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Original Research Article

Integration of Environmental and Health Safety Considerations in the Management of Early Childhood Care and Development Education in Rivers State

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Abstract: The study examined integration of environmental and health safety considerations in the management of early childhood care and development education in Rivers State. The study used the descriptive survey design. Two research questions as well as two corresponding hypotheses guided the study. The population of the study comprised of all the 620 approved private early childhood care and development education centres in Rivers State, Nigeria. The stratified random sampling technique was used to draw up a sample of 347 head teachers, representing 56% of the population (110 urban and 237 rural head teachers as well as 215 experienced and 132 inexperienced head teachers. One instrument was used for collection of data for this study; 'Integration of Safety Considerations Management of Early Childhood Care and Development Education Questionnaire. The face and content validity of the questionnaire were ensured, the reliability of the questionnaire was determined using Cronbach alpha statistics. The reliability co-efficients of 0.89 and 0.90 were obtained. Weighted criterion mean, weighted mean and standard deviation scores were used to answer the research questions while z-test was used to test hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The finding of the study shows that to a high extent environmental and health safety considerations are integrated in the management of early childhood care and development education in Rivers State. Further findings showed that there was no significant difference between means scores of the responses of teachers on the extent of integration of environmental and health safety considerations in the management of early childhood care and development education in Rivers State. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that proper evaluation of the curriculum in management of safety and health of early childhood care and development education should be taken seriously. Moreso, government and head teachers should endeavour to provide safety and health facilities in the schools for management of early childhood care and development education.

Keywords: Integration, Environmental safety, Health safety, Management, and Early Childhood Care and Development Education.

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood care and development education is one of the earliest forms of education introduced in Nigeria by the Christian Missionaries that herald the emergence of Western Education in the country. The early childhood care and development education is designed for infants between the ages of 0-5 years and prepares infants for transition from home to school. Asodike (2011) views early childhood care and development education as a system of education that applies formal and informal approaches towards developing infants in all ramifications so that they become fit for social interactions and ready for formal education at various stages. Anuna (2006) conceptualizes early childhood care and education as a type of education that is set aside in order to meet the unique needs of pre-school children and promoting their physical, mental and social growth, individually and as a group. In addition, Greenspring schools (2018) defines pre-school as a form of laboratory designed for critical observation of spontaneous behaviour of the child; a place of moulding and directing a child into desired form.Unachukwu and Ebenebe (1997) note that first five years of infants is critical and important for preparing them for adult life. They also posit that the rate of intellectual development of human

is at the point of highest acceleration during the early years between 0-5 years .Anuna (2006) summarizes that early childhood care and education is set up for the purpose of promoting good health, socialization and encouragement of curiosity, experiment, constructive skills and creative abilities. Early childhood care and development education emerged during the colonial era and its semblance 'kindergarten and infant classes were established by the colonial administration for the education of infants.

Learning at early childhood care and development education is therefore characterized with fun activities such as singing, chanting, rhythms, simulations, poems, basic counting and physical activities such as dancing, jumping and playing. The early childhood care and development education therefore is supposed to provide infants with quality care and safety while they are away from home and under the auspices of their parents. It is expected that early childhood care and development education upholds certain safety considerations in schools .Herein, safety considerations refer to factors that can influence the level of comprehensiveness of the safety of policies and programmes in early childhood care and development education (Jain & Rao, 2014). Safety considerations are guidelines for safety that determines what should be included when planning and formulating policies to guarantee safety of life and property in a school (Republic of Maldives, 2018). They are also factors that are used as criteria for evaluating the level to which safety in early childhood education centres comply with legislated statutory conditions for safety in early childhood care and development education. The government has set minimum standards for operation and management of school. The minimum standard addresses the various crucial aspects of school-safety or the various safety considerations of a school. Both staff and pupils of early childhood care and development education have safety needs. Those considerations that must be provided and managed in order to cater for the safety needs of staff and pupils is what constitute safety factors (India Today, 2018).

Some common safety considerations that exist in early childhood care and development education are the environmental and health safety considerations. The environment of a school refers to the totality of the physical space and facilities that exist in a school where learners and staff carryout their day-to-day activities in early childhood care and development education. The environment is one of the safety considerations in a school. This is because it affects the level of physical wellness or safety of members of the school. The state of the environment in a school can account for accidents, poisoning, suffocation, injuries, stress and even death. The school environment refers to the space and surroundings within the premises of a school. For most schools, there is a fence that demarcates the school from non-school environment. The school environment therefore covers all the space and facilities found within the school and which can directly or indirectly contribute to implementation of curricular and co-curricular programmes in the school. Edem (2006) describes school environment as totality of space within a school premises and all the physical facilities that exist within it. The school environment primarily focuses on the physical environment. The physical environment in a school therefore includes the space within the school compound, classrooms, offices, play grounds, car parks, convenience, libraries, laboratories, and others; as well as the equipments/facilities found in them. The management of school environment is supposed to be critical aspect of school management in early childhood care and development education (Ebelebe, 2016).

This is because the environment (itself) constitutes part of the safety factors of the school. Infants enrolled in early childhood care and development education needs safe environment because most of their day-to-day activities involve playing, walking/crawling around and picking up toys. Unachukwu and Ebenebe, (1997) note that environment can influence learner's physiologically and psychological. Since the environment has the potential to have such influence on learners, the need to consciously integrate the management of school environment into the core of management of early childhood education and care cannot be overemphasized. According to Unachukwu and Ebenebe, (1997), the factors in a school environment that can stimulate risk and hazards for learners include; the spatial design of the physical outlook of the school, location of school plant, degree of crowding in classes and playgrounds as well as the amount of light in classrooms. Kemjika (1996) maintain the view that poorly designed layouts, crowding and poor lighting result can account for environmental chaos and therefore affects student's health and wellness.

To determine the environmental safety considerations in a school, an inventory of the quantity, quality and utilization of available school physical facilities have to be conducted. Environmental safety considerations are a composition of the availability, quality and utilization of physical facilities (such as classrooms, play grounds, toys, sick bay, walk way and others) in early childhood care and development education. According to Igbinedion, (2014) physical facilities include school buildings, play grounds, recreational facilities, school plant, instructional materials, walkway and others. They also include the quality of air (whether or not there is proper ventilation and whether or not there is air pollution). An assessment of school plant planning (plan to cite school physical facilities) and design of school physical facilities in an early childhood care and development education is also a useful source of insight into the environmental safety considerations. Physical environment is a critical safety consideration because no school can exist without an environment that contains physical facilities. The environment and the physical facilities in it are used on day-to-day basis for the implementation of curricular and co-curricular programmes of early childhood care and development

education. The learners enrolled into early childhood care and development education is infants, who crawl on the floor and pick up objects that they insert almost immediately into their mouth. The physical environment is supposed to be in state that their use or disuse does not pose any form of threat to the safety of the school personnel (staff and pupils).

Health safety considerations are critical in early childhood care and development education. Health safety considerations are factors that are present in schools and if they are not properly integrated in the day-to-day process of management of the school could bring about a situation where members of the school can become sick. School health is concept that is used to describe the extent to which schools do not have risks and hazards that could negative affect the health of members of the school. Nigerian Finder (2018) explains that the first attempt towards introducing school health in Nigeria was done in 1929 and that medical services designed to cater for school children was the first known effort towards promoting school health in 1929. School health policy (SHP) was proposed and school inspectors were entrusted with the responsibility of conducting a thrice-a-year examination of the health of school children throughout their schools years (Sarkin-Kebbi & Kwashabawa 2017). In 1944, the Christian council of Nigeria called the attention of the colonial government to the problem of malnutrition amongst learners and advocated that the government should inaugurate the proposed school medical service. Fafunwa (2004), maintains that it was in 1952 that the government of the Western Nigeria released a white paper that contained a four-year plan for introduction of a school medical service for all children enrolled in schools. The policy maintains that children should be given regular medical examination and that teaching of health should be extended to the children's homes. Furthermore, that here should be a liaison between homes and medical authorities. In 1971, a school health service headed by a medical officer and assisted by other professional heads emerged at the Federal Government level in Lagos (Oku, 2016). Effort was also made towards the setting up of special clinics in some State capitals and large towns such as Kaduna, Zaria, Enugu, Benin City, Ibadan, and Jos. The special clinics were set up and saddled with the responsibility providing health care for school children that are affected by minor ailments. Although several policies have been formulated and programmes launched for school health, Oku (2016) laments that all efforts geared towards addressing the issue of school health in Nigeria seem to begin and end at policy levels. The implementation remains minimal and unsatisfactory. There are also concerns that focus have been on outside the school than inside the school.

Households and society expect the schools to keep infants safe from anything that could make them physically sick. Parents who sent their kids to school healthy expect the kids to return home healthy and not sick. Health appears to be a critical need of infants in early childhood care and development education because only a healthy infant can actively engage in curricular and co-curricular activities in early childhood care and development education. Health safety consideration in early childhood care and development education refer to the culmination of all factors in the school that can positively or negatively affect the health of infants. The hygiene status of the environment and physical facilities is one of the safety consideration in early childhood care and development education. Infants crawl and play with toys. They easily insert their hands into their mouth. They pick up objects and insert it into their mouth. This could pose a critical threat to the health of the infants. Poisonous substances, air pollution, broken or damaged school physical facilities can equally pose as negative health safety factors in schools. The safety considerations in early childhood care and development education also cover the readiness of schools to deal with unforeseen health related emergencies in schools. A child who is brought to school healthy can become suddenly sick or get injured while in school. The early childhood care and development education shouldn't find this overwhelming if they are proactive. Being proactive means that sick bay, equipped first aid box and quarantine is provided for management of sudden health challenge. Health challenge poses great risk of death of infants. Thus, it should be handled with utmost care. A quarantine centre in early childhood care and development education is usually set up so that infants that are identified to have contracted communicable diseases are (isolated without discrimination or stigmatization) until experts are invited to convey them to the hospitals. Health safety policies are also safety factors in early childhood care and development education. Schools formulate safety rules and regulations to ensure that activities of members of the school do not expose them or other members to risk of being sick or injured. Sterilising of toys, floors and other physical facilities helps to meet the safety needs of infants in early childhood care and development education.

There are worries from parents and guardians about the safety of their children school. We hear of media reports of infants being kidnapped, sexual molestation, rape of infants, and collapse of school buildings. There are concerns over the increased rate of road accidents involving children and the prevalent cases of communicable diseases among children.Therefore, this study examined integration of environmental and health safety considerations in the management of early childhood care and development education in Rivers State.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The study examined the integration of environmental and health safety considerations in the management of early childhood care and development education in Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to achieve the following;

1. Determine the extent of integration of environmental safety considerations in the management of early childhood care and development education in Rivers State.

2. Determine the extent of integration of health safety considerations in the management of early childhood care and development education in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study;

1. What is the extent of integration of environmental safety considerations in the management of early childhood care and development education in Rivers State?
2. What is the extent of integration of health safety considerations in the management of early childhood care and development education in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance guided the study;

1. There is no significant difference between means scores of the responses of experienced and inexperienced head teachers on the extent of integration of environmental safety considerations in the management of early childhood care and development education in Rivers State.
2. There is no significant difference between means scores of the responses of head teachers in urban and rural areas on the extent of integration of health safety considerations in the management of early childhood care and development education in Rivers State.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised of all the 620 approved private early childhood care and development education centres in Rivers State, Nigeria. The schools had 620 head teachers (which consist of 196 urban and 424 rural head teachers as well as 384 experienced and 236 inexperienced head teachers. The stratified random sampling technique was used to draw up a sample of 347 head teachers, representing 56% of the population (110 head teachers in urban and 237 rural areas as well as 215 experienced and 132 inexperienced head teachers. An instrument was used for collection of data for this study; 'Integration of Safety Considerations Management of Early Childhood Care and Development Education Questionnaire. The face and content validity of the questionnaire was ensured, the reliability of the questionnaire was determined using Cronbach alpha statistics. The reliability co-efficients of 0.89 and 0.90 were ascertained. Weighted criterion mean, weighted mean and standard deviation scores were used to answer the research questions while z-test was used to test hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: What is the extent of integration of environmental safety considerations in the management of early childhood care and development education in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean $(\bar{X})$ and Standard Deviation (SD) on the Responses of experienced and inexperienced Head Teachers on the extent of integration of environmental safety considerations in the management of early childhood care and development education in Rivers State

S/N	Items	Experienced Teachers $\bar{x}$	SD	Inexperienced Teachers $\bar{X}$	SD	Weighted Mean	Remark
1	The school maintains a culture of keeping the school environment constantly clean.	3.12	0.96	3.17	0.78	3.15	High Extent
2	The school hires a janitor whose job is to ensure that the school compound is clean all the time	2.91	0.94	2.92	0.84	2.91	High Extent
3	There is regular inspection of the condition of physical facilities to determine the effort that is to be made to guarantee physical facilities maintenance	2.19	0.93	2.32	1.04	2.25	Low Extent
4	Fire extinguishers are provided to guarantee safety in the event that there is an unforeseen fire outbreak	2.91	0.95	2.95	0.96	2.93	High Extent
5	There are designated muster points in the school	3.02	0.95	3.09	0.75	3.06	High Extent
	Average	**2.83**	**1.00**	**2.89**	**0.93**	**2.86**	

Scale: 1.00 – 1.79: Very Low Extent
1.80 – 2.49: Low Extent
2.50 – 3.19: High Extent
3.20 – 4.00: Very High Extent

Data on Table 1 reveals that items 1, 2, 4 and 5 had weighted mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50 and were seen as the extent of integration of environmental safety considerations in the management of early childhood care and development education in Rivers State. In summary, with an aggregate weighted mean of 2.86 which is above the criterion mean of 2.50, the respondents agreed that to high extent schools maintain a culture of keeping the school environment constantly clean, the school hires a janitor whose job is to ensure that the school compound is clean all the time, fire extinguishers are provided to guarantee safety in the event that there is an unforeseen fire outbreak and there are designated muster points in the school.

Research Question Two: What is the extent of integration of health safety considerations in the management of early childhood care and development education in Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean $(\overline{X})$ and Standard Deviation (SD) on the Responses of Headteachers in urban and rural areas on the extent of integration of health safety considerations in the management of early childhood care and development education in Rivers State

S/N	Items	Headteachers in Urban $\overline{X}$	SD	Headteachers in rural $\overline{X}$	SD	Weighted Mean	Remark
1	The school has a sick bay to provide first aid for infants who fall ill in school.	2.94	0.88	3.09	0.88	3.01	High Extent
2	The school has a trained nurse to carter for the health of the infants	2.25	1.04	2.23	1.00	2.24	Low Extent
3	The staff members are trained on how to provide first aid (like performing CPR)	3.09	0.86	3.03	0.88	3.06	High Extent
4	The infants are taught to report any feeling of illness to the caregivers	3.15	0.90	2.95	0.83	3.05	High Extent
5	The school regulates what the infants are allowed to eat in school during break hours	2.88	0.76	3.01	0.84	2.95	High Extent
6	The school maintains a culture of personal hygiene amongst members of the school	3.04	0.91	2.97	0.84	3.00	High Extent
7	The school keeps a record of the body temperature of the infants (when they arrive/leave the school)	2.88	0.79	2.95	0.81	2.90	High Extent
8	The school has a well-equipped first aid box	3.03	0.82	3.05	0.79	3.04	High Extent
9	Personal protective equipments (like hand gloves and nose masks) for members of the school	2.14	0.89	2.21	0.96	2.17	Low Extent
10	The school provides hand sanitizers for the caregivers	3.02	0.75	2.99	0.85	3.00	High Extent
	Average	**2.84**	**0.92**	**2.85**	**0.92**	**2.84**	

Data on Table 2 reveals that most of the items had weighted mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50 and were seen as the extent of integration of health safety considerations in the management of early childhood care and development education in Rivers State. In summary, with an aggregate weighted mean of 2.84 which is above the criterion mean of 2.50, the respondents agreed that to a high extent schools has a sick bay to provide first aid for infants who fall ill in school, the staff members are trained on how to provide first aid like performing Cardiac pulmonary resuscitation, the infants are taught to report any feeling of illness to the caregivers, the school regulates what the infants are allowed to eat in school during break hours, the school maintains a culture of personal hygiene amongst members of the school, the school keeps a record of the body temperature of the infants (when they arrive/leave the school), the school has a well-equipped first aid box and the school provides hand sanitizers for the caregivers.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference between means scores of the responses of experienced and inexperienced head teachers on the extent of integration of environmental safety considerations in the management of early childhood care and development education in Rivers State.

Table 3: Summary of z-test Analysis on the difference between means scores of the responses of experienced and inexperienced head teachers on the extent of integration of environmental safety considerations in the management of early childhood care and development education in Rivers State

Head Teachers	N	$\overline{X}$	SD	Level of sig	Df	z-cal	z-critical	Decision
Experienced	215	2.83	1.00	0.05	345	-0.57	1.96	Not Significant (Failed to reject Ho_2)
Inexperienced	132	2.89	0.93					

Data on the Table 3 revealed the summaries of Subject, mean, standard deviation and z-test of difference between means scores of the responses of experienced and inexperienced head teachers on the extent of integration of environmental safety considerations in the management of early childhood care and development education in Rivers State. The calculated z-test value used in testing hypothesis stood at -0.57, while z-critical value stood at 1.96 using 345 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance.

At 0.05 level of significance and 345 degrees of freedom, the calculated z-value of -0.57 is less than the z-critical value of 1.96. Hence there is no significant difference between the responses of the respondents. Consequently, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis, and concluded that there is no significant difference between means scores of the responses of experienced and less experienced head teachers on the level of integration of environmental safety considerations in the management of early childhood care and development education in Rivers State.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference between means scores of the responses of head teachers in urban and rural areas on the extent of integration of health safety consideration in the management of early childhood care and development education in Rivers State.

Table 4: Summary of z-test Analysis on the head teachers in urban and rural areas on the extent of integration of health safety considerations in the management of early childhood care and development education in Rivers State

Head Teachers	N	$\overline{X}$	SD	Level of sig	Df	z-cal	z-critical	Decision
zUrban	110	2.84	0.92					Not Significant
Rural	237	2.85	0.92	0.05	345	-0.28	1.96	(Failed to reject Ho_5)

Data on the Table 4 revealed the summaries of Subject, mean, standard deviation and z-test of difference between means scores of the responses of head teachers in urban and rural areas on the extent of integration of health safety considerations in the management of early childhood care and development education in Rivers State. The calculated z-test value used in testing hypothesis stood at -0.28, while z-critical value stood at 1.96 using 345 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance.

At 0.05 level of significance and 345 degrees of freedom, the calculated z-value of -0.28 is less than the z-critical value of 1.96. Hence there is no significant difference between the responses of the respondents. Consequently, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis, and concluded that there is no significant difference between means scores of the responses of head teachers in urban and rural areas on the extent of integration of health safety considerations in the management of early childhood care and development education in Rivers State.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study are summarized as follows:

1. Head teachers responded that to a high extent there is the integration of environmental safety considerations in the management of early childhood care and development education in Rivers State
2. Head teachers responded that to a high extent there is the integration of health safety considerations in the management of early childhood care and development education in Rivers State.
3. There is no significant difference between means scores of the responses of experienced and inexperienced head teachers on the extent of integration of environmental safety considerations in the management of early childhood care and development education in Rivers State.
4. There is no significant difference between means scores of the responses of headteachers in urban and rural ares on the extent of integration of health safety considerations in the management of early childhood care and development education in Rivers State.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Extent of integration of environmental safety considerations in the management of early childhood care and development education

From the study, the respondents agreed that school maintains a culture of keeping the school environment constantly clean, the school hires a janitor whose job is to ensure that the school compound is clean all the time, fire extinguishers are provided to guarantee safety in the event that there is an unforeseen fire outbreak and there are designated muster points in the school. Kpee (2016) examined school perimeter fencing and management of safety needs of pupils in primary schools in Choba UNIPORT community, Rivers State. The findings of the study showed that safety chances in schools with perimeter fencing were much more reduced than in schools with no perimeter fencing. Ebele, (2016) in a related empirical study, examined safety management as a tool for minimizing unsafe practices and environmental hazards in universities in Abia State .The findings of the study revealed amongst others that integrating

safety management programmes in the curriculum of every level of school system would contribute maximally in minimizing unsafe practices and environmental hazards. This assertion agrees with the findings of the present study. This implies that when safety management programmes are integrated in the curriculum of schools it will help in minimizing unsafe practices and environmental hazards. Also, management of school environment should be considered as critical aspect of school management in early childhood care and education because the environment constitutes part of the safety considerations of the school.

Extent of integration of health safety considerations in the management of early childhood care and development education

From the study, the respondents agreed that the school has a sick bay to provide first aid for infants who fall ill in school, the staff members are trained on how to provide first aid like performing Cardiac Pulmonary Resuscitation. the infants are taught to report any feeling of illness to the caregivers, the school regulates what the infants are allowed to eat in school during break hours, the school maintains a culture of personal hygiene amongst members of the school, the school keeps a record of the body temperature of the infants (when they arrive/leave the school), the school has a well-equipped first aid box and the school provides hand sanitizers for the caregivers. Mbu, (2016) investigated management of safety and health in school service delivery: Implications for curriculum development in 21st Century. The findings of the study showed that safety and health should be integrated into curriculum development in the 21st Century. In a similar study, Ukala and Nwabueze (2016), examined application of health and safety practices for quality education delivery in early childhood care and education centres in Rivers State. The findings of the study showed that safety and health management practices in early childhood and care education are very low and this can negatively affect instructional delivery. The awareness of teachers regarding health and safety practices in the school environment is very low as they do not participate in training on health and safety programmes for instructional effectiveness. This implies that learners who are in school should not be exposed to any situation that can adversely affect their health. When health safety considerations are not present in schools and are not properly integrated in the day-to-day process of management of the school, it could bring about a situation where members of the school can become sick.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study it is concluded that when safety is guaranteed in schools, avoidable risks that can pose as threat to lives and properties are not likely to occur, management of early childhood care and development education is maximized. This study has shown that to a high extent environmental and health safety considerations are integrated in the management of early childhood care and development education in Rivers State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommended the following;

1. Proper evaluation of the curriculum in management of safety and health of early childhood care and development education should be taken seriously.
2. Private school owners should endeavour to provide safety and health facilities in the schools for management of early childhood care and development education.
3. Government should integrate safety management programmes in the curriculum of teachers training as this will help in minimizing unsafe practices and environmental hazards.
4. Teachers in early childhood care and development centres should participate in training programmes to get acquainted with health and safety practices needed for school development.

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