

CHAPTER SEVEN

NIGERIA AND ITS EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

By

Dr Inibehe E. EKANEM
Department of Early Childhood and Special Education
Faculty of Education
University of Uyo
Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

“History is to people what memory is to the individual. A people with no knowledge of their past would suffer from collective amnesia, groping blindly into the future without guideposts of precedence to shape their course. For possible educational reform, reflection on previous events and policies will assist considerably in playing any future course of action” (Fafunwa, 2018:1). In this Chapter, a range of issues are discussed which will form a contextual basis for the study and understanding of the Nigerian Educational Context. The Nigerian context and issues bordering on Nigeria’s educational system and related issues are discussed in relation to early childhood education. The history, demography, and political structures of both Nigeria and Akwa Ibom state are discussed in this chapter as well. These will help the reader to have a better understanding of contexts regarding education in Nigeria.

KEYWORD: Nigeria, Educational and System.

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the Nigerian context and issues relating to Nigeria’s educational objectives, management and administration and related issues will be discussed in relation to early childhood education. The history, demography, and political structures of both Akwa Ibom state and Nigeria are discussed as well. These discussions are relevant because they will aid the understanding of the Nigerian political and educational structures and therefore enhance our understanding of the early childhood educational policies and provisions available for children in Nigeria, particularly Akwa Ibom state. Also, issues of management and administration of early childhood education, policies and educational structure in Nigeria will be discussed. These discussions on the historical and structural educational context of Nigeria are important because as research evidence shows (Leibowitz et al, 2014; van Schalkwyk et al, 2015) the context where teachers work has significant influence upon their practice.

NIGERIA: A BRIEF HISTORY AND DEMOGRAPHY

According to The World Bank (2018), Nigeria has an estimated population of 195, 874, 740 people. Of the total population, about 39 per cent are children aged below 15 years while adults constitute about 61 per cent. Akinyemi and Isuigi-Abanihe (2014) indicate that about

70% of the population in Nigeria are rural dwellers and almost all are engaged in subsistence farming while about 30% dwell in urban areas. The population was estimated to reach 200 million by 2020 and 400 million by 2050 (UNICEF Nigeria, 2017).

According to the 2010 National Literacy Survey Report (NBC, 2010b), the country's National adult literacy rate in English Language stood at 57.9% (Male, 65.1; Female, 50.6) while the rate was 71.6% (Male, 79.3; Female 63.7) for adult literacy in any language. Also, the national youth (age 15 to 24 years) literacy rate in English language stood at 76.3% (male 81.0; female, 71.4). On the other hand, the national youth literacy rate in any language is 85.6% (male, 89.4; female, 81.6). This shows that the literacy rate for youth is higher than the literacy rate of adult population in Nigeria. Although the literacy survey did not include children 0-5 years, the report however shows that about 1.5 million children of primary school age were not attending any school.

Nigeria is described as 'a country of the young' (UNICEF Nigeria, no date b) because almost half of the population (46%) are under 15 years while the total for children under age 5 is 31.8 million, and each year at least 7 million babies are born (UNICEF Nigeria, no date b; UNICEF Nigeria, 2018). The education of every child irrespective of where they live or what their circumstances are is a basic right (UNICEF Nigeria, no date c). However, even though primary education is free and compulsory in Nigeria, about 10.5 million of the country's children aged 5-14 years are not in school with only 61 percent of 6-11 year-olds regularly attending primary school while only 35.6 percent of children aged 36-59 months receive early childhood education (UNICEF Nigeria, no date c). This situation of non-school attendance has negative consequences and implications for early childhood and primary age children's education, learning and literacy acquisition in that school attendance would have helped them benefit from literacy education which equips individuals with the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for economic self-sufficiency, poverty reduction and sustainable development in adult life (Hanemann, 2015; Riekmann, 2018).

The Federal Republic of Nigeria is a country in West Africa, bordering Niger in the north, Chad in the northeast, Cameroon in the east, and Benin in the west while the Gulf of Guinea in the Atlantic Ocean surrounds its borders in the south. The country is made up of diverse ethnic groups and is widely referred to as 'a country with extreme linguistic diversity and fragmentation' (Oyetade, 2003). There are 36 federating states in Nigeria (see Figure 2.2: Map of Nigeria) and 1 Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. Also, there are 774 local government areas across the country. There are about 527 Nigerian languages (Orekan, 2010), but Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo (see Figure 1) are the three major native languages most widely spoken by the Nigerian people (UNESCO - IBE, 2010).

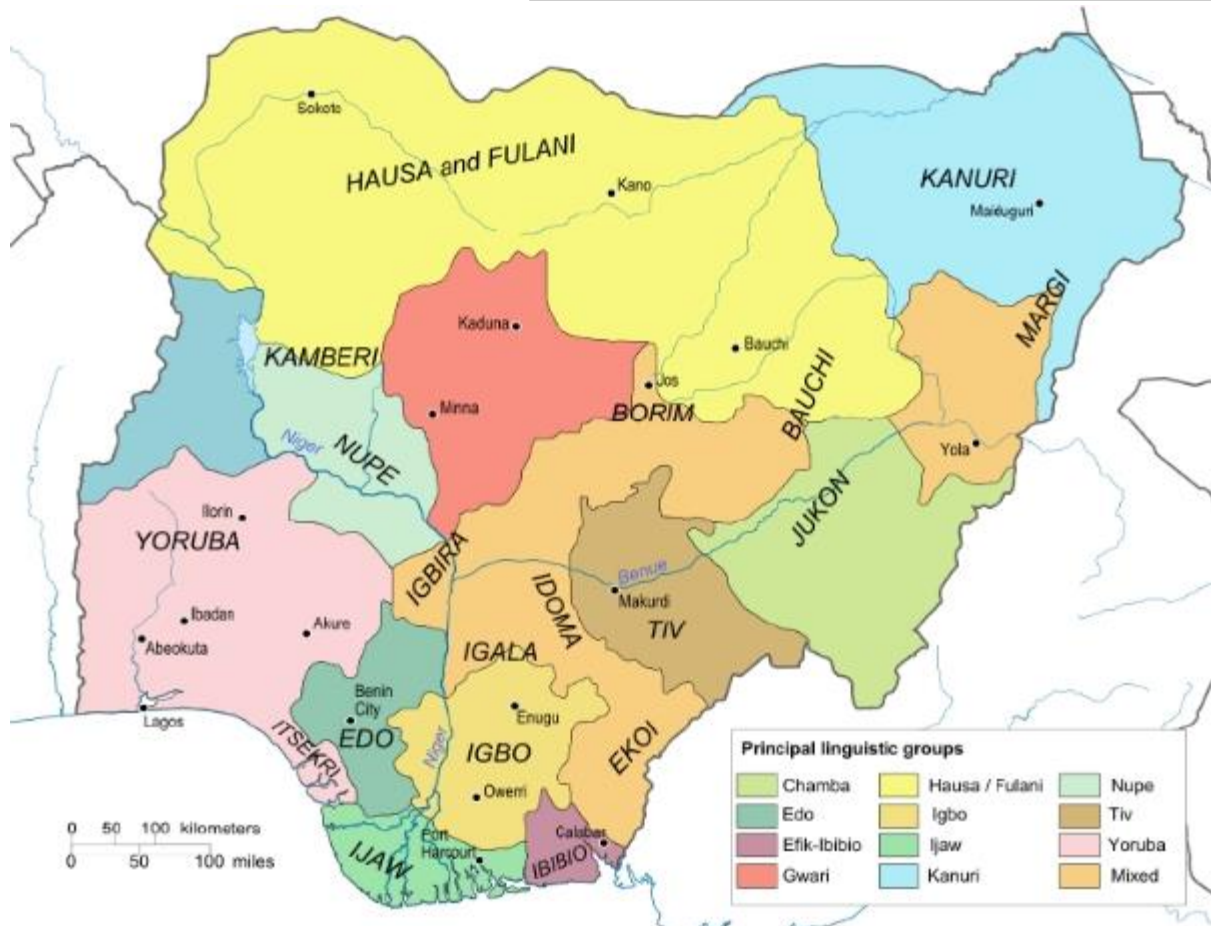


Figure1: Linguistic Map of Nigeria (Danladi, 2013: 5)

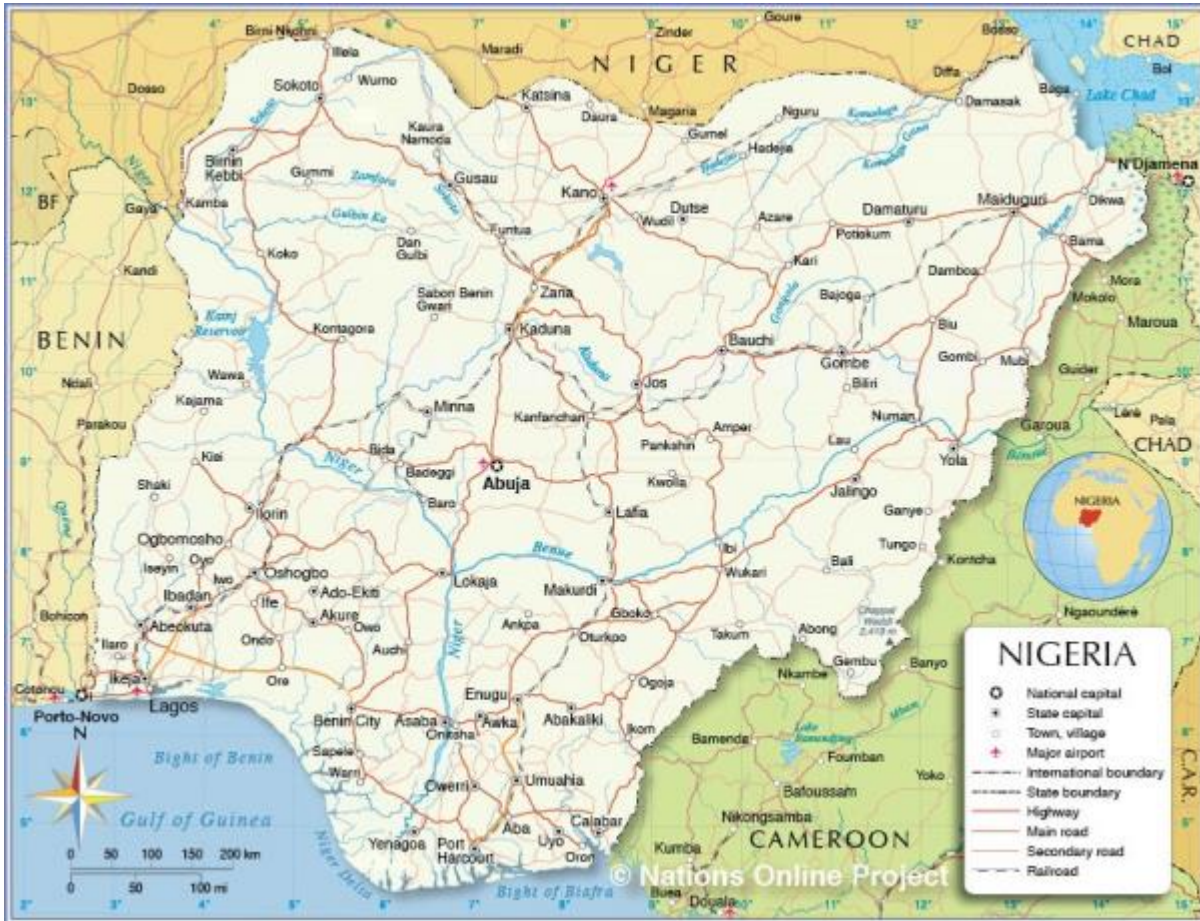


Figure 2: Map of Nigeria showing 36 states and their capital cities

Source: https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/nigeria_map.htm

The political entity called Nigeria today existed as Protectorate of Northern Nigeria and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria until Lord Fredrick Lugard amalgamated the two sections in 1914 as Nigeria. Therefore, the present-day Nigerian state was an offshoot of British political engineering and administration until it gained political independence in 1960. From 1960 to 1966, Nigeria had two different civilian regimes until the first military coup of 1966. From that year, it was not until 1976 when civilian rule returned to the country and lasted four years until the government was terminated again by another military coup which saw the military again in power until 1993. The interim civilian president appointed by the then military president lasted only three months and was overthrown again by another military regime that lasted until 1998. Following the death of the then incumbent military head of state, the years 1998 and 1999 saw the conduct of general elections and since then, the country has enjoyed democratic rule till date. It was during this present period of democratic rule commencing in 1999 that the Universal Basic Education Policy which incorporates early childhood education services was launched and implemented in 2004.

As a country, the Nigerian state has five national goals which are enshrined as the necessary foundation for the nation's educational system and these are "the building of a free and democratic society; just and egalitarian society; united, strong and self-reliant nation; a great and dynamic economy; a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens" (FGN, 2013:1). Educational provision in Nigeria therefore focuses on equipping every citizen with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values as to enable him/her to derive maximum benefits from his or her membership in society and lead a fulfilling life and contribute to the development and welfare of the community (UNESCO-IBE, 2010).

Therefore, it is through education that Nigerian citizens can be supported to acquire the basic skills needed for the development of the individual as well as the society (Abiata and Ekanem, 2018). For these goals to be achieved, the Nigerian education system should be marked by a continuous search for excellence supported by the political will for good governance and transparency (Moja, 2000) especially as it concerns how the language of instruction in early year's education is implemented. Additionally, the standard of education must be comparable at the international level by ensuring that every Nigerian child is allowed an equal opportunity of quality education in an enabling environment (UNESCO-IBE, 2010).

AKWA IBOM STATE: GEOGRAPHY, ECONOMY, AND EDUCATION

Figure 3 that follows is the political map of Akwa Ibom State showing the 31 local government areas.

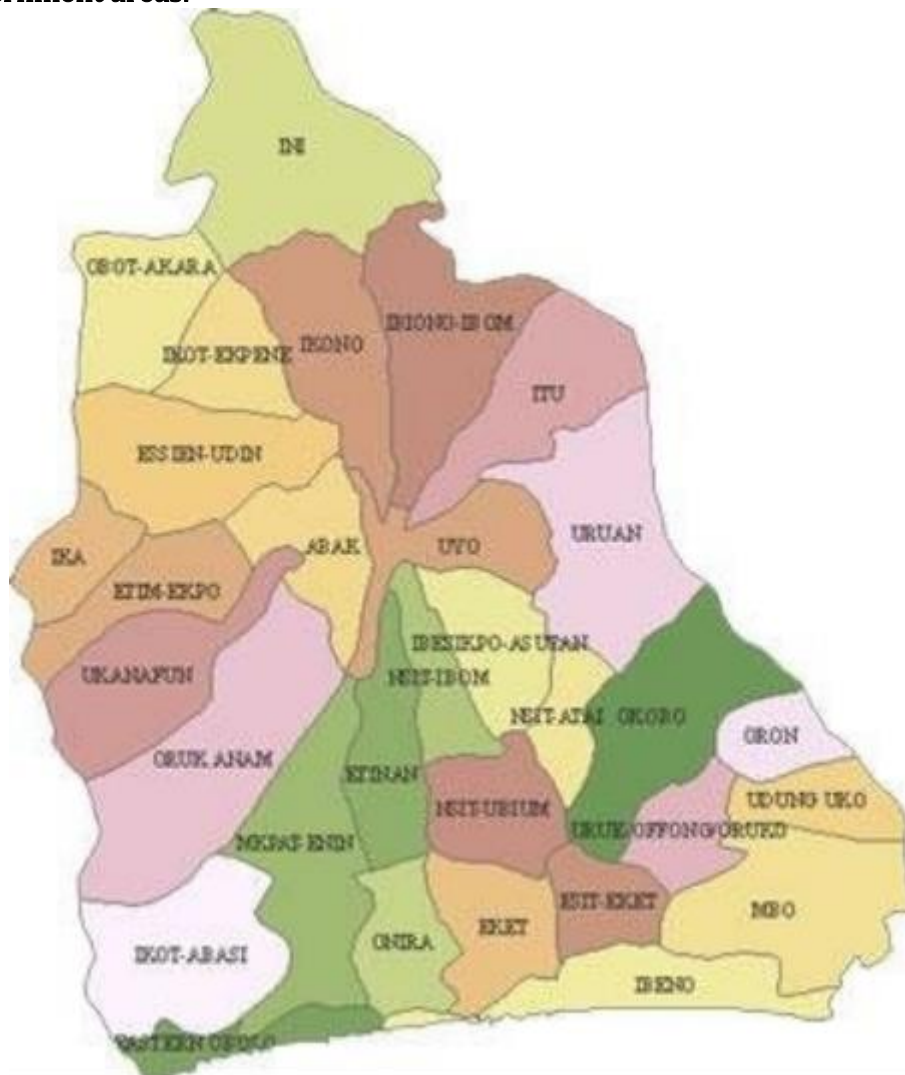


Figure 3: Map of Akwa Ibom State showing the 31 Local Government Areas (Udotong, Udoudo and Udotong, 2017: 30)

Akwa Ibom state is one of the states in Nigeria, and it is in the South -South geopolitical zone. The state was created by former and only Military president of Nigeria, General Ibrahim Babangida on 23rd September 1987. The State is bounded on the East by Rivers State, on the West by Cross River State, on the North by Abia State and on the South by the

Gulf of Guinea (Akwa Ibom State Government, AKSG, 2020).

Akwa Ibom State currently covers a total land area of about 7,249 square kilometres and it is the 10th largest state in Nigeria in terms of landmass (NBC, 2010a) with a projected population of 5, 451, 277 (2,770,590 male and 2,680,687 female) people in 2016 (akwaibomstate.gov.ng, 2020; NBC, 2010a). The State comprises 31 local government areas with Uyo as the State capital. Other major towns include Eket, Ikot Ekpene, Ikot Abasi, Oron, Abak, Itu, Etinan, Ibeno, Ikot Akpaden and Afaha Nsit.

Akwa Ibom falls within the tropical zone with a dominant vegetation of green foliage of trees and shrubs. It constitutes a major chunk of the nation's oil-palm belt. The State also has three distinct vegetation zones: the saline water swamp forest, the freshwater swamp forest and the rain forest. Akwa Ibom State has a tropical climate marked by two distinct seasons: The dry season (November – March,) and the Wet season (April – October). The wet season is usually interrupted by a short dry period in August. Average temperature of the State ranges from 23 to 31 degrees centigrade. This natural endowment of the state with an abundance of rainfall in the wet season affects children's attendance in schools especially in the rural and riverine areas where there are no good road networks with good drainage systems and effective transportation systems. Also, even in the rural upland areas, some children stay away from school to assist their parents in the farms during the planting and harvesting periods.

The main economic activities of the people are fishing (for riverine and coastal dwellers), farming (mostly for upland dwellers), trading, artisanship and 'white-collar services' (AKSG, 2020). A robust public sector also employs significant proportion of the State labour force. There are 5 public tertiary educational institutions and many secondary, primary, and early childhood centres located across the state. Out of these educational institutions, there are 1,160 early childhood education centres with 153,212 children in Akwa Ibom state (Universal Basic Education Commission, UBEC, 2018).

While Josiah and Akpan (2016) remark that Akwa Ibom state is made up of heterogenous groups of people, AKSG (2020) describes the State as comprising a culturally homogenous people with a common identity with three major dialectal groups of Ibibio, Annang and Oro. Other sub- groups in the state include Eket, Ibeno, Mbo, Okobo, Itu Mbonuso and the Andonis. Out of these nine languages, only Ibibio and Annang have been well researched and documented (Udondata, 2018). English is the language of governance and other official transactions while Ibibio, Annang and Oro are the main indigenous languages spoken by most of the people in their daily interactions in the state. It is important to note that the speakers of these indigenous languages also speak English language because of its status as "common language" which eases communication among people of diverse language backgrounds in the state. However, as Josiah and Akpan (2016) observe, it is important to mention that not all users of English language in Akwa Ibom state do so at the same level of proficiency. Hence, Eka (2000) (cited in Josiah and Akpan, 2016) classifies the varieties of English spoken in Nigeria into non-standard, basic (general), standard (or educated), and the sophisticated (or near native). As at 2010, the youth literacy rate in English language was 92.3% and 92.7% in any other language while adult literacy rate in English and any other language is 75.1% and 79.6% respectively (NBC, 2010b).

A BRIEF HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

In all human existence, no matter the location or period, people have always cared for the survival of the young child (Fawowe, 2011). Therefore, every society develops its own system for training and educating its young ones and, education for the good life has been one of the most persistent concerns of man throughout history (Fafunwa, 2018). In Nigeria,

this effort has always involved ensuring that the young ones have holistic development and harmoniously live well in the wider society (Obanya, 2011).

Fafunwa (2018) explains that before the introduction of Islamic education and western education in Africa in the 14th and 19th centuries respectively, the system of education practised by Africans was the traditional African education which had functionalism as its guiding principle. In this sense, therefore, education aimed primarily at inducting children into the society and preparing them for adult life where social responsibility, job orientation, political participation, and spiritual and moral values were emphasised (Fafunwa, 2018). In this system of education, children learnt informally from their parents, siblings, and other members of the nuclear and extended families through observation, role play, storytelling, and word of mouth (Akinbote and Alhassan, 2011). However, due to the influence of urbanisation as well as changing economic and social structure, Aligbe (2018) observes that this trend was reversed by creating two-parent working families as more women got into the labour force in search of paid jobs. This situation created the need for caregivers and other professionals and services who will take care of the children while their parents (particularly mothers) are at work away from their homes.

Whatever perspective one adopts in tracing the history of western education in Nigeria, it is imperative to note that in the 15th century, when the Portuguese, who were the first Europeans to visit some parts of the present-day Nigeria arrived, they came mainly for business and missionary activities (Akinbote and Ajayi, 2014). Their business activities took them to visit places such as Lagos, Warri, and Benin City. It was during this period that the traders met with the first Christian missionaries of the Roman Catholic Church and started the first school in the palace of Oba of Benin mainly for his sons and those of his chiefs who had already converted to Christianity (Akinbote and Ajayi, 2014). During this time, the Portuguese traders were engaged in slave trade as well with the local chiefs and this had some negative impacts on the work of the missionaries. For instance, Fafunwa (1991) states that the influence of the Catholic missionaries was almost eroded because of the negative perception that the locals had about them and their fellow countrymen traders who were engaging in slave trade. To a very large extent therefore, the Portuguese missionaries and traders were not very successful in establishing Christianity and Western education in Nigeria.

Gabriel (2015) writes that formal western type of education in Nigeria was started in 1842 by Christian Missionaries from Britain and was initially provided for the children and adult converts. During that time, church premises served as the venues for the schools, organised by missionaries, with their wives often in charge of their children and those of their members (Akinbote, 2006). A section of Sunday schools was dedicated for teaching the children in separate classes. As the number of the children increased, school days were soon spread from Sunday alone to span Monday to Friday. To these scholars (Gabriel, 2015; Akinbote, 2006; Akinbote and Alhassan 2011; Aligbe 2018), this was the beginning of early childhood education in Nigeria. However, this view is contested by Oyewumi, Alhassan and Ofoha (2010) who rather posit that ECE in Nigeria started with the British colonial masters and soon spread to their employee Nigerians who tried to imitate their masters by sending their own children too to those schools. According to these scholars, during this era (1914-1960), only the wealthy could afford to send their children for such educational provision.

After the abolition of slave trade, another set of Christian missionaries arrived in Nigeria. This second missionary effort was pioneered by Christian missionaries from English-speaking countries. Literature on history of Christianity and western education in Nigeria (Akinbote and Ajayi, 2014) indicates that Revd. Thomas Birch Freeman and other missionaries came to Badagry (in present day Lagos state) in 1842 while Henry Townsend and some other Church Missionary Society (C.M.S) missionaries arrived at Abeokuta (in

present day Ogun state) early in 1843. While Freeman sojourned to other parts of Nigeria to preach the Gospel, Mr and Mrs de Graft who also arrived Badagry with him stayed back to establish the first school there in 1842. After the school in Badagry, many other schools were established in other parts of the country particularly in the south by the various missionary bodies. For example, the CMS established two schools in Abeokuta, in 1846. Other Missions such as the Church of Scotland, the Baptist, the Catholic, the Qua Iboe, among others, established schools in Calabar, Lagos and other places in the South between 1842 and 1892.

Formal education, as was introduced to Nigeria by foreign missionaries or commercial entrepreneurs, was often designed primarily to suit not their interests but those of the providers, the foreign educators (Abiri, 2003; Kofi, 2005). At that time, the primary interest of education providers was to make the natives literate enough to be able to communicate in English and therefore assist them in local administration, understand the Gospel, and participate in trading activities. The education provided was therefore divorced from the people's realities as little or no attention was devoted to the teaching of indigenous languages (Iyamu and Ogiegbaen, 2008). Consequently, the English language was the focus of attention and served as the medium of instruction for other aspects of the curriculum. In fact, as Iyamu and Ogiegbaen (2008) argue, not only did the emphasis on the English language in the school system serve the needs of the colonial administrators, foreign traders and missionaries, it also projected the assumed superiority of the culture of the colonial masters while the lack of attention paid to indigenous languages in the curriculum undermined the sociocultural context of the curriculum, and was a deliberate attempt to dismantle the existing sociocultural infrastructure and heritage which are fundamental to human existence.

THE NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

The management and administration of education in Nigeria is patterned according to the political structure and system of government which is federalism (UNESCO-IBE, 2010). As mentioned earlier, there are 36 states and one FCT administration in Nigeria with 774 local government councils. To this end, the responsibility of management and administration of education in Nigeria is shared among the three tiers of government: The Federal government which is the central government of Nigeria with the president as head of government and his cabinet ministers; each of the 36 federating states with their respective governors as head of government and their commissioners; and the 774 local government councils across the country with their local government chairmen as heads of government and their councillors.

The federal government, through the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) formulates the basic policy of education about structure, curriculum, and school year centrally. Also, it is the responsibility of the FME to coordinate and harmonise educational policies and procedures of all the states of the Federation through the National Council on Education (NCE) (Orekan, 2010; FGN, 2013). The NCE is the highest education policy making body in the country and is chaired by the Federal Minister of Education with membership comprising the commissioners of education from each of the 36 states and the FCT. Also, at the Federal level, the Joint Consultative Committee on Education (JCCE) which comprises education officials, experts and other relevant stakeholders provide the needed framework for policy formulation. In summary, the Federal Ministry of Education has responsibility for the provision of the National Policy on Education which is a key policy document in educational management and administration in Nigeria at all levels.

At the states and in the FCT levels, the Ministry of Education and FCT Education

Authority have full responsibility for the provision of education at the Early Childhood Care Development and Education (ECCDE), Basic and Post-Basic as well as Tertiary institutions owned by the state using the guidelines, standards, and requirements of the National Policy on Education. The local government has responsibility for management of primary schools through Local Education Authority within their local government areas (FGN, 2013).

Based on the provisions of the National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004 & 2013), the administration of the education system is shared mainly amongst the Federal and State Ministries of Education as well as statutory bodies referred to as boards and commissions. For example, responsibility for the management of basic education is shared among the federal, state, and local government areas. The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) formulates the policies (drawing on the provisions of the National Policy on Education), allocates resources, and maintains standards while the states Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEB) implement the policies given by UBEC in all the states and the FCT.

As provided for by the 2004 National Policy on Education, basic education is of 9-year duration comprising 6 years of primary education and 3 years of junior secondary education. It includes adult and non-formal education programmes at primary and junior secondary education levels for adults and out of school youths (FGN, 2004:13). This definition only explains Basic education in terms of its duration and the types of programmes offered to the learners without indicating the ages of the learners. It is also observable that while ECCDE was not included as a component of Basic Education by the 2004 policy, adult and non-formal education were included.

However, in the revised National Policy on Education 2013, Basic education is defined more specifically as the education given to children aged 0-15 years. It encompasses the Early Child Care Development and Education (0-4) and 10 years of formal schooling. ECCDE is however segmented into ages 0-4, situated in day care or crèches, fully in the hands of the private sector and social development services, while ages 5-6 are within the formal education sector (FGN, 2013:4). The inclusion of ECCDE as a component of the formal education sector in Nigeria reflects the growing recognition of the importance of early year's education amongst policy makers and parents (Salami, 2016).

Unlike the 2004 Policy, the 2013 policy includes the ECCDE in Basic education and indicates the ages of the children that should be cared for at the different levels in different settings. It comprises ECCDE (0-4), 1 year of pre-primary (4-5), 6 years of primary (6-11) and 3 years of junior secondary education (12 - 14). It is also indicative from the definition of Basic Education in the 2013 policy cited here that government has abdicated the care and education of children aged 0-4 to institutions in the private sector and social services providers. But ironically, the Universal Basic Education Act 2004 includes ECCDE (preschool education) in Nigeria. The Act provides that all existing public primary schools should establish pre-primary sections to care for children of ages 3 to 5 before they start primary school at age 6.

Apart from the differences in the conceptualization of early childhood education and basic education in the two editions of the NPE, Trudell (2016) notes that there are also discrepancies in the policy provisions between the 2004 and 2013 editions of the National Policy on Education in terms of language use in education. Table 1 presents her analysis of the observed inconsistencies:

Table 1: Comparison of language provisions in 2004 NPE and 2013 NPE in relation to early years and primary education in Nigeria.

2004 NPE	2013 NPE
Section 1.10: Every child is required to learn ‘one of the three Nigerian languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba’	Section 1.10 does not appear and there is no reference in the document to Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba or ‘major Nigerian languages’
Section 1.10: ‘every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment’	Section 1.8: ‘Every child shall be taught in the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community for the first four years of basic education’ [including pre-primary and P1–P3]
Section 2.14: Pre-primary education is to be carried out in the mother tongue or ‘the language of the immediate community’	Section 2.16: For early childhood care development and education, ‘Government will ensure that the medium of instruction is principally the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community’
Section 4.19: ‘The medium of instruction in the primary school shall be the language of the environment for the first three years. During this period, English shall be taught as a subject’	Section 2.20: ‘The medium of instruction in the primary school shall be the language of the environment for the first three years in monolingual communities. During this period, English shall be taught as a subject’
From P4 to P6, ‘language of the immediate environment’ is a subject (as is French), with English as medium of instruction	Arabic added to subject languages in P4–P6

Source: Adapted from Trudell (2016)

The National Policy on Education which was first adopted in 1977 has undergone five revisions in 1981, 1998, 2004 and 2007 with the most recent version being the 2013 version. An analysis of Table 1 suggests that language provisions in the documents rather than being specifically discussed in one dedicated section, is presented in different sections in the documents. This situation may breed confusion and misinterpretation by different stakeholders particularly teachers who are the gateway to the policy implementation in the classrooms.

INTRODUCTION OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN NIGERIA

In Nigeria, formal education dates to the 19th century, that is the 1840s (Adesina and Okewole, 2014). However, Taiwo (2009) observes that even before this, English language had been in use in the country since the late 16th and early 17th centuries following the arrival and settlement of British traders and Christian missionaries. During this period, the British traders were involved in slave trade until 1807 when it was abolished. This made some freed slaves of Nigerian origin who were in various parts of the world to return to their home country. These freed slaves who had been exposed to English language, on their return to Nigeria, served as translators and interpreters to facilitate effective communication between the British colonial administrators, Christian missionaries, and the local Nigerian people (Agbatokun, 2013). During this period too, as the missionaries were cultivating the

Christian faith through the English language medium, Adesina and Okewole (2014) argue that their counterparts who were in colonial leadership positions were also using English language as a strong political administrative force, making English language the official language during the colonial era. Citing Olateju (2006) and Oyetade (2008), Agbatokun (2013) notes that the missionaries established schools in 1842, 1850 and 1868 using English language as medium of instruction to encourage more Christian converts to learn the English language. Also, during the years 1914 and 1960, Nigeria was colonised by the British and consequently, as Akindele and Adegbite (1999) and Fabunmi (2005) assert, English language was the main language of communication among the colonial administrators, Christian missionaries, Nigerian trained teachers and students in school with domestic employees of the British like cooks, stewards and clerks. During this time, the learning and use of English language was mainly through an informal system because there were very few schools which could hardly be afforded by most Nigerians. Therefore, its use was limited to interactions among the colonial masters, the missionaries and their converts and very few local business-people who had business with them. Most times, these interactions were mediated by Nigerians who were literate in the English language as interpreters and translators. This helped to develop interest in western education and English language particularly. More parents were therefore encouraged to allow their children learn the language in the hope that they will be able to secure jobs with the colonial government as clerks and interpreters or with the missionaries as catechists. Taiwo (2009) observes that during this period, English was purely seen as an instrumental language for communication between the Nigerians and the British, making the language a status marker.

HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

According to Gabriel (2015) ECCDE did not commence and was not encouraged by the Christian Missions or private individuals who established schools in any part of Nigeria. Hence, even before the introduction of Western education, members of the family, particularly mothers and siblings, had the responsibility of providing care for children from birth to six years of their early formative years of development.

During this period, the earliest schools were usually held within church premises in the church mission house. The wives of the missionaries used to gather their children and those of their members and teach as Sunday school. Over time, the number of children in such Sunday school classes increased and this eventually made the missionaries to incorporate the Sunday school lessons into the formal school system with classes held Monday to Friday as conventional schools. As Akinbote et al (2001) observe, the teaching and learning in those schools were no longer restricted to Sundays but were taking place on weekdays, and therefore Akinbote and Ajayi (2014) state that this was the origin of preschool education in Nigeria.

As time went on, more Europeans came into Nigeria as missionaries, traders, and some as members of the British colonial administration. This made it necessary for the establishment of more schools apart from the few established by the missionaries. To this end, big cities such as Lagos, Ibadan, Port Harcourt and Jos which had many European residents were among the first cities to have nursery schools in Nigeria during the colonial era (1914-1960).

During the colonial era, the colonial administration did not give much attention nor official recognition to early childhood education, and even at independence in 1960, ECE was not recognized as part of the school system until after ten years as only non-governmental organizations and private individuals had been actively involved in the provision of care and education of children (Gabriel, 2015). Akinbote and Ajayi (2014)

explain that the existence of infant classes/schools only commenced in 1887 following the enactment of the 1887 Ordinance (a purely colonial Nigerian Education Ordinance enacted as a result of the separation of Lagos (in present day Nigeria) and its hinterland from Gold Coast (in present day Ghana) in 1886 which provided grants for infant classes one, two and three which were part of the re-organized elementary education classes. The ages of children in these infant classes varied from six to fourteen years and children had to place their hands across their heads to touch their ears before they qualified for admission (Gabriel, 2014, cited in Gabriel, 2015). This still left children below age six out of school. In fact, the state of ECCDE in Nigeria during the colonial era could be understood by this summary by Gabriel (2015) that there was a clear neglect of ECCDE development in Nigeria during the colonial era. The author asserts that attempts were not made to legislate it or develop its curriculum and train teachers for this level of education; hence negligible efforts made by non-governmental organizations were not harnessed and monitored by government.

After independence in 1960 and up until 1976, non-governmental organizations and private individuals were largely responsible for the provision and development of ECCDE. Gabriel (2015) observes that in the first decade of independence, government did not recognize ECCDE and it was not a part of the education system. ECCDE schools were mainly established in the urban centres by non-governmental organizations and private individuals and organizations. For example, the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) a non-governmental organization established the first well known nursery school along Bernard Carr Street, Port Harcourt, Rivers State in 1961 (Gabriel, 2011). Also, Chief (Mrs.) Gladys Aduke Vaughan on 1st October 1962 and Mrs Helen Aina Eso in 1966 respectively established ECCDE schools at Ibadan (Babatunde and Babatunde, 2009). The National Policy on Education (NPE) 1977 that restructured the education system in Nigeria and its curriculum was the first government policy document that recognized ECCDE which it referred to as pre-primary education for children between the ages of three and five plus, prior to their commencement of primary school education. Since then, the NPE has undergone several revisions and still has provision for ECCDE. Tracking the timeline in historical developments in early childhood education in Nigeria, Gabriel (2015), Salami (2016) and Aligbe (2018) present some of the significant developments and policies in early childhood education and care in Nigeria covering the periods between 1977 and 2014. These significant developments include, among others, the publication of the first National Policy on Education in 1977 to the publication of policy guidelines to teachers and parents of children aged 0 to 5 years in Nigeria.

In 1977, the Federal government of Nigeria published the first edition of the National Policy on Education (NPE) which restructured the education system in Nigeria and its curriculum. The NPE outlines the philosophy, aims, objectives and national policies on education at all levels in Nigeria. This was the first Nigerian government document/law that recognized ECCDE which it referred to as pre-primary education for children between the ages of three and five, prior to their commencement of primary school at age 6. With the publication of the NPE (1977) by the Federal government, the Federal Ministry of Education was empowered to encourage private efforts in the provision of pre-primary education; provide teacher training institutions for student teachers who wanted to specialize in pre-primary education; ensure that the medium of instruction will be principally the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community; and to develop the orthography for many Nigerian languages and produce textbooks in Nigerian languages; regulate and control the operation of pre-primary education as well as ensure that the staff of pre-primary institutions are adequately trained and that essential equipment is provided; review and enforce the educational laws which relate to the establishment of nursery schools to make

sure that they are well-run and that pre-primary teachers are qualified and other academic infrastructure provided; and, make regular inspections to ensure maintenance of high standards (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1977). Although this was a commendable effort demonstrating government's commitment at improving educational provision and quality in the country, some scholars (for example, Gabriel 2015) were critical of government effort as being only regulatory rather than being participatory in the education process. This assertion was premised on the observation that despite government's intention to get involved in the establishment and supervision of education at this level, most ECE centres were still run by nongovernmental organizations and few private individuals while government only provided the supervision and operational guidelines (Gabriel, 2013; Salami, 2016). This explains why in the 1970s to 1980s, ECCDE was elitist (Gabriel 2015), and as observed before, were mainly operational in large urban cities. However, in 1987, the Federal Government, through the establishment of an ECCDE unit in the Nigerian Educational and Research Development Council (NERDC), expanded the scope of ECCDE to include children from birth to two, instead of the 3 to 5 years previously prescribed by the 1977 NPE. This gave room for wider access and participation in ECCDE programmes and services across the country.

Following this development, five pilot ECCDE centres were established by the NERDC in the first phase at Oyo, Owo, Ogun, Yamaltu/Deba and Calabar (Maduewesi, 2005) while in the second phase (1991-1995), ten centres were established in ten states. By the end of 1995, Gabriel (2015) reports that there were 1,272 ECCDE centres in Nigeria with an enrolment of 145,469 and by 1999, the number of facilities had increased to 7,379 with 400,000 children. Currently, available data show that there are 33, 214 public ECCDE facilities while the number of children (0 -5 years) enrolled stands at 49,190,476 (Universal Basic Education Commission, UBEC, 2019).

Osokoya, Atinmo, Ajayi and Sarumi (2010) argue that globally, education is viewed as a process that does not only help people to develop physically, mentally, morally, socially and technologically but also equips them with skills and knowledge which will help them to transform any economy. It is in the realisation of this benefit of education that the Nigerian government anchors her philosophy of education on the integration of all individuals to equal educational opportunities and at all levels through formal and non-formal school system. As the provision of functional education leads to an upgrading of the socio-economic conditions especially of the rural population (Osokoya, Atinmo, Ajayi and Sarumi, 2010), the establishment of the National Commission for Nomadic Education (NCNE) in 1990 (Akighir and Okpe, 2012) to look after the education of nomads and other migrant groups in Nigeria was another major development in the history of education in Nigeria. The commission had responsibility to formulate policies and guidelines on all matters relating to nomadic education in Nigeria; provide funds for research and personnel development for the improvement of nomadic education; and develop programmes on nomadic education and provide equipment, instructional materials, construction of classrooms and other facilities for nomadic education (Nafisatu and Bashir, 2010). Since its inception, the nomadic education programme has been beneficial to its users across the country. For example, Osokoya et al reports after a survey of 607 participants from six out of the 34 participating states (Nigeria has 36 states and a federal capital territory), in the nomadic and migrant fishermen education in Nigeria, that 77.1% indicated that the programme has assisted them to read with comprehension those things that affect their occupational roles. The study also reports that 77.2% indicate that the programme has enabled them to read and understand national newspapers to know what is going on in their environment. Amadi (2015) highlights the important benefits of nomadic education policy to the herdsmen and their families in that literacy in English language will help the nomads (some of whom include

children) to read and access information and also communicate with other people who do not speak their native language.

The Universal Basic Education programme (UBE), although launched in September 1999, was not implemented until 2004 when the necessary legal and operational framework were put in place by the federal government. The overall objective of the UBE programme is the provision of free, universal and compulsory basic education for every Nigerian child aged 0-15 years comprising ECCDE (0-4 years); one year pre-primary education (5 years); six years of primary education (6 -12 years) and 3 years of junior secondary education (13 -15 years). The National Policy on Education (FGN, 2013) indicates that the UBE scheme aims at developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion; providing free, compulsory, universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school age group; reducing the incidence of school drop out from the formal school system through improved relevance quality and efficiency; catering for drop outs and out of school children/adolescent through various forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education; and ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, communicative, manipulative and life skills as well as the ethical moral and civic values needed for laying the foundation for lifelong learning. Although the UBE Act of 2004 only catered for children of ages 3-5 years, the signing of the Child Rights Acts 2003 into law in 2006 highlighted the rights and status of every Nigerian child to quality care and education not minding physical disability, family or birth circumstances. Aligbe (2018) observes that only few states in Nigeria have implemented the Act due to claims that some provisions of the Act are contradictory to their cultural and religious values and beliefs. Nevertheless, with advocacy and enlightenment campaigns mounted by national and international organisations like UNICEF, some other reforms have been achieved which add up to the betterment of the care, welfare, well-being, and education of the Nigerian child. Some of these are the expansion of the scope of the UBE in 2007 to include ECCDE services in all public primary schools in the country which resulted in greater government participation and widening of access and opportunities for children's care and education in Nigeria. Other impacts of these efforts include the launching of the 2007 National Minimum Standards for Early Childhood Care Centres which provide guidelines for the various categories of facilities and operation in Early Childhood Care and Education. This document provides criteria for the supervision of ECCDE centres in the country to ensure quality assurance across the different states. Specifically, the prescribed minimum standards range from type of centre, location, ownership, steps in starting a centre, characteristics of an effective centre, conditions for closure of centre, classroom requirements, record keeping, furniture, parental/community participation, government involvement, assessment, special children, daily programmes, water and environmental sanitation, stakeholders' involvement, supervision, human resources, health care and nutrition, protection issues and stakeholders' roles (NERDC, 2007). However, this document does not address language issues which is a core element in the delivery of early childhood education programmes. Closely linked with the National Minimum standards is the 2006 National Caregivers Manual for birth-five which stipulates the roles and skills practitioners are required to possess to qualify as carers for children from birth-five.

In 2007, the federal government also launched the implementation of National Integrated Early Childhood Education Curriculum for children from birth-five years of age. Obed and Newman (2015) observe that this curriculum brings a multi-sectoral approach to early childhood education, with the aim of expanding, universalising and integrating the efforts of various sectors for effective intervention and coordination of programmes and the optimal development of children from birth to five years of age. Also, in 2014, another curriculum, One-Year Pre-Primary School Education Curriculum, was introduced to guide

the implementation of the compulsory one-year pre-primary education. Salami (2016) records this as the first attempt by the government to provide free preschool education for Nigerian children because in the past, the provision of preschool education rested in the hands of private individuals and organisations who were in a competitive market (mostly for profit making).

In 2013, The Federal Ministry of Education published the Guidelines for Implementing National Policy on Integrated Early Childhood Development in Nigeria (FME, 2013). The document provides guidelines on the provision of basic services to the child, community support for socio-cultural development, inter-sectoral collaboration and partnership, integration of ECD into Quranic schools, quality assurance, research, monitoring and evaluation, funding, and resources mobilisation. Salami (2016) asserts that an observed crucial challenge facing preschool education in Nigeria between 2007 and 2013 was the issue of the standard development expected of the children at every stage of the preschool education. Salami argues that during this period, it was noticed that many schools, in trying to impress the parents, exposed the children to academic activities meant for older children. Hence, to solve this problem, the Federal Ministry of Education, with assistance from UNICEF, published the guidelines document to provide a guide to teachers, parents and other stakeholders in providing learning experiences to children from ages 0 to 5 years plus (Shekarau, 2014).

THE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CURRICULUM IN NIGERIA

Early childhood education is widely agreed to cover the age range of children from 0 to 8 years, unifying training programmes for childcare services, kindergartens as well as for the first and second grades in primary schools (Hujala, 2008). However, this research focuses on the educational provisions available for ECCDE and pre-primary school aged children in government or public schools prior to their entering the primary school in Nigeria.

In Nigeria, ECCDE and pre-primary education aims at: effecting a smooth transition from the home to school; preparing the child for the primary level of education; providing adequate care, supervision and security for the children while their parents are at work (on the farms, in the markets, offices etc.); Inculcating social, moral norms and values; inculcating in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and the use of toys etc.; developing a sense of cooperation and team spirit; stimulating in the child good habits, including good health habits; and , teaching simple of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms etc, through play (FGN, 2004 and 2013; UNESCO-IBE, 2010). Drawing from these objectives, UNESCO-IBE, (2010) observes that the curriculum for this level of education is broad and the range of subjects offered is quite wide.

Citing Nwagbara (1999), Shoaga (2016) defines the curriculum as the sum of learning experiences acquired through a planned programme of activities whether in a formal or non-formal situation. Therefore, government perceives the curriculum document as a compulsory workplan for teachers. Hence, when planning the curriculum, the questions to consider should include the 'what', 'why', 'when', 'how', 'to whom', and 'by whom' of activities outlined (Salami, 2016). Therefore, the curriculum is believed to be the most important document for teaching because it makes teachers' and policy makers' thinking about children, growth, learning and pedagogy visible and understandable for others (Hujala, 2008). The curriculum is important to both the teachers and parents because it details the plan of work that includes the goals for children's development and learning, experiences through which the children will achieve the set goals, parents' and teachers' roles and responsibilities to help children achieve the goals and the materials that are

needed to support the implementation of the curriculum (Akinrotimi and Olowe, 2016) Consequently, the learner is considered the focus of learning and the learning experiences as the teachers and parents are guided to plan and draw up learning content and teaching methods that are appropriate for the children in their care based on the age group and individual needs of the children. Hence, since the curriculum represents all the experiences to which all learners must be exposed, the content, performance objectives, activities for both teachers and learners and evaluation guide should be provided for the teacher (UNESCO – IBE, 2010).

While curriculum is a representation of learning activities and experiences to be achieved in a year by the learners (Telu, 2016), the teachers break it down into scheme of work. The scheme of work comprises the term to term, week by week learning activities to be delivered by the teacher to the learners. It is usually, further broken down into lesson periods by the teacher in a bid to bring about specific objective(s) per lesson period. In my research, the curriculum represents all the experiences and interactions that the teacher has with the children in his/her class which add up to the learning and development of literacy skills of children.

As Hujala (2008) observes, while the value of early learning to children remains unquestionable, the curriculum and teaching methods have been burning topics of discussion everywhere in the world, including Nigeria. Literature suggests too that there is disagreement between practitioners and policy makers about how best children learn. For example, Guimaraes and McSherry (2002, 2010) observe that this disagreement centres around the distinction between the formal and informal curriculum approaches. In the formal curriculum approach, the authors argue that the teachers initiate and direct children's learning activities whereas in the informal/child-centred approach, children's learning is based on child-initiated and free-play activities. In Nigeria, the curriculum is viewed more from the formal approach where teachers dictate learning activities for the children. But in my view, in as much as the teacher provides children learning activities, the children themselves should also be given opportunities to choose what to learn especially through play activities in and outside the classroom. This will support children's development of early literacy skills, self-discipline, confidence, and the sense of responsibility needed for later years (Guimaraes and McSherry, 2002, 2010).

While some experts refer to the early years curriculum in Nigeria as being broad and offering a wide range of subjects (UNESCO-IBE, 2010), others contend that the document detailing guidelines on provision and management of pre-primary education is silent on the curriculum contents of such an institution, and therefore, the curriculum for early childhood education is at the whims and caprices of proprietors and teachers who may not be experts in that field (Shoaga, 2016). Both UNESCO-IBE (2010) and Shoaga (2016) list some of the subjects that are taught in early childhood centres in Nigeria to include English, mathematics, Nigerian languages, writing, reading rhymes, music, singing, colouring, story time, and elementary science/nature study.

Apart from the issue of the content of the curriculum, Okewole, Iluezi-Ogbedu and Osinowo (2015) posit that another aspect of concern about the ECCDE curriculum in Nigeria is the non-availability of the curriculum materials to the teachers in schools. In a review of five educational policy documents relating to Early Childhood Education in Nigeria, Salami (2016) reports that since the one-year- Pre-Primary School Education curriculum was produced in 2014, about 75% of the public school teachers in southwest part of Nigeria did not have any of the policy documents (including curriculum) to guide their activities. The author states further that, most of the time, the teachers either borrowed from the nearest private school or relied on their teaching experience to decide what to teach. Also, in a more recent study, Aligbe (2018) confirms the problem of unavailability of curriculum materials

in government owned ECCDE centres in Imo state, southeast Nigeria.

The National language policy for pre-primary and primary education on the use of the mother tongue or language of the immediate environment as a language of instruction has been in the Nigerian National Policy on Education since the very first edition in 1977 and in subsequent editions in 1981, 1998, 2004, 2006, and 2013, respectively. In the 2004 and 2013 editions of the NPE- which are the key working documents of this research- the federal government had made a commitment to: ensure that the medium of instruction is principally the mother tongue or language of the immediate environment, and to this end will; develop the orthography of many more Nigerian languages and produce textbooks in Nigerian languages. In Section 4.19e, it states that the medium of instruction in the primary school shall be the language of the environment for the first three years. During this period, English shall be taught as a school subject (FGN, 2013: 11). The National Policy recommends the use of the mother tongue or the language of the environment both for early childhood and primary education up to primary 3 (5 to 8 years old).

SUMMARY

In this Chapter, a range of issues have been discussed which will form a contextual basis for the study and understanding of the Nigerian Educational Context. The Nigerian context and issues bordering on Nigeria's educational system and related issues are discussed in relation to early childhood education. The history, demography, and political structures of both Nigeria and Akwa Ibom state are discussed in this chapter as well. These will help the reader to have a better understanding of context of regarding education in Nigeria.

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