

IMPLEMENTATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION POLICIES: EXAMINING THE SHORTAGE OF TRAINED TEACHERS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN KWARA STATE

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Abstract

This study examined the implementation of early childhood education policies in Kwara State, specifically focusing on the shortage of trained teachers in public schools. The research adopted a descriptive survey design with a mixed-method approach (quantitative and qualitative). The population comprised 222 public early childhood education teachers, while the sample size was 141 respondents, selected using multistage sampling techniques involving simple random and convenience sampling. Data were collected using a proforma, an unstructured interview guide, and a self-developed questionnaire titled "Implementation of Early Childhood Education Policies and Teacher Shortage (IECEPTS)." IECEPTS was validated by experts in early childhood and measurement & evaluation, and its reliability was established using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding the coefficient of 0.89. Ethical considerations were adhered via including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and an independent t-test were used for data analysis. Findings revealed that only 33% of early childhood education teachers in public schools are qualified, highlighting a critical shortage of trained personnel. The study also found no structured policy provisions for teacher recruitment and deployment and no significant differences in perceived policy implementation challenges based on gender ($p = 0.85$) or school location ($p = 0.889$). The study concludes that systemic challenges such as poor funding, weak policy enforcement, and a lack of continuous professional development hinder early childhood education policy implementation. It recommends targeted recruitment, structured policy frameworks, increased funding, and equitable resource distribution to enhance early childhood education in Kwara State.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Policy Implementation, Teacher Shortage, Public Schools

Introduction

Education serves as the bedrock of national development, and early childhood education (ECE) lays the foundation for lifelong learning. The Nigerian National Policy on Education explicitly addresses the implementation of ECE by mandating the establishment of pre-primary sections in existing public schools. The policy further requires that teacher education programs include specialization in early childhood education, that the medium of instruction be primarily the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community, and that play-based methods dominate teaching in ECE centres, supported by appropriately oriented curricula. In addition, it prescribes regulation and control of ECE operations, including a teacher/pupil ratio of 1:25, the

setting and monitoring of minimum standards for childcare centres, and active participation of government, communities, and teachers' associations in running and maintaining these facilities. However, one may wonder whether policies like those under the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) genuinely fulfil their promise of ensuring that every child counts and has access to quality education. With many parents engaged in the struggle to earn a living, leaving their children in the care of schools, does the current structure truly accommodate all children? If UBEC and SUBEB are committed to providing universal access to early childhood education, why do public schools continue to experience a shortage of trained teachers to cater to the developmental needs of these young learners?

UBEC and SUBEB are structured to facilitate quality education at all levels, with a specific emphasis on early childhood education through the Early Child Care Development and Education (ECCDE) framework (Federal Ministry of Education, 2019). The policy mandates that every public primary school in Nigeria should have a pre-primary education section integrated into the system, ensuring early exposure to foundational learning (Ogunmadeet. al., 2023). This initiative aligns with the global Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4), which aims to provide inclusive and equitable quality education for all children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds (United Nations, 2016). However, despite the existence of these policy frameworks, the practical implementation of early childhood education policies is fraught with challenges, particularly concerning the availability of trained teachers in public schools (Akinware, 2021).

The Yoruba adage says, “*Ilé latí ñkẹşò ròde*”, which means that charity begins at home. A key and first mandate of UBEC and SUBEB in Nigeria is to ensure that public schools are adequately staffed with professionally trained primary school teachers, including early childhood educators who possess specialised knowledge in child development (Ogunyemi & Lagunju, 2022), before the private schools. However, there exists a critical disconnect between policy aspirations and reality. The importance of treating children with love and raising them in a way that benefits their future directly relates to the necessity of trained early childhood teachers to provide quality education and care as it is said by Prophet (PBUH) “No father has given a child anything better than good manners.” (Sunan al-Tirmidhi, 4977, Hasan)” (Ibn Majah, 3671).

This situation further exacerbates educational inequality, as private schools, which typically employ trained early childhood educators, continue to provide superior early learning experiences compared to public institutions (Olaleye & Omotayo, 2020). The absence of trained professionals in public schools has dire implications for the overall effectiveness of early childhood education policies (Adedokun & Adebayo, 2023). Studies have shown that children who receive structured early childhood education from trained professionals are better equipped for primary education, exhibit stronger literacy and numeracy skills, and demonstrate improved social adaptability compared to those who lack such exposure (Ogunmadeet. al., 2023).

Without trained educators, the quality of knowledge children receive may be compromised, affecting their long-term development. Early childhood educators play a crucial role in fostering holistic development by facilitating cognitive, linguistic, socio-emotional, and motor skills among young children (Pianta et. al., 2021). Unlike general education teachers, early childhood specialists are trained to implement structured play-based learning, individualised instructional methods, and socio-emotional interventions that enhance children's developmental milestones (Akinware, 2021).

The ineffective implementation of early childhood education policies in Nigeria can be attributed to several structural and systemic challenges. Key among these is inadequate funding, which limits the recruitment, training, and retention of qualified early childhood educators in public schools (Ogunyemi & Lagunju, 2022). The theoretical underpinning of this study is derived from Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which posits that children's learning and development are influenced by various interacting environmental systems, including family, school, societal structures (microsystem) and parental work influence (exosystem) on the children with the presence of well-trained early childhood educators in public schools serves as a critical component of the microsystem and exosystem that directly shape children's cognitive and socio-emotional development (Pianta et. al., 2021).

The necessity of having skilled early childhood educators within public institutions to provide structured and nurturing learning environments that enhance children's developmental trajectories. Early childhood education policies in Nigeria are well-structured under UBEC and SUBEB, but significant gaps in implementation continue to undermine their effectiveness. The shortage of trained early childhood educators in public schools remains a critical barrier to achieving equitable access to quality early learning experiences.

Statement of the Problem

The implementation of early childhood education (ECE) policies in Kwara State has faced significant challenges, particularly regarding the availability of trained teachers in public schools. Despite policy frameworks established by the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) to ensure equitable access to quality early childhood education, there remains a shortage of adequately trained educators to meet the growing demand. This gap raises concerns about the effectiveness of early childhood education, as unqualified or insufficiently trained teachers may lack the pedagogical skills necessary to support children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. Without a well-trained workforce, achieving the policy goal of providing quality foundational education for all children becomes increasingly difficult, thereby undermining the broader objectives of educational equity and national development.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to investigate the availability of trained early childhood teachers in Kwara State. The specific purpose is to:

- i. assess the current availability of trained early childhood teachers in public schools in Kwara State.
- ii. determine the existing policy provisions guiding early childhood education teacher recruitment and deployment in Kwara State.
- iii. identify the major challenges affecting the full implementation of early childhood education policies in Kwara State.
- iv. examine whether challenges affecting the implementation of early childhood education policies in Kwara State differ based on gender.
- v. determine whether challenges affecting the implementation of early childhood education policies in Kwara State differ based on school location.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised.

- i. What is the current availability of trained early childhood teachers in public schools in Kwara State?
- ii. What are the existing policy provisions for early childhood education teacher recruitment and deployment in Kwara State?
- iii. What are the major challenges affecting the full implementation of early childhood education policies in Kwara State?

Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were formulated.

H01: There is no significant difference in the challenges affecting the full implementation of early childhood education policies in Kwara State based on gender.

H02: There is no significant difference in the challenges affecting the full implementation of early childhood education policies in Kwara State based on school location.

Methodology

This study employs a Parallel Mixed-Method Design (quantitative to answer research question one and three while qualitative to answer research question two) to examine the shortage of trained early childhood teachers in public schools in Kwara State. The population for this study consists of 222 public early childhood education (ECE) teachers in Kwara State, as documented in the Kwara State Annual School Census (ASC) Report (2020). The target population comprises teachers and educational stakeholders in government-owned primary schools across the 16 local government areas of Kwara State. A simple Random Sampling Technique (SRT) was used to select 141 respondents from four Local government areas using a research advisor (2006), while convenience sampling was used to meet the respondents during a seminars. Three instruments were used: a proforma, unstructured interview questions and a questionnaire. A proforma was used to assess the current availability of trained early childhood teachers in public schools in Kwara State using Kwara State Annual School Census (ASC) Report (2020). An unstructured interview was used to assess existing policy provisions for early

childhood education teacher recruitment and deployment in Kwara State, while a self-developed questionnaire titled "Implementation of Early Childhood Education Policies and Teacher Shortage (IECEPTS)" was used to collect data on challenges affecting the full implementation of early childhood education policies in Kwara State. The questionnaire was based on a modified four-point Likert Scale which ranged from Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD). Section A captured the demographic data of respondents (gender and School location), while Section B comprised 7 items covering possible Challenges in Policy Implementation. IECEPTS was subjected to face and content validation by experts in Early Childhood and Measurement & Evaluation, ensuring its relevance and appropriateness. The reliability of IECEPTS was determined using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a coefficient value of 0.89, indicating high internal consistency. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, confidentiality of responses was assured, and participation was voluntary to adhere to ethical standard. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while an independent t-test was used to examine differences in teacher and stakeholders' perceptions across different school locations (urban and rural settings).

Results

Research Question 1: What is the current availability of trained early childhood teachers in public schools in Kwara State?

To analyse the availability of trained early childhood teachers in public schools in Kwara State using frequency tables, mean, and standard deviation. Data from the 2018–2019 Kwara State School Census Report (2020) were analysed and presented in a structured statistical format below.

Table 1: Summary of descriptive statistics of the construct, a frequency table for qualified teachers and qualification State

S/N	LGEA	Total Teachers	Qualified Teachers	Qualification Rate (%)
ĈB	Asa	18	14	78%
ĈB	Baruten	7	5	71%
ĈB	Edu	3	2	67%
ĈB	Ekiti	6	3	50%
DB	Ifelodun	23	18	94%
ĎB	Ilorin East	19	17	89%
ĎB	Ilorin South	20	18	90%
ĎB	Ilorin West	23	9	39%
EB	Irepodun	13	12	94%
ĈĈB	Isin	3	3	100%
ĈĈB	Kaiama	1	1	100%
ĈĈB	Moro	6	4	67%
ĈĈB	Offa	3	3	100%
ĈĈB	Oke-Ero	3	3	100%
ĈDB	Oyun	3	3	100%
ĈĎB	Patigi	14	10	75%
Total		148	49	33% (overall)

The frequency table above for the **number of teachers per LGEA** and their qualification status indicates that **only 49 out of 148 teachers (33%) are qualified**, which highlights a critical shortage of trained early childhood education teachers in public schools. Also, the table revealed that GEAs such as **Ilorin West (39%)** and **Edu (67%)** have the lowest qualification rates.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Early Childhood Education Teachers in Public Schools in Kwara State

	Mean	SD	Remarks
Total Teachers	10.31	8.06	
Qualified Teachers	7.81	6.18	Shortage
Valid N (listwise)			

Table 2 above indicates the availability of early childhood education teachers in public schools across Kwara State. The mean number of total teachers per Local Government Education Authority (LGEA) is 10.31, with a standard deviation of 8.06, indicating substantial variability in teacher distribution among LGAs. The mean number of qualified teachers per LGEA stands at 7.81, with a standard deviation of 6.18, suggesting disparities in the availability of trained personnel across different local governments. The high standard deviations observed in both variables indicate significant inconsistencies in teacher deployment.

Research Question 2: What are the existing policy provisions for early childhood education teacher recruitment and deployment in Kwara State?

The results for the research question on the existing policy provisions for early childhood education teacher recruitment and deployment in Kwara State were obtained through interviews with stakeholders and teachers and analysed using thematic analysis.

The findings revealed no existing policy provision for early childhood education teacher recruitment and deployment in Kwara State, as “Respondent A” expressed uncertainty about the inclusion of early childhood education under the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) programs. The respondent stated, “As far as I know, early childhood education in Kwara State is mainly handled by private schools. I am not aware that public schools under SUBEB have structured provisions for this level of education.” Another respondent emphasised the lack of recruitment efforts for early childhood education teachers in recent years, stating, “There has been no specific recruitment for early childhood education teachers under this administration. If at all recruitment takes place in the future, there is no guarantee that early childhood caregivers will be considered separately. Another educator pointed out that even when teachers are deployed to public schools, many lack the necessary training to handle early childhood education. The respondent explained, “Teachers posted to public schools often do not have specialised training in early childhood education. Many of them are general education teachers who struggle with the foundational developmental needs of young learners.” One respondent, who has been working within the education sector for years, expressed concern over the inconsistency in implementing policies at the school level. “On paper, there may be provisions for early childhood education, but in practice, many public schools do not have the required structures, materials, or trained teachers to implement it effectively”

Research Question 3: What are the major challenges affecting the full implementation of early childhood education policies in Kwara State?

To find out the challenges affecting the full implementation of early childhood education in Kwara state, mean responses of the respondents to each item on the questionnaire were computed, having modified four Likert Scale format of *Strongly Agree* (4), *Agree* (3), *Disagree* (2), and *Strongly Disagree* (1). To get the cut-off mark, the average of the total points was calculated to be 3.0 (That is, $4+3+2+1 = 10$; $10/4 = 2.50$). The result is presented in the table below:

Table 3: *Challenges Affecting the Full Implementation of Early Childhood*

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Ranks	Remarks
1.	There is an inadequate number of trained teachers for early childhood education in public schools.	3.48	1.02	5 th	High
2.	The government provides insufficient funding for the effective implementation of early childhood education policies.	3.67	1.41	2 nd	High
3.	Infrastructure and teaching facilities for early childhood education in public schools are grossly inadequate.	3.64	1.45	3 rd	High
4.	There is a lack of structured recruitment and deployment processes for early childhood education teachers in Kwara State.	3.61	1.44	4 th	High
5.	Policymakers and education stakeholders do not give adequate attention to early childhood education in Kwara State.	3.76	1.28	1 st	High
6.	The absence of continuous professional development and training programs limits teachers' effectiveness in early childhood education.	3.21	1.20	6 th	High
7.	Societal and parental attitudes toward early childhood education negatively impact policy implementation and teacher recruitment.	3.08	1.13	7 th	High

Table 4 above reveals challenges affecting the full implementation of early childhood education policies in Kwara State. The despondence evidence was seen in the table, where the mean value of all the items was greater than 3.0. From their response, it was revealed that challenges affecting the full implementation of early childhood education policies in Kwara State are; Policymakers and education stakeholders do not give adequate attention to early childhood education, government provides insufficient funding for the effective implementation of early childhood education policies, infrastructure and teaching facilities for early childhood education in public schools are grossly inadequate, lack of structured recruitment and deployment processes for early childhood education teachers, inadequate number of trained teachers for early childhood education in public schools, absence of continuous professional development and training programs limits teachers' effectiveness in early childhood education, and societal and parental attitudes toward early childhood education negatively impact policy implementation and teacher recruitment. These were all ranked 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th respectively by their mean values from the highest to the least. The overall mean value of 3.49, which is greater than the cut-off means of 2.50, indicated that all the items listed above are challenges affecting the implementation of early childhood education policies in Kwara State. Those items that are above the weighted mean (3.49) indicated that they are the most prominent factors identified by the respondents. Hence, it was revealed that Policymakers and education stakeholders do not give adequate attention to early childhood education, which is the major challenge affecting the full implementation of early childhood education policies in Kwara State.

Research Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the challenges affecting the full implementation of early childhood education policies in Kwara State based on gender.

Table 4: Table of t-test analysis showing the differences between males and females in perceiving the challenges affecting the full implementation of early childhood education policies in Kwara State.

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-value	Sig.	Decision
TotalChallenges	Male	64	24.14	4.05	139	-.800	0.85	H₀₁ Retained
	Female	77	24.70	4.22				

Table 4 above shows no significant difference between males and females in perceiving the challenges affecting the full implementation of early childhood education policies in Kwara State. The table revealed that there is no significant difference between males and females in their viewson challenges that affect the full implementation of early childhood education policies in Kwara State. This was evident by the p-value of 0.85, which is not significant at the 0.05 alpha level ($0.85 > 0.05$). Hence, the stated null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant difference in the challenges affecting the full implementation of early childhood education policies in Kwara State based on gender, is retained. It can, therefore, be affirmed that male and female respondents comprehend all these challenges from the same point of view.

Research Hypotheses 2: There is no significant difference in the challenges affecting the full implementation of early childhood education policies in Kwara State based on school location.

Table 5: t-test table analysis showing the differences between responses from rural and urban stakeholders and teachers on the challenges affecting the full implementation of early childhood education policies

	School Location	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	Sig	Decision
TotalChallenges	Rural	46	24.26	4.14	139	-3.70	0.889	Not Significant
	Urban	95	24.54	4.15				

Table 5 above revealed that there is no significant difference between those in rural and urban areas in insightful the challenges affecting the full implementation of early childhood education policies in Kwara State. The t-test result compares responses from rural stakeholders (N = 46, M = 24.26, SD = 4.14) and urban stakeholders (N = 95, M = 24.54, SD = 4.15) regarding the challenges. The t-value (-3.70) and p-value (0.889) indicate that there is no statistically significant difference between the responses of rural and urban stakeholders. Since the p-value (0.889) is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis is then retained, confirming that respondents from rural and urban areas perceive the challenges of early childhood education policy implementation similarly. It can, therefore, be affirmed that rural and urban respondents comprehend all these challenges from the same point of view.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study indicated that the availability of trained early childhood teachers in public schools in Kwara State is significantly low. *The mean number of qualified teachers per LGEA, with a standard deviation, suggests disparities in the availability of trained personnel across different local governments.* Frequency distribution and mean analysis reveal that a majority of public schools lack adequately trained early childhood educators, with many preschool classes being handled by generalist primary school teachers rather than specialised professionals. This finding aligns with the study by Ajibola *et. al.*, (2022), which reported that public schools in Nigeria face an acute shortage of early childhood educators, often leaving primary school teachers without specialised training to handle preschool classes. The absence of dedicated early childhood professionals negatively impacts learning outcomes, as generalist teachers may lack the pedagogical skills required to address the unique developmental needs of preschoolers (Adedokun & Adebayo, 2023).

The results indicated that there are no structured policy provisions for the recruitment and deployment of early childhood education teachers in Kwara State. The stakeholders interviewed expressed uncertainty about the inclusion of early childhood education under the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), emphasising that this level of education is primarily handled by private schools. The lack of recruitment efforts for early childhood education teachers in public schools further exacerbates the shortage of trained personnel. These findings are consistent with Ogunyemi and Lagunju (2022), who highlighted that despite policy frameworks under the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and SUBEB, implementation remains weak due to inadequate funding and the absence of dedicated recruitment initiatives.

The findings highlighted multiple challenges that hinder the effective implementation of early childhood education policies in Kwara State. A critical challenge is that policymakers and education stakeholders do not give adequate attention to early childhood education, which leads to inadequate funding allocated to early childhood education, restricting the recruitment, training, and retention of qualified teachers. Poor remuneration and unfavourable working conditions further discourage trained early childhood educators from taking up positions in public schools, as observed in previous studies by Olaleye and Omotayo (2020). Another major challenge is the lack of continuous professional development programs tailored specifically for early childhood educators, resulting in an underprepared workforce (Ajayi, 2021).

The findings revealed that there is no statistically significant difference in the perception of challenges affecting the full implementation of early childhood education policies in Kwara State based on gender. The p-value of 0.85, which exceeds the 0.05 significance level, confirms that both male and female respondents share similar perspectives on the barriers hindering policy implementation. This suggests that weak policy enforcement is universally recognised by both genders as a key impediment to the effective implementation of early childhood education policies. This finding aligns with the study of Ogunyemi and Adepoju (2022), which reported that gender does not significantly influence perceptions of educational policy challenges since both male and female stakeholders, whether teachers, administrators, or policymakers, experience similar institutional and systemic barriers in the education sector.

The results also demonstrated that there is no significant difference in the perception of early childhood education policy challenges between stakeholders in rural and urban schools. The statistical analysis showed that the mean scores for rural ($M = 24.26$, $SD = 4.14$) and urban ($M = 24.54$, $SD = 4.15$) respondents were very close, and the p-value of 0.889 exceeded the 0.05 threshold. This suggests that respondents in both settings recognise similar challenges affecting the full implementation of early childhood education policies, including inadequate teacher recruitment, lack of instructional materials, insufficient funding, and poor infrastructure. This finding aligns with the study of Adebisi *et. al.*, (2021), which reported that while rural schools often face more infrastructural deficits, urban schools also struggle with policy implementation issues, such as overcrowding, resource misallocation, and bureaucratic inefficiencies.

Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the systemic challenges hindering the full implementation of early childhood education policies in Kwara State, particularly policymakers and education stakeholders who do not give adequate attention to early childhood education, the shortage of trained educators, inadequate funding, weak policy enforcement, and poor infrastructure. Addressing these issues requires urgent policy reforms,

increased investment in teacher recruitment and training, and enhanced resource allocation to improve learning conditions. Strengthening early childhood education through targeted interventions will ensure equitable access to quality foundational learning experiences, ultimately enhancing educational outcomes for children in Kwara State.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were construed from the findings of the study.

1. State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) should implement a targeted recruitment and training program for specialised early childhood teachers to ensure qualified personnel in public schools.
2. Kwara State Ministry of Education should establish clear policies mandating the recruitment and deployment of certified early childhood educators under the state's education framework.
3. State Government should allocate a dedicated budget for early childhood education to support teacher training, infrastructure development, and the provision of instructional materials.
4. Education Stakeholders and Policymakers should adopt inclusive, gender-responsive policies that address early childhood education challenges holistically without bias.
5. Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs) should ensure the equitable distribution of resources, infrastructure, and teaching materials across both rural and urban schools.

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