

*Full Length Research*

# Educational Needs of Special Needs Children in Early Childhood Education: Implication for Inclusive Settings

<sup>1</sup>AKOS, P. M., <sup>2</sup>BODANG, J. R.(Ph.D) and <sup>3</sup>AMWE, R. A.

<sup>1</sup>Department of Special, Education And Rehabilitation Sciences, University Of Jos. E-Mail: pashakos56@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup>Department of Special, Education and Rehabilitation Sciences, University Of Jos. E-mail:bworot@yahoo.com

<sup>3</sup>Department Of Special, Education And Rehabilitation Sciences, University Of Jos. E-Mail: amweracheal44@gmail.com

Accepted 29 June 2017

The thrust of this paper is to examine the educational needs of special needs children in early childhood education and its implication for inclusive settings. The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The sample of the study comprises of 28 pre-primary school teachers in selected primary schools and day care centres in Plateau State. The instruments used for the study was the Pre-Primary School Teachers Questionnaire (PSTQ) which comprised of 12 items. Among the major findings of the study are; inadequate materials (toys, simulation materials etc) as well as facilities in schools or day care centres to accommodate children with special needs; the objectives stated in the National Policy on Education for Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) are not being implemented. It was however recommended that; adequate training and retraining should be provided for IECD regular and special teachers in schools and day care centres; the current curriculum should consider children with special needs in Nigeria; existing facilities as well as classroom instructional aids and materials should be adapted and modified to suit to suit children with special learning needs in a bid to embrace inclusive education.

**Keywords:** early childhood education, pre-school children, inclusive education, special needs education

**Cite This Article As:** AKOS PM, BODANG JR, AMWE RA (2017). Educational Needs of Special Needs Children in Early Childhood Education: Implication for Inclusive Settings. *Inter. J. Acad. Res. Educ. Rev.* 5(3): 88-94

## INTRODUCTION

Recently, the need for inclusive early childhood education programme is becoming more evident and stakeholders in the educational sector are advocating for inclusive education at all levels of education in Nigeria. The practice of providing early childhood education programmes for children with special needs in special schools is becoming outdated globally. However, a need for contemporary practice of inclusive is relevant and geared towards providing educational services to children with special needs and also providing this opportunity in

an early stage in life is of utmost benefit to the child with or without disability. Early childhood education refers to the period of developmental training and education of a child and it spans from the period of birth to early primary educational level and this stage is crucial for a child's future development.

Similarly as defined by Chartier and Geneix (2007), early childhood refers to a period preceding the age of compulsory schooling and according to the age range may vary from 5 (five) to 7 (seven) years old. Early

childhood education is the schooling for young children usually beginning at age 3 and is intended to prepare them for elementary grades. However, infancy period is a time from birth to about 2 years of age while early childhood is a period of schooling for young children. Pre-school age (3 - 6 years) corresponds to a critical period of rapid physical, emotional, cognitive and psychological development of the child. The quality and intensity of care, nutrition and stimulation a child receives during this period determines to a large extent the level of physical and cognitive development a child can attain. At this period, they also start manifesting the major stages of locomotion (crawling, propulsion – using arms or hands and knees only, creeping and walking. (Encarta, 2009).

In Nigeria, and other developing countries, most children do not have the opportunity to experience the much needed early childhood education. Statistics in Nigeria shows that only 2.02 out of 22 million Nigerian children eligible for Early Childhood Education (ECE) have access to these services (Global Movement for Children (GMC, 2010). Similarly as asserted by UNICEF (2012), the figure of pre-school children enrolled is approximately 2.3 million children and this represents only about 21% of the population in this age group. This calls for a qualitative early childhood education programme for children and most especially to children with visual impairment who are often less represented in most of these early childhood centers with little or no provision made for them.

The Federal Ministry of Education (FME, 2006) refers to early childhood education as education given in an educational institution, to children prior to their transition to the primary school. It includes the crèche, nursery and kindergarten levels of education. The adoption of the National Policy on Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) in November 2007 is an achievement in early childhood education in Nigeria. However, the purpose of early childhood education include: (a) affect a smooth transition from the home to school (b) prepare the child for the primary level of education (c) provide adequate care and supervision for children while their parents are at work and also (d) inculcating social norms in the young children. However, the Integrated Development Scheme (ICDS) in Kim and Lim (2010) postulated that early childhood education provides appropriate education and training for children between two and the half ( $2\frac{1}{2}$ ) and eight (8) years of age. This is aimed at identifying and referring children with special needs mainstream schools through pre-primary education inclusive neighborhood school settings.

In past years, the Nigerian government as posited in the National Policy on Education, directed all public schools to have pre-primary units. However, the proportion of children enrolled in these existing early childhood pre-primary schools and centres is very low.

Early childhood education and Education (ECCE) as it is referred to in other developed countries. But in Nigeria and some developing countries, the preferred name is interpreted Integrated Early childhood Development (IECD). This is due to the fact that it is entitled in the National Policy on Education as Education for Integrated Early Childhood Development (FME, 2006). The objectives of the ICED as contained in the federal republic of Nigerian document (FRN, 2007:4) are enumerated thus:

- a. Provide care and support that will ensure the rights of child to;
  - i. Good nutrition and health
  - ii. Healthy and safe environment
  - iii. Psycho-social and participation
  - iv. Protection and participation.
- b. Inculcate in the child the spirit of inquiry and creation through the exploration of nature, environment, art, music, playing with toys.
- c. Provide adequate care and supervision for the children while parents/guardians are at work in day care centres, schools, home care etc.

Institutions in Nigeria where early childhood education programmes are provided in day care centres, nursery and kindergarten schools which may be existing within a primary school or outside the school environment (Fowowe, 2011). However, the nursery and kindergarten schools are located within the school system which most day care centres are located in residential areas.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Educational Needs of Children with Special Needs

The educational needs of children with special needs cannot be over emphasized as their learning needs are quite unique and different from the needs of the so-called “normal” children. These needs, if not met can affect the child’s development physically and psychologically. Therefore, a qualitative and intensive early childhood programme should stimulate a child’s development. However, both group of children (with and without special (needs) can receive instructions in regular school setting. Onibokun as cited in Jimoh (2008) enumerate the needs of children in early childhood education to include the following:

**Cognitive Development:** Young children with special needs may have a delay in language acquisition which may be severe or inadequate. However, cognitive learning (reading, writing and arithmetic) requires language that is acquired if the child is often engaged in

activities that facilitates the acquisition or development of skills. Thus aids the intellectual growth and learning success in school.

**Social and emotional needs:** The negative reactions exhibited by parents after the birth of a child with special needs adversely affect the child's wellbeing within the home. Therefore, parents need to show love, security and acceptance to the child with special need. This enable the child at an early age develop cordial relationship with family members, the community and also to develop a positive self-concept.

**Physical development:** A child's physical development during infancy comprises the pre walking to walking stages. According to Scholl as cited Ayoku (1997), this stage involves; holding the head, sitting down, reaching for objects, standing and walking. A child with special need however, needs stimulation to be able to achieve the aim. However, if the child lacks motivation, the development might be delayed. Therefore, there is need to engage young children with special needs in activities that will help.

**Custodial core:** Nursery schools with adequately trained staff are good custodians of special needs children while their parents are at work. Effective service provision at the tender age of children with special needs is relevant to their health and also in the early detection of special problems the child may exhibit.

**Family intervention measures:** A number of disabilities can only become apparent when a child interacts with children of his age. A child that remains isolated will not be noticed easily. The disorders may be reversible if they are treated sufficiently at an early stage. Such disorders include visual, auditory, speech and psychological disorders. Family members assist in early detection which in-turn facilitates care and progress. Therefore, the role of the family is crucial because parents form part of the education team in early childhood education (Chantier and Generic 2007). Consequently, the parents are also expected to start early moral training, inculcating positive health habits and encourage interactions with peers and other numerous activities much as possible in order to motivate the child with special need to explore his/her environment and prepare him for transition to school.

## CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The philosophy of inclusion maintains that all children irrespective of their special needs are given the right to belong and participate in all activities within a setting. It

also specified that diversity is valued and provides different greater opportunities for learning. This is geared towards providing a natural proportion for children with special needs by creating a realistic environment for them. However for the success of inclusive early childhood education, all the members of the school community and parents of children with special needs are expected to be active participants in the education programme. In addition, necessary adaptations most importantly adapted curriculum, provisions of services based on needs rather than labels, adequate support networks, inter dependence, stakeholders and facilitators as well as collaboration of parents and teachers.

A survey study was carried out by Kim and Lim (2010) to investigate and describe teachers experiences in seeking an inclusive educational climate shaped for children with special needs in Korean EECE (Eco-Early child education) institutes. The aim of the study was to investigate teachers experiences for young children from the age of 3(three) to 6(six) years. The study revealed and benefits of Eco-Early Child Education (EECE) institutes that are practicing inclusive education to include the following.

- 1) The EECE institutes lay more emphasis and practice on outdoor activities and play. This created an accepting inclusive environment.
- 2) Co-operative relationships among young children offered betterment of the program.
- 3) Children learn to accept a handicapping condition as a unique feature of a child with special needs in an atmosphere of freedom and acceptance.
- 4) The program positively served the children programs were based on diversities.
- 5) Peers are not competitive position with each other rather they are good tempered, cooperative in activities and develop a spirit of community.
- 6) Children also become generally cooperative and open to children with special needs by assisting then in carrying out tasks.
- 7) Mainstreamed school will include curriculum provides a cost effective education.

Similarly, early childhood intervention programmes for children with special needs has always been special school programs. These programs may involve volunteers, professionals, special teachers and service providers. Okeke (2011), identified such school programmes to include home stunt or family programs, healthy and psychological services, day care programmes etc. consequently, these services are grossly inadequate and are not situated in environment that will be assessable to special needs children.

In addition, it does not foster close relationships between special needs children and their counterparts (children without special needs). Therefore the global

practice of inclusion is aimed at eliminating these exclusionary practices that affects early childhood education negatively. Therefore, inclusive practices will enable children with special needs receive early childhood interventions services within their natural environments.

## METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for this research study is the Descriptive Survey research design. This design is appropriate for the study because it seeks to investigate the effects phenomenon by using a population of a sample that represents the larger population. As posited by Awotunde, Ugodulunwa, and Ozoji (2002), this research design enables the researcher to make generalization and draw conclusions accordingly. The population of this study comprises of all pre-primary school special teachers in selected primary schools and day care centres in Plateau State. The convenience sampling technique was used to select the sample for the study. The sample of the study comprises of 28 pre-primary school special teachers in 4 selected primary schools and day care centres in Plateau State. Similarly, the criterion means score for decisions is 3.00 to take decisions relative to the research questions that guided the study. Therefore, an item with a mean of 3.00 and above was considered as an agreement to the questionnaire item while an item below 3.00 is considered a disagreement to the questionnaire item. The research questions were answered using mean while t-test was used to analyze the hypotheses.

## RESULTS/DISCUSSION

### Research questions 1

To what extent are facilities and materials adequate in nursery schools and day care centres to promote inclusive education?

As presented in the table 1, the mean response of item 1 is 2.32 which is wee below the criterion mean score of 3.00 hence, there materials inadequate materials (toys, simulation material) in your school or centre. Item 2 with a mean of 3.67 is above the criterion mean score therefore, preschool teachers agree that there is an existing curricular for early childhood education programmes in Nigeria. Item 3 with a mean response of 3.82 is also well above the criterion mean score of 3.00. This shows that respondents agree that teachers of pre-school children usually use the curriculum content to provide learning instructions. Similarly, with a mean response of 4.14 respondents strongly agree to item 4

that the integration of nursery education day care centres into the primary education structure is necessary. Item 5 has a mean response of 3.60 which is also above the criterion mean of 3.00 which accepts that with the facilities in your centre/school, children will special needs can function maximally.

As posited by Akinware, (2010), the current curriculum in use in the Nigerian pre-primary educational system rates as well as those in use in developed countries of the world but its implementation is the major problem that that hinders the programme to be rated as successful. Similarly, according to the Global Movement for Children (GMC. 2010), the early childhood care education subsector had been besieged with some challenges which include lack of basic infrastructure, uniform standard, relevant segregated data, funds and dearth of qualified teachers/caregivers.

### Research questions 2

To what extent are the IECD Objectives being met?

As indicated in the table 2, item 1 has a mean of 3.92 which indicated that pre-school teachers have received adequate training in early childhood education. Item 2 has a mean of 4.39 which accepts that it is usually challenging to provide care and education to children with special needs in your school/centre. In addition, item 3 with a meanof 1.82 is well below the mean score and is rejected. Therefore, this implies that policies on IECD are not being implemented by the Nigerian Government. Similarly, as maintained by Oguntase, (2010), implementation of the IECD curriculum is the perennial lack of political will to remain true and faithful to National policies or international agreements and conventions.

### Research questions 3

Are children with special needs enrolled in your school or centre?

In table 3, item 1 has a mean response of 2.07 which implies that the statement is rejected therefore parents of children with special needs are not often encouraged to enroll their children in school/centres. In addition, item 2 has a mean score of 3.60 therefore, children with special needs are excluded in your school/centre. In addition, a mean score of 2.00 was recorded for item 3 which is also below the mean score and is rejected. therefore the toys, teaching materials, stimulators etc are usually not adapted and modifies to suit children with special needs. For item 4, the mean reponse is 3.92and is above the mean score of 3.00 therefore respondents agree that it is appropriate to include children with special needs in regular/centres.

**Table 1:** Mean Responses Of Pre-Primary School Special Teachers For Research Question One

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	U	D	SD	MEAN
1	There are adequate materials (toys, simulation material) in your school or centre	4	2	-	12	10	2.32
2	There is an existing curriculum for early childhood education programmes in Nigeria.	13	-	10	3	2	3.67
3	Teachers of pre-school children usually use the curriculum content to provide learning instructions.	15	3	5	-	5	3.82
4	The integration of nursery education day care centres into the primary education structure is necessary	16	8	-	-	4	4.14
5	With the facilities in your centre/school, children will special needs can function maximally.	13	3	5	7	-	3.60

**Table 2:** Mean Responses Of Pre-Primary School Special Teachers For Research Question Two

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	U	D	SD	MEAN
1	You have received adequate training in early childhood education	13	10	-	-	5	3.92
2	It is usually challenging to provide care and education to children with special needs in your school/centre.	19	5	-	4	-	4.39
3	Policies on IECD are being implemented by the Nigerian Government	3	2	8	10	5	1.85

**Table 3:** Mean Responses Of Pre-Primary School Special Teachers For Research Question Three

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	U	D	SD	MEAN
1	Parents of children with special needs are often encouraged to enroll their children in school/centres	7	2	5	9	5	2.07
2	Children with special needs are excluded in your school/centre	8	7	-	6	7	3.60
3	The toys, teaching materials, stimulators etc are often adapted and modifies to suit children with special needs.	2	3	-	11	12	2.00
4	It is appropriate to include children with special needs in regular/centres.	12	10	1	2	3	3.92

### Research Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the mean score response of male and female pre-primary school special teachers.

As presented in table 4, the mean response for the male respondents is 52.62 while for female respondents is 53.93 with a mean difference of 1.31 which is insignificant. Similarly, the t- calculated is - .526 while the P-value is .604 hence, there is insufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis. Therefore we conclude that

there is no significant difference in the mean score response of male and female pre-primary school special teachers.

### CHALLENGES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

A Study conducted by Uche and Onugbo (2008) on the challenges of early needs reveals that inadequate personnel, non-accommodating learning environment, lack of appropriate curriculum and inadequate use of

**Table 4:** Mean Score Response of Male and Female Pre-Primary School Special Teachers

GROUP	N	MEAN	S	DF	T- VALUE	P- VALUE
Male	13	52.62	6.513			
				26	-.526	.604
Female	15	53.93	6.703			

instructional teaching/learning (pedagogical approaches) are amongst the problems of early childhood education. This is a great challenge to the implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria. Similarly, other challenges of early childhood education include the following:

*Inadequate funding:* Non availability of funds implementing a functional early education programme in schools is a major constraint. Funding is needed to procure special instructional materials special facilities (i.e. functional resources rooms) and other support devices needed in pre-school educational programmes for children with special needs.

*Unqualified and Inadequate Regular and Special Teachers:* teachers must be highly competent and motivated to operate in early childhood programmes. Their inability to positively provide essential services is detrimental to the earliest years of life for special needs children. Therefore, early childhood education teachers must acquire relevant experience and collaborate with professionally trained persons in the field of early childhood education in inclusive schools.

*Lack of appropriate curriculum that accommodated children with special needs:* Curricular goals must be realistic and attainable by diverse learners. Jimoh (2008) stated that the age of the special learners must be considered in developing an appropriate curriculum to suit their needs thus promoting the creative potentials of children with special needs at an early age.

*Non implementation of the Integrated Early childhood Development (IECD) policy:* There is laxity in the implementation of the objectives of Integrated Early childhood Development (IECD) as outlined the National Policy. This has been a major challenge in the providing early childhood care and education to children with and without special needs education in Nigeria.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are therefore proffered:

1. Existing kindergarten nursery and day care centres should be encouraged and equipped to accommodate children with special needs into existing structures.
2. Adequate training and retraining should be provided for IECD teachers in schools and day care centres.
3. Existing facilities as well as classroom instructional aids and materials should be adapted and modifies to suit to suit children with special learning needs to embrace inclusive education .
4. There is need to orgarnize conferences, seminars and outreach programmes for all stakeholders in early childhood education in order to provide evidence based research studies on qualitative IECD practices and special needs education in Nigeria.
5. The current curriculum should consider the early childhood education for children with special needs in Nigeria.
6. Government should ensure implementation of the National Policy on Integrated Early childhood Development (IECD) aimed at meeting the stated objectives.

## CONCLUSION

The prognosis for children with special needs is effective when it is available at an early age therefore, early childhood education is worth considering in inclusive practice. Consequently, inclusive early childhood education is inevitable in other to achieve a smooth transition process. Based on the discussion so far, the provision of quality Early Childhood Care and Education (EECE) for preschool children with special needs in Nigeria is essential. Early childhood education will

improve the Nigerian educational system. Thus, it is recommended that there is need for the development of a broad based curriculum for early childhood education, provision of adequate funding, facilities and resources (human and material) as well as qualitative early childhood education programmes for teachers (special and regular) in tertiary training institutions in Nigeria.

## REFERENCES

- Akinware, M. (2010). "Interpretation of National Policy for Intergrated Early Child Development in Nigeria" bring a paper presented at a day-workshop on implementation of ECCE in Lagos-State on July 4<sup>th</sup> 2010.
- Awotunde, P. O, Ugodulunwa, C. A. & Ozoji, E. D.(2002). *Practical steps to research in education*. Jos: Deka publications
- Ayoku, F.A (1997). Early childhood intervention by the family of visually handicapped children. *Journal of the National Council of Exceptional Children (NCEC)*. 1(2) 98 – 101.
- Bruder, M.B. (1997). *Inclusion for pre-school age children: A collaborative service model*. UNESCO. Publication.
- Chartier, A.M.& Geneix, N (2007). Pedagogical approach to early childhood education. education for all global monitoring report. UNESCO. Retrieved on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2011 from [etareportunesco.org/2007/ed/efa/mart/p1/q/rev](http://etareportunesco.org/2007/ed/efa/mart/p1/q/rev).
- Encarta (2009). Early childhood years (DVD) Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation.
- Federal Ministry of Education (2004).*National Policy on Education*. (4<sup>th</sup> Edition) Lagos: NERDC Press.
- Fowowe, S.S. (2011).Curriculum imperatives: a case for early childhood education in Nigeria. Department of Early Childhood Education, AOCOED Lagos, Nigeria.
- Global Movement for Children (GMC. 2010). Nigeria: Child education-a case for an improved system. Retrieved from <http://www/gmfc.org/en/action>.
- Jimoh, A.O.(2008). Pre-primary education. The cornerstone for functional educational system in Nigeria. *Journal of Childhood and Primary Education*. 5(1) 154 – 162.
- Kim, U. & Li. G.(2010). Inclusive education: Teachers experience in south Korean Eco-Early childhood education (EECE) Pusa National University. Korea. Retrieved from 2<sup>nd</sup> April from <http://www.suite/02/com/eco-earlychildhoodeducation/eece>.
- Oguntase, K. (2010). Early child care and education as the foundation for the holistic development of the Nigeria Society.(An inaugural Lecture, University of Lagos, 22<sup>nd</sup> December, 2010).
- Okeke, B.A. (2001). *Essentials of Special education*. Nsuka: Afro-Obis Publications.
- Uche,N.E & Onuigbo, L.N. (2008).Strategies for meeting the challenges of quality early childhood education of children with special needs *Journal of Childhood and Primary Education* 5(1) 76 – 79.
- UNICEF (2012). Early childhood care and education. Retrieved 4<sup>th</sup> march 2012 from <http://www.unicef.org/nigeria/children-1931.html>.