

**REVOLUTIONIZING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AS A
VEHICLE FOR ENSURING THE HIGHEST QUALITY
EDUCATION**

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INTRODUCTION

The recent population of Nigeria was estimated at about 140 million and with a diverse ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. This has implications for mother tongue as a medium of teaching.

Major ethnic groups in the country are the Hausa/Fulani in North, Yoruba in South-West, Igbo in South-East and Ijaw in 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 age structure breakdown shows that 0-14years: 40.9% (male 32, 476,681/female 31,064,539);
- ❑ This age structure ought to determine the wheel of its investment, especially in education but 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 remain at what stage, the study is therefore 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 the demand of changing society has increased the

WHY CAREGIVERS/TEACHERS NOT FAMILY

- Looking back historically at 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.
- The transformation from industrial revolution to globalization has an immense impact on the life of older adults and children:
 - ❑ brought 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 leading to more Lonely and only children.
- With both parents at work, high divorce rate, family members searching for their own means of survival. 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.

This marked the beginning of formal early childhood education and care(ECEC): 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).

In Nigeria, Universal Basic Education Commission is in-charge of Early Childhood Education and Care. The commission has remained silent in the education of zero to three years even with its present reforms in education.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY & WHY

- 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).

WHY FOCUS ON ZERO TO THREE (INFANTS/ TODDLERS)

- 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 (Association for childhood education,2011).

Recent studies have consistently shown the "under- threes" brain development is enhanced by the environmental experience deepening on the nature: i.e. whether it is positive or negative.

POSITIVE EXPERIENCES: Leads to healthy development in the earliest years of life. This 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).

NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES: 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.

To enhance positive development, qualified teachers, quality programme and learning environment has to be provided

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.
- In adult education that ought to provide second chance: **Poor literacy enrollment rates in adult education; high dropout rates linked to both economic problems, adult literacy programme lack of relevance, funding issues and low morale among adult literacy instructors; untrained Literacy instructors in facilitation skills and gender.**
- *The argument is: if adult and non-formal education is also in poor condition, there is a great urgent need for a revolutionizing.*
- This revolution 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).
- Again, studies on 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).
- In the context of the scenario 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 of ECEC could generate new ideas and knowledge relating to quality education that will enable the Ministry of Education improves existing education programmes.

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.
- ❑ ECEC is one of the least developed areas in the agenda of the three tiers of Government in Nigeria and still an unexplored terrain in Nigeria as a means of ensuring the highest possible quality education.
- ❑ 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.
- Some critical questions therefore arise which need evidence-based answer: This study is the search for the answers.

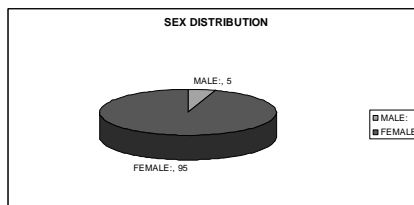
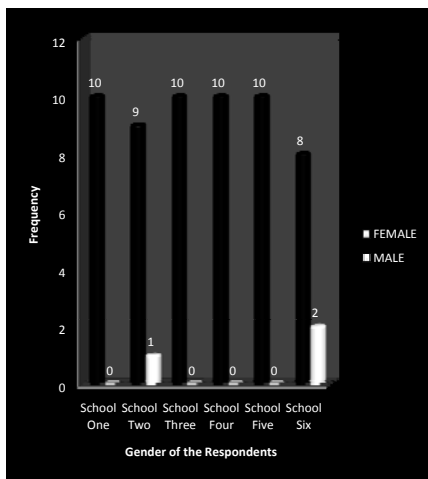
METHODOLOGY

- 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).
- The population of the study comprises of 240 schools that provide preschool education, 40 schools were 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.
- Data was analyzed using simple frequencies .
- **RESULTS: The results are shown in the next slide**

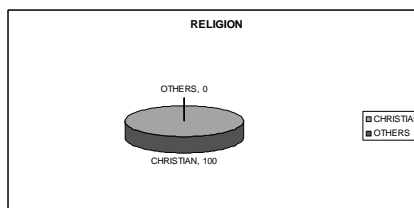
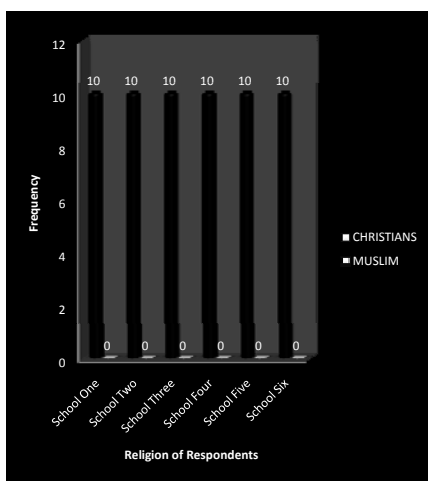
MAJOR FINDINGS

- Untrained teachers/caregivers are employed and paid poorly.
- Lack of ongoing professional training.
- Inconsistency in curriculum/ program used to guide the children.
- Children are mixed in classroom, there is no grouping according to age i.e.(0-6months; 6-12months; 12-24months; 24-36months)
- Parents outright rejection of mother tongue as medium of teaching.
- Some Parent claim they increased their children's age to get them into the school of their choice.
- People from other discipline teach as a last resort to unemployment.
- Poor quality education and high cost of schools fees .
- Children with special needs are not provided for.
- Universalization of ECEC is not present as children from marginalized region, rural-rural, those in region with difficult terrain remain unreached.
- Early childhood education departments are lacking in many of Nigeria universities.
- There is poor awareness of ECEC for zero to three years and demand for discipline even in the university offering the course.
- Parents are aware of the low quality but do not know what to do.
- Lack of government funding, participation and motivation of present providers.
- The education of zero to three years remains unrecognized, unmonitored and surrounded by Culture of silence .

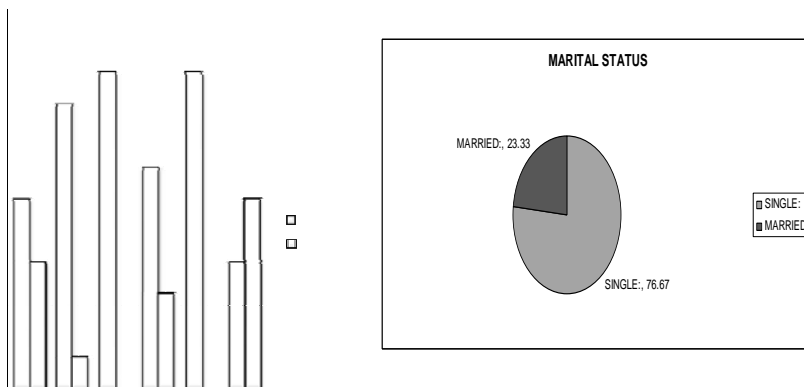
GRAPH I ; GENDER OF PARTICIPANTS



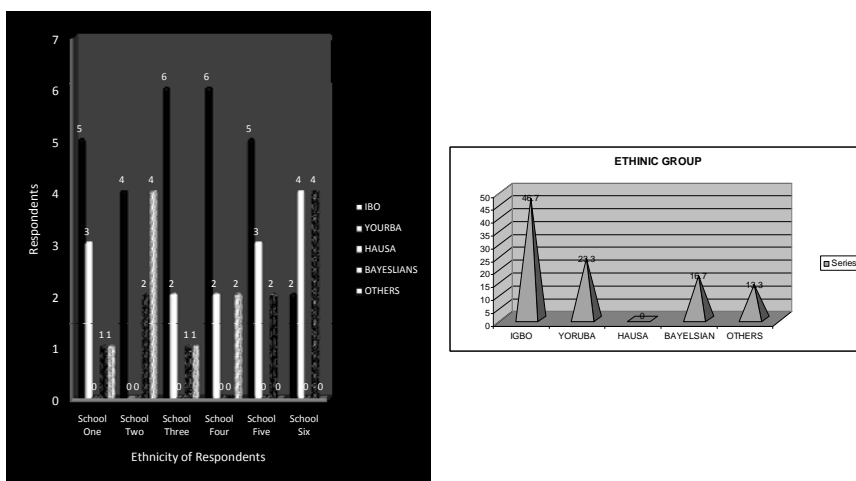
RELIGION OF PARTICIPANTS.



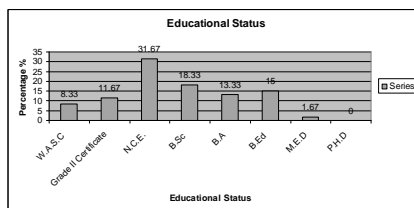
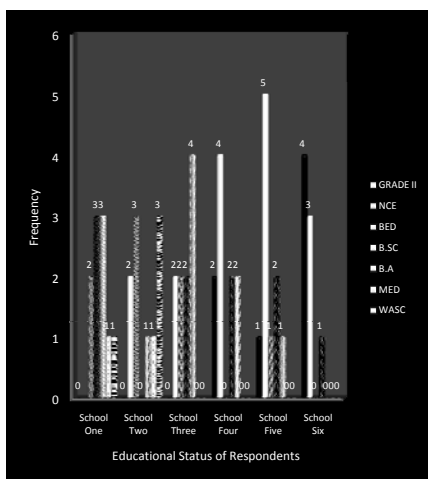
MARITAL STATUS OF RESPONDENTS



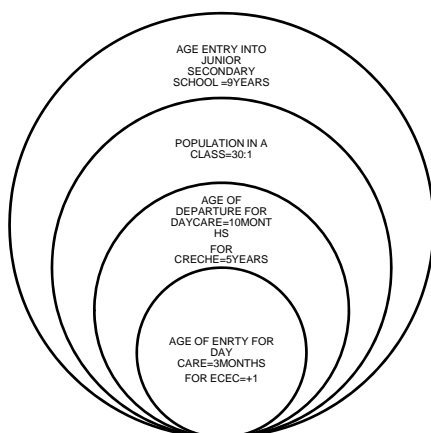
ETHNICITY OF PARTICIPANTS



QULIFICATIONS OF PARTICIPANTS



AGE OF ENTRY AND DEPARTURE/PARENTS VIEW ON MOTHER-TONGUE AS A MEDIUM OF TEACHING.



- 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 creche. Sometimes I feel very guilty, my mother took care of me but I cannot take care of my own because of money. Mrs. Janet.*

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 process from quality ECEC, primary, secondary, to higher institution and 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.

QUALITY IN ECEC

- 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.
- Quality is about the 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).

Conclusion

The study investigated the state of early childhood education 0-3years and major findings showed it is presently in a very poor state. The quality is at the 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, monitory, assessment and evaluation, completion and successful learning.***

The findings of this study showed all of the above is lacking in Nigeria schools; the government should therefore reconsider its stand on education and make a radical reform starting at the root which is 0-3years, because quality is a process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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; 24-36month.
- 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.