

# ANALYSIS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

*The study investigated the situation of special early childhood education programme in Nigeria. This involved an appraisal of the programme which focused on the major components such as; availability of special early childhood education programme itself; significant roles of specialists in the provision of services, and existing potentialities in the provision of special early childhood education in the country. Three research questions were stated for the study. A descriptive survey was adopted to ascertain the position regarding the programme setting and establishment of ECCDE sections in public schools. The population of the study includes every nursery school located in the public school setting. The special nursery preschool provisions in the states visited automatically inform the research sample. A test –retest validity was established for ECESQ and a coefficient value of 0.71 was obtained, confirming the applicability of the instruments. Descriptive statistical analysis was used, which were in the form of calculation of percentages and ratios. Findings indicate that services for children with special needs are very scarce and almost unnoticeable in Nigeria, and almost exclusive private entrepreneurship of the minimal services available. There is, however, potential base for the development of early special needs education programmes. The findings have relevant implications for the establishment of special early childhood education in Nigeria.*

## **Introduction**

There is a commitment in Special Early Childhood Education. The programme is unique considering the blending of special education and early childhood education. Special education involves the practice of educating students with special needs, addressing their individual differences and needs. The blend of special education with early childhood education possesses obvious implication for the process which makes provision for the individually planned and systematically monitored arrangement of teaching procedures, adopted equipment and materials with accessible setting (Dantata, 1999).

Whereas special education is specifically for students with special needs, early childhood education is designed for the infant child, with or without special needs, the defining trait being that they are within the stages of under- preparedness, regardless of the reason (Hicks 2011). Early childhood education often focuses on learning through play, based on the research and philosophy of Jean Piaget, which posits that play meets

the physical, intellectual, language, emotional and social needs of the children (Beverly, and York-Barr, 1997). Studies indicate that early childhood education is critical in preparing children to enter and succeed in school, diminishing their risk of social-emotional mental health problems, and increasing their self-sufficiency (Dougherty, 1997). Early childhood education possesses that capacity to close the educational achievement gap, increase school graduation rates, improve performance on tests and reduce both class repetition and the number of children placed in special education (Schweinhrat, Mantie, Xiang, Barnett, Belfield, and Nores, 2005)

### **Statement of the Problem**

Granted, the theories and practice of early childhood education are clearly stated and relevant policies and pronouncement have mandated the implementation of the programme in schools. At the same time, educators are required to modify teaching methods and learning environments so that the minimum number of students are served under special early childhood education environments.

What remains, therefore, is to ascertain the extent to which special early childhood education programme obtains in the school setting. Among the issues of concern here include the availability of special early childhood education programmes for young children with disabilities, the significant roles of specialists in the provision of related services as required of them in the programme, and the potentialities that exist in the provision of special education under early childhood education.

### **Research Questions**

Three research questions have been stated for invention in this study:

1. To what extent are special early childhood education programmes for infants with disabilities available in Nigeria?
2. What significant roles do specialists play in the provision of related services to early childhood programmes for the children with special needs?
3. What potentialities exist in the provision of nursery education which can be used to facilitate early childhood programmes for children with special needs?

### **Theoretical / Conceptual Framework**

The section two, Basic Education of the National Policy (2009) has articulated the concept of early childhood education to include the care, protection, stimulation and learning to be promoted in children, age of 5 years in the nursery or kindergarten. In this effect Government shall; among others: (a) set and monitor minimum standard for ECCDE centres; and (b) establish ECCDE sections in public schools and encourage both community and private efforts in its provision based on set standards. (P. 9).

Among, the Articles of the National Policy on ECCDE 1:25 indicate that Government shall: --develop suitable ECCDE curriculum for nationwide implementation, and supervise and control quality of ECCDE institutions.

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### **Significance of the Study**

Results from this investigation represent an appraisal of availability of special early childhood education establishment in the country. Information obtained which inform the findings, have obvious implication for minimum standards for ECCDE centres, and establishment of ECCDE sections in public schools and encourage both community and private efforts in its provision based on set standards. Others include developing suitable ECCDE curriculum for nationwide implementation, supervision, and control quality of ECCDE institutions.

The early childhood and special needs education is concerned with main areas in teacher education, which include: Early Childhood and Special Education (including Gifted and Talented Education) (Frank, 2004). Early Childhood Education is defined as the knowledge and expertise in classroom teaching for young children between the ages of 3 and 8 years. Early Childhood and Special Education deal with knowledge and expertise in classroom teaching which caters to children and young adults encountering learning difficulties.

Both programmes are concerned with understanding the emotional, social and behavioural problems of children and with providing meaningful and relevant educational programmes and experiences to help them adjust to the school and later on, to society at large.

### **Methods and Procedures**

#### **Research Design**

Survey description was adopted for the study being reported. This was meant to ascertain the position regarding the setting and maintaining of minimum standards for ECCDE centres, and establishment of ECCDE sections in public schools and encourage both community and private efforts in its provisions based on set standards.

#### **Population and Sample**

The population of the study include the situational and human aspects. The situational or locational aspect include all nursery schools in Nigeria. An upsurge of such schools has been observed across the length and breadth of the nation (Dantata, 1999). This is virtually every nursery school located for the study which was of regular education status. The very rare occasions in which services were found for infants with disability were included in the population and sample.

In this study, available special preschool school provisions in the states visited automatically made up the sample, considering the investigation on the establishment and availability of special early childhood centres across the country.

### Instruments

Owing to paucity of researches which focused on appraisals of special early childhood education in Nigeria, and given the survey nature of this study, two main data collection instruments were developed and applied for the study. They include questionnaire and inventories. In developing the Early Childhood Education Services Questionnaire (ECESQ), the researcher took cognizance of what early childhood education services for children with special needs imply, what categories of special needs children are more readily served in schools, including general factors informing proprietorship of nursery schools.

Three other main inventories were developed and applied for data collection in the study: (a) Early Childhood Education Services and Facilities Inventory (ECESI). (B) Pre-school Programmes Facilities Inventory (PPFII and (c) Pre-school Programmes Facilities Inventory (PPFI.II).

### Validity and Reliability of Instruments

The instruments were validated in terms of their construct and content validity which invariably informed the relevance of their usability (reliability).

The ECESQ was developed to solicit for views and obtain information from proprietors, and coordinators of nursery schools and special education provisions, about the state of early childhood education programmes in their respective schools and States. In developing the ECESQ, the researcher took cognizance of what early childhood education services imply. The first draft of six items was subjected to scrutiny and review by five Special Educationists and five nursery education experts located at Bayaro University, Kano, University of Jos, and University of Ibadan.

A test-retest validity was established for ECESQ, and a coefficient value of 0.71 was obtained confirming the applicability of the instruments, including the inventories respectively.

Descriptive statistical analysis was used, which were in the form of calculation of percentages and ratios.

### Results

**Table 1 : Practices Regarding Special Needs Infants in Regular Nursery Schools**

	<b>Types of Practices</b>	<b>No. of Schools</b>	<b>%</b>
a)	Acceptance of all categories of children with special needs	-	-
b)	Acceptance of some categories of children with special needs	6	10
c)	Class integration of children with special needs	2	3

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d)	School integration of children with special needs	6	10
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**Table 2 : Existing Practices for Special Needs children in Special Schools**

	Types of Practices	No. of Schools	%
a)	Psycho-educational assessment and diagnosis	8	100
b)	Referral services	8	100
c)	Use of qualified specialists	8	25
d)	Home services	2	50
e)	Community services	-	-
	Educational link-up	4	-

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### Discussion

This study investigated among others, the availability of early childhood education programmes for infants with disabilities in Nigeria, the significant roles specialists play in the provision of related services to early childhood programmes for the children, and potentials available in the provision of special education which can be used to facilitate early childhood programmes for such children with special needs in Nigeria.

The findings indicate that services for special needs children are very scarce and almost unnoticeable in Nigeria, and almost exclusive private entrepreneurship of the minimal services available. Again, there is potential base for the development of early special need education programmes in Nigeria, which are also very scarce with interestingly instances of integration in a few regular nursery schools, and a country specialist involvement almost exclusively to special teachers and psychologists and only very minimal involvement of medical personnel and regular teachers in services meant to meet the special needs of infants with disabilities.

Special education or special needs education is the practice of educating students with special needs in a way that addresses their individual differences and needs. Under the special early childhood arrangement, this process involves the individually planned and systematically monitored arrangement of teaching procedures, adopted equipment, and materials with accessible settings (Bos & Vaughn, 2005). Whereas special education

is designed specifically for students with special needs, early childhood education can be designed for any students, with or without special needs, the deferring trait being simply that they are young and at a point of under preparedness, regardless of the reason (Hicks, 2011).

Early childhood education posits that interaction and play should meet the physical, intellectual, language, emotional and social needs of the children irrespective of their status (Beverly and York – Barr, 1997).

### Conclusion

Appraisal of early childhood education becomes obvious at this point. This is as it becomes necessary to ascertain the availability of the programme, the significant roles played by specialists and the potentials that exist in the provision of such specialized programme.

Early childhood and special needs education deals with knowledge and expertise in classroom teaching, which caters to children and young adults encountering learning difficulties. Both programmes are concerned with understanding the emotional, social and behavioral problems of children, and with providing meaningful and relevant educational programmes and experiences to help them adjust to school and later on, to society at large.

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