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**ASSESSMENT OF PREPAREDNESS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATION ON SPECIALIST TEACHER PROGRAMME IN KWARA
STATE COLLEGES OF EDUCATION**

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Abstract

The introduction of any educational policy all over the world is always made towards the attainment of educational goals; this applies to the introduction of Early Childhood Education Specialist Teacher Programme in Kwara State Colleges of Education. This paper therefore x-rayed the preparedness of the three Colleges of Education in the state on the implementation of the policy on Early Childhood Education Specialist Teacher Programme. Four research questions were raised to guide the study while the questionnaire used to collect the data was analyzed using mean rating. The mean rating from 1.00-2.49 was considered low, 2.50-3.29 to be average while 3.30-5.00 was considered high. The findings revealed that the preparedness of the Colleges in the area of suitable curriculum and academic support services provided for lecturers as well as in the area of physical facilities provided were found to be high, while that of getting experts in the field of early childhood education was considered low. It was therefore considered that efforts should be made towards having experts who specialize in the field of early childhood education as lecturers in the department for effective implementation of the policy.

Keywords: Preparedness, Early Childhood, Education, Policy, and Implementation

Introduction

Education remains an essential tool in the process of national development. Its importance as aptly described in the National Policy on Education (2004) is justified by recognition given to it by the Federal Government of Nigeria as reflected in the budgetary allocation to education. It is for this reason that education is adopted as the instrument per excellence for effecting national development. Just like any economic sectors in the country, educational goals are clearly stated in terms of relevance to the needs of the individuals and those of the society in consonance with the realities of our environment and the modern world. It was realized that no education quality can rise above the quality of its teachers. Therefore, there is no way of addressing quality of education that teacher will not be looked into.

The Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) stated that the minimum qualification for entry into the teaching profession shall be the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE), that is the more reason why a body known as the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) was established for the teacher education programmes. The body is charged with the following responsibilities among others:

- Laying down the minimum standard for all programmes of teacher education at NCE level
- Accrediting their certificates and other academic awards
- Checking of staff quality
- Disbursement of grants to colleges of education
- Serve as advisory body to the government on colleges of education issues
- Make recommendations on the national policy on teacher education
- Seeing to the welfare of personnel in the colleges of education
- Reviewing methods of assessment of students
- Developing courses for teachers improvement programmes
- Organization of Local, National and International seminars, conferences and workshops (Oyedepo, 2003)

In pursuance of this mandate of maintaining the standard of teacher education, the NCCE has to formulate policies. According to Owolabi (2005), policy is a set of decisions taken by a political action group concerning the selection of goals and method of attaining them, relating to a specific situation. Policy can be viewed as a course of action or an action towards the accomplishment of intended desired goals. (Oyedepo & Oyeniran, 2009)

In every community, educational policy is directed towards increasing the quality of life. It is doubtful that a child may reasonably be expected not to succeed in life if he/she is denied the opportunity to a formal education. Hence, policy of education is important and must be properly understood by all those who are involved in its formulation, implementation and beneficiaries of education.

Teaching as a profession is not static but dynamic so there is used for continuous review in order to address contemporary issues and challenges in teacher education. Part of such issues is the general belief that there is a decline in the quality of teachers. One of the reasons for this is that the NCE curriculum is not structured for the production of quality teachers for basic schools which include pre-primary, primary and junior secondary schools. This observation led NCCE to formulate new policy on specialized Professional Teaching Areas and programmes to facilitate the production of effective teachers for the basic education sector. The programme is expected to cater for the following areas:

- Early childhood care education (ECCE)
- Primary Education (PE)
- Junior Secondary Education (JSE)
- Adult and Non-formal Education
- Special Education SPED (NCCE,2011)

The following objectives were considered for the specialist teacher programme:

- i. To bridge the gap between curriculum content and good curriculum practice in teacher education
- ii. To attain best practice in teacher education
- iii. To produce specific and measurable curriculum output by assessing the input, process and output.

As laudable as the new policy is, there is need to provide an enabling environment that will help to equip the recipients of that educational policy with every skills, knowledge, values and attitudes that will make them to be productive in order to achieve the desired objectives of the policy. The curriculum, the lecturers, the facilities and host of other resources should be properly selected and made available to enhance and facilitate the nurturing of the right perspective basic school teachers particularly at early childhood level which is the focus of this paper.

Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of this paper is to assess the preparedness of the early childhood education specialist teacher programme in Kwara state Colleges of Education. Specifically, the objectives of the study are assess:

1. The extent to which the ECE curriculum prepared students as expected in the field
2. The extent to which lecturers teaching the course in ECC are adequately qualified
3. The extent of support services available for lecturers of ECC
4. The level of availability of physical facility for ECC centers

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the focus of this paper:

1. Does the early childhood education curriculum prepare students as experts in the field?
2. Are lecturers teaching the course in Early Childhood Education adequately qualified?
3. Are there academic support services for lecturers taking courses in Early Childhood Education?

4. What is the level of availability of physical facilities for the teaching of the ECC course?

Method of Data Analysis

To answer the four research questions, the data collected were analyzed using mean rating. Any item with a mean greater than 2.5 was considered as agreement with the stated research question. The computed means were then converted to overall mean. Hence, mean ranging from 1.00-2.49= Low, 2.50-3.29= Average while 3.30-5.00= High.

Results

Research Question 1: Does the Early Childhood Education Curriculum prepare students as expert in the field?

This research question was answered and presented in table 1.

Table1: Early Childhood Education Curriculum

S/N	Statement	Agree	Disagree	Mean
1.	Early childhood education curriculum cover necessary areas	21 (80.8%)	5 (19.2%)	2.80
2.	The curriculum does not give room for students practicals	13 (50.0%)	13 (50.0%)	3.50
3.	There is provision for practical in the Curriculum	17 (65.4%)	9 (34.6%)	3.65
4.	The curriculum does not make provision for new techniques in handling children	17 (65.4%)	9 (34.6%)	3.65
Overall Mean		3.40		

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

Table 1 indicates that respondents agreed with the stated statement above. The overall mean score of 3.40 clearly shows to a large extent that Early Childhood Curriculum prepare students adequately to be expert in their fields.

Research Question 2: Are lecturers teaching the courses in Early Childhood Education adequately qualified?

This research question was answered and presented in table 2.

(in answering the research questions 2, data collected from questionnaire items on lecturer teaching Early Childhood Education adequately qualified was used in table 2, using descriptive statistic of mean)

Table 2: Adequacy of qualified Early Childhood Education Lecturer

S/N	Statement	Agree	Disagree	Mean
5.	Sixty percent of lecturers taking early Childhood education courses are master Degree holders	12 (46.2%)	14 (65.4%)	2.46
6.	Lecturers taking Early Childhood Education courses have at least five years teaching experience	9 (34.6%)	17 (65.4%)	2.34
7.	Lecturers handling Early Childhood Education courses have at least five years teaching experiences	4 (15.4%)	22 (84.6%)	2.15
8.	Lecturers teaching the courses are not professionally qualified	8 (30.8%)	18 (69.2%)	2.30
Overall Mean		2.31		

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

Table 2 indicates that respondents disagreed with the stated statement above. The overall mean score of 2.31 clearly shows to low extent that lecturers teaching the courses in early childhood education are not adequately qualified to teach the course.

Research Question 3: What are the academic support services for lecturers taking courses in Early Childhood Education?

This research question was answered and presented in table 3.

(in answering the research question 3, data collected from questionnaire items on academic support services for early childhood education was used in table 3, using descriptive statistic mean)

Table 3: Academic Support Services for Early Childhood Education

S/N	Statement	Agree	Disagree	Mean
9.	Lecturer in the school of Early Childhood Education do attend seminars	18 (69.2%)	8 (30.8%)	2.69
10.	Early Childhood Education lecturers are Always encouraged to pursue higher Degree in the field	8 (30.8%)	18 (69.2%)	2.30
11.	No internet facility for lecturers to Broaden their knowledge	18 (69.2%)	8 (30.8%)	2.30
12.	There is a well stock library for Lecturers use	17 (65.4%)	9 (34.6%)	3.65
Overall Mean		2.83		

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

Table 3 shows that respondents agreed with the statement 1, 3 and 4 but disagreed with statement 2. The overall mean score of 2.83 clearly shows to a moderate extent that there are adequate support services for lecturers taking courses in Early Childhood Education. This means that academic support services for early Childhood Education for lecturers are average.

Research Question 4: What is the level of availability of physical facilities for effective teaching of the course adequate?

This research question was answered and presented in table 4.

(in answering the research question 4, data were collected from questionnaire items on adequacy of physical facilities for effective teaching was used in table 4, using descriptive statistic mean

Table 4: Adequacy of Physical Facilities for Effective Teaching of the Course

S/N	Statement	Agree	Disagree	Mean
13.	There are adequate lecture rooms for Reading.	21	5 (80.8%)	2.80 (19.2%)
14.	Furniture are not adequate for students use in the lecture rooms	12	14 (46.2%)	2.46 (53.8%)
15.	There are instructional materials for effective teaching of the course	22	4 (84.6%)	2.84 (15.4%)
16.	There is resource center for practical teaching of the course	8 (30.8%)	18 (69.3%)	2.40
Overall Mean		2.63		

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

Table 4 shows that respondents agreed with the statement 1 and 3 but disagreed with statement 2 and 4. The overall mean score of 2.63 clearly shows to a moderate extent that there are physical facilities for effective teaching of the course. This means that physical facilities are averagely adequate for effective teaching of the course

Summary of Findings

The following are summaries of the major findings of this study:

1. The study revealed that Early Childhood Curriculum available in Kwara State Colleges of Education, prepare students adequately to become expert in the ECC field.
2. That the lecturers teaching Early Childhood Education courses in Kwara State Colleges of Education are not adequately qualified.
3. That the support services available for lecturers teaching Early Childhood Education courses in Kwara State Colleges of Education is moderate to requirement.
4. That the physical facilities available for effective teaching of Early Childhood Education courses in Kwara State Colleges of Education are on average level of availability.

Discussion of the Major Findings of the study

Sequenced to the findings in this study, it was obvious that despite the Kwara state Colleges of Education curriculum preparedness for the running of Early Childhood Education programme, there is no adequate supply of qualified teaching personnel to teach courses in the program. Also, physical facilities and lecturer support services available for the program in Kwara State Colleges of Education are not sufficient. The position of facilities availability, staff quality and staff support services revealed in this study moderate for effective running of the ECCE programme in the three Colleges of Education in Kwara State. Thus, with adequate supply of qualified teaching personnel the Colleges will be well positioned for quick attainment of ECCE programme objectives. This is in line with the pronouncement of Issa and Yusoff (2015), that the state of physical facilities availability, teachers' quality and support services available for the running of various program in institutions of higher learn are some of the major determinant for the attainment of Educational program objectives.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it was concluded that the preparedness of the three colleges of education in Kwara state in the implementation of Early Childhood Education Specialist Teacher Programme is considered to be high in the areas of suitable curriculum, academic support services provided for lecturers as well as in the area of physical facilities provided for the teaching of the course. While their preparedness in the area of getting experts in the field of Early Childhood Education is considered to be low and almost all the lecturers taking the course are not specifically trained in the field of Early Childhood Education.

Recommendations

Based on the finding of the study, it is therefore recommended that:

1. That adequate staff development programme be provided in the three Colleges of Education for lecturers in the Department of Early Childhood Education to go for further studies in the field of Early Childhood Education, especially those with Bachelor and Master Degrees in the quest for professionalism.
2. Regular seminars and lectures should be organized for lecturers in the department to further broaden their horizon on effective delivery of lessons.
3. That additional physical facility is provided by the different stakeholders (TETFund and Philanthropies) to enhance effective lecture delivery. Additionally, Kwara state government should upgrade the existing facilities and provide new ones in place as a way of enhancing effective teaching and learning.

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