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# Government commitments and teaching strategies for effective quality early childhood education in South Western Nigeria

Moyinoluwa Grace Owojori\* and Taiwo Oladunni Gbenga-Akanmu 

\*Correspondence:  
moyinowojori@gmail.com  
Institute of Education,  
Obafemi Awolowo University,  
Ile-Ife, Nigeria

## Abstract

This study assessed government commitment in fulfilling its obligations in ensuring quality early childhood education (ECE) as outlined in the National Policy on Education; examined the teaching strategies that teachers employed to ensure appropriate teaching and learning process; and assessed the challenges associated to teaching strategies used by teachers. A descriptive survey design was used. The population consisted of all ECE teachers and proprietors/proprietress. The sample comprised 150 teachers and 30 proprietors/proprietress of both public and private primary schools selected from two southwestern states of Nigeria using simple random sampling technique based on the availability of ECE class(es) in the study area. An instrument entitled “Government Commitment and Teaching Strategy for Effective Quality Early Childhood Education (GCTSQECE) was validated and used for data collection. The instrument has two sections with section A focusing on the demographic data of the participants while section B focused on governments involvement and teaching strategies employed by ECE teachers in having effective quality early childhood education. The instrument was validated using internal consistency while the Cronbach  $\alpha$  reliability test coefficient of the GCTSQECE was 0.76. The data collected were analyzed using frequency and simple percentage. Results showed that there are not enough ECE professionals, few ECE departments in the universities, poor remuneration of teachers and that teachers employed the use of appropriate teaching strategies and improvised in most cases. It is therefore recommended that government should promote and support the training of teachers and implement ECE policy in primary schools.

**Keywords:** Government commitments, Teaching strategies, Effective quality, Early childhood education

## Introduction

Government commitment to its citizenry is very crucial most especially in educating the younger ones which is among the main goals in achieving good quality in education. The operation of the school system is expected to be governed alongside with the government commitment. The Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) thereby recognizes early childhood education as a foundational and essential program that Nigerian children must experience.

In the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013), early childhood education is labeled as pre-primary education and is defined as education that is given in an educational institution to children prior to their entering to primary school. Early childhood education in a broad sense refers to the programs and settings that serve young children from birth through 8 years (NAEYC and Lewis 2021).

It is during this phase of life that the foundation for cognitive, physical and emotional development is built. This is a period of intense, rapid growth and development, with early childhood education (ECE) at the helm for fostering a healthy foundation for life. Early childhood education has a positive influence on the affective, conceptual, and social and in fact, overall educational development of children in later life and that investing in it can yield high returns (Rolnick & Grunewald, 2003; Bernette, 2006). For this level of education, it is important to note that these little children need quality teaching from their teachers, as such, their teachers in addition to the academic qualifications must be humane, have genuine love for children and be patient with them.

The National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004, 2013) has not only defined the goals of education, but also enumerated the tools for the achievement of these goals. As highlighted in the National Policy on Education (2004,2013), the following government's commitments which shall be to:

- a. establishing pre-primary sections in existing public schools and encouraging both community and private efforts in the provision of early childhood education;
- b. making provision in teacher education programs for specialization in early childhood education;
- c. ensuring that the medium of instruction will principally be the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community; and to this end: (i) developing the orthography for many more Nigerian languages; and (ii) producing textbooks in Nigerian languages;
- d. ensuring that the main method of teaching in the childhood education centers will be through play, and that the curriculum of teacher education is appropriately oriented to achieve this;
- e. regulating and controlling the operation of early childhood education—to this end, the teacher/pupil ratio is set at 1:25;
- f. setting and monitoring a minimum standard for early childcare centers in the country; and
- g. ensuring full participation of government, communities and teachers' associations in the running and maintenance of early childhood education facilities (FGN, 1981, 1998, 2004, 2013).

In line with those goals, education can only act as an empowerment tool when the quality is such that it will improve the ability of the citizenry to compete effectively in the global village. In pursuance of this quality in education, government set up minimum standards to be attained in all levels of education including early childhood education (ECE) with respect to staffing; infrastructure; library; instructional materials; teaching and learning activities; quality control and assessment of instructional materials; and co-curricular activities among others.

Though government has come up with various interventions, which includes the formulation of policy documents, guidelines for establishing ECE, the question on the lips of many Nigerians is to what extent is the fulfillment of government commitments toward its obligations in ensuring quality ECE.

The face of education has changed dramatically over the past 10 years. Teachers across the country are working hard to equip children with the skills needed for success in the twenty-first century world. In addition to instilling in pupils the flexibility to readily adapt to changing technologies, teachers must foster appropriate teaching strategies and enabling learning environments that encourage critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving (Reinen, 2019). Teaching strategies in a broad sense refer to the structure, system, methods, techniques, procedures and processes that a teacher uses during instruction. These are strategies the teacher employs to assist pupils learning. The teacher must take into account the age of the learners, their level, the setting of the class, the length of the class and the curriculum. The teacher might use different teaching aids to reach all pupils with different learning styles and abilities (Heinrich, 2017; Oduolowu, 2011; Reinen, 2019).

There may be a particular strategy that works well with a group of pupils and may not work with other pupils. Because of this, it is important to have lots of teaching strategies in the toolbox such as play way, class discussion, modeling, cooperative learning, questioning, creativity, integrated technology and so on. To be an effective teacher therefore requires the implementation of creative and innovative teaching strategies in order to meet children individual needs. To be an effective teacher is a great challenge because every child is unique on his/her own, however, by using a combination of teaching strategies; teacher can address children's varying learning styles and academic capabilities as well as make the classroom a dynamic and motivational environment for children.

Qualification is one of the criteria that will have impact on children outcomes, but the ability to demonstrate a high-quality pedagogic environment that makes the difference in teaching and learning process is also needed (Elliott, 2006; Sheridan et al., 2009). An enriched stimulating environments and high-quality pedagogy provided by better qualified teachers and better quality pedagogy makes learning to take place (Litjens & Taguma, 2010).

Quality control is designed for systematic monitoring and evaluation of any project, service, program among others to ensure that quality is maintained. Therefore, for effective teaching and learning in ECE, quality control cannot be overemphasized with respect to teacher preparedness. The teacher is at the center of the attainment of this high quality depending on his/her educational background, teaching methods and length of service (UNESCO, 2008). The main importance of staff lies in their effect on the process and content quality of early childhood education care (Sheridan, 2009; Pramling and Pramling Samuelsson, in press 2011).

Observations have shown that government commitments towards ECE policy have not been encouraging; it was revealed that there are many ill-equipped, substandard pre-primary schools scattered all over the country Nakpodia (2011), (Ayoola et al., 2019). This is as a result of lack of supervision and inspection to ensure that standard and quality are maintained; there is not enough provision in teacher education program for specialization in early childhood education. Unfortunately, significant

provisions for production of professional teachers in early childhood education in public or private teacher training institutions in Nigeria are few. More so, in most of private primary schools in Nigeria the medium of instruction is principally the English language. As far as mother tongue instruction is concerned, the input of government in terms of the financial aspect in ECE has been very negligible (Ajayi, 2008; Obiweluozor, 2015).

This study is important in that, establishing and ascertaining that quality early childhood education services are given to children are best determined through improvement in government commitments of its various policies and ensured appropriate teaching strategies are been used in the schools. It is in the light of this view that this study was carried out and guided by three specific objectives as follows:

- i. assess government commitment in fulfilling its obligations in ensuring quality early childhood education as outlined in the National Policy on Education;
- ii. examine the teaching strategies that teachers employed to ensure appropriate teaching and learning process; and
- iii. assess the challenges associated with the effective quality of early childhood education.

Research questions:

- i. what are the commitments of government in fulfilling its obligations in ensuring quality early childhood education as outlined in the National Policy on Education?
- ii. what are the teaching strategies that teachers employed to ensure appropriate teaching and learning process? and
- iii. what are the challenges associated with the effective quality of early childhood education?

## **Method**

The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population consisted of all ECE teachers and proprietors/proprietress. The sample comprised 150 teachers and 30 proprietors/proprietress which were selected from two Southwestern states of Nigeria purposively based on the availability of ECE class(es) in the study area which was the number recovered out of 200 of the questionnaires sent out. An instrument entitled "*Government Commitment and Teaching Strategy for Effective Quality Early Childhood Education (GCTSQECE)*" was validated and used for data collection. The instrument has two sections with section A focusing on the demographic data of the participants while section B focused on governments involvement and strategies employed by ECE teachers in having effective quality early childhood education. The instrument was validated using internal consistency while the Cronbach  $\alpha$  reliability test coefficient of the GCTSQECE was 0.76. The data collected were analyzed using tables, frequency and simple percentage.

## Results

Results on government commitments in fulfilling its obligations in ensuring effective quality ECE revealed that the establishment of pre-primary sections in existing public schools has been moderate (68.3%). Result also showed that the Government has not established enough colleges of education (43.4%). The creation of Departments of Early Childhood Education in most Faculties of Education in Universities is low (52.8%) while the availability of professionals in early childhood education in teacher training colleges has been encouraging (45.6%). Ensuring that the curriculum of teachers' education is appropriately oriented for play way method has been low (16.7%). Also, the Government implementing the early childhood education policy in primary schools has fallen below expectation (35%) while the promotion and support of Government for regular training of teachers has been encouraging (56.7%). Regulating and controlling the operation of ECE centers has been low (47.8%), respectively.

Results on the percentage distribution of teaching strategies that teachers employed revealed that the use of play way method by teachers has been high (47.2%) and very high (30%), respectively, while the implementations of new methods of teaching (e.g.,

**Table 1** Government commitments in fulfilling its obligations in ensuring effective quality ECE.

S/N	Items	L	MD	H	VH	Mean	Std. D	Remark
1	Establishing pre-primary sections in existing public schools	3(1.7%)	123 (68.3%)	16 (8.9%)	38 (21.1%)	3.08	0.60	High
2	Government has established enough colleges of education	78 (43.4%)	14 (7.8%)	53 (29.4%)	35 (19.4%)	2.74	0.85	Moderate
3	Departments of early childhood education have been created in most Faculties of Education in Universities	95 (52.8%)	38 (21.1%)	32 (17.8%)	15 (8.3%)	2.74	0.82	Moderate
4	There are enough professionals in early childhood education in teacher training colleges	82 (45.6%)	63 (35%)	18 (10%)	17 (9.4%)	2.54	0.80	Moderate
5	Ensuring that the curriculum of teachers' education is appropriately oriented for play way method	30 (16.7%)	16 (8.9%)	85 (47.2%)	49 (27.2%)	2.28	0.84	Moderate
6	Providing textbooks in Nigerian languages for medium of instruction in mother tongue	104 (57.8%)	34 (18.9%)	30 (16.7%)	12 (6.7%)	2.88	0.78	Moderate
7	Government implement the early childhood education policy in primary schools	63 (35%)	51 (38.3)	35 (19.4)	31 (17.2)	2.15	1.10	Moderate
8	Government promotes and supports regular training of teachers	102 (56.7%)	41 (22.8%)	27 (15%)	10 (5.6%)	2.81	0.75	Moderate
9	Regulating and controlling the operation of ECE centers	86 (47.8%)	49 (27.2%)	27 (15%)	18 (10%)	2.32	0.84	Moderate
Total no. = 180 weighted average (2.54)								

L (low), MD (moderate), H (high), VH (very high)

Source: Research Findings, 2019

**Table 2** Percentage distribution of teaching strategies that teachers employed. Source: Research findings

S/N	Items	L	MD	H	VH	Std. D	Mean	Remark
1	The play way method is what the teachers uses in all the classroom activities	12 (6.7%)	29 (16.1%)	85 (47.2%)	54 (30%)	2.72	0.81	Moderate
2	Teachers implement new methods of teaching (e.g., using cooperative learning method)	3 (1.7%)	16 (8.9%)	105 (58.3%)	56 (31.1%)	3.18	0.65	High
3	The teachers use creative materials to develop creativity in the children	4 (2.2%)	5 (2.8%)	90 (50%)	81 (45%)	3.37	0.65	High
4	The teachers allow children to participate during learning process	5 (2.8%)	9 (5%)	70 (38.9%)	96 (53.4%)	2.69	0.75	Moderate
5	The use of mother tongue is the language of instruction	51 (28.3%)	41 (22.8%)	53 (29.4%)	35 (19.4%)	2.40	1.09	Moderate
6	Teacher's employ individual differences	10 (5.6%)	15 (8.3%)	65 (36.1%)	90 (50%)	2.95	0.82	Moderate
7	Teachers integrate educational technology in the teaching	3 (1.7%)	36 (20.0%)	106 (58.9%)	35 (19.4%)	2.96	0.67	Moderate
8	Scaffolding (parental involvement)	22 (12.2%)	38 (21.1%)	66 (36.7%)	54 (30.0%)	2.84	0.99	Moderate
9	Teacher's employed open-ended techniques	8 (4.4%)	14 (7.8%)	89 (49.4%)	69 (38.3%)	3.32	0.80	High
Total no. = 180 weighted average (2.93)								

L (low), MD (moderate), H (high), VH (very high)

Source: Research Findings, 2019

using cooperative learning method) has been high (58.3%). The use of creative materials by teachers to develop creativity in the children has been (50.0%) while teachers highly allow children to participate during learning process (53.4%). The use of mother tongue is the language of instruction is low (28.3%), moderate (22.8%), high (29.4%) and very high (19.4%) while teachers' understanding of individual differences is very high (50%). The integration of educational technology in the teaching by teachers is also high (58.9%) while the use of scaffolding via parental involvement is low (12.2%), moderate (21.1%), high (36.7%) and very high (30.0%). In a nutshell teachers' employment of open-ended techniques is high (49.4%) and very high (38.3%).

Findings on the possible challenges associated with effective quality of ECE revealed that 57 (31.7%) of the respondents agreed that there is low rating of teaching profession while and 65(36.1%) strongly disagreed. The promotion of teachers is delayed (47.8%) and there is lack of adequate instructional materials (51.1%). It was collated that more than (46.1%) agreed that the teachers' remunerations are low compared to other professions while 50% agreed that there is lack of qualified teachers for ECE. It was however, found that there is poor funding and lack of financial support from government (67.8%).

## Discussion

The results in Table 1, indicates that government has not done enough in the implementation of the policy of early childhood education in Nigeria. Though, the National Policy of Education outlined the responsibilities of the government to the realization of

**Table 3** Percentage distribution of the possible challenges associated with effective quality of ECE

S/N	Items	Strongly agree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly disagree	Mean	Std.D	Ranking
1	Low rating of teaching profession	37 (20.6%)	21 (11.7%)	57 (31.7%)	65 (36.1%)	2.83	1.13	4th
2	Promotion of teachers are delayed	19 (10.6%)	30 (16.7%)	86 (47.8%)	45 (25.0%)	1.90	1.03	6th
3	Lack of adequate instructional materials	16 (8.9%)	29 (16.1%)	92 (51.1%)	43 (23.9%)	2.90	0.86	2nd
4	Teachers remunerations are low compared to other professions	22 (12.2%)	25 (13.9%)	83 (46.1%)	50 (27.8%)	2.89	0.94	3rd
5	Lack of qualified teachers for ECE	3 (1.7%)	43 (23.9%)	90 (50.0%)	44 (24.4%)	2.97	0.74	1st
6	Poor funding and lack of financial support from government	30 (16.7%)	28 (15.6%)	61 (33.9%)	61 (33.9%)	2.85	1.07	5th
Total no. = 180 weighted average (1.81)								

"Source: Research findings"

Source: Research Findings, 2019

the objectives of the early childhood education policy. These include the establishment of enough colleges of education; creating departments of early childhood education in faculties of education in universities; promotes and supports the training of teachers; ensure monitoring and supervision of the activities of ECE centers. The government has laudable objectives for early childhood education in Nigeria unfortunately, results from the study reveals that the machinery for government commitments is mostly on papers. This is in line with the findings of Ugwu (2016) who worked on quality assurance in pre-primary education teacher preparation and established that the government is yet to put policy into practice. It also in agreement with the finding of Eyengho (2008) that the government has not given early childhood the attention needed. It also reveals that there are not enough early childhood professionals in the schools. More so, it corroborated with the finding done by Owojori et al. (2017) that the majority of public primary schools in the study did not have adequate personnel for the implementation of ECCDE while private primary schools have fairly adequate capacity.

Furthermore, the findings in Table 2 showed larger percentage of the respondents that agrees to the play way method which is the mode of teaching used by teachers in all the classroom activities and also that the teachers use creative materials to develop creativity in the children. This indicates that the teacher complies with the policy (FGN, 2004) that the main method of teaching at this level supposed to be through play way method. This also corroborates with the findings of Onukaogu et al. (2010) who cited the pioneer of early childhood education such as Froebel, Montessori and Vygotsky all who propounded that children should be taught through play. In addition, Ayodele (2004) found that pedagogical activities are best carried out through play way method whereby the child could learn on his own among his mates using play strategies. Also, the use of mother tongue as a means of instruction is not been encouraged in most private primary schools which

is in conflicts with the policy that the medium of instruction in lower classes of primary schools should be principally the child's mother tongue or the language of the immediate community. This assertion agrees with Ejieh (2006) who affirmed that the use of mother tongue should be the mode of instructions in the primary schools. He associated this with parents who see the use of English Language as criteria to assess the quality of primary institutions in the country. Osanyin (2012) also opined that the practice of using foreign languages is simply "child abuse" because denying a child of the use of the mother tongue at the early stage of life is denying the child his/her identity and this is not too good for our Nation.

Finally, the findings as indicated in Table 3 shows that teachers are not treated well enough as a professional; lack of adequate instructional materials to be used by teachers; teachers are not well remunerated and to crown it all salaries are been delayed. This corroborates with Babagana and Babagana (2015) findings that there is irregularity in the remuneration of teachers which will eventually affect their performance that is supposed to bring out the good quality in their teaching and learning processes. Achi (2004) believes that to improve the standard of education in Nigeria, the society has to first educate the educators and motivate them to perform their duties well. In addition, he found out that there has been a steady increase in the number of schools and enrollment figures, the increase has neither been matched by a corresponding rise in the number of qualified teachers nor by an expansion and improvement in the facilities utilized by these schools (Achi, 2004).

### **Conclusion**

The paper has examined government commitments and teaching strategies for effecting quality early childhood education in Southwestern Nigeria. It has been established that there are not enough ECE professionals, few ECE departments created in the Colleges of Education and the Universities and poor remuneration of teachers. It is therefore recommended that there should be more provisions in the teacher education program for more ECE professionals, so that they can be deployed to the primary schools as soon as they are done with their studies. There should be more creation of ECE departments in Colleges of Education, National Teacher Institute and the Universities. The issue of teachers' remuneration is also a big problem that needs to be looked into as the working conditions is important in determining the quality of instruction and the commitments of the government. In addition, there should be a periodic workshops and seminars to be organized for proprietors and teachers of primary education to update their knowledge and skills. Therefore, measuring quality is necessary to ensure all children have a good start in life and to maximize their potential development. Quality and its measurement require clear policy from government.

### **Recommendation**

It is therefore recommended that government should be more committed to its policies for effective quality of early childhood education by establishing more early childhood departments in the colleges of education and universities so that more professionals can be available which would give room for quality early childhood, ensure regular teachers



training and improvement of the teachers' remuneration. More so, appropriate teaching strategies should be adhered to by teachers for effective teaching and learning process.

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#### Authors' contributions

MGO: conception of the work. TOGA: drafting of the manuscript. MGO, TOGA: data collection, critical revision of the manuscript, discussed the results. Both author read and approved the final manuscript.

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#### Availability of data and materials

The data used for the study were collected from teachers and proprietress of both public and private schools.

#### Declarations

##### Competing interests

There is no competing interest between the authors.

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