

## A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA AND THEIR MINIMUM OPERATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

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### Abstract

*Teacher Education in Nigeria, as part of Tertiary Education is regulated by various bodies, depending on the awarding institutions of the certificate in question. Early Childhood Teacher Education on the other hand is an integral part of Teacher Education. There is a need to take a critical look at the basic guidelines set for running these programmes. This paper reveals that there are three types of institutions running approved programmes in Early Childhood Teacher Education in Nigeria. The guidelines stipulated for operating the three variants of higher institutions in Nigeria offering approved Early Childhood Teacher Education courses. The guidelines set by the National Universities Commission, National Commission for Colleges of Education and the National Board for Technical Education were examined. This was with a view to exploring the basic requirements for setting up the programmes, making criticism of same and offering necessary input in the form of recommendation for the improvement of Teacher Education in general and Early Childhood Teacher Education specifically. It was therefore recommended that Innovation Enterprises should be further modified or upgraded to award National Certificates in Education; Colleges of Education should restructure to allow for more flexibility in admission requirements; allow for more input and flexibility by the individual institution by allowing for greater inputs as regards choice of courses to add teach and examine. Universities are also recommended to jettison the practice of fusing the course content and pedagogies of Early Childhood Education and Primary Education Studies.*

### Keywords

Early Childhood Education, Education Programs, Minimum Requirements

### Introduction

The National Policy on Education, 2013, describes Early Childhood Education as the care, protection, stimulation and learning promoted in children from age 0-4 years in a crèche or nursery and also the education given to children aged 5, before entering into the primary school

(National Policy on Education 2013). World over however, early childhood education is defined as education given to children in educational institutions within the first eight years of life. Therefore, practically in Nigeria too, early childhood education covers up to the first three years of primary education including the traditional

early years defined by the national policy on education (Akinbote, Osuji and Salawu 2014 P.5; Salami 2016 P.71).

### **Classes of Early Childhood Education Programmes available in Nigeria**

There are various types of early childhood education programmes in Nigeria. The Nigerian classification could be said to base on institution granting such certificates. In Nigeria there are three government recognized higher institutions offering early childhood education programmes, they are:

1. The Universities: they award a variety of certificates in Early Childhood Education including Bachelor's degree, Professional diploma in education, Master's degree and Doctor of Philosophy in Early Childhood Education.
2. The Colleges of Education; they award the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) however, the Colleges are also empowered to award Professional Diploma in Education (PDE) in Early Childhood Education (TRCN 2010).
3. The Innovation Enterprise Institutions (IEI); they on the other hand award National Innovation Diploma (NID) in Early Childhood Education Management (NBTE 2014). However, the qualification obtainable in these institutions (IEI) are not listed as acceptable by the teacher regulatory institutions but they are approved by the national board for technical education and indeed have education outlook and content, in terms of curriculum.

The teacher regulatory body in Nigeria (TRCN) has developed a classification model for teachers in Nigeria. The classification of the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) for the purpose of recognition and registration of holders of such certificates are as follows especially as regards early childhood education. The body classified the various qualifications acceptable for registration as a teacher in Nigeria to the following groups:

- Group A: PhD in or with education qualification.
- Group B: Master's degree in or with education.
- Group C: Bachelor's degree in or with education qualification or HND with PDGE or PDE
- Group D: NCE holders.

It should however be noted that either the post graduate diploma in education (PDGE) or professional diploma in education (PDE) serve the purpose of upgrading a non-educational qualification into an education equivalent qualification (TRCN 2008).

This review shall dwell more on the classification of early childhood programmes by awarding institution, this is for the convenience of reviewing the guidelines, as set by relevant supervisory agencies.

### **The Innovation Enterprise Institutions**

Innovation enterprise institutions are primarily technical institutions, approved by the Federal Government in 2007. They offer post-secondary education programmes leading to the award of diplomas and certificates such as the National innovation Diploma of IEIs (NID) and Higher National Diploma (HND). The

products of these institutions will have entry level employment skills to function as technicians, higher technicians/technologists, or professionals, depending on the level of training in their fields of specialization. There are presently over 158 such institutions in Nigeria as at today, 7 of which offer national innovative diploma (NID) in Early Childhood Education Management (NID) or sometimes called professional development Early Childhood Care Management (Nigeria's enterprise institutions and education 2019; National board for technical education 2007).

### **Entry Admissions Requirements into Innovation Enterprise Institutions**

The admission requirements for the programme include the five relevant credits at WASC/SSCE O/L or Equivalent (TC Grade II), including Mathematics, English Language and any other three from Arts and Social Science subjects (NBTE 2021 p.234).

The Minimum Guideline and Requirements for Running the Innovation Enterprise Institutions Diploma in Early Childhood Education, as Set by the NBTE are as follows:

The programme, Nigeria innovative diploma (NID) should run for two years for the full time and three years for the part time version; four and six semesters respectively. The philosophies and objectives of the programme should be in consonance with the goals of post-secondary vocational education. The programme is also recommended to be graded and scored as follows: 80 -100: grade A; 70-79: grade B; 60-69: C; 50-59: D; 40-49: E and 0-39 Fail. Furthermore, 1800 lecture contact hours should be realized before graduation. The students are also required to have a total of 480 hours industrial training (teaching

experience/practice for those in early childhood) per year in an early childhood center set up by the department as a requirement of accreditation, the industrial training experience should be recorded by students daily and the logbook endorsed by the industry supervisor. Two external assessors should be appointed, one to assess the academic result of the terminal class and the other should assess the industry experience of the students. Each programme is also expected to have a single classroom for a stream of 30-35 students, more class facilities shall be provided in multiples of 35 students, however temporary makeshift classes may be accepted. A staff office accommodating at most two teaching staffs each should be provided, appropriate furniture and ICT.

On staffing, four classes of staffs are recommended, they are: The teaching staffs, service staffs, technical staffs and administrative staffs. The qualification of the teaching staffs shall be a minimum of HND with requisite teaching experience. Source: NBTE 2007

### **Analysis, observations, and comments**

The following are noted and deemed to be worthy of comments and further analysis as regards the minimum guidelines for operating and awarding the national innovation diploma (NID).

1. The admission criteria for the programme
2. The approval status of the programme
3. The technological orientation of the programme
4. The requirements of teaching staff

##### 5. Prospects and career progression of holders

The admission criteria for the programme: the admission criteria for the programme is five ordinary level credits in West African examination council's examination. This criterion may be described as being too stringent and largely unrealistic. Most candidates who possess the requisite O' level qualification are likely to seek university or polytechnic admission instead of opting for admission into innovation enterprises.

It is worthy of note that, the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria does not regard a diploma obtained in the field of education, including those awarded by the government approved innovation institutes, as a pre-requisite qualification for registration (to practice as a teacher) neither does the body view the awarding institutions (innovation institutes) as part of the recognized bodies to so do. Nowhere was the institution mentioned in any of the TRCN policy documents available to the public as being capable of producing qualified teachers, who could be registered. The body regards NCE as the basic qualification for registration as a teacher in Nigeria. Furthermore, the holders of the certificate are not eligible to proceed with the PDE certificate and thus eligible to practice as teachers and get registered as such. Invariably holders of the certificates may be stranded and not officially recognized as teachers.

The program's minimum standard and guideline for operations are highly biased towards technical education rather than Early Childhood Education in outlook. The objectives of setting up the innovation institutions, shows they are technologically incline with education related courses as afterthought. For all the objectives

stated by the NBTE for setting up innovation institutions none are related to the goals of education as a field or Early Childhood Education as a sub-field. For instance, the item 9 of the objectives of setting up the innovation institutions state thus: "Contribute technology, capital, industry expertise in TVET" (NBTE P.5) this objective just like others from the document, display that the aim for setting up the innovation institutions is for technical and vocational education fulfilment. However, the guideline for executing the Early Childhood component in the institution has very similar goals and objectives with the NCE Early Childhood Education programme. The goals for setting up the programme (ECE) in the Innovation Institutions was listed as; "concerned with the care and education of children aged 0 – 6 year or just before the age of formal schooling that teachers and educators must know before they embark on Early Childhood Care Management" (NBTE 2014; P.4).

The requirements for teaching staffs: according to the guideline setting up the program include that "a lecturer should possess a minimum of a good HND/honors degree or equivalent professional qualification and a minimum of 4 years cognate experience" (NBTE 2007). At no other time did the guideline specify a qualification in education in general and or Early Childhood Education specifically as a criterion for being eligible to teach under the programme. One wonders how possible it is, for a holder of Higher National Diploma (HND) in technology or other fields of endeavor to produce holders of certificates or diplomas in Early Childhood Education.

The prospects and career progression of holders: one wonders the available employment prospects

and career progression of holders of the NID certificate. As at now there are no higher institutions offering Early Childhood Education at degree level who officially list admission requirements to include an NID. One wonders where the holders of such certificates are likely to further their educational endeavors, especially in early childhood education.

Apart from these observations, the guidelines for setting up the early childhood programmes in innovation institutions seems workable and realistic. For most of the courses are identical to courses offered in early childhood programmes of sister higher institutions.

### **The College of Education**

The College of Education is an academic institution which runs a three-year sub-degree program. It is the minimum qualification needed to be registered as a teacher in Nigeria. Colleges of education started awarding independent Nigeria certificate in education (NCE) in the year 1990 after the national commission for colleges of education was established in the year 1989 (NCCE 2012; TRCN 2010). There are over 152 government approved colleges of education, as at now, comprising 27 federal, 54 states and 82 private colleges of education in Nigeria.

### **Entry/ admission qualification**

The entry requirement as listed include credit passes at the West African Examination Council (W.a.e.c) or equivalent examination in English, Mathematics and three other relevant subjects (Jamb 2021 p. 1037).

The minimum guideline and requirements for running the Nigeria Certificate in Education Colleges of Education are as follows.

The programmes shall be a double major course, meaning it shall

not be combined with any other subject/ combination. The guideline also states that a demonstration center (pre-school) should be established under the control of the department, the center should as well serve as practicum center for the students. The center should have a teacher/ children ratio of 1:10 for children under 3years and 1:20 for children 3 years and above. A playground is required as a condition for the programme, also the teaching practice for the department is directed to take place in pre-schools. The center is recommended to be populated with caregiver and teachers with requisite academic qualification (NCE) and they are not to be below 21 years. The Early Childhood center is also recommended to run the approved NERDC curriculum. The center is to have developmentally appropriate and stimulating play materials for the children's use, some of which were specified and mentioned in the guide. The dimension of the classroom for the children was also specified, as would cater for 10-15 children at a time. The ventilation, illumination, and other specific conditions of the ECD center were also enumerated by the guideline. Play materials in the playing ground and also the records and furniture specifications are also mentioned for the ECD center. The operation hours, environment and every other detail of the center were also recommended in the guide (NCCE 2012).

Furthermore, the teaching staff policy guideline stipulates a minimum of 8 lecturers for the takeoff of the programme, one each specializing in music education, science education, language education and ICT. There should be at least six others who are specialists in early childhood education. Master's degree is pegged as the minimum qualification for lecturing in the programme. The position of head of the department is

also recommended to be held by a specialist in early childhood education. A separate office accommodation is recommended for each academic staff, furnished, and equipped with modern office requirements. The guideline stipulates those lectures should teach the students using students' centred mode of teaching like storytelling, demonstration method, play way method amongst other child centered methods. Teaching observation and practicum is said to be important courses for the students. 118 credits units of courses is required for graduation in the programme. A semester long teaching practice is recommended in first semester of year three.

### **Analysis, observations and comments**

The following are noted and deemed worthy of comments and further analysis as regards the minimum guidelines for operating and awarding the Nigeria certificate in education in Early Childhood Education. The comments would be discussed under the following headings:

1. The admissions requirements
2. The detailed nature of the guidelines
3. The non-provision of teacher/student ratio

The requirements for admission into the early childhood education department of the colleges of education stipulates 5 ordinary level credits in Mathematics English and any other relevant three subjects (Jamb 2021). This requirement may be described as too stringent. This may partly account for decline in students' patronage of the colleges of education in recent times. Also, this may also be partly responsible for the un-official but common practice

of admitting students with deficiency in ordinary level examination, with a condition that such students remedy the deficiency before their NCE results are issued. Some institutions even make such conditions "official" by asking students to sign undertaking to remedy their deficiency while still studying for their NCE. It may be better for these institutions to stick to the former three credits in relevant subjects to be combined as teaching subjects in the NCE program, which may be sustainable and realistic.

The guideline seems to be too detailed, leaving no room for variation or addition, unlike the university operational guidelines which are indeed minimum in nature, thus calling for input, modification, and variation by different universities. This probably make the colleges of education to take the guidelines (minimum standard) as maximum standards, and in essence implement the guidelines without any form of variations. Often times no addition or substitution of items which are provided for by the minimum standards. The guidelines may be said to contain too detailed provisions including office wares to be provided and also a list of types and actual names of toys to be provided in the early childhood center, as contained on pages 32-45 of the NCCE guidelines and minimum standards (NCCE 2012). Unlike the university guideline, the guideline issued to the colleges of education seem to detailed and elementary even though qualified academics in early childhood education should ordinarily not require such fine details and illustration.

The guideline though stated the number of academic staffs needed to set up the programme, the guideline, expectedly, however did not set the lecturer/ student ratio. All the guideline mentioned was the employment of 8

academic staffs mostly early childhood education biased (NCCE 2012). By implication, a department with eight academic staffs mostly early childhood biased should get accredited even if it has 600 student population. This may require adjustment and specification in the nearest future.

### **The University**

Universities run a variety of Early Childhood Education programmes. The review shall examine some of the guidelines required to setting up the programs. The regulating body for university programmes is the National University Commission (NUC). The NUC was set up in 1962 but it became a statutory body in 1974 (NUC 2021).

### **The bachelor's degree Programme in Early Childhood Education**

#### Admission/ entry requirements

The programme requires 5 ordinary level credits in Mathematics, English and three other subjects. The programme also admits holders of A' level and NCE with good grades (Jamb 2021).

### **Course Related Issues**

For graduation, a minimum of 150 units is prescribed. Classes of degree in Education (including early childhood education) is classified into three levels as follows: 1st Class Honor Degree with cumulative grade point average of 4.5 – 5 points. 2nd Class Honor Degree; Upper with Cumulative grade point average of 3.50 – 4.49, then 2nd Lower with cumulative grade point average of 2.40 – 3.49. 3rd Class Degree with cumulative grade point average of 1.50 – 2.39. (NUC 2007 p.8). The grade point average system shall apply to students grading. The guideline also states that continuous assessment should constitute 30-40% while the examination should

constitute 60-70% of assessment scores. External examiners are to be appointed especially for final year courses and project. Students are also required to evaluate courses taught to them. Each programme is advised by the guideline to review the content every five years. The CGPA system is advised. Teacher observation and teaching practice are also incorporated with the teaching practice taking a whole semester of the programme.

### **On Academic Staff and Library**

The guideline prescribes the lecturer mix in the department as, 20% in the Professorial cadre, 35% in the Senior Lecturer grade and 45% in the Lecturer I grade and below. The staff student ratio for the department is also advised to be 1: 30. One ratio of lecturer is to serve 30 students.

Every department is also obliged to have a good number of classes, all departments are required to have a computer room, internet facilities and resource room. A well-stocked library with relevant textual and non- textual materials is also advised (NUC 2007).

The following are noted and deemed to be worthy of comments and further analysis as regards the minimum guidelines for operating and awarding the bachelor's degree in early childhood education. The following observations are hereby raised and put forward in the areas of

### **Comments on course content and requirements for graduation**

The course content of the Primary Education and Early Childhood Education is fused and housed under same academic program. There is a need to separate the course contents of the Primary Education from that of Early Childhood Education. Although in some countries in the West, Early Childhood Education covers from birth to eight years. This

ordinarily makes Early Childhood Education cover till primary 3 in our own situation. Yet there might be need to separate the courses into two fields in the University, for there are some peculiarities and differences in the core areas of focus of the two disciplines. The University guideline for academic programme and courses which is regarded as the Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) has the course contents of the Early Childhood Education and Primary Education under same heading and section, without separating the two in anyway. However no Nigerian university, as at today, awards a combined degree of Early Childhood Education and Primary Education simultaneously to same student.

The BMAS which is the minimum criteria and standards for setting up the Early Childhood Education department merges the Primary Education and Early Childhood Education as though they are a single and same programme. The list of courses and minimum credit for graduation were stated under same heading, irrespective of the fact that the two programmes (degrees) are often awarded as separate and distinct degrees. Therefore, it follows that the BMAS should identify and treat the identical fields as though identical but separate fields of study requiring different criterium for graduation.

The BMAS also suggests five years for the degree programme by delineating the programme into five years of ten semesters. for elementary/early childhood education and or primary education.

### **Conclusion**

From the foregoing, it has become abundantly clear that all is not well with the structure and implementation of Ealy childhood

Teacher Education in Nigeria. There is a strong need for the government and stake holders in tertiary education to do a general overhaul of the criteria and conditions for operating departments or units of Early Childhood Education. This is in a view to updating the programmes to become more relevant and sensitive to modern trends and innovations. To this end the following recommendation are hereby put forward towards achieving these suggested changes.

### **Recommendations**

There is a need to enhance the curriculum of the innovation enterprises institutions, to make it make it either wholly education based in outlook or become the technological arm of the early childhood education programme.

There is also a need to upgrade the content of the innovation enterprise institutions curriculum to bring its status to parity with the minimum teaching qualification, which is the NCE. Alternatively, the Teachers Registration Council might need to list diploma in innovative enterprises as a requisite qualification, for admittance into the teaching profession in order to make the graduates of the programme employable in the field of Early Childhood Education, and also proceed beyond the ordinary diploma stage unto the degree level and beyond. Furthermore, the requirement for teaching staffs of the programme needs to be reviewed, a Higher National Diploma holder, in technology biased field, cannot possibly produce a well nurtured teacher or caregiver for the Early Childhood level of education.

Furthermore, there is also a need to review the minimum standards of the colleges of education to include the recommended student/teacher ratio. As earlier stated, the guiding



document for Colleges of Education simply states the minimum number of members of staff needed, without stating specifically the ratio of students to a teacher.

Finally, there is a need to separate the content and course description of early childhood education and primary education. Though similar in scope there are some fundamental differences in the programmes, such differences need to be acknowledged and amplified in the university BMAS.

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