

A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF THE KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES, AND PRACTICES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study used a qualitative design to explore the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of early childhood education (ECE), held by educators and parents in the city of Ibadan, Nigeria. The study proceeds upon the understanding that early childhood education provides the ground for the progressive lifelong development of a child. It discusses how the different stakeholders perceive, value, and put to practice ECE. The study is anchored to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory. Through in-depth interviews of ten (10) educators, and parents, this study identified more nuanced understandings of the extent of awareness on child development theories, qualification depth, and socio-cultural beliefs influencing ECE delivery and participation.

Findings show clear differences in understanding and application of ECE principles: on the part of the educators, there is some theoretical knowledge but little adaptation in the classroom, while on the part of the parents, ECE is perceived much as custodial care and not viewed as essentially developmental. Attitudes toward ECE were constructed primarily by socioeconomic realities, educational backgrounds, and exposure to information regarding child development. Practices consisted of a cocktail of traditional methods as well as irregular ones, which were associated with issues of poor training, infrastructure limitations and perceptions from society about early childhood learning. Such results were also substantiated from literature, borrowed from sub-Saharan Africa and Nigeria that shed light on systemic underinvestment, poor teacher preparation, and misconceptions by parents regarding early learning.

The study ends by recommending better professional training for educators, mass parental sensitisation, and stronger policy support for ECE implementation. Limitations cover the geographical area the study focused on and the reliance on self-reported data. Future research is recommended to include determining the dynamics of ECE across the regions of the diverse nation of Nigeria, as well as incorporating the voice of the children in future inquiries. This study foregrounds the voices of educators and parents in order to provide context-specific evidence for policy and practice toward improvement in early childhood education in Nigeria.

Keywords: Attitude, Early childhood education, Educators, Knowledge, Parents, Practices.

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1. Introduction

Beyond economic reasoning, there is a strong moral argument that each child should have a right to Early Childhood Education (ECE). ECE can minimise social inequities and raise academic attainment. It has been shown, all over the world, that the better the quality of the ECE system, the greater the cognitive development [1]. Thus, an investment in ECE pays immense dividends, most easily seen through components, such as improved performance at school, health, and productivity later on in life. However, many governments do not consider ECE as important as other priorities in

their budgets and policies. For example, the UK – a developed economy – reflects a low spending trend on pre-primary education compared to other developed economies [1]. Such a contemptuous disregard for foundational education is a consistent challenge across the world: to redeem early education from care and acknowledge it as genuine infrastructure for national development.

The importance of juxtaposing these issues against the background of Africa becomes critical as global discourses on early learning are emerging. Besides all these, the landscapes of ECE in Sub-Saharan Africa are rife with structural inequalities, coupled with low economic capacity and poorly invested public funds. Evidence globally indicates that accessible childcare and early education provide the entry points for transforming labor markets and gender equity [2]. Most countries in Africa are still yet to explore the associated potentials. The lack of cultural context and consideration in the use of externally developed curricula and pedagogy often leads to disjointed results [3]. In addition, early childhood education research in Africa remains fractured and findings seldom cohere in a singular impact on policy or classroom practice [4]. This brings an increasingly urgent calling to quest and prove a regional model that just fits local socio-cultural realities and needs for child development.

In that context, Nigeria would perhaps be the ideal case for studying the state of ECE in this region. The National Policy on Education in Nigeria makes provision for pre-primary education, but there is limited practical implementation, considering the weak infrastructural base, lack of political will, and unprepared teachers [5]. ECE centres are mostly privately owned in Nigeria, thereby creating unequal preference and application based on socioeconomic status. A few international partners, UNESCO inclusive, have ventured to support ECE enhancement through play-based curricula and teacher training - the impact has been neither so dramatic nor sustainable [6]. Minimal government supervision and lack of quality assurance around the implementation are making it ineffective, thus barring many children from access to quality Early Childhood Education. Therefore, while the Nigerian case is emblematic of broad challenges throughout the region, it is further compounded by rapid urbanisation and growing inequality.

Psychosocial conditions contribute even more to early childhood development complications. According to [7] who investigated the psychosocial and economic causes of criminal behaviour among youth in Ibadan, most often children facing adverse experiences in their childhood will be found by the researchers to have precursors for delinquency. Their results verify the importance of early intervention through ECE in breaking the cycles of abuse, neglect, and trauma. In a related study, [4] also showed that unresolved childhood traumas and peer pressure would always result in the abuse of substances among psychiatric patients, adding that childhood environments would have a long-lasting psychological effect. Therefore, these findings will also advocate for psychosocial elements in ECE programming.

Applicable above are the domestic environments, in which children are brought up, especially the behaviours and lifestyles of their parents or the caregivers involved. [8] studied the effects of parental substance abuse and criminal behaviour on education and behaviour of children in Ibadan, which showed how such negative dynamics in the home can greatly hinder participation and adjustment in school. This research confirms that all these potential benefits from ECE may not be achieved in isolation. It thus provides the tree of understanding around the collaborative ecosystem of educators, caregivers, and community structures. With rising youth vulnerability nationwide, the importance of integrating ECE into larger child protection and family support systems have become even more crucial, especially in Nigeria.

Despite this growing body of evidence, a clear gap practically exists in information about the specific knowledge, attitudes, and practices of stakeholders, directly involved in early childhood education in Nigeria, such as those pertaining to educators and parents from urban centres like Ibadan. Most evidence currently available deliberated more on macro-level policy or institutional analyses as opposed to exploring ground level realities. This study will fill that exact void by capturing data from both educators and parents, domiciled in Ibadan, with regards to awareness, perceptions, and practices regarding ECE. Thus, it will provide some contextualised understanding of what works well and what challenges lie within the current ECE framework to inform more lo-

calised interventions and wider policy strategies on improving early childhood outcomes in Nigeria and similar Sub-Saharan African contexts.

Purpose and Objectives of the Study. The present study collects and analyzes primary (qualitative) data from relevant stakeholders with the chief aim of studying the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of early childhood education (ECE) in Ibadan, Nigeria. This, researchers hope to acquire a profound understanding of the ways, in which the phenomena of early childhood education are actually understood, valued, and accessed. This study also documented the context-specific hindering factors and motivators and recommend concrete strategies for early childhood education improvement in Nigeria. With the qualitative approach, it is possible to achieve much better comprehension of the contexts behind the social, cultural, and economic dynamics on the engagement as well as perception of ECE. To realise this aim, concern in this study has been underpinned by the following objectives:

1. Evaluate Knowledge Levels: Assess the scope and nature of the understanding about early childhood education, associated with the educators and parents, thereby identifying the voids and strengths in their awareness, beliefs, and educational exposure.

2. Attitude Evaluation toward ECE: The very personal and professional attitudes of parents as well as educators towards early childhood education, their perceived value of the ECE, the motivating factors, and barriers to their active involvement.

3. Analyzing Current Practices: What exact teaching methods, caregiving approaches, and learning environments have been observed in ECE settings, concerning established pedagogical standards and principles for comparison?

Research Questions. The research questions were as follows:

1. What is the extent of awareness or knowledge that stakeholders, particularly educators and parents, have on early childhood education in Nigeria?

2. How does professional education and parents view importance and effectiveness of early childhood education, including their perceived barriers against being involved?

3. What present pedagogical practices in Nigeria relate to those considered best practices in early childhood education?

1. 1. Theoretical Framework

In Nigeria, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, propounded in 1979, forms a framework to investigate knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) toward early childhood education (ECE) by factoring in the multitudes of environmental influences in shaping the view and behaviour of the individuals concerned [9]. This theory proposes that the human development process is a result of nested systems, including the microsystem (immediate environments, such as families, teachers, and schools), mesosystem (interactions among these environments), exosystem (external influences like government policy and media), and macrosystem (broader culture and social values). In Nigeria, knowledge of early childhood education that is exercised by parents, teachers' instructional practices, and policy decisions are all a product of these systemic interactions. Secondary analysis data permits the understanding of how socio-economic differences, cultural differences, and government policies influence early childhood education practices across different regions. Therefore, this theoretical perspective enables a coherent understanding of those interlocking and sometimes overlapping factors that really do influence the processes of ECE adoption and implementation in Nigeria [9].

The Chronosystem is critical in finding the cross-national trends in early childhood education, as it has changes over a certain period. The changes are national policy, economic development, and cultural attitudes towards early learning, affecting how families and educators behave towards ECE. For instance, government funding, curriculum policies, and public awareness may alter the way parents feel or influence their decisions on enrollment. The application of Bronfenbrenner's framework ensures that the study is not merely describing ECE practices but analyzing broader structural and institutional factors shaping them. The perspective is thereby validating the secondary data approach in that it allows analysis of large-scale datasets to monitor patterns

and divergences within Nigeria concerning the accessibility and quality of ECE. **Fig. 1** shows the conceptual model for the study.

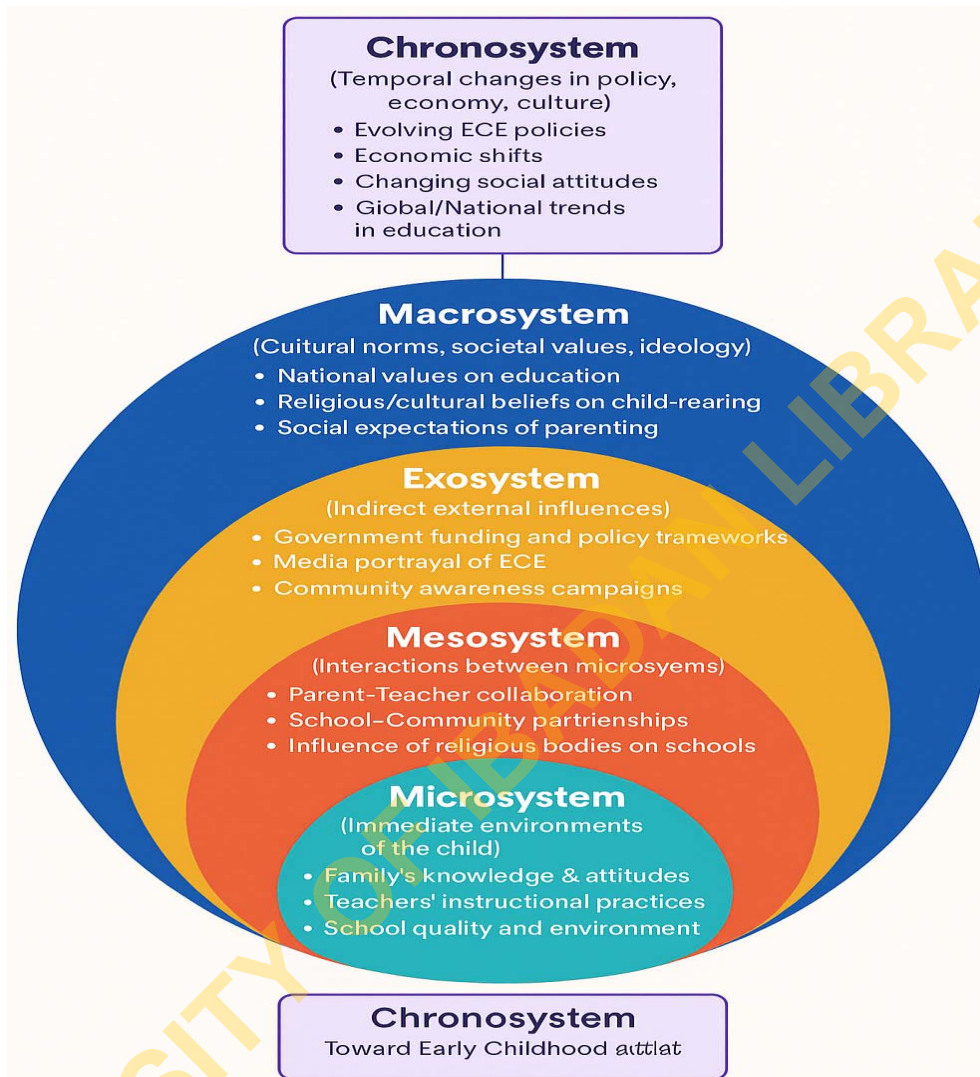


Fig. 1. Conceptual Model connecting Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory to Early Childhood Education

1. 2. Literature Review

Global Perspectives on Knowledge of Early Childhood Education

In recent years, studies have gradually begun to examine just how deep the knowledge of parents and educators goes regarding early childhood education (ECE) and showed that considerable variation in awareness has been found across the world. In a study, conducted in Saudi Arabia, [10] stated that parents were moderately knowledgeable about early developmental disorders regardless of education or income level, thus suggesting general gaps in ECE knowledge, on the other hand, [11] "assessed parental knowledge" regarding ECE in Pakistan and found that while parents upheld ECE with great esteem, their understanding was rather underlined with moral instruction, not formal learning paradigms. In Cameroon, [12] found that teachers were stressing improving parental knowledge during home-to-school transitions: hence, teacher-parent collaboration is key. Knowledge thus borne out of these studies is not purely an individual affair; rather, it is shaped by larger information and institutional exposures. As such, enhancing knowledge will require a firm commitment to sensitising the public and training parents. It thus emerges from

these that varying levels of knowledge may indicate the structural inequities pertaining to access to such knowledge. In many instances, knowledge is also said to be reactive, being acquired only in the event of the occurrence of developmental issues related to children. This points to the idea that in many parts of the world, knowledge of ECE remains rather patchy, if not obscure.

Further investigations have highlighted the role, played by external scenarios, such as health crises or policy shifts in knowledge acquisition about early education. In Turkey during the COVID-19 pandemic, [13, 14] showed how parent engagement – and consequently parent knowledge – was explicitly impacted when interruptions to regular teacher-parent communication occurred. Parents had a strong reliance on the educator for guidance, further depicting the interdependent nature of ECE knowledge. Within the Canadian context, [15] noted that educators' own comprehension of such developmental assessments greatly affected their communications with the parents. Such findings illustrate a reciprocal relationship between educators' knowledge and parental knowledge. Where educators are well informed and articulate about developmental measures, they can assist parents in becoming knowledgeable. In contrast, this flow of knowledge is disrupted by disjointed policy support and inconsistent training in many settings worldwide. This interplay implies that investment in pre-service and in-service continuing professional development for educators would mutually benefit raising community awareness. These studies present a wider concern with bridging knowledge gaps between interested parties, especially in deprived areas or in a state of interruption.

Owing to recent trends, parental involvement is considered an indicator of parents' knowledge and awareness of various ECE processes. [16] mention the emergence of parental transformation - facilitated by knowledge and engagement – as an essential marker of the quality of the ECE system based on post-pandemic data. Parents who comprehend early childhood education will participate in their child's education and influence the education planning and the decision-making processes that were ongoing. [17] further supported this correlation, indicating that educators valued parents' contributions to the socio-emotional preparedness of their children over others. This evidence shows that knowledge exists together with attitudes and practice, namely the more informed parents and teachers are, the more aligned their actions toward early learning become. However, in the absence of systemic support, knowledge-enhancing efforts risk remaining piecemeal and uncoordinated. In this respect, the global literature has gone even further in calling for comprehensive strategies that will use stakeholder knowledge as a bedrock for enhancing access and quality in early childhood education.

Regional Attitudes to Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education (ECE) attitudes tend to vary greatly across world regions based mainly on divergent cultural settings, economic conditions, and institutional practices. [18] noted parental attitudes in Eastern India: many parents, especially those from low-income backgrounds, seemed indifferent or showed negative attitudes concerning prenatal education. These attitudes were products not merely of economic hardship but of their generational educational experiences. Similarly, [19] found that teachers in rural Pakistan were suspicious of parental involvement, seeing it as interference rather than support, and that these views hampered collaboration and thus the formation of a shared view about child development. Both studies point to the sustained leverage of attitudes against the intentions of various educational policies regarding key stakeholders. Where understanding and trust are absent, early learning initiatives undergo arduous traction. Hence, negotiation for context-specific strategies is needed to change attitudes for the better and to improve participation in ECE systems.

Teacher attitudes may also have a core effect on the centers for early childhood learning environment settings and engagement of stakeholders. [20] presented research results of a study, conducted in Turkey, which indicated mismatch between the teachers' verbal positive attitude on children's rights and their practices. Most teachers were in favor of the participation by all students by including them; however, their behaviours did not entirely reflect the inclusiveness belief, especially regarding the value, attached to children's voices. This inconsistency might be due to inadequate training or institutional limitations. Likewise, [21] treated teacher attitudes on father

involvement in ECE related to the study, done in New Zealand, where teachers actually appreciate the presence of fathers even though they insist that participation is low. Even if these are general attitudes, it does not mean, however, that such will be translated to action-oriented strategies. This shows that attitudinal support is not sufficient without structural reinforcement. Positive attitudes from educators must be accompanied by intentional practices and support structures to achieve inclusive collaborative ECE systems.

On the other side of parents, attitudes are usually influenced by perceived costs and benefits of ECE and the emotional well-being of the child attending the learning environment. [22] studied what parents in South Africa think about particularly their demographic characteristics. The research found that positive high proportions were not solely from families with high economic means, but a considerable percentage of families across economic lines generally are greatly appreciative of ECE typical settings that are well designed to ensure well-being and a sense of belonging for students. This emotional dimension was by no means less appreciated as compared to academic learning but mirrored the global trend of emphasising holistic development. Provided that parents feel that these centres are emotionally nurturing and culturally responsive, they cease to have negative attitudes toward them and, in consequence, increase active participation. This means that in the long run when such conditions do not exist, there could be negative or hesitant attitudes. Most pieces of evidence all over regions soundly point that while positive attitudes toward early childhood education are felt in many circumstances, real and perceived barriers from economic to mistrust often temper enthusiasm. It then follows that to promote positive attitudes, there must be consistent contact, cultural sensitivity, as well as child-centered, inclusive policy directives.

Practices in Early Childhood Education: International Trends and Challenges

There is a marked difference concerning early childhood education (ECE) practices across regions due to the fact that they are affected by established factors, including the qualifications of the teachers, infrastructural support, and cultural expectations. [23] conducted a research study in Rwanda on the influence of early childhood education on the academic performance of learners in primary schools. From the findings of the study, early childhood education programme effects could be felt positively regarding learners' accomplishments in school. This finding indicates the value of fundamental learning in future learning outcomes. However, many regions continue to witness challenges like insufficient resources and inadequate training for teachers. All these factors tend to hinder the success of early childhood practices. This assertion has been supported by [24] as they found out the need for thorough evaluation as pertains to the ECE programmes for improving their quality with resulting impact. The use of secondary data analysis was employed by the authors to explore evaluative practices for programme improvements, advancing the case that data-driven decisions are paramount to the development of ECE practice in all corners of the world.

Implementation of the curriculum as well as teacher training is not distinguishable in other regions where it is challenged. [25] studied the management of early childhood education data in Tanzania in inclusive public schools. The findings revealed that although practices for data collection were widely done, often there were challenges related to logistics and cooperation that made the data difficult to use for decision-making purposes. The scenario in Ethiopia was as seriously appalling with regard to early childhood care and education. Many preschool teachers had no formal training, and infrastructure in many schools was poor [19]. Collectively, these challenges raise broader issues on the implementation of effective ECE practices, in which the learning success as defined in base years relied strongly on teachers' qualifications and resource availability. Investment in teacher training and infrastructure will consequently be important for enhancing the quality of early childhood education across regions.

Now, bringing digital technologies into early childhood education is the emerging practice that shows variable effectiveness across regions. [26] looked at how digital education impacts early childhood education practice in Delta State, Nigeria. According to them, although the educators are now embracing digital instruments for the enhancement of learning experiences, the successes are largely thwarted by access challenges of technology and unreliable internet connectivity. This is one of the common challenges in most developing countries, where infrastructural limitations

restrict digital education to its full potential. Thus, while appreciating the ability to transform early childhood learning practices, the truth still stands that practical application highly varies. Collectively, these studies indicate that although early childhood education practices are globally changing, the challenge of teacher preparedness, infrastructure, and resource availability still persists.

2. Materials and Methods

2. 1. Research Design

Qualitative research design was used in this study because it best investigated subjective experiences and attitudes. It allowed for nuances and in-depth examinations of participants' knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding early childhood education. The study utilised semi-structured interview format as it gave flexibility for the participants to speak out, while also engaging the researchers to go in-depth on topics. This method provided rich and elaborate data that unpacked the nuances of KAP in relation to ECE in Ibadan.

2. 2. Population

The population of the study are people that were in one way or the other involved in early childhood education in Ibadan, Nigeria, such as early childhood educators; parents of children in early childhood education; and other stakeholders developing education policies in that region. The reason for selecting this particular group was that they are directly involved with or impact children's education by teaching or making important decisions or policies. This population is important for the study since it has within it the characteristics of those whose knowledge, attitudes, and practices most directly source to ECE in Ibadan.

2. 3. Sampling and Sampling Method

The sample of this study was a total of 10 participants. This has been found to be an appropriate sample size as far as qualitative methodology goes for exploring personal experiences and perspectives of individuals, engaged in early childhood education. Participants were purposively selected to ensure that individuals with the relevant competence and experience were part of the sample. This sample consisted of 5 early childhood educators, and 5 parents of children currently in early childhood education programmes. Purposive sampling was applied as it allowed the researchers to select individuals' likely to yield rich and concerning data on the subject matter. This sampling technique was absolutely important because it ensured that respondents involved were knowledgeable and experienced enough to contribute to the study.

2. 4. Instrumentation

The study's major method of data collection was semi-structured interviews. An interview guide has been developed to see that the study's research questions are made to be answered, while at the same time allowing that flexibility through the way one can answer. The interview guide included open-ended questions prompting respondents to share with the researchers their views concerning various aspects of knowledge, attitudes, and practices in early childhood education. Questions were from issues like the respondents' knowledge levels of early childhood education, the perceived importance, regarded barriers to access, and current practices related to ECE in Ibadan. The semi-structured guide allowed the researchers to probe further to get the details.

2. 5. Procedure for Data Collection

The data collection was done through some procedures. Identifying potential participants, invited into the study, would be the first step. Invitations would come via phone, e-mail, or in-person depending on availability and preferences. Where participants consented to participation, suitable timing and place for interviews were arranged. Some interviews were also conducted via video calls. Interviews on average lasted about 45 to 60 minutes. With consent, all interviews were audio recorded, so that they would be accurately transcribed. At the end of the interview, audio recordings were transcribed verbatim to prepare data for analysis.

2. 6. Ethical Considerations

The study followed ethical guidelines in participant safety, rights, and confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained from the interviewees before the commencement of interviews. The interviewees were availed all necessary information about the purpose of the study and its procedures and intimated their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. They were reassured about the voluntary nature of their participation and the confidentiality surrounding their personal details. Anonymity has been maintained throughout the study by removing identifying information from all transcripts and reports in regard to research participants. All efforts have been made by the researchers to ensure integrity in the handling of data; thus, all information are accurately transcribed and presented. These ethical practices ensured the trustworthiness of the study and respected the rights of the participants.

2. 7. Method of Data Analysis

Semi-structured interviews were engaged in the study, and the analyses were coded through thematic analyses. Thematic analysis defines a method for detecting and interpreting patterns or themes as they emerge from the data. Recording interviews, transcripts were read and reread by the researchers many times for familiarity with the data. Initial codes were assigned to text segments reflecting important notes about the research questions. Codes were developed into broader themes that included all major issues, such as knowledge of early childhood education, feelings about its importance, and practices, seen in managing ECE in Ibadan. After that, the themes were refined to identify patterns or relationships and interpret findings against the research objective. The thematic analysis probes deeply into determining knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding early childhood education in Ibadan.

3. Results and Discussions

3. 1. Assessment of Knowledge Levels

Assessing the levels of ECE knowledge among the educators and parents in Ibadan showed important variations among them, influenced by different areas, such as educational background, access to further training opportunities, awareness about child development concepts, and many other factors.

P1, an educator stated:

I know enough about talking to little children but don't have a lot of special training in anything new or in child psychology. (Educator P1: female, NCE qualification, 3 years' experience)

This shows a general trend toward educators who are well-versed in the basics but unfamiliar with the current practices of ECE. According to [27], quite a number of ECE teachers in Nigeria are not familiar with modern assessment techniques and instructional strategies, all attributed to the limited opportunities for training.

Parent P2, with secondary education, remarked:

I believe early education is important, but I'm not sure what exactly my child should be learning at this age. (Parent P2: Male, secondary education, father of a 3-year-old)

A knowledge gap exists among parents regarding their children's age-appropriate learning milestones. With this scenario, [27], assertively agrees on the necessity of parental sensitisation programmes, directed to advance their knowledge on early childhood development and better support of children's learning at home.

Educator P3, with a bachelor's degree in early childhood education and 7 years of working experience, noted:

Attending workshops has helped me learn new techniques and understand children's needs better. (Educator P3: Male, B.Ed in Early Childhood Education, 7 years of experience)

It thus emphasises the affirmative outcome emerging from continuous professional development towards education practitioners regarding their knowledge and teaching practices. As discovered by [28], ongoing training tremendously boosts teachers' competencies with regard to the effective delivery of ECE programmes. This further shows that the assessment reveals that from some educators and parents, there is a basic understanding of ECE; however, this urgently points to the need for a more thorough training and awareness programme to fill in knowledge gaps and ensure adequate early childhood education practices.

3. 2. Evaluation of Attitudes towards ECE

A survey of attitudes towards early childhood education was conducted among educators and parents in Ibadan. Responses revealed a variety of outlooks, shaped by cultural ways, perceptions of gender, experiences of certain individuals, and their levels of awareness. Some were positive and supportive of ECE, while others responded to the survey with indifferent or negative attitudes related to very traditional myths and the lack of exposure to early childhood education theory and practice. Educator P5, a male early childhood teacher, described the professional stigma, associated with his role:

Working in early childhood education is fulfilling, but it's difficult being a male teacher here. People assume it's a woman's job. Even family members have asked why I didn't choose a 'real' teaching job in secondary school. (Educator P5: Male, Bachelor of Education in progress, 1 year of experience)

In this response, it is found that gender norms have a direct influence on professional identity and commitment to the field. Even though Educator P5 appreciated his work with children, he felt that societal values belittled the very essence of his professional worth. What we have seen here is consistent with the findings of [29], who revealed that both in-service and pre-service male teachers in Nigeria were apprehensive and uncomfortable pursuing sustainable careers in Early Childhood Education due to social biases in the field and to subsequent low valuation. Other educators expressed mixed feelings due to poor working conditions. Educator P4 shared:

I enjoy working with children, but the pay is too low, and we are not respected like primary school teachers. Sometimes I think of leaving to teach older children where the job is more appreciated. (Educator P4: Female, NCE qualification, 4 years of experience)

It can also be inferred from the above that Early Childhood Educators are devalued and this trend is reported in national reports wherein ECE teachers usually receive lower pay and scant professional support compared to their colleagues in primary schools [30]. A few educators showed good levels of commitment, driven by passion, although it was not the dominant narrative. Differently, parents expressed a variety of attitudes, some of which were supportive and admiring towards ECE, while others viewed it as being custodial in terms of care. Parent P6 commented as follows:

I send my daughter to school because it keeps her busy and safe while I go to the market. I never really thought of it as a place where she would learn important things. (Parent P6: Female, secondary school education, single mother of one)

This perception perceives how economic responsibilities can define parental expectations on early education, thereby valuing the service more for its utility rather than early childhood development. [31], in a parallel view, found that in many parts of Nigeria, ECE is perceived more as activity care than foundational education. On the other hand, there were parents who took a more enlightened view about pre-school education. Parent P8, who attended a parent-teacher seminar on early learning, stated:

I never knew how important this stage was until I attended a meeting at the school. They explained how it affects the brain and social development. Since then, I've been paying closer

attention and asking the teacher about what my child is learning. (Parent P8: Male, tertiary education, father of two)

Such information indicates the possibility for the opening of possibilities for the modification of parental attitudes on more relevant attachments to ECE programmes. On the other hand, [32] specify that parental awareness programmes can implode almost every aspect of families' engagement in early learning, resulting in better child developmental results. These evidences suggest that in Ibadan, generally, attitudes towards ECE find social, economic, and cultural conditioning. For example, teachers' commitment ranges with little pay and low social regard, and the attitudes of parents vary from total rejection to outright acceptance. How the difference appears depends on experience and knowledge. Such results would also be justification for calling on campaigns to educate the public, to address recruitment issues with a gender lens, and to improve working conditions, all of which are geared towards changing attitudes and increasing motivation in early childhood education.

3. 3. Evaluation of Current Practices in Early Childhood Education

The analysis of current practices in early childhood education (ECE) in Ibadan reveals alarming gaps between pedagogy, having inclusive programmes and integrating developmentally appropriate practice among educators and parents. Some of the educators tend to adopt progressive pedagogies, but most still depend on conventional teaching methods that cannot fulfill children's holistic developmental needs. Hence, the age-old-cultural setting of the classroom is now more tilted towards readiness for academics rather than experiential, child-centred learning. Educator P4, shared:

We try to include songs and games, but most times, we have to stick to the syllabus and prepare the children for primary school. There's not much room for play. (Educator P4: Female, NCE qualification, 4 years of experience)

This finding resonates with the common pattern as described by [7], which states that in many Nigerian ECE classrooms, there is emphasis on rote learning and much academic drilling rather than exploration and play, even with policies encouraging more interactive ways. Educators are often managed by limited time resources, and the pressure is on meeting academic benchmarks. Educator P9 also weighed in:

In my school, we're encouraged to teach through storytelling and hands-on activities, but sometimes the class size makes it hard. When you have 40 children in a room, how do you give everyone attention? (Educator P9: Male, B.Ed. in Early Childhood Education, 8 years of experience)

This shows the operational challenges related to overcrowding and poor ratios of teachers to pupils, which [28] identified as principal constraints to effective ECE delivery across Nigerian classrooms. The inability to apply child-centred methods due to structural impediments severely compromises the already poor attainment levels. Another issue soon came up on its heels: inclusivity. While instances of individual efforts to assist children who are learning challenged abound, there is a stark absence of any systematic structures of support for inclusive education. Parent P7 remarked:

My son has some learning difficulties, but his teacher is patient and tries different methods to help him understand. Not all schools are like this. (Parent P7: Male, tertiary education, father of one)

This unevenness reflects broader inequalities in the provision of ECE. According to [16], only a small handful of ECE centres in Nigeria are equipped with inclusive learning resources, while many educators are not adequately trained in the special skills to effectively work with children with special needs. Another parent, Parent P10, stressed the lack of innovative instructional methods:

Most of what my daughter learns is recitation. They don't do much drawing, building blocks or role-playing. I wish there was more of that to help her think creatively. (Parent P10: Female, diploma holder, mother of a 4-year-old)

Similar to the findings, drawn by [7], the issue raised confirms that a lot of the Nigerian ECE centres are poorly equipped for actual learning. This somewhat explains the underutilisation of visual or manipulative resources that would develop critical and creative thinking among young learners. Technology, used in the centres, has also been studied, and it appears that the use of technology is scanty in the centres. Although some centres offer an introduction to very basic digital tools, lack of infrastructure, inconsistent supply of electricity, and limited competence of teachers restrict its application. According to [28], even today, ICT integration in ECE is still in its infancy in almost all urban areas, with the resultant widening of the already existing digital learning gap from the early years.

In conclusion, current ECE practices in Ibadan are a mixed bag of efforts, constraints, and inconsistencies. For those educators who are being creative or committed, the reality is that without institutional support, proper infrastructure, and inclusive policies, then the full potential of ECE would not be had in terms of holistic development of children. Such practices would require systemic investments in teacher training, infrastructure, and curriculum innovation to change.

Limitations. The limitations of the study are as follows: the study focused on the selected schools, and parents, in Ibadan; the scope hence cannot be generalised beyond the state or for such regional studies for all of Nigeria or Sub-Saharan Africa. Furthermore, a purposeful sample was used and was quite small in size, thus not being able to cover the diversity of perspectives across different socio-economic and institutional contexts. The study relied on self-reporting in interviews, so biases may arise due to social desirability: the participants may give more promising views with respect to their knowledge or practice apparently understating their Gaps. Time and limited access to government ECE centres also served to restrict the study further.

Recommendations. Considering the findings, it is recommended that elaborate professional development programmes be prepared and implemented for early childhood educators, centering on the application of child development theories and classroom management approaches. Likewise, sensitisation programmes should be designed to enable parents to help caregivers appreciate the developmental importance of early childhood education. It is appropriate, therefore, that an area for partnership between government agencies and other stakeholders in education be solid partnership in enforcing ECE policies across the board, with monitoring mechanisms that hold them accountable to standards. Funding should also go to improvements in curriculum and provision of materials for classrooms for developmentally appropriate, interactive learning.

Suggestions for Further Studies. Future research should seek to establish the influence of governmental policy and institutional support mechanisms on ECE implementation across urban-rural settings. Longitudinal studies that would follow change in educator knowledge and parental perspective after targeted intervention will provide some insight into the sustainability and impact of the programme. Further investigation could also involve a comparison of public and privately owned ECE centres, focusing on structural and pedagogical differences. Wider coverage in other states in Nigeria or the inclusion of quantitative methods may provide more generalisable data and bolster the empirical base for policy reform concerning early childhood education.

4. Conclusion

By and large, these findings recommend a big gap regarding knowledge, attitudes and practices towards early childhood education (ECE) among educators and non-educators in Ibadan. Some educators could actually explain some basic concepts of ECE, but most of them did exhibit less capability in the application of these concepts, due to poor training. Like parents, they used to understand or value the purposes of ECE, thus putting it into view mainly as childcare. The attitudes towards early childhood education are seemingly positive, but they lack depth of understanding, when approached for collaborative efforts. Current practices in the classroom seem more inconsistent and do not follow the developmentally appropriate practices in pedagogy. Together, these findings give weight to the requirement for focused in-service training, awareness programmes and improved system support for ECE delivery in the area.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in relation to this paper, as well as the published research results, including the financial aspects of conducting the research, obtaining and using its results, as well as any non-financial personal relationships.

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Data availability

Data will be made available on reasonable request.

Use of artificial intelligence

The authors affirms that they did not use any form of artificial intelligence technologies when creating the present study.

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