

# INVESTIGATING THE EXTENT OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE EXISTING PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN RIVERS STATE OF NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

*Understanding the readiness of children to learn even from birth is a vital step towards exposing them to necessary learning experiences very early in life. The federal government of Nigeria having realized the importance of early childhood education stated in the national policy on education, (FGN, 2004) that pre-primary schools will be established in the existing primary schools. This however, appeared not to be in practice in many states. It is based on this that this paper investigated the extent of the establishment of pre-primary schools in the existing public primary schools in Rivers State. Out of the population of 16,452 primary school teachers in the state, stratified and random sampling techniques were used to select a total of 400 teachers from 40 schools in 10 local government areas. A researcher-structured 20-item EPSQ instrument, titled "Establishment of Pre-primary Schools Questionnaire" (EPSQ) was employed to elicit responses. Out of 400 research instruments distributed, only 368 were retrieved. Frequencies, mean rating, percentages and standard deviation were used for data analyses. The study made these findings; Rivers State government has not implemented the policy statement on pre-primary education; most of the pre-primary schools in Rivers State are privately owned; children who attended private pre-primary schools are better prepared for primary education than those who did not; and only children of educated and wealthy parents have the opportunities of attending private pre-primary schools and this makes them better prepared for basic education. Based on these findings, it was recommended that Rivers State government should bring to practice the policy statement on pre-primary education to ensure children's readiness for basic education.*

The beginning of every human venture contributes a lot to its final success or failure. It pays to have a good beginning. Pre-primary education has been discovered to be a good instrument of preventing drop-out from formal education of children all through the globe. It is widely acceptable that early childhood pre-primary education of children have a significant impact on the performance of children in basic education programme. Pre-primary education creates room for smooth transition to primary education and lays the foundation for life-long learning. It is a known fact that children of educated parents have the privileges of being prepared at home for formal education unlike the children of uneducated parents who as a result of their unpreparedness usually drop out of school. Thus, to ensure that an education system does not experience drop-outs, there is obvious need for pre-primary education for all children.

In view of the current condition of education system, it is not out of place to state that the Nigerian education system currently has a faulty beginning. This can be proven by the very fact that the policy statement on pre-primary education stated in the National Policy on Education is not yet in practice. FGN (2004:11(a)) stated that "Government shall establish pre-primary sections in existing public schools and encourage both community/private efforts in the provision of pre-primary education". Government has only succeeded in abandoning this sector of education to private school owners who provide this level of education at very exorbitant prizes and worst still, without uniform

government approved scheme or curriculum. This results to varied degrees of unpreparedness of Nigerian children for basic education. This is also contrary to what the policy stated in section 2 subsections 13(b) ‘the purpose of pre-primary education shall be to prepare the child for the primary level of education’. This implies that a situation whereby the parents are unable to provide the early childhood education for the child via private schools, the child goes to primary school unprepared. This is in fact, the case with many Nigerian children who are not privileged to have educated parents.

In a study conducted by Muhinnat, Okafor and Amali (2012), in Kwara State on the extent of governments adherence to the policy statement on pre-primary education, it was discovered that government involvement in this sector of education was in jeopardy due to the lack of government’s adherence to the policy in respect to adequate funding, infrastructural development, material and non-material resources and standard curriculum guidelines as stipulated in the policy statement. It is in this light that this paper wants to investigate the extent of government’s establishment and management of early childhood education in Rivers State.

### **Statement of Problems**

The importance of early childhood education/pre-primary education in Nigeria, has made the study on the extent of implementation of the policy statement on this level of education necessary. It is therefore important to find out if government has provided the needed funds and infrastructural resources for the establishment of pre-primary schools in various states of the federation. There may be a relationship between the governments’ establishments of pre-primary schools and the preparedness of the average Nigerian child for primary education. It appears that Pre-primary education has been left in the hands of private school owners and communities, and this may have been one of the major causes of school drop-out of children.

### **Purposes of the Study**

The purposes of this study are to;

1. Find out the extent to which Rivers State Government has implemented the policy statement on pre-primary education;
2. Determine the effect of pre-primary education on pupils’ adaptation to basic education in Rivers state?
3. Awaken Governments’ consciousness towards the establishment of pre-primary schools in public primary schools as stated in the 2004 National policy on education.
4. Determine the implications of the non-implementation of the National Policy statement on pre-primary education towards basic education in Rivers State.

### **Significance of the Study**

It is hoped that the results obtained from the study will; show whether Rivers state government has been able to put in practice the policy statement on pre-primary education as stated in the national policy on education, FGN (2004) or not. It will also make government, parents and guardians realize the need for early childhood education.

### **Research Questions**

This study was therefore designed to answer the following research questions.

- 1) What is the extent of the implementation of pre-primary education policy statement by the Rivers state government?
- 2) What effect does pre-primary education have on pupils’ basic education in Rivers State?
- 3) What are the factors militating against the establishment of pre-primary education in the existing public schools in Rivers State?
- 4) What are the implications of the non-implementation of the National policy on education statement on pre-primary education towards basic education programmes in Rivers State?

## **Review of Related Literature and Theoretical Framework**

### **The Concept of Early Childhood/ Pre-Primary Education**

Early childhood/pre-primary education programmes is defined by FRN (2004:11) as “the education given in an educational institution to children prior to their entering the primary school. It includes the crèche, the nursery and the kindergarten”. The Federal Government’s policy statement on the establishment of pre-primary education is in line with the UN declaration for Universal pre-primary and basic education.

According to Bellow, Okafor and Amadi (2012) pre-primary education covers all forms of organized and sustained centre-based activities such as pre-primary schools, kindergartens and day-centre designed to foster learning, emotional and social development in children. These programmes are generally offered to children from the age of three’. It is equally seen as set of knowledge, skills, experience and behavioural rules which provide the prerequisites for coping successfully in everyday life. Pre-primary education is the initial stage of organized instruction designed primarily to introduce very young children to a school-type environment. This stage comprises kindergarten and upon the completion of this stage, children continue their education at the next stage (primary education) (eng.urm.dk/.pre-primary-Education).

Bibi and Ali (2012) are also of the view that by age three children have turned away from babyhood and are “on the straight “ with the kindergarten and the infant school ahead of them, where they learn many essential facts about the universe, people and objects simply by playing. It is also during these pre-school years that the child undergoes distinct, though very gradual changes. He naturally leaves his babyhood completely and emerges into a natural, likeable child who is very pleasant to interact with.

Pre-primary education was fully supported during the world conference held in Jomtien Thailand in 1990 where the world community pronounced their commitment to Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and adopted rights-based approach to the provision of education in their countries. The Jomtien conference resulted in a declaration, which is known as the World Declaration on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs. The declaration had an operational framework that sets out six target dimensions against which progress towards provision of Education for all can be appraised. One of the important dimensions is one that states that there is need for the expansion of early childhood care and developmental activities, including family and community interventions, especially for poor, disadvantaged and children with disabilities. Thus, the Jomtien framework sees basic education as the level of education that starts with early children development education and extends to in-school activities.

From the fore-going it can be seen that there is a wide spread consensus on the importance of early childhood period of education in the life of any individual. This is the period when the cognitive, emotional as well as physical development of the child takes place. The child’s development depends to a large extent, on the conditions in which these years.

### **The Importance of Pre-Primary Education**

In the words of Plato (427-348BC), “ No man should bring children into the world, who is unwilling to persevere to the end in their nurture and education’. This stresses the obvious need for early childhood education. This level of education is important for toddlers because it is the building base of the child’s elementary education. It helps in laying down a sound and healthy foundations for the all-round development of the child. It helps the child to portray his/her inner skills, talents and creativity so that the child develops his/her personality. It allows a child to give vent to his/her inner desires in positive ways.

This level of education helps the child to adjust with his peers and learn to interact with outsiders. The child learns to find a life outside the home. He/she learns to be independent and learns to eat independently, sleep independently and exists independently. Pre-primary education offers the child the mental, emotional, psychological and scientific skills for growth. The child learns to adjust to his/her social environment and acquire social skills. He learns how to overcome bullies, aggressive and harsh environment without being discouraged to go to school. At this level of education, the child learns social etiquettes and good manners. He learns to work in groups with other children. The child goes on field trips, where he is taught the importance of discipline. So for the child to have a balanced personality, he needs the pre-primary education (earlychildeducationgurgaon.blogspot...).

It is at this stage that the child lays good foundation for literacy and numeracy for future learning. The child learns the official language which may be different from the mother tongue. He learns various communication skills and signs. The child learns how to hold his teacher in high esteem by listening attentively to what the teacher says. The child learns to keep his environment clean because he is taught how not to litter the environment. He learns the act concentration, especially while listening and reading his books.

Indeed, pre-primary education is a very vital level of education which every child must have. Children learn faster at this stage since their brains are not yet congested with so many other experiences. It is not a stage to be neglected in the life of any child. This is because, when children are given the chances to have this level of education, it enhances their future academic performance.

#### **Factors Militating against the Establishment of Public Pre-Primary Schools**

Poor funding has been seen as a major cause of non-implementation of pre-primary schools in the existing public primary schools as stated the education policy in the country. Supporting this view, Bellow, Okafor and Amali (2012) stated that inadequate funding; infrastructural facilities, material and non-material resources and low standard curriculum are some of the factors hindering the establishment of public pre-primary schools.

Ignorance of the importance of pre-primary education on the part of government as well as some uneducated parents and guardians is another factor that makes the government to neglect this level of education and abandon its establishment and management to private school owners. Another factor is the fact that the government has poor knowledge of what is obtainable in other countries' system of education. For instance, countries like Britain, Hong Kong and many other western countries have well established programmes for early childhood education. This is not the case in Nigeria in general and Rivers State in particular.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is hinged on John Dewey's theory, on early childhood education, Maria Montessori sensory approach to learning and Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development. John Dewey holds that "education is not a preparation for life: education is life itself". As such, children's own instincts, activities and interests should be the starting point of education. John Dewey's belief about education for young children were based on the fact that education and life are interrelated, not separate; children learn best by doing, by acting on the world, and continuity of experience is essential to growth.

Similarly, Maria Montessori, in her sensory approach to learning stated that, "early childhood education is the key to the betterment of society". This implies that when children have the opportunities of getting education early in life, they become very useful members of the society later in life.

***Investigating the Extent of the Establishment of Pre-Primary Schools in the Existing Public Primary Schools in Rivers State of Nigeria***

Jean Piaget also in his stage theory of cognitive development proposed that children play active roles in gaining knowledge of the world. Children can therefore be seen as ‘‘little scientist’ who actively construct their knowledge and understanding of the world. This obvious implies that all children should be made to be actively involved in acquiring learning experiences even from birth. They should not be neglected. They should be exposed to as many learning experiences as possible.

It is in this light that this paper stressed the need for the establishments of public pre-primary schools in Nigeria as stated in FGN (2004). All states and local governments are therefore encouraged to do so. This will to a very large extent, prevent school drop-outs. In a radio broadcast on 2013 UNESCO’s vision of education after 2015, the body asserted that Nigeria has about 10.5 million children who drop out of schools in Nigeria. This does not send a hopeful signal to the future manpower resources of the country. When a huge number of Nigerian children drop out of schools, there is the fear of having unhealthy country where illiteracy will hinder a lot of advancement and technological development.

**Methodology**

This study employed survey design. It was carried out in Rivers state. The population consists of about 16,452 primary school teachers in this state. The stratified and random sampling techniques were used to select a total of 400 teachers from 40 schools in 10 local government areas.

A researcher-structured 20 -item instrument, titled ‘‘ Establishment of Pre-primary Schools Questionnaire’’. (EPSQ) patterned after a 4 Point multiple Likert rating of strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) and strongly (SD) was employed to elicit responses. The EPSQ instrument was validated by experts in Educational Foundations and Administration. Furthermore, the Cronbach Alpha ( $r_a$ ) method was used to determine the reliability coefficient of 0.86. Out of 400 copies of (EPSQ) research instrument for data collection administered by the researcher, only 368 were retrieved, which is 92% of 100%. The statistical tools used for the analysis of data were; frequencies, percentages, mean rating and standard deviation.

**Research Question1:** What is the extent of implementation of pre-primary education policy statement by the Rivers State government?

**Table 1: Frequency, Percentage, Means Rating and Standard Deviation on the Extent of Implementation of Pre-Primary Education Policy Statement by the Rivers State Government**

S/N	Extent of Implementation	Responses N=368					Mean	SD	Decision
		SA	A	D	SD	SD			
1	Rivers State has not so far established pre-primary sections in the existing primary schools as stated in national policy on education.	253 (68.8%)	70 (19.0%)	45 (12.2%)	- (0.0)	3.57	0.70	*	
2	Most of the pre-primary schools in Rivers State are privately owned.	368 (100.0%)	- (0.0)	- (0.0)	- (0.0)	4.00	0.00	*	
3	Basic structures and infrastructural facilities for the establishment of pre-primary schools are lacking.	69 (18.3%)	299 (81.3%)	- (0.0)	- (0.0)	3.19	0.39	*	

4	No conscious effort or plan by government for the establishment of pre-primary schools in Rivers state.	253 (68.8%)	115 (31.3%)	- (0.0)	- (0.0)	3.69	0.46	*
5	There are pre-primary schools in the existing primary schools.	323 (87.8%)	45 (12.2%)	- (0.0)	- (0.0)	1.25	0.66	#
<b>Grand mean</b>						<b>3.14</b>	<b>0.44</b>	*

\* =Agree while # =Disagree

Data in table 1 shows the frequency, percentage, mean rating and standard deviation on the extent of implementation of pre-primary education policy statement by the Rivers State government to include: most of the pre-primary schools in Rivers State are privately owned ( $\bar{x} = 4.00$ ). This was followed by no conscious effort or plan by government for the establishment of pre-primary schools in Rivers state ( $\bar{x} = 3.69$ ), Rivers State has not so far established pre-primary sections in the existing primary schools as stated in national policy on education ( $\bar{x} = 3.57$ ), while the least was basic structures and infrastructural facilities for the establishment of pre-primary schools are lacking ( $\bar{x} = 3.19$ ). Although the respondents disagreed that there are pre-primary schools in the existing primary schools ( $\bar{x} = 1.25$ ) yet the grand mean score of 3.14 (above the criterion mean of 2.5) points to further acceptance of the non-implementation of pre-primary education policy statement by the Rivers State government.

**Research Question2:** What effect does pre-primary education have on pupils' adaptation to basic education in Rivers State?

**Table 2: Frequency, Percentage, Mean Rating and Standard Deviation on the Effect of Pre-Primary Education on Pupils Adaptation to Basic Education in Rivers State**

SN	Relationship	Responses N=368					Mean	SD	Decision
		SA	A	D	SD	SD			
6	Children who attended pre-primary schools are better prepared for basic education than those who did not.	229 (62.2%)	139 (37.8%)	- (0.0)	- (0.0)	3.62	0.49	*	
7	High academic readiness of children in primary schools depends so much on their exposure to early childhood education.	229 (62.2%)	69 (18.8%)	70 (19.0%)	- (0.0)	3.43	0.79	*	
8	All children excel in basic education whether they attend pre-primary education or not.	184 (50.0%)	69 (18.8%)	45 (12.2%)	70 (19.0%)	2.93	1.20	*	
9	Pupils preparedness during primary education is affected by non- exposure to early childhood education.	45 (12.2%)	253 (68.3%)	70 (19.0%)	- (0.0)	2.93	0.56	*	
10	Only children of educated and wealthy parents go to private pre-primary schools and as such perform better than children of uneducated parents.	184 (50.0%)	45 (12.2%)	70 (19.0%)	69 (18.8%)	2.93	1.20	*	
<b>Grand mean</b>						<b>3.15</b>	<b>0.63</b>	*	

\* =Agree while # =Disagree

**Investigating the Extent of the Establishment of Pre-Primary Schools in the Existing Public Primary Schools in Rivers State of Nigeria**

Data in table 2 shows the frequency, percentage, mean rating and standard deviation on the effect of pre-primary education on pupils' adaptation to basic education in Rivers State to include: children who attended pre-primary schools are better prepared for basic education than those who did not. ( $\bar{x} = 3.62$ ). This was followed by high academic readiness of children in primary schools depends so much on their exposure to early childhood education (with  $\bar{x} = 3.43$ ), while the least was that all children excel in basic education whether they attend pre-primary education or not, pupils preparedness during primary education is affected by non- exposure to early childhood education and only children of educated and wealthy parents go to private pre-primary schools and as such, perform better than children of uneducated parents (each with  $\bar{x} = 2.93$ ). Furthermore, the grand mean score of 3.15 (above the criterion mean of 2.5) is a further indication that pupils' with pre-primary education are better adapted to basic education in Rivers State.

**Research Question 3:** What are the factors militating against the establishment of pre-primary education in the existing public schools in Rivers State?

**Table 3: Frequency, Percentage, Mean Rating and Standard Deviation on the Factors Militating against the Establishment of Pre-Primary Education in the Existing Public Schools in Rivers State**

S/N	Factors	Responses N=368					Mean	SD	Decision
		SA	A	D	SD				
11	Poor funding.	299 (81.3%)	- (0.0)	- (0.0)	69 (18.8%)	3.44	1.17	*	
12	Ignorance.	184 (50.0%)	45 (12.2%)	139 (37.8%)	- (0.0)	3.12	0.93	*	
13	Poor education management.	144 (31.0%)	254 (69.0%)	- (0.0)	- (0.0)	3.31	0.46	*	
14	Poor parental awareness on the importance of pre-primary education.	- (0.0)	229 (62.2%)	139 (37.8%)	- (0.0)	2.62	0.49	*	
15	Poor knowledge of the education systems of other countries has made the government unaware of the need for early childhood education.	184 (50.0%)	45 (12.2%)	139 (37.8%)	- (0.0)	3.12	0.93	*	
<b>Grand mean</b>						<b>3.14</b>	<b>0.68</b>	*	

\* =Agree while # =Disagree

Data in table 3 shows the frequency, percentage, mean rating and standard deviation on factors militating against the establishment of pre-primary education in the existing public schools in Rivers State to include: poor funding ( $\bar{x} = 3.44$ ). This was followed by poor education management (with  $\bar{x} = 3.31$ ), ignorance and poor knowledge of the education systems of other countries has made the government unaware of the need for early childhood education ( $\bar{x} = 3.12$ ), while the least was poor parental awareness on the importance of pre-primary education ( $\bar{x} = 2.62$ ). Furthermore, the grand mean score of 3.14 (above the criterion mean of 2.5) is a further indication of these factors that militate against the establishment of pre-primary education in the existing public schools in Rivers State.

**Research Question 4:** What are the implications of the non-implementation of the National policy statement on pre-primary education towards basic education programmes in Rivers State?

**Table 4: Frequency, Percentage, Mean Rating and Standard Deviation on the Implications of the Non-Implementation of the National Policy on Pre-Primary Education towards Basic Education Programmes in Rivers State**

SN	Non-implementation	Responses N=368				Mean	SD	Decision
		SA	A	D	SD			
16	Increasing rate of pupils drop-out in primary schools.	229 (62.2%)	70 (19.0%)	69 (18.8%)	-(0.0)	3.44	0.79	*
17	Proliferations of private owned pre-primary schools.	298 (81.0%)	-(0.0)	70 (19.0%)	-(0.0)	3.62	0.79	*
18	Unpreparedness of pupils for basic education challenges.	184 (50.0%)	184 (50.0%)	-(0.0)	-(0.0)	3.50	0.50	*
19	Non-uniformity of pre-primary schools curriculum.	229 (62.2%)	69 (18.8%)	70 (19.0%)	-(0.0)	3.43	0.79	*
20	Poor acclimatization of children to the learning environments in basic education	69 (18.8%)	229 (62.2%)	70 (22.5%)	-(0.0)	3.43	0.79	*
<b>Grand mean</b>						<b>3.22</b>	<b>0.69</b>	<b>*</b>

\* =Agree while # =Disagree

Data in table 4 shows the frequency, percentage, mean rating and standard deviation on the implications of the non-implementation of the National policy statement on pre-primary education towards basic education programmes in Rivers State include: proliferations of private owned pre-primary schools ( $\bar{x}$  =3.62). This was followed by unpreparedness of pupils for basic education challenges ( $\bar{x}$  =3.50), increasing rate of pupils drop-out in primary schools ( $\bar{x}$  =3.44), while the least was non-uniformity of pre-primary schools curriculum and poor acclimatization of children to the learning environments in basic education (each with  $\bar{x}$  =3.43). Furthermore, the grand mean score of 3.22 (above the criterion mean of 2.5) is a further indication of the implications of the non-implementation of the National policy statement on pre-primary education towards basic education programmes in Rivers State.

**Conclusions**

In view of the findings of this study, the paper concludes that;

- 1) Rivers State government has not implemented the policy statement on the establishment of pre-primary schools in the existing public primary schools;
- 2) Poor funding, inadequate infrastructural facilities, ignorance of the importance of pre-primary education, poverty, and poor awareness of the educational systems of other countries by the government are some of the factors militating against the establishment of pre-primary schools in Rivers State.
- 3) Children who attend the existing private pre-primary education are better prepared for basic education.
- 4) Only children of educated and wealthy parents have the opportunities of attending the private pre-primary schools.
- 5) Pre-primary education is very important for children’s readiness for basic education.



### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings in this paper, it is therefore recommended that;

- 1) Government should as a matter of necessity establish pre-primary schools in the existing public primary schools as stated in the education policy.
- 2) When these schools are established, they should be equipped with toys pictures and many other communication and play gadgets to aid children's learning.
- 3) Teacher education programmes for the training of pre-primary education teachers should be organized to ensure that these schools do not lack capable hands to teach the children.
- 4) Funds should constantly be provided by the government to ensure that the needed infrastructural facilities are made available for the adequate management of these schools.
- 5) Privately owned pre-primary schools should be made to abide by the official curriculum and infrastructural facilities for these schools so as to maintain uniform standard.
- 6) The environment of the schools should be made very conducive for learning and forms of hostility and unfriendliness should be discouraged so that the children will not be scared of attending school.
- 7) Parents and guardians should be enlightened about the importance of pre-primary education of their children.
- 8) There should be uniform evaluation schemes across the state to determine the individual child preparedness for basic education programmes.
- 9) The new edition of the national policy on education should state the developmental objectives of pre-primary education in the curriculum framework; these should include, cognitive and language development, physical development, affective and social development and aesthetic development.
- 10) still in the new edition of the national policy, the pre-primary education objectives can be made in six learning areas; Physical fitness and health, Language, Early mathematics, Science and Technology, Self and society, Arts;
- 11) Special emphasis should be placed on developing children's basic skills, building up basic concepts and helping the development of positive values and attitudes.
- 12) Finally, there should be emphasis on knowledge, skills and attitudes so as to nurture a balanced development of children in ethical , intellectual, physical, social and aesthetic aspects. By these means, children will be prepared for life long learning.

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