

An Investigation on Development and Awareness of Quality Assurance in Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

This research study investigated the development and awareness of quality assurance in early childhood education centres in Delta State. Descriptive survey design was used for this study and the targeted populations for this study were teachers of early childhood centres. One hundred (100) teachers were sampled using simple random sampling technique. A self-designed questionnaire was used for data collection, and it was divided into two sections. Section A captured the demographic data while Section B comprised different statements for items under study. Frequency counts and percentage distribution were used to analyse the demographic data while the mean and standard deviation were used in answering the research questions. The finding revealed that private individuals are the major founders of early childhood centres, and early childhood founders are not aware of the principles guiding school establishment in Delta State. It was recommended that founders of early childhood education centres should be trained and certified. In addition, the founders of early childhood education centres should be fully aware of the principles guiding the operations of the centres.

Keywords: *quality assurance, early childhood centres, development and awareness.*

Introduction

Quality assurance is the systematic review of educational programmes and processes to maintain and improve their quality, equity and efficiency. While the design of quality assurance mechanisms (tools, processes and actors) are different across national contexts, their common objective is to improve teaching and learning – with the ultimate goal of supporting the best outcomes for learners. Quality assurance covers the mechanisms that are both external and internal to schools. External mechanisms may include national or regional school evaluations and/or large-scale student assessments. Internal mechanisms may include school self-evaluation, staff appraisal and classroom-based student assessments. Such mechanisms have different but complementary purposes. Ideally, they are part of a coherent, integrated system, with the different mechanisms supporting and reinforcing each other.

Developing the base of workers' skill in this field becomes a part of government economic development strategy. This is consequential to the socio-economic benefits accrued to the nation. There are short-term and

long-term economic benefits to taxpayers and the community if early education that meets high standards is available to all children, starting with those who are most disadvantaged. Indeed, universally available qualitative early education would benefit everyone and be the most cost-effective economic investment. High-quality early childhood education prepares young children to succeed in school and becomes better citizens; they earn more, pay more taxes, and commit fewer crimes.

The early childhood education and care industry is economically important, often much larger in terms of employees and revenues than other industries that receive considerable government attention and investment. Access to available and affordable choices of early childhood learning programmes enables working parents to fulfil their responsibilities. This kind of productive synergy can make real a clear focus on school development, providing data on aspects such as school climate and the well-being of all members of the school community, effective teaching and learning, and the impact of innovations (ET2020 Working Group, EAC, 2015).

Quality assurance is, therefore, important for accountability as well as to support ongoing development of schools and of teaching and learning. Resilient systems have

mechanisms to support and balance vertical and horizontal, internal and external accountability. Quality assurance focused on developing and supporting schools to adapt to the changing needs of learners. The focus is not just on improvement but also innovation – that is, the development or experimental testing of approaches in different contexts – to support quality, equity and efficiency. In turn, quality assurance systems may require being adapted over time to better meet the needs for learning across systems (ET2020 Working Group, EAC, 2015).

Prospects of Early Childhood Education to National Development

Early childhood education's importance to a child's early formative years is acknowledged worldwide and the ratio of early childhood educator to children has to be low to be able to provide proper care and learning experiences. Although qualitative ECE is expensive, it is important for the growth, development and the health of a child. As Uppal (2015) and Sinha (2014) stated, in Canada, high-quality early childhood education and care costs are so high that many families are not able to afford. It is more than a place for parents to leave their children when they go to work. Appropriate early experiences given to a child through quality care and educational provisions are essential to his/her development. Qualitative early

childhood education ensures a sure start for a child's development and capacity building. This capacity building is not only for the child's sake, it is also capacity building for the nation. High-quality early childhood education is a wise investment to help children who are the future citizens. Quality really matters and needs to be built into any expansion of existing options.

Qualitative early education is as important for a productive 21st-century workforce as roads or the internet; investing in it grows the economy (Calman & Tarr-Whelan, 2005). Government investment in early education brings about economic development for communities in the short run in the form of jobs, the purchase of goods and services, and a more efficient workforce. Quality early education builds an employable, educated workforce. Children who receive quality early education arrive at school ready to learn and they do better in school in the long run. They need fewer costly special education classes. They are more likely to graduate from high school with a changed orientation to create and hold jobs with higher salaries. They are less likely to be on government welfare scheme and significantly less likely to wind up as criminals in jails (Calman, & Tarr-Whelan, 2005).

The Eight Guiding Principles of Quality Assurance

1. Systems should strive over time to achieve balance and coherence across different mechanisms that have been developed to meet the demands and expectations of stakeholders working within schools and in the wider school education system.
2. Quality assurance policies should support professional learning communities to make the best use of quality assurance data for school and system development with the ultimate goal of ensuring the best learning opportunities for all learners.
3. Trust and respect between and among internal and external actors are fundamental for effective evaluation and school development.
4. Schools leaders and teachers need opportunities to take considered risks in order to enable innovation and development. Careful attention to data on the impact of innovations, including potential unintended outcomes, is essential.
5. Quality assurance systems should support the development of a common language and shared understanding among internal and external actors

that the fundamental purpose of evaluation is to support school development.

6. Networks between schools and with local and wider communities can support collective engagement. build social and intellectual capital and spark new synergies across school systems.
7. Investments in building capacity of key actors to generate, interpret and use data, are crucial.
8. Different types of data - both quantitative and qualitative and gathered over time - are necessary for a balanced understanding of school development and learner progress. These data should communicate authentic narratives of schools and provide the information necessary to support decision-making both within schools and across school systems (ET2020 Working Group, EAC, 2015).

Monitoring Practices and Quality Assurance

A similar important indicator is the extent to which compliance and quality of ECEC provision are monitored and evaluated. All countries have various central and regional-level regulations covering a broad range of aspects related to quality. Typically, EU countries monitor the following aspects related to quality such as monitoring

of curriculum and learning objectives related to children's progress, staff quality, child's development and outcomes, service quality and capacity monitoring. Monitoring the quality of ECEC provision is typically the responsibility of national public institutions or agencies, such as respective ministries (e.g. ministry of education) or inspectorates, and is funded from public sources. Monitoring is carried out by regional and local authorities in decentralized systems. The objective of monitoring is mainly for accountability purposes, to provide suggestions on how the quality of ECEC provision could be improved and to further inform policy design. Information from the monitoring exercises is also shared with parents to allow them to make informed decisions about ECEC services that are best suited for their children (OECD, 2015).

The Eurydice report (2014) emphasized that curriculum and learning objectives related to children's progress and development are set and monitored in all EU countries. These objectives are codified in official educational guidelines aimed to help settings improve their provision. The learning objectives are focused on personal, emotional and social development, as well as language and communication skills. However, as the authors noted, in around half of the EU countries, these

educational guidelines are only provided for settings for older children (three-year-olds and over), with the emphasis on the core element in provision for younger children (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014).

In all EU countries, assessment of children's progress, achievements and outcomes is conducted on a regular basis. The aim of this assessment is typically twofold: first of all, to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and learning, and secondly to identify the needs of children and potential difficulties that hamper their progress. The Eurydice report (2014) comments that in the case of older children, observations of their progress are typically provided in the format of a written record of assessment, which is typically shared with schools to enable continuity of learning and development (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014).

Service quality, including monitoring and accreditation of ECEC provision, is in place in all EU member states with the exception of Bulgaria. Despite that, the authority responsible for implementing the processes varies from the central level (in countries including Croatia, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Romania, Slovenia and parts of Belgium) to the regional or local level (Austria

and Denmark), with other EU member states having a mix of central, regional and local level accreditation processes (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014). The external evaluation of ECEC provision is similarly implemented often time at the central level. Evaluation procedures typically measure compliance with regulations, such as: health and safety and group sizes; management procedures of the ECEC centres; staff performance; and child wellbeing and learning outcomes. A few countries also involve some element of parental satisfaction feedback (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014).

Finally, all EU countries have some form of capacity-monitoring and forward-planning systems in place, typically for older children. Yet, the particular arrangements for planning and monitoring capacity in ECEC differ largely across countries and are distributed between central, regional and local levels. For instance, responsibilities for such planning and monitoring are highly centralized in Malta, whereas in Denmark and Scotland (UK) local authorities play a prominent role. In Ireland and France, independent bodies take on a prominent or central role in capacity monitoring and development (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014).

The Purpose of Quality Assurance Mechanisms

Governments are increasingly giving attention to assuring the quality of public services, including education. Schools are held accountable for helping all students to meet standards and for effective and efficient use of resources in education systems. Within the context of the European and National Quality Frameworks, systems focus on learning outcomes (defined as ‘statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do at the end of a learning process’) (Cedefop, 2014). Learning outcomes are intended to ascertain qualifications are transparent, and to support accountability (Cedefop, 2013). These mechanisms generate data on the overall performance of systems as well as the quality of schools and of the teacher workforce, as measured against learning outcomes and standards defined in National Qualification Frameworks. Ideally, a broad range of education and training stakeholders (including Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), general, Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Higher Education (HE) cooperate to ensure continuity of standards across the sectors (Cedefop, 2013). At the European level, ongoing work on quality assurance is articulated across fields in education (see also reports of the EC Working Group on ECEC, 2014 and work on the quality

of certification in VET in Cedefop, 2015).

Finally, it is pertinent to note that quality assurance is an important complement to education research and knowledge. Quality assurance mechanisms provide data on current performance and help to identify areas of success as well as areas for system and school improvement. Education research methodologies allow a much deeper view on ‘what works best for learning’ (Hattie, 2008), for whom and under what circumstances. Both quality assurance and education research support reflection on effective school development.

Reviewing Complex Quality Assurance Systems – Achieving Coherence, Adaptability and Sustainability

No single internal or external quality assurance mechanism can provide all the information needed for school accountability and development. Taken together, the different mechanisms can provide important and complementary insights on school, teacher and student performance and support evidence-based decision-making. External quality assurance mechanisms aim to provide objective, valid and reliable data on school performance. For example, school inspectors, who are not part of the school community, bring objective viewpoints to school climate, the quality of development strategies,

and teacher performance. As inspectors visit a range of schools, they also have the unique opportunity to share ideas on effective practice among schools. A recent study concludes that inspection visits, and other inspection processes, appear to have direct, immediate effects on the quality and responsiveness of school's self-evaluation processes, and therefore, school effectiveness (University of Twente, 2014). It is important for inspectorates to provide evidence that inspectors use the same criteria and standards to evaluate schools and teachers (inter-inspector reliability), ensuring that the approach is fair to all schools.

Quality and Quality Assurance in Education

Ajayi and Adegbesan (2007) state that the concern for quality has been at the core of the motivating forces for reforms in education. Fadokun (2005) attributed quality to three interrelated and interdependent strands: efficiency in the meeting of its goals, relevance to human and environmental conditions and needs, and something more" that is the exploration of new ideas, the pursuit of excellence and encouragement of creativity. With regard to education, the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) views quality from different perspectives. The first is from the internal criteria of the system such as profile expiration and the external criteria which are the fitness and relevance

of such an education to its environment.

Arikewuyo (2004) observes quality in education to be judged by both its ability to enable the students performs well in standard examinations and relevance to the needs of the students, community, and society as a whole. He finally concluded that quality serves as determination of gradations based on standard of excellence beneath which a mark of inferiority is imposed or adduced and above which grades of superiority are defined. However, quality assurance is related to quality control, but it functions in a rather proactive manner in the sense that quality control serves as series of operational techniques and activities used to ensure that requirements are met. Quality assurance goes beyond that because it extends the focus from outcomes or outputs to the process which produces them.

Similarly, quality assurance is related to accountability both of which are concerned with maximizing the effectiveness and efficiency of educational systems and services in relation to their contexts, of their missions and their stated objectives (Ajayi & Adegbesan, 2007). In his own definitions, Ehindero (2004) states that quality assurance focused on the following:

- a. Learners entry behaviours, characteristics and attributes

- including some demographic factors that can inhibitor facilitate their learning,
- b. The teacher entry qualification, values pedagogic stalls, professional preparedness, subject background, philosophical orientation, etc.,
 - c. The teaching/learning processes including the structure of the curriculum and learning environment,
 - d. The outcomes, which are defined for different levels in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes including appropriate and relevant instruments to assess these objectives.

Finally, according to Fadokun (2005), sums the definition of quality assurance in education as a programmed, an institution or a whole education system. In such case, quality assurance is all these attitudes, objectives, actions and procedures that through their existence and use, and together with quality control activities, ensure that appropriate academic standards are being maintained and enhanced in and by each programmed.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the development and awareness of quality assurance in Delta State. Specifically, this study attempted to know the major founder of early childhood education centres

and to know if the founders of early childhood education centres are aware of principles guiding school establishment. In line with this purpose, the following research questions were designed to examine the development and awareness of quality assurance in Delta State, Nigeria.

1. Who are the major founders of early childhood education centres?
2. What is the level of awareness of the founders of early childhood education centres about the principles guiding school establishment?

Method

Design

The research design adopted for this research study is descriptive survey. Aggarwal (2008) describes descriptive survey research as the gathering of information about prevailing conditions or situations for the purpose of description and interpretation. Daramola (2006) observed that the descriptive survey method enables the researcher to obtain the opinion of the representative sample of the target population. He further asserted that survey method of investigation focuses on people and their beliefs, opinions, perception and makes it easier for the situations to be described exactly as they exist.

Sample

A sample size of fifty (50) early childhood centres such as day-care, kindergarten, and nursery school were selected as the accessible population. from in Delta State using simple random sampling technique in the selection. Hundred (100) instructors, generally known as teachers were selected as respondents, two (2) each from the fifty (50) early childhood centres in the study. The researcher constructed a questionnaire and administered it to collect the data for the study.

Instruments

The instruments were validated by experts in the fields of test, measurement and evaluation and early childhood education. The experts studied the instruments through a cross-examination by peer review in relation to the objectives raised for the study. The reliability of the instrument was done through test-re-test method. Copies of the questionnaire were randomly administered on 20 participants for pilot testing in the first instance. After a period of two weeks interval the questionnaire was administered again. Then data collected in the first and second instances were correlated to ascertain the difference between the first and the second tests in order to obtain reliability co-efficient by using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) from which a co-efficient of 0.87 was obtained. The information from reliability

reliability test were utilised and the instrument were reviewed and modified accordingly before final administration.

Data Collection and Analysis

The administration of the instrument was carried out by the researcher and three volunteer research assistants who have preliminary knowledge on the content of the questionnaire, administration procedure and confidentiality of the respondents. The researcher sought permission and approval to conduct the research work from the authorities in the respective schools selected for the study. The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics. The research questions raised were analysed by using of frequency counts, percentages, mean and standard deviation. The justifications for using these statistical tools were to inform or know responses of the respondents that differ in size. The mid-point of 2.5 was adopted as the bench mark.

Results

Demographic Data of the Respondents

Table 1 indicates the demographic data of one hundred (100) respondents in the study where 81 were female and 19 were males. It also shows the age of respondents, were 18-28 years dominated with 60, 29-39 years age interval were 35, and 40 years above age interval were 5.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic Data	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	81	81
Female	19	19
Age		
18–28 years	60	60
29–39 years	35	35
40 years above	5	5
Educational Qualification		
Primary School Certificate	12	12
Secondary School Certificate	46	46
ND/NCE/Diploma	23	23
HND/BSc/B.Ed	19	19

Note: $n = 100$

Research Question 1: Who are the major founders of early childhood education centres in the Delta State, Nigeria?

This research question sought to find out the major founders of early childhood education centres. Table

2 shows that there were 100 respondents (teachers) that participated in the study and in each of the five founders listed all of them selected the agency they consider the major founder of early childhood education centres.

Table 2
Founders of Early Childhood Education Centres

No.	Founders	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1.	Government Agency	9	9
2.	Religious Agencies (Church & Mosque)	16	16
3.	Private Individual (not a certified early childhood educator)	44	44
4.	Certified Early Childhood Educator	5	5
5.	The Community (e.g. babysitting lesson)	26	26
	Total	100	100

Note: $n = 100$

In all, 9 respondents considered government agency, 16 respondents considered religious agencies, 44 respondents considered private individuals, 5 respondents considered certified early childhood educators, and 26 respondents considered the community has the major founder of early childhood education centres. It can, therefore, be deduced that private individuals are the major founders of early childhood education centres in Delta State, Nigeria.

Research Question 2: What is the level of awareness of the founders of

early childhood education centres about the principles guiding school establishment?

Based on the output in Table 3, it can be seen that founders of early childhood education centres are not aware of the principles guiding school establishment. The mean of mean of 2.42 indicates that founders of early childhood education centres are not aware of the principles guiding school establishment in Delta State. This result is justified with the average mean value of the items in Table 3 is less than 2.50 ($2.42 < 2.50$).

Table 3

Awareness of Founders of Early Childhood Education Centres of Principles Guiding School Establishment

No.	Items	M	SD
1.	Early childhood education centres are aware that early years are critical to development and wellbeing throughout life	2.10	1.08
2.	They are aware that children develop mental health within sensitive, nurturing and responsive relationships	2.44	1.15
3.	They are aware that reflective practice supports educators to understand and respond to children's emotional needs	2.10	1.08
4.	They are aware that families are organised as the most important people in children's lives	2.44	1.12
5.	They are aware that play is essential to help optimise children's wellbeing, development and learning	2.46	1.17
6.	They are aware that parenting and child development occurs within diverse range of family systems, values and beliefs	2.66	1.11
7.	They are aware that all family should have access to high-quality, affordable childcare	2.67	1.14
8.	They are aware of the importance of the environment, that the environment must be attractive to children	2.37	1.04
9.	Teachers to be employed must be aware of their duty as	2.59	1.01

10.	a Guidance of learning and not the overall decider of learning Early Childhood Education must be general and concrete and not abstract whatsoever	2.38	1.03
Mean of Means		2.42	

Note: M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation. Mean values between 0–2.49 is low level of awareness and 2.50–5.0 is high level of awareness.

Discussion

The first finding of this study revealed that the major founder of early childhood education centres are private individuals, who do not have qualifications is early childhood education. More so, the Certified Earlier Childhood Educators are discovered not to partake to a meaningful extent in the establishment of early childhood centres. Other founders of early childhood education centres were religious agencies (Church and Mosque) and communities as showed in Table 3. Ambali's (2017) study also found that Community Based Associations (CBAs) and Faith Based Organisations (FBOs) play vital roles in supporting early childhood education. Such complementary roles are premised on the fact that government alone at whatever level cannot satisfy all of the needful desires of its citizens, especially in the areas of education.

Second finding from the study revealed that the founders of early childhood education centres' awareness of the principles guiding school establishment was low as evidently showed in Table 3. Having

awareness of the principles guiding school establishment significantly contributes to ensuring quality. This is corroborated with the findings of Fasasi (2006) who reported that quality assurance is employed to ensure there is a consistent provision and utilisation of high standard resources to foster effective teaching and learning at every stage and aspect of the educational system with emphasis on improvement of overall school performance and set academic targets. In addition to the above, the finding of Babalola (2004) revealed that quality assurance ensures that inputs have positive impact on teaching-learning process, academic achievement of students before things get out of hands.

According to the European Commission (2015), school/education systems are complex and vary greatly and require quality assurance mechanisms that are embedded in them. It is believed that one model of quality assurance cannot fit all systems. Therefore, it is more appropriate to explore the role of different stakeholders and the

processes they follow at national and/or regional level. Similarly, Ajayi and Adegbesan's (2007) findings also supported the present study that quality is the total of the features of a process, product or service on its performance, in 'customers' or clients' perception of that performance. It is not just a feature of a finished product or services but involves a focus on internal processes and outputs and includes the reduction of waste and improvement or productivity.

Conclusion

The research findings imply that school founders are not certified early childhood educators and aware of the guiding principles of establishing early childhood centres. These guiding principles can enable the centres achieve holistic development in children and child-friendly environment. In addition, this study highlights the importance of quality assurance mechanisms in meeting educational standards for early childhood education. It is therefore recommended that founders of early childhood education centres should be trained and certified. In addition, the founders of early childhood education centres should be fully aware of the principles guiding the operations of the centres.

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