooms and good school health and security, diversified instructional materials; adequate funding, appropriate language of instruction-preferably the mother tongue, good support services, monitoring, assessment and evaluation, completion and successful learning.

Prasad (2007) referred to quality as a concept, a journey, what we practice and necessary ingredients to national development. The idea of quality is not new, nor that of quality assurance. Neither, for that matter the concerns on quality (Prasad, 2007). Quality in education (especially early childhood education) is crucial in Africa's strategic plans towards catching up with developed world. While the notion of quality and priority foci may differ from country to country, the term has become a determining factor in facilitating international support for education and development initiatives (Ankomah, Koomson, Bosu with Oduro, 2005). The understanding the geographical context of quality in education, what indicators are within the cultural milieu of particular countries, the challenges associated with implementing quality education are therefore significant(Ankomah, Koomson, Bosu with Oduro, 2005) .

Quality in ECEC is about developmental appropriate content, standard, better integration and broader outcomes, relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of learning content and delivery pedagogy. It is about learning environment and the experiences to enable the children, play, explore and construct unbiased knowledge after critical thinking and self-reflectivity through the guide of adult. But quality must not ignore some fundamental theoretical questions about children's development ,especially Microsystems-that is, the child immediate context for development and quality can be delivered within very differently structured settings, although structural factors do make a difference. Developmental appropriateness assumes that children's learning experiences should be designed according to appropriate stages of development (Smith, 1996; Bronfenbrenner; 1974). This must be guided by Rogoff (1990) in smith (1996) coined the term "guided participation" to include both the notion of guidance or scaffolding) and participation in culturally valued activities. Scaffolding is a term that describes the guidance and interactional support given tutor in the ZPD. Scaffolding is usually introduced after the children have exhausted the ability to critically create an unbiased knowledge. It is child specific both in quantity and quality. Quantity is about the how high the scaffold is placed, at what level and how long it is kept in place. While quality concerns the different ways helps is offered; through directions, attentions, modeling, and asking questions or giving encouragement. This where the importance of quality early childhood teacher/caregiver and learning environment is of need.

Teacher quality to provide a caring and responsive adult-child (child-child) relationship is necessary before children can acquire intellectual skills through social interaction, both teacher and learner need to have a shared understanding of the task's purposes, goals tools and contexts (McNaughton, 1991) . Professional development can help overcome shortcomings that may have been part of teacher's Preservice education and keep teachers abreast of new

knowledge and practices in the field. This ongoing training for teachers can have direct for teachers can be a direct impact on student achievement (UNICEF, 2000). Quality continuing professional development may take forms of formal off-site kinds of programmes, dialogue and reflections with colleagues, peer and supervisor observation, keeping journal, in-service as well as external workshop training on use of child-centered teaching and learning behaviours and use of interactive video technology to reach a large number of teachers to improve conceptual understanding of pedagogical issues (UNICEF, 2002; Maheshwari & Raina, 1998).

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

The study investigated ECEC in South-South Nigeria, the findings shows it is presently at a poor state, the conclusion drawn is, since there is a growing interest in providing quality education for ECEC and it must not be allowed to continuing under the culture of silence without a separate ministry/ commission for quality assurance and enhancement. Nigerian government should develop strategic action to ensure children do not receive poor quality care, but have expanded access and choice, particularly children from low socio economic groups, children in rural and remote communities (Lee, 2004; Immervoll & Barber, 2005 cited in OECD 2006, McMahon, 2004). Establishing ECEC centres to bring an end to the identified issues in the study can help to improve awareness education, information and promote prevention program. The recommendation of the study is therefore that changes can be made in key areas:

- ✚ Improve staff to child ratios to ensure each child gets more individual care and attention.
- ✚ New staff qualification requirements to ensure staff have the skills to help children learn and develop.
- ✚ A new quality rating system to ensure ... families have access to transparent information relating to the quality of early childhood education and care services.
- ✚ The establishment of a new National body to ensure early childhood education and care is of a high quality (Australian Government, 2011).
- ✚ Children should not be group together in class but according to age range to enable developmentally appropriate care and education: for example: 0-6months; 6-12months; 12-24months; 24-36months.
- ✚ The three tiers of government in Nigeria (Federal, state and Local government) must see ECEC as an important stage that needs huge investment.
- ✚ All faculties of education in universities must introduce ECEC or integrate it into program of study.
- ✚ Government must fund and support ongoing professional development, research.

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