

Teachers' and Proprietors' perception of pre-primary school curriculum process in Ife-East Local Government Area of Osun State, Nigeria

Victoria I. Iroegbu

Institute of Education, Obafemi Awolowo University.

Ife – Ife, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

This study investigated preprimary school teachers' and proprietors' perception of curriculum process in preprimary education in Nigeria. 140 teachers/proprietors from private preprimary schools were purposively selected for the study. The research instrument was a 32 item researcher constructed curriculum process questionnaire in the Likert format with Cronbach's Alpha of .852. The items were distributed into five sections: impending curriculum sensitization; curriculum objectives; contentment; methods and strategies; and methods of evaluation. The instrument was administered on the teachers and proprietors in their various schools and collected by the researcher and assistants on the same day. The resulting data were analyzed using the Chi Squared statistics. The results showed that in 28 cases out of 32, the Chi squared obtained was not significant at the .05 level. It was concluded that preprimary school teachers and proprietors had similar perceptions of preprimary curriculum process. It was recommended that preprimary school teachers and proprietors be given regular on-the-job training in this regard.

Key words: Curriculum process; preprimary school; teachers and proprietors; perception

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Curriculum process is an interactive process between curriculum planners, critical stakeholders and variously concerned interest groups, by which a civil society prepares and introduces an educational curriculum or reform for the benefits of learners and the society. The process involves various experts in the fields of knowledge such as experienced and practicing educators who are current in their disciplines. Others may include content area specialists, knowledgeable members of the society/community, child development experts, psychologists and sociologists. In addition, others may include measurement and evaluation experts. The process has been viewed by experts to involve four important stages:

- i. Selection of objectives that consist of important and achievable learning outcomes which must be self evident during and by the end of the program;
- ii. Selection and organization of content materials that will be used to attain the selected objectives
- iii. Selection and organization of learning experiences (methods and strategies) to be employed for achieving stated objectives;
- iv. Non ambiguous methods of determining if stated objectives have been achieved (evaluation); [1, 2]

These processes have been recognized or accepted as required stages through which most validated curriculums that are now in use passed through [2, 3]. The scholars are of the view that the process is applicable to school curriculum at the early childhood education stage, the primary as well as secondary school and later stages. It is pertinent to emphasize here that

new curriculums are not imposed on the public and institutions, but are prepared, scrutinized, tried and validated, before they are released for use by relevant institutions.

It is known that some qualified, experienced and practicing professionals from the benefitting institutions and organizations serve on the curriculum process committees. What is not evident is whether this has been the case with the recent Nigerian pre-school and early childhood education curriculums [3 - 5]. These scholars had indicated the existence of great concerns among the populace on the level of education attained by pre-school teachers, proprietors of pre-primary schools and caregivers in early childhood education centers and pre-primary schools.

However, the proprietors of early childhood education establishments have a strong association in Nigeria through which its members share information and experiences, such as Early Childhood Association of Nigeria (ECAN) [3, 4]. It is not unlikely that some of the proprietors of the early childhood establishments, and or some other early childhood education professionals, took part in the Nigerian curriculum review process for early childhood education. However, it is not certain that the early childhood education establishments including the pre-primary schools are really implementing the existing curriculum which they joined in sponsoring.

The Nigerian Early childhood education experiences of the 1960's were very highly rated by educators and the general public when compared with what obtains today [6]. The reasons might have been because at that time, there were fewer early childhood education centers than there are today; and in addition, the teachers of the early childhood education centers then were more mature, more dedicated and perhaps more professional than those presently serving at these centers [7, 8]. This problem might have arisen from the uncontrolled expansion and multiplication of these early childhood education centers nationwide which occurred between the proclamation of universal primary education in 1999 and institutionalization of basic education scheme in Nigeria in 2004 [6, 9].

The proliferation of early childhood education centers all over Nigerian towns and cities coupled with the use of unqualified teachers and caregivers to nurture, care and educate Nigerian children in the twenty-first century has become a matter of grave concern to Nigerian researchers and educationists [4, 7, and 10]. There is the fear that possession of inadequate educational qualification by pre-school teachers, proprietors and caregivers in early childhood education centers may deprive Nigerian early childhood education beneficiaries, especially pre-school children, the benefits of the current curriculum reforms; including appropriate care, nurture, education and other opportunities for proper development [11]. UNICEF [12] has shown the very poor educational achievement level of Nigerian children, which might have emanated from the very poor foundation work at the pre-school and primary education levels. Similarly UNESCO [13] seemed to corroborate the belief by highlighting the very limited access to quality education that is made available to Nigerian children. The data of UNESCO [13] points to the urgent need for decisive action to be taken to stop the steep dive of educational achievement among Nigerian children.

The persisting view among the populace is that most early childhood education centers that are privately run including the pre-primary schools, are outfits for profit taking, and not really centers for proper care, nurture and education of young children under their care [3, 4, 6 and 14]. Despite this observation, the patronage of these centers by parents and their children is still on the rise [7, 15] probably because of the failure of public schools to provide to these children strike free school years. The idea of maximizing profits might have been a motivating

factor for private proprietors of early childhood centers to employ unqualified teachers and caregivers. If that reason was correct, how will the years of practicing pre-primary school teacher experience affect their perception of curriculum process and implementation at the pre-primary school level of education?

Statement of the problem

This study was therefore designed to investigate the impression of teachers and proprietors on matters regarding the preparation, awareness and implementation of pre-school curriculum in early childhood education institutions. The study therefore investigated teachers and proprietors' perception of pre-curriculum activities, curriculum objectives, content, methods/strategies of implementation, and evaluation processes.

Research questions:

Five research questions were raised and investigated in this study. The study therefore provided answers to these research questions that follow: Do Pre-school teachers/ proprietors who have varying numbers of years of teaching experience have similar or differing perceptions of:

- I. Pre-curriculum activities for ECE curriculum
- II. Objectives of pre-primary school curriculum
- III. Contents of pre-primary school curriculum
- IV. Methods and strategies of preprimary school curriculum
- V. Evaluation processes in pre-primary school Education

METHODS THE STUDY

This study is a survey research in which the survey technique was employed for the collection of data from the field.

Sampling and sample:

Purposive sampling technique was used in selecting pre-primary school teachers who have served four years or more as teachers, managers or proprietors at their current pre-primary institutions or other ECE levels. The limiting of respondents' minimum number of years of experience was done in order to exclude the teachers that were not yet in employment during the most current curriculum review/change process. Nine pre-primary school teachers and one proprietor from each of the fourteen purposively selected private pre-primary schools, which were willing to participate in this study, were selected for the study.

The target population for this survey was all pre-primary school teachers, head teachers and proprietors who were still involved in regular teaching and had been in service for the last three years, during which the current Early Childhood Care Development Education curriculum was prepared, disseminated and introduced. Only teachers and proprietors who willingly agreed to participate in this study were selected. The sample size was one hundred and forty (140) pre-primary school teachers and proprietors.

Instrument:

The instrument used for data collection was a researcher designed Teachers' Perception Questionnaire on Curriculum Process in Nigeria [TPQCPN]. The instrument had thirty two items, each of which was calibrated into four point scale in the Likert's format as follows: SA = strongly agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = strongly disagree. The condition of "undecided" response was expunged from the scale, since each respondent was supposed to take a stand. The questionnaire items were divided into five sections. Each question demanded a response

from each of the respondents and all items on the questionnaire must be responded to for a valid questionnaire. The five sections were as follows:

Section A: Sensitization of the public on impending curriculum reviews or changes (6 items)

Section B: The objectives of pre-primary education curriculum (6 items)

Section C: The contents of pre-primary education curriculum (7 items)

Section D: Methods/strategies that the pre-primary school teachers employ (7 items)

Section E: Evaluation methods/techniques/approaches employed by pre-school teachers (6 items)

The instrument was vetted by three professional early childhood education professional before it was trial-tested in another state that was not part of the one for this investigation. The trial testing was to ensure that the instrument contained no ambiguities and was suitable for this study. The standardized instrument was administered on twenty preschool teachers and yielded Cronbach's Alpha of .852. After validation, the researcher and two assistants administered the questionnaire on the teachers and proprietors in their respective schools and allowed sufficient time for each respondent to complete the questionnaire before collecting them on the same day. The resultant data were analyzed using Chi squared statistics.

RESULTS

The results of data analyses are presented following the order of research questions.

Research question I: This research question stated as follows: Do Pre-school teachers/ proprietors who have varying numbers of years of teaching experience have similar or differing perceptions of Pre-curriculum activities for ECE curriculum?

There were six questionnaire items under pre-curriculum activities that sought to ascertain teachers' and proprietor's perceptions on these activities. The frequency of responses of participants to each questionnaire item on the four point scale were analyzed using Chi squared statistics as contained in Table 1. The results for questionnaire items 1 to 6 are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Chi squared Analysis of teachers' and proprietors' responses to questionnaire items on pre-curriculum activities

	SECTION A: Pre-curriculum activities	N	df.	X ²	Sig.
1	The Nigerian pre-primary curriculum was well publicized before implementation	140	6	8.105	.230
2	Practicing pre-primary school teachers were aware of the curriculum process	140	6	10.105	.124
3	Professional early childhood educators took part in the curriculum process	140	6	7.957	.242
4	Pre-primary school teachers/proprietors had no hand in the curriculum process	140	6	8.154	.227
5	Some pre-primary school teachers/proprietors participated in curriculum preparatory workshops	140	6	.702	.994
6	Curriculum process is the work of specialists in the Ministry of Education	140	6	2.840	.829

X² Critical for 6 degrees of freedom = 12.592 at p = .05

The data in Table 1 shows that the obtained chi squared values for each of questionnaire item numbers 1 to 6 was not significant. This implies that preschool teachers and proprietors of varying teaching experiences had similar perceptions on each of the six items of pre-curriculum process. It therefore appears that teaching experience of the teacher/proprietors had no influence on their perceptions of pre-curriculum activities.

Research question II: Do Pre-school teachers/ proprietors who have varying numbers of years of teaching experience have similar or differing perceptions on the Objectives of pre-primary school curriculum The X² analysis for this research question is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: X² analysis of respondents' responses on questionnaire items 7 to 12 on objectives

SECTION B: objectives The objectives of pre-primary education curriculum contain the following ideas:		N	df	X ²	Sig.
7	To produce highly literate children	100	6	6.738	.346
8	To improve the child's ability to solve maths problems	100	6	3.974	.680
9	To develop readiness to go to primary school	100	6	5.746	.452
10	To acquire rudimentary skills in handling, pencils, paper, book,	100	6	3.793	.795
11	To develop skill in speaking, listening, recognition of letters, numbers and sounds	100	6	7.586	.270
12	To enjoy play, nature, and socialize with peers	100	6	11.406*	.077

= Significant at $p < .05$; X² Critical = 12.592, at $df = 6$

The results in Table 2 shows that the chi squared obtained for each questionnaire items 7 to 11, was not significant, but item 12 was significant. The Chi squared obtained was evaluated at the .05 level of significance for 6 degrees of freedom. The critical Chi squared for the degrees of freedom shown is 12.592. Research question II was not rejected for questions 7 to 11, (six out of seven) on the objectives of the Nigerian pre-primary school curriculum. This result implies that the pre-school teachers and their proprietors of varying years of teaching experience predominantly perceived the objectives of pre-schools similarly. The only exception was on item 12, where there was a significant divergence of perceptions.

Research question III: Do Pre-school teachers/ proprietors who have varying numbers of years of teaching experience have similar or differing perceptions on contents of pre-primary school curriculum. The data analysis for this research question is contained in Table 3.

Table 3: X² analysis of respondents' perceptions on contents of Nigerian pre-primary school curriculum

SECTION C: Contents of curriculum The curriculum of pre-primary schools may include lessons on:		N	df	X ²	Sig.
13	Reading and writing of short stories	140	6	4.770	.574
14	Solving of arithmetic problems in exercise books	140	6	6.383	.382
15	Reciting poetry and singing	140	6	13.759*	.032
16	Learning to handle pencil, pen, paper and scribbling	140	6	3.283	.773
17	Drawing of lines, shapes, letters	140	6	2.947	.815
18	Playing games, learning name of things, animals and plants	140	6	8.227	.219
19	Listening and speaking	140	6	16.829*	.010

= Significant at $p \leq .05$; Critical X² = 12.592

Table 3 shows the results of X² analysis of questionnaire items 13 to 19 that focused on curriculum content for pre-primary school level. It will be observed that X² obtained for item 15 was significant: [X² = 13.759]; and also item 19 were significant: [X² = 16.829]. The other items on curriculum content for pre-schools: items 13, 14, 16, 17 and 18 were not significant. However for Item 19, X² obtained is 14.064, while the critical value for X² for degrees of freedom shown is 12.592. These results showed that teachers/proprietors with varying number of years of teaching experience differed in their perceptions of:

- Use of poetry and singing as curriculum content in pre-school curriculum, and
- Inclusion of listening and speaking as curriculum content in pre-school education.

It may be seen that in five cases out of seven or 71 percent of the cases, preprimary teachers/proprietors perceived pre-primary school curriculum content similarly. This observed dissimilarity in perception of contents of pre-primary school curriculum by the key implementers of this curriculum, indicates that substantial differences will be observe in pre-

primary teachers' knowledge and application of the content curriculum in their various centers.

Research question IV: Do Pre-school teachers/ proprietors who have varying numbers of years of teaching experience have similar or differing perceptions on methods and strategies of pre-primary school instruction

Table 4: Respondents' perception on Methods/strategies that the pre-primary school teachers employ

SECTION D		N	df	X ²	Sig.
Methods and strategies employed by preprimary teachers to teach children are:					
20	Verbalization or teacher talk and chalk board illustrations	140	6	4.770	.577
21	Home work or assignments and corrections	140	6	9.836	.132
22	Play way strategies and demonstrations	140	6	2.469	.872
23	Memorization and recitation	140	6	2.766	.839
24	Discovery approach and activity	140	6	9.701	.138
25	Demonstration and modeling	140	6	15.107*	.019
26	Use of pictures and illustrations	140	6	9.107	.138

= Significant at $p \leq .05$; Critical $X^2 = 12.592$ for $df = 6$.

The data in Table 4 reveals that the perceptions of teachers and proprietors of pre-primary schools in the study were similar on methods of teaching at the pre-primary schools such as exemplified from the X^2 analyses contained in Table 4 for items 20 through 24 and item 26. It is only in item 25 that teachers and proprietors of differing years of teaching experiences were significantly different in their perception [$x^2 = 15.107$; Critical $X^2 = 12.592$]. The results for items 20 to 24 and item 26 seem to show that the pre-primary school teachers and proprietors do not differ to a large extent on their ideas of what constitute appropriate methods and strategies to be employed at these early childhood institutions. An example could be taken by considering frequencies on respondents' perception on item 24: the use of Discovery and activity as a teaching strategy in pre-primary schools, Table 5.

Table 5: Frequency of responses to Item 24 by teachers of differing years of teaching experience

Count		teaching experience in years			Total
		less than 5	5 to 7	above 7	
Discovery and activity	strongly disagree	9	7	8	24
	Disagree	5	13	8	26
	Agree	16	20	15	51
	strongly agree	8	10	21	39
Total		38	50	52	140

Table 5 reveals that for teachers/proprietors with less than five years experience, 24 teachers agreed with the statement, while the 14 disagreed; that gives 63 percent agreement. For those teachers/proprietors with (5 - 7) years' experience, 30 agreed while 20 disagreed; that gives 60 percent agreement. Similarly, teachers/proprietors with over 7 years experience, 26 agreed with the item statement while 16 disagreed; these values give 50 percent agreement. The proportion of agreement by teacher/proprietors in the order of increasing number of years of teaching experience is 63:60:50 respectively. However, the modal response for two less experienced groups occurred at "Agree", while the most experienced had the modal response at strongly agree. This observation is instructive on the nature of the similarity of perceptions observed among other items of the instrument.

It is therefore evident that teachers/proprietors who had between five and seven years experience had less focus in their perceptions than the less and more experienced ones. The

point here is to exemplify one of the factors that most probably led to observed lack of significant differences in perception of these teachers and proprietors of differing year of teaching experience in 29 out of 32 items considered in this study. Lack of appropriate educational and professional training among these pre-primary school teachers and proprietors might have contributed greatly to the inappropriate perceptions in observed responses to most of the questionnaire items. This finding is supported by the researches [5, 6 and 15].

Research question IV: Do Pre-school teachers/ proprietors who have varying numbers of years of teaching experience have similar or differing perceptions of evaluation techniques in pre-primary education?

Table 6: Chi squared analysis of teachers' and proprietors' perception of assessment and evaluation techniques in pre-primary education

	SECTION E: Assessment/Evaluation techniques for pre-primary children include:	N	df	X ²	Sig.
27	Multiple choice objective tests	140	6	1.421	.965
28	Short essay questions	140	6	5.856	.439
29	Observation techniques	140	6	9.357	.154
30	Oral questions	140	6	8.800	.185
31	Interest/Participation	140	6	3.646	.724
32	Writing and spelling	140	6	5.843	.441

Critical X² = 12.592 at p ≤ .05; df = 6

The data in Table 6 reveals that teachers and proprietors of varying years of experience were similar in their perceptions of assessment and evaluation techniques in pre-primary school education: [X² squared obtained for items 27 through 32, each was not significant at .05 level for 6 degrees of freedom]. This finding is in agreement with research finding [5, 7 and 11].

DISCUSSION

The data analyses in this investigation has revealed that the use of years of experience in pre-primary school level of education to classify pre-school teachers and proprietors has very little instructional benefit, since all the teachers, young or old in service reasoned practically in the same way in 28 out of 32 situations. The probable reason to adduce for this observation is that most serving pre-school teachers and proprietors of private pre-schools are not properly trained in the field of early childhood education and or they are not specialists or professionals in the field that they are practicing [14, 15]. This reason might have led to observed dissatisfaction among the elite on the performance of the early childhood education sector [6]. It is important to realize that appropriate training will confer on these teachers/proprietors, professional knowledge and status that will enable them to understand and appreciate pre-school children; their developmental needs abilities, capabilities and duties that teachers and caregivers owe these pupils [15].

The data analyses for questionnaire items 1 – 32 reveal that there were four items for which the respondents showed significant differences in their perceptions. These include two items under curriculum content of pre-primary schools. The first was on the use of poetry and songs. The older teachers/proprietor tended to show relatively better perception of what is required than the younger teachers/proprietors. The second significant perception still occurred under curriculum of pre-schools, item 19. The item sought the inclusion of listening and speaking as part of the curriculum content of pre-primary schools. It was the least experienced group of teachers/proprietors that indicated highest positive agreement (53 percent), those with 5 – 7 years experience (42 percent) positive agreement; and those with more than 7 years experience (46 percent) positive support.

The third significant X^2 occurred section D under Perception of methods and strategies of pre-school instruction, Item 25 (demonstration and modeling). For teachers/proprietors with fewer than five years experience showed high negative perception (53 percent); those with 5 – 7 years experience (20 percent) negative; and those teachers/proprietors with more than seven years experience (23 percent) negative. It is in this item that older teachers showed that their experience tended to count by relative percentages of agreement with the item. The relative proportion in increasing order of experience is 47:80:77 in positive perceptions. Thus the teachers/proprietors with 5 – 7 years of teaching experience had the highest positive perception.

CONCLUSION

The perceptions of curriculum process by teachers and proprietors of varying number of years of teaching experience in this study were similar in 28 out of 32 situations under investigation. Teaching experience did not appear to have much influence on the perceptions of the teachers; therefore the obtained results were not significant in 88 percent of the cases as observed in this study. It was therefore concluded that teachers and proprietors in Nigerian pre-primary schools perceive curriculum process similarly.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study, this researcher recommends as follows:

1. That states and local governments should join hands with pre-primary school owners in recruitment of qualified and trained pre-school teachers to ensure that children at these centers benefit maximally from their stay at such centers.
2. Teachers at these centers should be tested periodically on knowledge and application of early childhood education teaching, nurture, and developmental skills, to determine their suitability to function appropriately at this level.
3. Government should regulate the establishment of these centers to ensure that any approved center will be appropriate, healthy and suitable for the up-bringing of future Nigerian leaders.
4. The States and Local Governments should establish some form of grants in aid for the development and continuous improvement of these centers in their domain to enable them contribute adequately to the proper nurture, physical, social, psychological and educational development of young children in their care.

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