

REPOSITIONING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SECTOR FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

The study examined the repositioning of early childhood education sector for sustainable development in contemporary society, particularly in Rivers State. Three research questions and hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised caregivers and head teachers from selected early childhood education centres of public preschools in Rivers State. The convenient sampling technique was used to draw a sample size of 232. The instrument for data collection was a researcher – made questionnaire titled: Repositioning Early Childhood Education Sector for Sustainable Development Questionnaire (RECESSDQ), comprising 18 items. Mean, standard deviation and Z – test were used for data analysis. Findings revealed that human resources improved curriculum, adequate facilities play prominent and paramount roles in the effectiveness of the ECE programme, adequate employment of qualified, experienced and passionate caregivers are keys to effective teaching and learning in the preschool classroom. It was concluded that for the ECE centres of the public preschools in Rivers State to achieve sustainable development in contemporary society, repositioning is paramount; both caregivers/head teachers must be updated and up and doing, Government must keep to their duty of providing avenue for modern trending knowledge in early childhood education.

Keywords: Early childhood, Education, Sustainable Development, Repositioning, Contemporary Society, Facility.

Introduction

The early childhood education or pre-primary education is the education that is established to take care or carter for the transmission of the various required or necessary, adequate skills to children between the ages of 3 – 8 years in an educational center or institution before they enter primary schools. It is to say that the government of such a place must approve such educational institution for the purpose of teaching and learning. When such educational institution has met all necessary requirements for its take-off and is finally approved by the government, it helps prepare the preschoolers to acquire emotional skills, social skills, literacy skills, physical skills, thinking (cognitive) skills are crucial to the growth of the preschoolers.

However, over the years, one can ask if the quality of early childhood education in Rivers State has improved? The answer is no, this is due to undue emphasis on off – the – job education and the inadequate supply of qualified caregivers with renewed experiences or competencies. The early childhood education centres and the physical facilities that caregivers employ to facilitate teaching have become dilapidated and fraught with shortfall in the supply of the required and needed instructional materials. Scholars, parents and other stakeholders in the field of the early childhood education, to this effect, have attributed the situation to the reason for increased disrespect in preschoolers, crime rate among peers, disobedience to laws and orders in the state, violence among the youths and lack of agape love among youths in Rivers State. Andrew (2014) posits the factors responsible for the under development of the early childhood education for sustainable development

in Rivers State are lack of adequate supply of qualified early childhood education caregivers who have degrees in the early childhood education department, the nature of early childhood education centres, and the provision of inadequate facilities and instructional materials for teaching among others.

Nevertheless, if government do not take a drastic measure and declare a state of emergency in the early childhood education centres in Rivers State, our children will grow up to become social misfit among peers, there will be increase in crime rate, there will be low self-esteem in the future youths, the future youths of our dear state will lack confidence in themselves, the future youths will be unable to solve their own problems making them dependent on their parents even as an adults making them to lack behind in the face of sustainable development. Yet, another way of repositioning the early childhood education centres or sectors is when government of the day recruit caregivers who have required degrees or certificates in the endeavor of early childhood education, make them to be competent in the subject contents. The qualified caregivers is one who has gone through training in a recognized institution and has obtained a certificate in early childhood education, when there is short of the above, it is said that most children do not feel comfortable at school because of the caregivers non-compliance with the stated objectives (Enyi, 2000).

On the other hand, when the government of the state do the needful, will result in the acquisition of balanced knowledge on both sides of the caregivers and the preschool children, competent work force, and requisite skills that will make the preschool children to become better and functional persons when reached adulthood in the society for sustainable development in our contemporary society. It will significantly aid the chances of meeting sustainable developmental needs in its entire ramification, reduce crime, violence in the society increase self-confidence.

Statement of the Problem

In spite of the fact that the integrated early childhood education approach views the survival, growth and development of young to accommodate the changing trends in the system of modern education to meet the standard of the sustainable development in the global world, in Rivers state and immediate Nigerian society, the school system has never ceased to produce graduates who are supposedly the caregivers but who have appear confused or rejected or not make used in the early childhood education centres in Rivers State. To contain this problem, both the National Policy on Education (NPE) and the early childhood education curriculum have been reviewed severally to accommodate all suggestions and recommendations made by the various stakeholders of early childhood education, to ensure that the pre-school centres products who are the pre-school children are functional upon transition to primary, secondary and university.

However, there is a tremendous concern expressed by parents, and stakeholders as to the quality of the early childhood education provided in their various ECEC. This problem is further escalated or compounded by the governments in ability to employ competent and qualified caregivers, who should man the various approved public pre-school centres, dearth of teaching facilities and instructional materials required in the public pre-school centres in Rivers State, hence, the need to reposition early childhood education in Rivers State for sustainable development in contemporary society.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to investigate how to reposition the early childhood education centres in Rivers State for sustainable development in contemporary society. Specifically, the study sought to:

- i. Asses the nature of the early childhood education centres in Rivers State for sustainable development.
- ii. Find out the ways provision of adequate employment of qualified caregivers of early childhood education in repositioning the early childhood education centres in Rivers State.
- iii. Find out the ways adequate provision of facilities will help to reposition the early childhood education centres in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study.

- i. What is the nature of early childhood education centres in Rivers State for sustainable development?
- ii. What are the ways the provision of adequate employment of qualified caregivers of early childhood education help in repositioning early childhood education centres in Rivers State?
- iii. In what ways does adequate provision of facilities help to reposition the early childhood education centres in Rivers State.

Hypothesis

- i. There is no significant difference between the mean scores of caregivers on the nature of the early childhood education centres in Rivers State for sustainable development in contemporary society.
- ii. There is no significant difference between the means scores of caregivers on the ways of the provision of adequate employment of qualified caregivers of early childhood education help in repositioning the early childhood education centres in Rivers State.
- iii. There is no significant difference between the mean scores of caregivers on the ways adequate provision of facilities help to reposition the early childhood education centres in Rivers State.

Literature

Nature of the Early Childhood Education centres in Rivers State.

Early childhood education is recognized by the Federal Government of Nigeria as one of the critical aspects of education in the country, following this, it was considered in the National Policy of Education and was also approved as one of the programmes of education in Nigeria. The significance of the early childhood education include to promote the needed and required development of the preschoolers, identify and tackle the problems and needs of the preschoolers, exploit the innate talents of the preschoolers, contain, and shape their character, improve significantly on the preschoolers learning condition and environment, make them become functional persons in the society when they get to adulthood to make their actions are channeled towards positive citizen, communal and global development in all strata of their endeavours.

According to Obinaju & Ibiam (2012), early childhood education cover or encompasses the total overall development of the preschoolers socially, emotionally, physically, and cognitively, and among others. Early childhood education is therefore seen or taken as covering the care development

and education of the progenies below age of six (6) years. It is a foundation of bedrock for a lifespan learning which is provided in preschool institutional.

The existing policy on early childhood education in Nigeria is targeted at achieving the following objectives:

- i. Effecting a smooth transition from home to school.
- ii. Get the child ready for the primary level of education.
- iii. Ensuring sufficient care and management for the children while their parents are at work.
- iv. Preparing and nursing individuals who are responsible citizens.
- v. Equipping the child with the spirit of enquiry and creativeness through the exploration of nature and their local environment, playing with toys, artistic and musical activities etc.
- vi. Teaching cooperation and team spirit.
- vii. Teaching the rudiment of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms, etc. through play pattern.
- viii. Teaching the children good habits, particularly good health habits, greetings such as “Welcome, Goodbye” Morals such as “Sorry. Thank you, Value etc. as posits (Bush, 2001).

According to Gallagher and Clifford (2000), infrastructures are desirable to make progress or support the high quality technical services of the preschool centres they further state, that states and communities do have the appropriate facilities or structures to ensure that learning activities in the preschool centres are effectively and efficiently executed meritoriously. The problem of quality in ECEC is critical with high increase of private schools. In appropriate indoor play space and work space for caregivers and preschoolers are what we see in some preschool centres. Standard Classrooms with cross ventilation, well-lit with inbuilt storage cupboard, with accessible windows ought to be provided. Some classrooms walls have no paint of two or three bright colours, some staff do not have table and chairs but have converted the desks in the classroom to be their seats. Some ECEC have been overtaken by weeds and reptiles which are in appropriate and dangerous to the preschoolers.

Chitty (2002) describes learning outcome as the key indicator of educational quality need to be executed or carried out in acceptable learning environment alongside the infrastructures and good sanitation facilities. Accordingly, Williams (2000) admitted that sanitation and healthy environment in suiting infrastructures or facilities promoted school attendance and high performance and achievement.

In light of the above, one would wonder how come the preschool centres in River State are not been taken care of, a visit to one of the public preschool centres would show you the extent of negligence, lack of maintenance culture in our government which has led to the rot in the preschool centres. In the opinion of Osho, Aliyu, Okolie & Onifade (2014), all preschoolers remain special or talented which goes to buttress that the caregivers who are in charge of their daily care must possess the required knowledge or qualification. It is not just the potential to manage the children but they must have to manage the environment from the subjective or viewpoint of the preschool children as once this is observed, it will allow the preschoolers the thoughtfulness they need to make progress as well as valuable learning know-how. Caregivers in public preschools should be equipped or trained on daily basis with the modern knowledge of social support classroom pedagogy alongside literateness scholarship of the preschoolers and their households.

Ways the Provision of Adequate Recruitment of Qualified Early Childhood Education Caregivers help in Repositioning the early Childhood Education centers in Rivers State.

Adequate recruitment of qualified, and experienced early childhood education caregivers to man the preschools centers of learning in public preschoolers in Rivers State is of necessity and should not be treated or sacrificed on the altar of political sentiment, compensation or god-fatherism. It will help the public preschool centers to build our tomorrow leader who will be good citizens who have acquired the necessary or required skills to be functional future leaders, it also helps restore values in the public preschool centers, bring back the confidence which the parents, and stakeholders have loss in the public preschool centers, parent can sent their children to public preschool centers knowing that their children are in safe hands and not in the hands of one unqualified, inexperienced caregivers who have little or nothing to show in the classroom. Building professionalism resilient, qualified culture and restoring values or confidences or competence as a way of repositioning the early childhood education centers in Rivers State in the opinion of Okam (2016) requires analysis such as SWOT analysis. When this is carried out, it helps to fish out or identify the internal strength and lapses or lacuna, opportunities created in the public preschool centers and then contain or treat such weakness that affect desired outcomes of early childhood education system leading in to what Ololube (2017) and Ololube (2018) opined to as feedback mechanism.

Feedback mechanism deals with strategies otherwise called strategic analysis, strategic formulation, strategic implementation and strategic controls. Strategic analysis evaluates the present condition of the early childhood education centers thereby identifying the preschool system assets, skills of the caregivers as well as the resources that represent the strength, weakness, lapses, lacuna, vacuums obstacles and challenges (SWOT). Again, strategies formulation helps direct the preschool centres to where it wants to be, it includes setting strategies goals, objectives of the national minimum standard of the ECEC, as well as providing that optimum performance of the caregivers who are manning the preschool centers of the public preschool in Rivers State. Furthermore, strategic implementation focused on translating the National Policy of Educational in to releasable policies, finally, strategies control, focus or involve in the implementation of the ECE curriculum to the later.

Based on the foregoing explanation, the National Research Council of Nigeria (2004) concluded that the developers also believe that apart from benefiting the learners, the curriculum plan should be responsive to community in feelings and reflect official policy.

Further, the recruitment of adequate and qualified caregivers will help to improve innovative instructional method and material that will positively impact on the overall development of the public preschool centres. As supported by Maduwesi (2005), qualified experience and passionate caregivers who are proficient as well as devoted remain the best asset and essential possessions to operate, and man then public preschools centres in Rivers State. These proficient and passionate caregivers must be motivated, promoted as when due and their salaries always paid on time to make them happy and teach or facilitate the preschoolers' learning. The potentials of the above caregivers include: pedagogical training, years of service-retired nurses or midwives who yet have the passion to be in the classroom, experiences, ability or aptitude and full knowledge of subject matter among others. It is also important to understand that training and skills which the caregivers already possessed or prepared in educating the preschoolers is a crucial indicator of educational quality (Aisha, 2012).

Provision of Adequate Facilities

Some physical facilities such as school buildings, classrooms, books, and libraries, vehicles, chair, table, playing ground, toilets, waste bins running taps, sanitizers, instructional materials, toys, modern and magnetic blocks for building, baby dolls, balls of various shapes, floor puzzles with large pieces, creative corners, open space classroom, and nature corner, computer room among others in early institution of learning occupy important position in the achievement of the national minimum standard, the integrated early childhood education curriculum as well as the National Policy of Education especially in public preschool centres in Rivers State.

The adequacy or sufficiency of these facilities in achieving that sustainable development goal (SDG-4) cannot be undermined thus, Lle (2018) defines school facilities as tools for cultural reproduction and skill acquisition that facilitates teaching, learning and administrative duties of the caregivers in the preschool centres. In collaborating the above view, Fasiria in Nwonkwaola (2018) buttress that the provision of adequate and the sufficient school facilities or plants has or presents a learning effect on the academic performance and psychological stability of the preschool caregivers and preschoolers. Accordingly, Odum (2013) states that provision of adequate and up-to date facilities in preschool centres enhances performance and motivate the preschool caregivers in their manning of the ECE centres. It also affects the school and the choice of parents in terms of preschoolers enrolment in the public preschool centres in Rivers State.

Sustainable Development in Contemporary Society

Sustainable development in contemporary society in this context talks about the daily maintenance of a constant growth and improvement on the ability and capacity of the preschoolers for greater creativity and responsibility. The Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners (2002), defines sustainable as capable of continuing for a long time at the same level. Ake (2001) cited in Okorosaye-Orubite (2008) defines development as the process by which people create and recreate themselves and their life circumstances to realize higher level of civilization with their own choices and values.

Ukeje (1986) state development as a positive and natural process:

It is positive and remedial and thus expressive of man's confidence in his own natural power to create, to generate, to face continually and to overcome satisfactorily the fears, constraints, superstitions and bewilderments of an ever-threatening environment.

Education projects sustainable development in order to equip the preschool children for the creation of future sustainability. In this context, efforts should be made to improve the quality of public preschool centres in Rivers State, restructure the current public preschool centres that can address the objectives of the Integrated Early Childhood Education Curriculum, the National Policy of Education as well as the National Minimum Standard for the early childhood education.

Methodology

This study made use of descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised caregivers from early childhood education centres as well as some head teachers from public preschool centres in Rivers State. The convenient sampling technique was used to draw a sample size of 232. The instrument for this study was a researcher-made questionnaire titled: Repositioning early childhood education sector for sustainable development questionnaire (RECESSDQ) comprising 18 items.

The questionnaire was structured along a 4-point modified Likert rating scale of Strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strong disagree (SD). Mean, standard deviation and Z-test were used for data analysis. Experts from the Department of Education of the Nigeria Police Academy for face and content validity. A reliability coefficient of 0.76 was obtained through test-re-test method. Z-test was used to test the researchers together with a researcher assistant who was briefed on how to distribute and retrieve the copies of the instruments.

Results

Research Question One: What is the nature of early childhood education centers in Rivers State for sustainable development?

Table1: Mean and Standard Deviation on Nature of Early Childhood Education Centers in Rivers State.

S/N	Item	N	Mean	SD
1.	Early childhood education promotes proper development of children	232	2.2F	0.62
2.	Early childhood education prepares children to discover and tackle their problem in the future	232	2.30	0.63
3.	Early childhood education helps pattern character of the children in Rivers state	232	2.70	0.66
4.	Early childhood education caregivers have the redistrict competence and qualification to impact the right attitudes/skills to make preschoolers self-reliant	232	2.81	0.65
5.	Preschoolers are equipped with the required skills to be self-dependent	232	2.01	0.55
	Grand Mean	232	2.39	0.62

Data in table 1 show the mean score and standard deviation of early childhood education center. From the table, it is observed that the respondent agree on item 3 and 4 with means score greater than the criteria mean of 2.50.

Research Question Two: what are the ways the provision of adequate employment of qualified caregivers of early childhood education help in repositioning early childhood education centers in Rivers state?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of the ways of the provision of adequate employment of qualified caregivers of early childhood education help in repositioning early childhood education centres in Rivers State.

S/N	Item	N	Mean	SD
1.	The early childhood education curriculum is quite okay in terms of implementation.	232	2.37	0.56
2.	The current curriculum covers all the skills areas	232	2.14	0.71
3.	Adequate employment of qualified caregivers helps early childhood education to building required skills in the preassemble for future	232	2.70	0.61
4.	Adequate employment of qualified caregivers improves innovative instructional method and provide transformational learning and closing of gaps	232	2.51	0.60

5.	Adequate employment of qualified caregivers of ECE which curriculum content in a way that requires modernization and help the ECE preschoolers have self-esteem/self confidence	232	2.71	0.55
6.	The early childhood education curriculum reflects the course of the national policy in ECE	232	3.20	0.60

Data in table 2 show mean score and standard deviation of the impacts of curriculum on the effectiveness of early childhood education. From the table observed that respondent agreed items on 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 mean score greater than the criteria mean of 2.50

Research Question Three: In what ways does provision of facilities help to reposition the early childhood education centers in Rivers State?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of the Ways Adequate Provision of Facilities Help to Reposition Early Childhood Education Centers in Rivers State.

S/N	Item	N	Mean	SD
1.	Instructional material available to teach pre- scholars are adequate	232	2.11	0.71
2.	The use of instructional material helps in enhancing teaching and learning of preschool children curriculum in pre- scholar center	232	3.20	0.53
3.	The use of the integrated early childhood education curriculum provides necessary information for knowledge-based society	232	3.11	0.55
4.	Early childhood education centres in public pre-school in Rivers State are provided with adequate and up to date equipment and facilities.	232	2.23	0.66
5.	The availability of facilities helps preschoolers to develop interest and acquire problem solving skills	232	3.20	0.65
6.	The provision of adequate sanitary facilities enhances good health habit among the preschoolers	232	3.25	0.61
7.	The government of Rivers State provides adequate funds for effective running of the ECE centres in public preschools	232	2.11	0.76
	Grand Mean	232	2.74	0.63

Data in table 3 show mean score and standard deviation of the impact of adequate facilities of the effectiveness of the early childhood education centres. From the table, it is observed that respondent agreed on item 2, 3, 5 and 6 with mean scores greater than the criteria mean of 2.50.

Hypothesis One: There is no significance difference between the mean responses of caregivers on the nature of the early childhood education centres in Rivers State.

Table 4: Analysis of the Mean Responses of Caregivers on the Nature of Early Childhood Education Centres.

Variable	N	X	SD	DF	Cal. value	Z- Crit. values	Decision
Human Resources	232	2.39	0.62	230	0.2261	96Ho ₁	Accepted
Effective ECEC			232	2.36	0.59		

Table 5 above showed that z-calculated value is 0.226 while the Z-critical value is 1.96. since the Z-calculated value of 0.226 is less than the Z-critical value at 1.96 at 0.05 level of significant and 230 degree of freedom, the null hypothesis is accepted. This therefore means that there is no significant

difference in the mean responses of categories in the nature of ECEC in public preschool centers in River State.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of caregivers on the ways the provision of adequate employment of qualified early childhood education caregivers help in repositioning early childhood education centers in River state.

Table 5: Analysis of the Mean Responses of Caregivers on the Adequate Employment of Qualified Caregivers of Early Childhood Education Centers in Rivers State.

<i>Variables</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>DF</i>	<i>Cal. 2- value</i>	<i>Crit. 2- value</i>	<i>Decision</i>
Adequate facilities	232	2.61	0.61	230	0.237	1.96ho2.	Accepted
Effective ECEC			232	2.58	0.63		

At z- calculated value of 0.237 and the z- critical value is 1.96. Since the z-calculated value of 0.237 is less than the z- critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significant and 230 degree of freedom, the null hypothesis is accepted. This implies that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of caregivers on the adequate employment of qualified caregivers of early childhood education centers in public preschool in Rivers State.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant differences between the mean scores of caregivers on the ways of adequate facilities help to reposition early childhood education centers of the public preschools in Rivers State.

Table 6: Analysis of the Mean Responses in the Provision of Adequate Facilities in Early Childhood Education Centers.

<i>Variables</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>DF</i>	<i>Cal. Z- value</i>	<i>Crit. Z- value</i>	<i>Decision</i>
Adequate facilities	232	2.74	0.63	230	0.216	1.96HO ₂	Accepted
Effective ECEC			232	2.65	0.62		

At Z- calculate value of 0.216 which is less than the critical value of 1.96 at 230 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance, hence the null hypothesis is accepted. By implication, there is no significant difference in the mean responses of caregivers on the provision of facilities for early childhood education centers in the public preschools in Rivers State.

Discussions of findings

Hypothesis One: Revealed the nature of early childhood education in Rivers State. It shows how early childhood education promote proper development of children, prepare children to discover and tackle their problems, help pattern their characters for future citizens, impact the right attitudes/skills to make the preschoolers self-reliant and equip them with the required skills to be self-independent in the future for sustainable development in contemporary society in Rivers State.

Hypothesis Two: Showed that adequate employment of qualified, passionate, and experienced caregivers of early childhood education is prominent key in repositioning the ECE centers especially the public preschool centres in Rivers State. Thus, early childhood education centers of the public preschools require qualified and passionate human resources to derive and implement government policies and programs for sustainable development in contemporary society.

Hypothesis Three: Showed that the provision of adequate facilities has prominent and paramount role in the effectiveness of the public preschools of the ECE centers in Rivers State. It is however most shocking to know that all the modern schools built up by the previous administration in Rivers State have all dilapidated, lacking the necessary teaching/learning facilities, vandalized and the government is doing little or nothing to revamp or resuscitate the public preschools centers back to life. This study concludes that to meet sustainable development in contemporary society in Rivers State, the state government must or should awake from its slumber to see to the provision of adequate facilities are necessary.

Conclusion

The early childhood education is widely accepted and recognized as the most critical stage in a child's development as they experience cognitive, emotional, language, social, physical, perception and motor development which form the basic requirement that determine their future and social functioning for sustainable development in contemporary society. The stakeholders in the education industry must ensure that tomorrow's future leaders must be equipped during their early years with the best values, knowledge, skills and moral to make appreciate hard work and become independent youths in the contemporary society. There should be need to over overhaul and redesign the entire structures of the ECE public preschool centres for sustainable development in contemporary society.

Recommendations

- i. The Rivers State government through the ministry of education should appoint a substantial committee to oversee the entire activities of the ECE public preschool centers.
- ii. Adequate employment/recruitment of qualified, experienced, and passionate caregivers for the public preschools should be taken seriously.
- iii. Regular competency training and retraining of the caregivers should be encourage for sustainable development.

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