



# Impact of the Preliminary Education Policy on North Central Region of Nigeria Primary School System

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**Abstract:** The study was carried out to investigate the impact of the preliminary education policy on the primary school system of the North Central region of Nigeria. The study aimed to advance the understanding of the perceived impact of preliminary education policy implementation on the primary school system. The research question focused on the perception of key stakeholders' that could improve the full participation and facilitate the establishment of more quality primary schools in the region. A case study was employed with a purposeful sample of 16 semi-structured interviews which included combination of parents or guardians, preschool heads, primary school principals, and officials from the region. Themes were extracted through descriptive coding regarding the preschool education policy's perceived strengths and opportunities for improvement from collected data transcripts. The emergent themes from the study included equality and social justice, education for all, and school readiness for next level. The results point to the need for collaboration and active participation of all key stakeholders towards effective preliminary education policy implementation.

**Keywords:** Impact, preliminary education policy, primary school system

## 1. Introduction

According to Alase (2017) Nigeria witnessed a boom in the education sector from 1975 to 1983 due to oil discovery and exportation. The economic boom did not last long as the federal government abandoned the investment and development in other economic sectors (Alase, 2017). The discovery of crude oil quickly harmed other economic sectors of the nation. However, improvements were made in the education sector through the Nigerian constitutional amendments of 1999 (NPE, 2013). Chapter II, Article 18 mandates free education for all citizens, beginning with the free compulsory primary education and continuing up to the university level. The article also mentioned the efforts of the federal government to eradicate illiteracy in the society. As a result of these efforts made by the federal government in 2013 (NPE, 2013), education is again recognized as a fundamental human right and not a privilege in Nigerian society. One of the early scholarly works in the area of UBE in Nigeria was by Uyanga in 2012.

Uyanga (2012) stressed that education is a fundamental right of all citizens in a country. This goal could be achieved by providing an affordable and quality education to all Nigerians. The provision of adequate quality primary education could eradicate illiteracy in society and reduce poverty by empowering the population with essential knowledge for their daily earnings. It could also promote unity among the diverse ethnic groups and religious groups that would yield sustainable coexistence. Nonetheless, the Nigerian government has been unsuccessful in fully implementing the NPE since its establishment in 1997 (Alase, 2017).

The subsequent section explores some of the unimplemented or partially implemented portions of the NPE.

- Section 1, subsection 5. This section of NPE states that Nigeria's philosophy of education is based on each citizen's development into a sound and productive citizen. The policy further states the full integration of everyone into the community, and there would also be equal access to education for all citizens. In reality, Nigerian education data survey (NEDS) (2015) revealed that the effect of the prekindergarten (Pre-K) participation on the literacy rate of children in the North-Central region is among the lowest in the country, at 25.9%. The net attendance rate is only 39.6% of children between the ages of 4 and 5 years. Another issue is related to the number of schools and infrastructures at all educational levels to handle the 8.73 million youths that are expected to be admitted into the school system yearly (Awofala & Sopekan, 2013).
- Section 1, subsection 10. This section addressed national policy on language. It mentioned the important role language plays in society. The syllabus should have the three main Nigerian languages that are Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba. The policy further states full integration of everyone into the community, and there should also be equal access to education for all citizens, and the three Nigerian languages should be taught in schools. This measure could also promote unity among citizens. The policy further states the importance of smooth interaction with the neighboring countries in the West Africa region, such as Cameroon, Mali, Ivory Coast, Guinea, and others. It stated that French should become the second official language in Nigeria. The national policy on language is only partially implemented in a few schools due to the lack of qualified workforce, while other schools do not have any French teachers.
- Section 2 of the NPE. This section mandated the provision of pre-primary education with adequate skilled professionals. As such, it is the responsibility of the federal government to provide appropriate preschool in the country. This policy had not been implemented at all, especially at the federal level, due to lack of funding at the Ministry. The Lagos State college of primary education is the only institution that offers preprimary teachers' training sessions.
- Section 9, subsection 79. This section established the teachers' registration council. This section had not been implemented since its inception in 1977 until 1999, when the registrar and the council's chief executive were appointed. Despite this, only a few teachers have been able to register, while many are still unaware of its existence. Students of science and technology at the tertiary level received 70% of the admission quota according to the commission's proposal. However, NPE (2013) showed that less than 50% of the graduates come from the humanities and social sciences. This measure was intended to produce graduates that can be self-employed. These graduates can also be creative and self-motivated to tackle the problems of increasing unemployment of graduates in the country.

Policy on private universities. The commission recommended establishing private universities across the country to solve the problem of an increasing number of students who seek admission into tertiary level of education. There is inadequate support for the private sector to venture into the establishment of private universities. This is premised on the many bottlenecks and bureaucracy of the government agencies charged with the establishment of private universities in the country.

Invariably, an ongoing argument among interest groups is about improving public schools' educational standards in the country. These interest groups advocate the inclusion of parents, student associations, professional organizations, and NGOs to formulate new educational reforms so that there can be some closure of the gap between the educational standards for private schools and those for public schools across Nigeria (Uyanga, 2012). This education reform and policy improvement can also promote affordable education to lower-income earners. As a result of this education reform, all the key stakeholders are pushing for various agendas to improve an accessible educational system in Nigeria (Alase, 2017). The core aim was to address problems concerning the standard of living, poverty eradication, self-reliance, and empowerment of the citizens, especially the youth in the job market.

Additionally, since 1977, this vital economic sector has not witnessed the desired development, regardless of the several reforms of the NPE. The NPE explicitly specified the guideline for establishing preprimary education at the federal, 9 state, and local educational jurisdictions in Nigeria (FRN, 2013). A review of the NPE Act (FRN, 2013) revealed no provision made for the inclusion of children from under one-year-old to three years old. Furthermore, the NPE shared the Nigerian government's duties at the state and local levels to provide qualified teachers with adequate numbers, develop curricula, supervision; and control the preschools' standards. However, the recent publication of the Nigerian education research and development council in conjunction with the United Nations children's educational fund and the universal basic education commission showed the recent improvement in early childhood education has just established a national curriculum for the ages one year to five years.

Little is known about the role the key stakeholders played in the negatively perceived experience and perception of the policy implementation of the universal basic education in the North-Central region of Nigeria (Akinrotimi & Olowe, 2016; Alabi & Ijaiya, 2014; Amuchie et al., 2013; Nsoedo, 2014; Nudzor, 2015). Therefore, this study filled the gap that may well inform decision-makers and key stakeholders on finding a viable solution that could reverse the negative impact of the current early childhood education programs.

The UBE program consists of the preprimary level, nine years of continuous primary education that is divided into one to three years of primary school (lower level), four to six years (middle basic), and one to three years of junior secondary school (upper basic). UBE's primary focus is the provision of equal opportunities for all preprimary school-age children between three and five years old. Odekunle and Okuwa (2012) argued on restructuring the current UBE programs, despite the introduction of several reforms since its enactment in 1977.

The national education programs' ineffectiveness denied Nigerian children adequate access to the country's free compulsory basic education. It has also hampered the socio-economic development of the nation (Uyanga, 2012). Existing literature also showed that the pre-primary education policy implementation lacks the federal government's commitment. Lack of responsibility by the federal government and political will constitute societal problems that prevent a child's school readiness and psychological development.

Recent research highlighted numerous challenges in implementing the UBE and EFA (Porter, 2015; Potokri, 2014). The recent historical perspective of the impact of education on the economic growth in sub-Saharan African countries was suggested by Glewwe et al. (2014). Glewwe et al. concluded that most SSA's low economic development could be traced to the substandard schools compared to the developing countries. The authors further stated that the increase in economic growth trends was due to government commitment and investment in those developed countries' education sectors.

A recent study on government expenditure and economic development in Nigeria showed that spending on education had an immense impact on its economic growth (Alase, 2017; Omodero & Azubike, 2016). The world summit in 1990 on the expansion of a child's right to education per the Jomtien Declaration shed light on EFA in Thailand as a global agenda contributing to the world's economic development (Alabi & Ijaiya, 2014).

The multifaceted programs of EFA are essential components of the MDGs. The EFA aimed at the provision of quality and comprehensive early childhood education to all children between the ages of three and five years. However, the private sector has provided the needed infrastructure to promote this aspect of the NPE, supporting this undertaking by the Nigerian government. The current EFA implementation is experiencing several issues: accessibility, funding, political support, and lack of qualified staff (Potokri, 2014; Porter, 2015).

The 1990 EFA and the 2000 MDGs agreements gained support from the international communities and donors. In sub-Saharan African countries, the EFA's commitment and the MDGs promoted the accessibility of education throughout the continent. This measure was expected to tackle poverty alleviation and facilitate the region's socio-economic development that includes the most poverty-stricken countries in the world (Lewin & Sabates, 2012; Lyytinen & Richardso, 2014; Umukoro, 2013; Unterhalter, 2014). Lewin and Sabates (2012) argued in support of the success recorded from implementing the EFA in the sub-Saharan African countries. The authors concluded that the documented success had exceeded the set goals towards the inclusion of a full complete basic education until grade nine and beyond. However, basic education's growth rate has been unsustainable due to inadequate infrastructure and a lack of qualified teachers. Additionally, the problem with insufficient preschools, combined with more over-age children, indicated a degeneration of the educational programs.

This study, therefore, aimed to examine the issue of ineffectiveness in the policy implementation of universal basic education in North-Central Nigeria. The study sought to facilitate a better understanding of the decision-makers and key stakeholders' perspective towards the achievement of the government's set national agenda, which is the provision of accessible education to its citizenry. It may also facilitate reaching the objectives of Education for All (EFA) and SDGs in the country and simultaneously promote the children's right to education in Nigeria. The selected key respondents provided the perception of their inputs. They also explained how they had been affected regarding the implementation of the preschool education policy. Effective policy implementation of early childhood education in Nigeria could facilitate school readiness and aid children's psychological development (Amuche & Kukwi, 2013).

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Preschool Policies

This section served to facilitate the understanding of preschool access and the political environment that could foster an adequate establishment of preschools. The developed countries have embraced this critical early childhood education because of the statistical evidence which links it to socioeconomic development. Sub-Saharan Africa charted a different course, as a result of inadequate political will in the provision of preschools for its citizens. The situation is similar in Nigeria as the ECCDE programs were constitutionalized to establish preschools in the country that lacks effectiveness. Neuman and Devercelli (2012) found that the national policy of offering PreK on the African continent still needs a solid framework that could assist in policy formulation and effective implementation. Scholars and researchers agreed on the importance of ECE towards the achievement of gender equality and social justice. For example, Amadi (2013) and Gabriel (2013) emphasized the neglect of the child's right to education, especially female children in Nigeria, which could facilitate a practical solution to many societal issues, such as maternal mortality, health-related issues, poverty, and socioeconomic problems. Haque *et al.* (2013) also called the need for a continuing commitment of governments to provide adequate ECE policies and effective implementation to promote economic and human development. Haque *et al.* observed that ECE could also help prevent the drop-out rate of children, while supporting them to experience a smooth transition from preschool into primary school. The case study conducted by Margetts and Phatudi (2013) highlighted the importance of key stakeholders and government support in the realization of quality ECE in South Africa. Nonetheless, the inputs of the stakeholders in the preschool policy processes are still absent in the country. The quality case study conducted by Correia (2016) suggested that parental and teacher participation had positive support for the transition of children from preschool into primary school in Portugal.

### 3. Methodology

A total of 16 participants were interviewed for the study, which is made up of four preschool heads from private preschools, four primary principals from the public schools, four UBE officials, and four parents who had been impacted by the preschool education policy from the North-Central zone of Nigeria. The researcher employed a purposeful sampling method for the study, which involved the deliberate selection of the participants and the site for the study which contributed to answering the research questions (Maxwell, 2013). In this study, the criterion-based case selection strategy was used. Presented in Table 1 is the demographic information of the 16 selected participants for the study.

**Table 1 - Participants' characteristics-case classification**

Participants/Category	School type	Gender	Qualification
Parent 1	Public	Male	B.ED
Parent 2	Public	Female	HND
Parent 3	Public	Female	NCE
Parent 4	Public	Male	B.SC
UBE 1	Deputy Director	Female	PGD
UBE 2	Deputy Director	Male	M.ED
UBE 3	Education Officer	Male	M.ED
UBE 4	Deputy Director	Female	Doctorate
PSH 1	Private	Male	NCE
PSH 2	Private	Female	M.SC
PSH 3	Private	Female	NCE
PSH 4	Private	Female	B.SC
Principal 1	Public	Male	B.ED
Principal 2	Public	Male	B.ED
Principal 3	Public	Male	HND
Principal 4	Public	Male	Doctorate

The data collection was conducted in the North-Central region of Nigeria, with both public and private community organizations as partners in this present study. Interviews were held with the participants; this lasted for 60 minutes. These interviews were audio-recorded with the participant's consent and later transcribed. The main objective of the study was to ascertain the perceptions of local stakeholders from the North-central region of Nigeria of the overall impact of the pre-primary education policy of the Nigerian primary school system. The perceptions of local stakeholders from the North-Central region of Nigeria on the overall impact of the preprimary education policy of the Nigerian primary school system were addressed with the two research questions. The participants' responses to the research questions were coded into categories and themes with the NVivo software program's help. The themes are:

- Equality and social justice
- Education for all
- School readiness for next level

## 4. Result and Discussion

### 4.1 Equality and Social Justice

The participants in this study were the perceptions of local stakeholders from the North-central region of Nigeria of the overall impact of the Nigerian primary school system? Parent 1 explained that "there is equal opportunity in their classes. I am always seeing that pupils are doing everything equally within the school." As noted by Alase (2017), the federal government should increase its spending on education to enhance social justice and equality in geopolitical regions of the nation. Another participant pointed out the preschool program policy implementation fosters equality among pupils in school. Parent 4 responded by stating, "some children come from low-income families while some other children come from the middle class, but the teachers still teach them together in the class." Egharevba et al. (2016) concluded that an improvement in accessible ECE would promote social justice in society. Similarly, the answer was also given by Preschool Head 2, explaining, "it is not about the gender or that type of a thing. The pupils have equal rights; we teach them the same way." Likewise, Principal #3 stated, "both the male and female are being taught and treated equally. There is no segregation between males and females." Herberle & Carter (2014) noted that it is essential for the government to enhance equality and social justice in society to have equally accessible education in the country. Also, UBE Official 3 explained that "there are no discrepancies in the education of male or female children. All the pupils have equal rights regardless of gender, background or religion, affiliation, or economic status." Scholars concluded that the government must achieve effective intervention of problems that could promote equality and social

justice (Adebisi et al., 2014; Alabi & Ijaiya, 2014; Kana et al., 2015; Olubor & Inua, 2015; Sooter, 2013). According to some UBE officials, the introduction of the ECE policy implementation has helped reduce Out-School Children (OSC) in the North-Central region of Nigeria. Also, key stakeholders have intensified citizens' enlightenment regarding the importance of education in society (Raudenbush & Eschmann, 2015).

## 4.2 Education for All

When I asked the participants in the interview, what are the perceptions of local stakeholders from the North-central region of Nigeria of the overall impact of the Nigerian primary school system's pre-primary education policy? Parent 1 stated that "there is slogan called Every Child Counts in the school. There are some physically challenged children in that school, and the educators still teach all the pupils equally." As noted by Uyanga (2012) that education is the right of all children. Similarly, Principal #3 stressed that "preschool formulation in Nigeria has helped many people, especially the less privileged people in society." The affirmation also came from UBE Official 1, stating, "ECE program has helped a lot reduce the number of OSC." Additionally, UBE Official 4 explained that "all children in Nigeria, irrespective of race, religion, color, and challenges, must be given an education." Accordingly, Nigeria's federal government has committed itself to realize the Education for All (EFA) in the country (FRN, 2013). However, the literature review shows a lack of political will and government commitment in achieving the set goals. As Porter (2016) described, the quality of teaching methods used in some of the developing countries is ineffective. The achievement of EFA is a global plan to which every government should be committed towards its success. Lyytinen and Richardso (2014) noted that a high rate of children in sub-Saharan Africa requires basic education assistance.

## 4.3 School Readiness for Next Level

When the participants were asked in the interview what the perceptions of local stakeholders from the North-central region of Nigeria of the overall impact of the preprimary education policy of the Nigerian primary school system were, Parent 2 responded by saying "...preschool is preparing our children for the primary class." Expressing a similar opinion, Parent 3 said, "children are exposed to learning things, and they understand more when they get to primary school." Scholars have emphasized that the quality of preschools is essential to the school readiness of children (Fuller et al., 2017). Preschool Head 1 response to the interview question was, "when children get to the primary section, teachers have less effort to teach them." Similar affirmation was from Preschool Head 2 by stating, "the performance is outstanding because those preschool classes build the foundation of children before they get to primary school." Benner (2017) noted that government should promote accessible Pre-K programs that will enhance the school readiness of Nigerian children. Similarly, Fuller et al. (2017) argued that the federal government commits more resources towards the establishment of quality preschools that positively influence the school readiness of children. As noted by Principal 1 by stating, "going to school with all the activities will not be new anymore." Likewise, Principal 2 indicated that "preschool programs train children for primary school." However, Woldehanna (2016) advocated that there should continuous government support to access basic education. Woldehanna further explained that low-cost education and family.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendation

This study's focus was to understand how early childhood education policy affects the prospective children's entry into the primary school system in the North-Central region of Nigeria. The findings of the study confirmed that the formation of advocacy coalitions was driven by the coalition actors' deep core belief system, policy core belief system, and secondary policy beliefs.

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