

**The Assessment of Quality in Early Childhood Care  
and Education in Nigeria.**

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Taiwo Frances Gbadegesin

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) stakeholders' accounts of quality assessment in the Nigerian context from an educational including sociological perspective. It unfolds the diverse socio-cultural meanings of the notion of quality in relation to teacher-child relationship, pedagogical instruction, learning environment and learning outcomes. The thesis demonstrates the need to locate current policy initiatives and quality measures (including the notion and development of quality care and learning) within the social, cultural, economic and political contexts that surround its provision. It is argued that understanding contextual complexity is germane to quality assessment of ECCE institutions.

The study was carried out during seven months intensive fieldwork in Lagos state, Nigeria. The study employed a qualitative interpretive approach using semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, observations and policy analysis. The study involved a number of stakeholders: teachers, parents, policymakers and Schools inspectors from the Ministry of Education.

The study reveals that quality assessment of children's services reflects economic, cultural and socio-political contexts that shape the welfare support services for children and how the aims of early childhood services are perceived by the stakeholders. The findings suggest that the contribution of poverty on early childhood provision and management, through public and private sectors' involvement, constitutes a problematic notion of quality education for children. The study argues that the socio-cultural values that

relate to communality and cultural learning have to be sufficiently incorporated into policy and practice structures in ECCE.

The notion of quality from the perspectives of the different stakeholders taking part in the study was found to be open-ended, whilst embracing a mix of traditional and contemporary values that allow for continuous reflection and dialogue about possible ways of achieving quality care and education for Nigerian children given the challenges and possibilities of changes in the economic, political and socio-cultural outlook. Their major concern is how to adapt child care and learning to the rapidly changing educational structure that occurs around the world without losing the significance of cherished Nigerian societal values.

The study suggests that there is a need to follow up on colonial educational policy and practices by documenting existing childrearing traditional practices and negotiating on the essential aspects that meet the notion of quality care and learning for children.

In conclusion the study proposes a provisional theoretical model for assessing quality in the Nigerian ECCE parlance. The model emphasises an intensive interdisciplinary approach combining different aspects of relevant fields of study to understanding quality assessment and other assemblages of early childhood care and education.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

<b>QA</b>	Quality Assurance
<b>ECCE</b>	Early Childhood Care and Education
<b>UBEC</b>	Universal Basic Education Commission
<b>UBE</b>	Universal Basic Education
<b>UPE</b>	Universal Primary Education
<b>SUBEB</b>	State Universal Basic Education Board
<b>LGEA</b>	Local Government Education Authority
<b>NERDC</b>	Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council
<b>FME</b>	Federal Ministry of Education
<b>MDGs</b>	Millennium Development Goals
<b>EFA</b>	Education for All
<b>IDPs</b>	International Development Partners
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Funds
<b>TEARFUND</b>	The Evangelical Alliance Relief Fund
<b>MoE</b>	Ministry of Education
<b>FRN</b>	Federal Republic of Nigeria
<b>FGN</b>	Federal Government of Nigeria
<b>DFID</b>	Department for International Development (UK)
<b>ESSPIN</b>	Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria
<b>NPE</b>	National Policy on Education
<b>NCE</b>	Nigerian Certificate in Education
<b>ECDE</b>	Early Childhood Development and Education
<b>CRC</b>	Convention on the Rights of the Child
<b>OECD</b>	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>NBES</b>	Nigerian Basic Education Subsector
<b>IECD</b>	Integrated Early Childhood Development

## **Chapter One: Research Background**

### **1.1. Introduction**

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) provision is increasingly attracting local and global concern such that national governments across the globe are beginning to pay more attention to its provision. Undoubtedly, provision for ECCE has become a fundamental need of human society. This is evidenced by a series of policy directives and pre-determined standards from national (FRN, 2004; NERDC, 2013; FME, 2009) and international (MDG, 2010; EFA- Dakar Framework, 2000) agencies. In Nigeria, there have been policy directives and reforms by successive governments since the Obasanjo-led administration of 1999 when the Universal Basic Education (UBEC) programme was inaugurated. The main aim of UBE programme is to “provide functional, universal, and quality education for all Nigerians irrespective of age, sex, race, religion, occupation, or location” (UBEC, 2004; FME, 2009; NERDC, 2013). This document was the first educational policy to integrate early childhood care and education services into the mainstream of public educational programmes in Nigeria. Undoubtedly, this was informed by international protocols such as Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goal (MDGs (ibid), aided by a number of international agencies providing technical and financial support with much emphasis on access to and quality assurance of ECCE services. The programme pursued a national plan that involved all state governments to contribute a certain percentage of their national allocation as a form of financial commitment to ECCE provision. As asserted by Penn (2011), the presence of International Development Partners (IDPs) in ECCE projects in many developing economies is to ensure equity and

quality of services through knowledge transfer. This suggests that many of the countries in the Global South<sup>1</sup>, Nigeria inclusive, will continue to pursue measures that will keep them abreast of contemporary issues in ECCE services from the Global North, what Pearson (2011) describes as “making globalised ideals working realities in all contexts across the globe”.

From an international perspective, the major attraction of the growing concern for early childhood care and education is its social and economic benefits to national development (Lynch, 2004, Woodhead and Moss, 2007, Penn, 2009, Hardin et al., 2015, UNESCO, 2000). Studies have shown that returns from ECCE are beneficial to families, society and children. However, the different pathways which take into consideration the specific contextual understanding of achieving these benefits have not been given sufficient attention in research writings. For instance, children in the traditional era in Nigeria were integrated into family businesses and other forms of venture as early as possible, which in itself was beneficial to the immediate community. While it is established that access to institutional ECCE service is beneficial in its own right, application of universal standards problematize the notion of quality assessment. From a local perspective, the imperative to incorporate children into knowledge and cultural environments as early as possible seems to guide patronage of ECCE services.

Globalisation in the form of transfer of educational policy measures, policy borrowing and technological advancement, (Ball, 2012, Rizvi and Lingard,

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<sup>1</sup> The term Global South denotes the developing countries while the Global North denotes the developed countries.

2010, Lingard, 2010) has not only brought about the reconsideration of the roles of children's agencies, but has also altered the scope of child rearing practices in Nigeria. For instance, with the increasing "internationalisation" of educational experiences for children (Penn, 2005a, Penn, 2005b) in their local contexts, the need for "quality" assurance in early years has become an imperative pursuit of the national and state government. This suggests the multiple perspectives that the concept of *quality* is prone to generate; and a situation which makes quality assessment and definition in early childhood settings a complex exercise to undertake. In present academic debates, the notion of *quality* assessment seems to be a highly contentious issue generating multifaceted and pluralistic views (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence 1999; 2007; Penn, 2009). UNESCO's (2000) document attests that in education many definitions of quality exist, testifying to the *complexity* and *multifaceted* nature of the concept. For instance, at the political level, the notion of *quality* provision is informed by values and norms that shape international relations and internal allegiance to political manifestos.

Studies have, however, established that contextual variations, in the form of social, economic, political and cultural contexts, play a significant part in establishing the meaning of the concept of quality in ECCE and the conceptualisation of the impact of its various dimensions on children (Woolf, 2011, Degotardi and Davis, 2008, Dahlberg et al., 2007, Li et al., 2016, Woodhead, 1998). Indeed, Dahlberg et al. (1999:2007); Woodhead (2006a) in the UK and Hardin et al. (2015) in the USA demonstrate that quality can be understood within the social and cultural environment that ECCE services exist and that its assessment should take into consideration multiple and subjective

perspectives of stakeholders. Socio-cultural factors and the associated dimensions are implicit components of quality assessment because they depict the underlying framework that leads to the understanding of the notion of best practices within institutional environment in which ECCE service is being provided. This might be connected with the viewpoint of (Burr, 2015:4) on the historic and cultural specificity of concepts.

Specifically, (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010, Tamatea, 2005, Woodhead, 1998) warn that reliance on quality constructs derived from Anglo-American ideologies may not yield the best results as they do not necessarily cover significant aspects of other contexts. Therefore, the universality of quality measures, which has become the international norm in ECCE settings, needs to be reconsidered in the light of specific contextual elements of children's learning and development. These elements will be explored in subsequent chapters of this thesis.

Early childhood care and education provision in Nigeria is based within the broader political, economic, social and cultural context. The country's organisation of pre-school provision seems to be conditioned, on the one hand, by the international protocols and mandates, and on the other hand, by the local/national socio-cultural child rearing perspectives. The intersection of global and local ideals on child care and education influence ECCE provision beyond local provision and create a tension between government and other stakeholders' stance on quality assessment. For instance, pressure from international agencies predisposes policymakers to set guidelines in ways that may not be in congruence with local societal practices and are difficult for practitioners to understand. Indeed, official guidelines have been found to be a

major constraint to the development of a more coordinated ECCE sector in Nigeria (Alan et al., 2011).

For instance, the aforementioned policy directives by the Federal and State government emphasised quality assurance mechanisms as the main driver of educational provision in early years, though without an explicit description of the intricacies of policy application and implications.

This doctoral study is the first empirical study to explore analytically the concept of quality assessment of pre-school provision in Nigeria within its wider local and global socio-cultural contexts after the inception of the Office of Quality Assurance in Lagos state in 2009. Thus, empirical assessment of the feasibility and workability of quality measures, including their implementation, challenges and future possibilities needs to be undertaken. Hence, this study is an attempt at bridging the gaps in literature and contributing to the body of literature on qualitative enquiry of social studies of childhood with a particular focus on the socio-cultural matrix in which early childhood care and education services are provided in Lagos state, Nigeria.

Against this background, it is pertinent to locate this study of quality assessment in ECCE within the social, cultural, economic and political local and global contexts of children's care, learning and development in Lagos state, Nigeria. It examines how (ECCE) stakeholders (teachers, parents and policymakers) understand and construct quality education and care for young children. It unfolds the socio-cultural meanings that parents, practitioners and policymakers hold about quality provision and highlights specific areas of contention and cooperation between policy directives and actual classroom



practices and how these understandings shape classroom behaviour and practices. An understanding of the sociocultural dynamics of early childhood care and education assessment is not only necessary for establishing a common ground upon which quality dimensions in early childhood settings can be understood and provided in Nigeria, it also important for policy planning and allocation of both human and material resources for effective early childhood provision. The next section highlights the interest and motivation for this thesis.

## **1.2. Interest and motivation for the study**

My personal experience as an early childhood teacher, a researcher and a parent prompted my interest in this research. I have undergone teaching practicum in both nursery and primary schools in Nigeria. I have been involved in the translation of ECCE guidelines and curriculum into learning outcomes and supervision of practices in ECCE centres. I have also been involved in the facilitation of life skills to young children in Lagos State, a programme sponsored by TEARFUND and UNICEF through the Scripture Union Nigeria. I am also a mother of two young girls.

These different experiences and perspectives have offered me an opportunity to witness the interaction of social and cultural factors in the process of educating children. I have observed the school system as a complex social organisation with its own rules and regulations and consequential influence of the regulatory framework and societal expectation on its operation. Moreover, it became clear to me that cultural elements mediate between “education for the heart” and “education for the head” (Morrison, 2010). I have also observed how teaching-learning processes in ECCE centres are shaped by practitioners’ implicit beliefs, and the influence of community values in shaping people’s

behaviour. For instance, parents often wish that any cherished cultural heritage is transferred to their children. One of such cultural values is the aspect of respect for elders.

Moreover, in the course of my academic pursuit, I discovered that studies within many of the developed economies of America and Europe have explored to a greater extent quality dimensions- both structural and process, in early childhood provision, and within the qualitative and quantitative enquiry. For example, Penn (ibid); Penn and Lloyd (2007); Woodhead (1998); (Sylva et al., 2006); Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002); Greenway (2011); (Moss, 1994); Moss and Pence (1994); Moss and Dahlberg (2008) Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (ibid); examined the dynamics of UK and European early care and education provision, while Burchinal et al. (2015); Magnuson and Waldfogel (2005) and Hardin et al. (2015) have examined the concept of quality provision in the United State of America. Many of these studies adopted a quantitative enquiry approach while some emphasised the influence of contextual variations in assessing quality education for children within developed economy. This study explores the contextual elements that are germane to understanding quality assessment in a developing economy like Nigeria through a qualitative inquiry.

### **1.3. Regional context of the study area- Lagos, Nigeria**

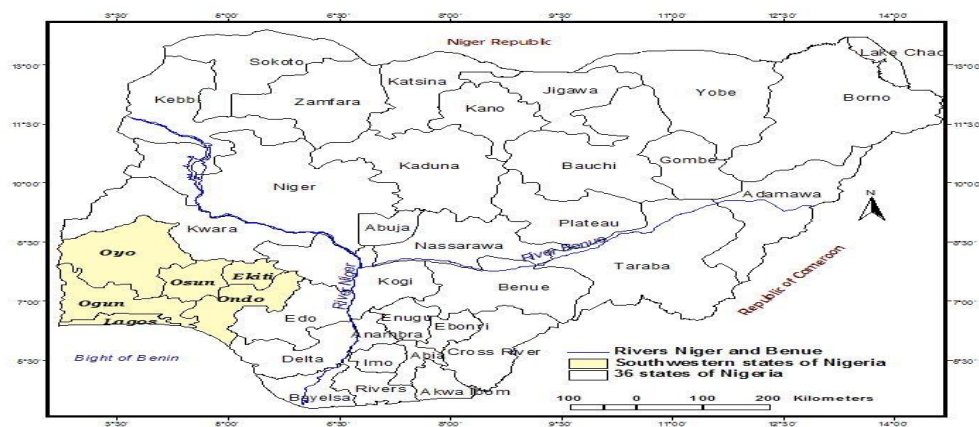
Nigeria is located in West Africa and shares boundaries with Republic of Benin to the west, Chad and Cameroon to the east, Niger to the north and Gulf of Guinea to the south (Olukoju, 2012). Nigeria has a large population of over 140 million which makes the nation the most populous in Africa and it is often regarded as the "Giant of Africa" (Factbook, 2012)). Nigeria as a nation has its origin in the British colonization during the late nineteenth and early twentieth

century and eventually emerged from the merging of two neighbouring British protectorates, which are the northern and southern Nigeria Protectorate, in 1914. The combination of these two protectorates brought about the co-existence of people with different tribes, ethnic groups and religious beliefs which formed the nation called Nigeria. In 1960, Nigeria got its independence from colonial rule and had since been alternating between military and democratic rule. Nigeria is a federal constitutional republic with 36 states and a federal capital territory, Abuja. It has over a hundred cities with populations that qualify as urban centres. Nigeria has over 500 ethnic groups and can be regarded as a pluralistic society, with each ethnic group identified by its own traditional norms and values for educating the citizens. The largest prominent tribes are the Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.

The Nigerian nation is made of six geopolitical zones – The North-east, North-west, North-central, the South-east, the South-south and the South-west. Nigerian largest cities are Lagos, Kano and Ibadan. Nigeria is considered to be an emerging economy by the World Bank and has been identified as a regional power in Africa. The South Western area of Nigeria, which is the study region for this study, consists of six states- Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo and Ekiti (see Figure 1). The area lies between longitude  $2^{\circ} 3'$  and  $6^{\circ} 0'$  East and Latitude  $6^{\circ} 21'$  and  $8^{\circ} 37'$  N (Agboola, 1979). The author opined that the South-Western population today is thought of as the most educated, as western education came into Nigeria through this region and education as a resource was democratized from the early sixties. South Western Nigeria was the first part of the country to advocate a planned and organised literacy programme for the inhabitants, thus setting the pace for literacy development in Nigeria.

It was later discovered that this literacy programme placed the children in South Western part of the country to have a head start above those in other regions. The geographical location, democratization of western education, enhanced availability of resources and some empowerment have collectively enabled the South-Western economy to rank as first of the four economies in Nigeria. Today, the South West region of Nigeria can be described as having a defined growing middle class and is perceived to have at least 20,000 of its indigenes with net worth of over N100m each (Agboola, ibid)

**Figure 1: Map of Nigeria showing the Geographical Location of South West Region**



*Source<sup>2</sup>*

From the foregoing, it is obvious that South Western region is too large for the kind of qualitative study reported in this thesis. Therefore, my study is focused on Lagos state. Lagos state, though the smallest in geographical space, is one of the most populous cities in Africa. Lagos State was created on May 27, 1967. Lagos state has over the years emerged as the leading economic and industrial city in Nigeria with its sophisticated urban amenities, medical facilities, judicial

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.intechopen.com/source/html/40420/media/image1\\_w.jpg](http://www.intechopen.com/source/html/40420/media/image1_w.jpg)

and legislative institutions, media and educational institutions. It has a population density of about 5,000/persons/square km and its population was estimated to be 11.2 million (World Urbanization Prospects, 2011)<sup>3</sup>. This region recorded the first set of Christian mission school established in Badagry by missionaries in 1842, which later opened doors for the establishment of schools in other regions (NOUN, 2006). Lagos state government runs free, compulsory education from basic to secondary education. Variants of childcare centres and services which include nursery, kindergarten, owned and operated by private, public and corporate bodies can be found in Lagos. The Ministry of Education (MoE) is in charge of development and implementation of policy, control and management of public nursery and primary schools. The LGEA and SUBEB are in charge of managing and overseeing the operations of early childhood education in the state.

Lagos is perceived to be a good location for this study because it displays a significant level of racial, cultural and social diversities with an assortment of contemporary and traditional cultures (Olukoju, 2004). The Nigerian economy can be described as transitional in nature, in between traditional pre-colonial era and the post-modern capitalist world (Ali-Akpajiak and Pyke, 2003) characterised by poverty and structural imbalances in the access to and utilisation of national wealth. According to the UNDP (2001), 70% of the population live below the extreme poverty line (\$1 a day) and survival means depend on individual's creativity. Poverty manifests in the form of inadequate

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[http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/urbanization/WUP2011\\_Report.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/urbanization/WUP2011_Report.pdf)

access to social services such as education, health services and employment opportunities for majority of all citizens. Nigeria's commitment to provision of social welfare was found to be among the worst in Africa (UNDP, 2001). Public sector commitment to early childhood care and education as part of the social service has been inadequate and left to the hands of private investors without proper monitoring and control. The relatively conducive learning environment provided by some private schools demands a high school fees while inadequate learning resources in public schools suggest a stigmatised form of provision for disadvantaged/poor. For instance, some of the schools I visited are located in slum areas where parents could not afford to buy school shoes and bags for their children. Other schools are located in affluent areas where children have access to the adequate resources and learning materials.

#### **1.4. The provision of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Lagos State**

The education sector in Lagos state can be said to be one of the largest in Nigeria. ECCE sub-sector has continued to witness increased establishments and enrolment as a result of the influx of migrants from other regions of the country into the state. Moreover, the economic and social terrain of the state necessitate a rising demand for early childhood services. For instance, being a highly industrialised metropolitan city, many parents are either working class or business owners who would require ECCE services for their children. Variants of childcare centres and services which include nursery, kindergarten, owned and operated by private, public, religious and corporate bodies can be found in Lagos (see Table 1 & 2).

With an expanded scope of private ownership of ECCE centres (FRN, 2004), the early childhood market is an attractive venture for many private investors. While some private schools are low-cost for parents with low socio-economic background, others are high profile attracting parents from high socio-economic background. Early childhood provision in Lagos remains fragmented into different forms of private and public arrangements, which problematizes the concept of quality assessment. Indeed, Alan *et al.* (2011) observe that the fragmented nature of nursery provision generates concerns about the quality of learning achievements.

In addition, these services are provided within a diverse social and cultural matrix across Lagos. As I discovered during the fieldwork, while the teaching approach and content do not differ markedly among settings, services seem to be shaped by their social status, resources and cultural environment, all of which have important influence on children's learning and care. For instance, private schools within affluent environment used textbooks that are meant for the next class for pupils, go by the logo "international" and do not encourage the use of local languages in any form. Public and private schools that serve low income earners allow for the use of local languages intermittently with English language and follow through on the use of prescribed level of textbooks.

**Table 1: The Nigerian educational sector**

<b>ECCDE/ Basic Sub-Sector</b>	<b>Post-Basic</b>	<b>Tertiary</b>
Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD)	Senior Secondary Schools	Universities
Primary Schools	Technical Colleges	Polytechnics/Monotechnics Colleges of Education
Junior Secondary Schools	Vocational Enterprise Institutions (VEIs)	Innovative Enterprise Institutions (IEIs)
	Vocational Schools	
	Apprenticeship Centres	

**Table 2: Data of nursery schools in Lagos state<sup>4</sup>**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Pupils' enrolment</b>	<b>Publicly funded</b>	<b>Private</b>		<b>Total</b>
			<b>Approved</b>	<b>Unapproved</b>	
2010/2011	484,109	991	2,313	7,922	11,226

*Source: Harma (2011): Lagos private school report.*

ECCE is coordinated in Nigeria by Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) at the federal and state levels respectively. Generally, the formulation of Policy guidelines and national Curriculum (NERDC 2004), and the monitoring of the level at which ECCE conform to these standards through inspectorate services at federal, state and local government levels constitute quality control interventions (FRN, 2004). The offices of the Local Government Education Authority (LGEA) and State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) oversee the operations of early childhood education in the state.

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<sup>4</sup> Excluding stand-alone preschool and those serving senior secondary



The education sector in Nigeria is a shared responsibility of the Federal, State and Local Governments (FME 2009). Specifically, the recent Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) Policy ensures quality in different aspects of ECCE by creating a network of stakeholders within the regulatory frameworks. Internal supervision is expected to be done by head teachers/caregiver, Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), school-based management committees and community committees. External supervision is expected to be conducted by UBEC national desk officers, SUBEB desk officers and LGEA desk officers (FME, 2009).

### **1.5. Early childhood education policy in Nigeria**

Government intervention in ECCE became pronounced in Nigeria following the UN Jomtien Conventions in 1990, which stated that basic education is a fundamental right of children, and as such government should ensure free universal access to it. The first educational policy that included early childhood education in its provisions is the National Policy on Education, promulgated in 1977 and revised in 1981, 1998 and 2004 (FRN, 2004). The provisions of the revised 2004 National Policy on Education, Universal Basic Education as well as global attention to a comprehensive care of children through a multi-sectoral approach contributed to the development of the National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) in 2007 to accommodate children between the ages of 0 to 5 years (Osho et al., 2014). Specifically, the National Policy on Education 4th Edition (FRN, 2004) highlights Early Childhood /Pre-primary Education in Section 2, sub-section 11 as the education given in an educational institution to children aged 3 to 5 plus, prior to their entering the

primary school. It highlights the purposes and government strategies of achieving the stated objectives (see Appendices 1 & 2).

There are a number of factors which influence child care and education policy and practice in different countries. For instance, in Nigeria, factors such as socio-cultural, economic and political structures seem to play major roles in mediating between the notion of quality and equity in the provision of children's services. One may quite agree with the contents of IPPR reports by Parker (2013), which state that provisions that boost child development are sometimes difficult to disentangle from the political, cultural and social conditions that surround the issue of quality in ECCE. Following the formulation of ECCE policy in Nigeria, there is a prevalence of private-sector led ECCE institutions, rather than public ones; a situation in which the provision of ECCE programmes is largely fragmented in nature; integration of care and education is weak and state regulation is not very strictly enforced. In this case, Nigeria's ECCE child care and education programme seems to fit into a developing "neo-liberal" welfare model as described by Pringle (1998) and Esping-Andersen (1990). The neo-liberal welfare system is characterised with fragmented child services, residual and often stigmatising social welfare protection, privatisation and deregulation (Wiarda, 1997, Haque, 1998). For instance, France's adoption of a high pupil-adult ratio for the children that are over-three is complemented with a very highly qualified workforce, unlike in the UK, where there is high monitoring and a fairly prescriptive syllabus, low ratios, and a comparatively low qualified and poorly remunerated workforce (Parker, *ibid*). The Nordic countries are well respected for an ECCE system built on a highly respected

pedagogical tradition, for instance, Denmark is known for a highly qualified, well-integrated ECCE professional services (Parker, *ibid*).

### **1.6. Childrearing beliefs and practices in Nigeria**

A meaningful description of socio cultural contexts in Nigeria often revolves around family and kinship related matters such as beliefs about the family, pregnancy, child care, breastfeeding, gender, greetings/respect for elders, marriage, child health, care and education (Fafunwa, 1982, Ogbu, 1995, Evans and Myers, 2004). This assertion supports the observation of Rothstein-Fisch et al. (2009) that childrearing beliefs about what children need and what they are expected to become later in life shape parental behaviour and practices. Nigeria faces social upheaval and cultural dilemmas, which bear heavily on child rearing and educational practices (Ukeje, 1966, Ukeje, 1986). Dukor (2010) observes that every ethnic group has a set of social value system and cultural environment that manifest wholly or partly through a process of child rearing. However, behind the childrearing patterns of each of the ethnic group in Nigeria is a common goal of integrating children into the wider society, character formation and achieving autonomy. This goal is captured in the Nigerian concept of “omoluabi” (Adeniji-Neill, 2011), called “Ubuntu” (Muwanga-Zake, 2009) in South Africa. The concept of Omoluabi is further explored in Chapter Two.

In the traditional era, the child rearing approach of each ethnic group is characterised by introducing children to their cultural heritage including use of language, greetings, respect for elders, local music, dance, folklores, and history. Traditional childhood training inculcated in children skills, attitudes, abilities, and all other forms of behaviour that are consistent with

interdependence, communalism and humanism (Nsamenang and Tchombe, 2011, Phasha and Moichela, 2011) creating national consciousness and self-realisation (Fafunwa, *ibid*). This training that took place without the four walls of any classroom setting, and ensured that children are taught with things that are feasible within their environment. Children were exposed to learning activities which were not pre-determined and were learnt through imitation and hands-on experience, thus, knowledge of the society and educational experiences were not necessarily mutually exclusive. For instance children were actively involved in ceremonies, initiation and histories of their societies through folklores, proverbs and other oral literature. In this way, they are able to engage in social, cultural, economic, artistic, religious and recreational life (Fafunwa, *ibid*) of the society. Apart from clan and family settings, children learn in the neighbourhood exploring the knowledge of the physical and social terrain for their advantage. Children naturally developed their gross motor skills by climbing, strolling, and jumping (Fafunwa, *ibid*). Also, resources within the immediate environment were used as resource for professional training.

Traditional education encourages gender differentiation because it established a community of practice within family based on gender roles. Girls were expected to be reserved and learn hospitality and house chores from their mothers while boys were expected to be outgoing and daring. While a girl child would naturally go for apprenticeship like mat weaving, tailoring and hairdressing, a male child would aspire to be a farmer, hunter and climber. In all, traditional education for children, though criticized for its limitedness, crudeness and closed nature, advanced a holistic view of children training for the society in which they lived.

The quest for better life and the desire to participate in modern society and civilization process have brought about rapid transformation in thinking, attitude and values far beyond the pattern of child rearing that traditional era presented. This influence which came in through “western” education brought during the colonial rule has contributed to the synchronisation of traditional practices and foreign ideologies on child rearing, thus creating a “cultural hybrid”. However, due to the pluralism and diversity that the Nigerian society is entrenched, traditional practices that have existed before, during and in the present modern times are regarded as cultural in nature because they are tied to different ways of life that each ethnic community cherish.

Bray et al. (1986) argue that formal education has provided a common language in ensuring a horizontal unification of the different ethnic, religious and linguistic groups in Nigeria. The implication is that education has been perceived to help citizens handle any changes that modernization processes bring. Indeed, Woolman (2001) opines that education and national development in Africa should embrace dynamism of “cultural transmission as well as change”

It is also important to note that the Nigerian populace is stratified into classes/groups: lower, middle and upper income groups and the classification determines the nature of childcare arrangement employed by each group. According to Gbadegesin and Alabi (2014), families with high socio-economic status often have more success in preparing their children for school because they have access to a wide range of resources to promote and support young children’s development. In addition, higher income families are most likely to select in-home care, nonrelatives and child care centres at higher rates than

families with low income who choose childcare homes, federally subsidized care centres due to the cost implication (Capizzano and Adams, 2004). This development has drastically changed the childrearing goals of families, and had a profound effect on how children are being cared for (Timyan, 1988).

Alabi (2003) contends that the unfamiliar situations that the young parents now find themselves in necessitate support from knowledgeable adults from their own culture. According to the author, certain positive traditional practices which are perhaps no longer encouraged might need to be reinforced. For example, Raeff et al. (2000) and Leseman (2002) posit that parental childrearing beliefs, and general ideas about children's development, care and learning are influenced by parents' educational level, social class and urbanisation, and that they become manifest in the form of traditional collectivistic and modern individualistic ideas (see Table 3). Thus, an important issue that I consider to be relevant to childrearing patterns in Nigeria is how teachers and parents harmonise any socio-cultural changes to produce quality education for young children.

**Table 3: Characteristics of traditional and modern child rearing patterns**

<b>Sphere of influence</b>	<b>Traditional Collectivistic Approach</b>	<b>Modern Individualistic Approach</b>
Cultural belief	Extended family/ community and kinship ties, interdependence	Nuclear family setting, independence
Social relations	Socialisation goals are obedience, control, respect for adults, conformity to rules, responsibility	Emphasis is on free choice, emotional independence, self-will, verbal intelligence, competitiveness,
Gender roles	There is a strict gender differentiation, Gender roles are based on maturation (age)	Emphasis is on gender equality
Learning experiences	Learning is by direct instruction/role modelling, emphasis is on social, narrative and relational intelligence. Children are seen as “becoming adults”	Learning is socially constructed/ dialogical, emphasis is on cognitive development and factual knowledge. See children in their own rights capable of self-initiated exploration, discovery and experience
Mode of learning	Working in groups, observation and criticism for any deviation	Independent and active participation, praise and rewards are emphasized
Parenting style	Authoritarian parenting styles	Authoritative/ Permissive parenting styles

Source: Adapted from Leseman (2002) and Rothstein-Fisch et al. (2009)

It can be said that these stereotypically presented characteristics do not represent the reality of many ECCE classroom practices in Nigeria. Perhaps, the most productive way of understanding quality in ECCE is by envisaging classroom practices falling somewhere in the middle of the two cultural

practices and drawing on both frameworks. This confirms the opinions of Moss (1994) and Woodhead (2006b) that the subject of quality in ECCE is best situated within the socio-cultural context of the environment. The authors aver that quality education that best suits a child in a given situation should take cognisance of the skills and behaviours that shape people's behaviour and the social construct of childhood.

### **1.7. Organisation of the thesis**

This thesis is divided into eight chapters. As presented above, Chapter One introduces the research contextual background, researcher's personal interest and motivation for the study. It also describes the study area, highlighting the place of early childhood care and education policy and services within the broader framework of the Nigerian educational system and childrearing patterns. Chapter Two presents the literature review and theoretical underpinnings of quality assessment in early childhood care and education. It highlights the conceptualisation of quality assessment and the languages of evaluation within the postmodern perspectives as postulated by Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999; 2009).

Chapter Three presents the research methodology which is based on the interpretative paradigm of qualitative inquiry. It also presents the methods adopted in analysing the data generated from the fieldwork. It outlines the aims and objectives which the research seeks to accomplish. It further presents the research designs and techniques which involve the use of interview, focus group discussions, document analysis and observations.



Chapter Four discusses the contextual narratives of ECCE provision in Lagos state. It commences by exploring the socio-cultural particularities of Lagos State and the global influences on traditional practices of children's care and learning. It further presents ECCE policy document analysis on the notion of children's care, learning and development. This discussion relates to research data based on the first objective of the study, which is the analysis of ECCE policy document.

Chapter Five is a presentation of the teachers' narrative analysis and report of findings on the second objective of the study, which is teachers' meaning making and practice of quality assessment in ECCE. It also gives an account of how these constructions and understandings inform actual classroom practices by incorporating field notes obtained during classroom observations into the analysis. I achieved this by connecting teachers' narratives to the quality dimensions that relate to teacher-child relationship, learning outcomes, pedagogical instruction and learning environment.

Chapter Six discusses policymakers' account of policy intentions for quality education in ECCE. It highlights what they perceived to have informed policy directives and how they interpret policy statements about ECCE in Nigeria.

Chapter Seven presents parents' understanding of quality criteria that relates to pedagogical instruction and expectations on learning outcomes. Chapter Eight presents the summary of the research finding. It further presents the contributions of the research to knowledge and implications of the findings for policy and practice. Finally, it presents a provisional theoretical model and some recommendations from the report of the findings.

## **Chapter Two: The Theoretical framework for the study**

### **2.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents the theoretical framework for the study, including the review of literature on quality assessment in early childhood care and education. It also examines global and local contexts of different assemblages of ECCE provision. Having examined the contextual features that relate to social, cultural, economic and political structure and how they influence provision in Nigeria, this chapter presents the outcomes of literature searches which underpin the theoretical framework, research questions and the choice of research design for my study. It highlights the socio-cultural framework of quality education in Nigeria within the 'traditional', 'modern' and 'post-modern' perspectives. What distinguishes these three perspectives is how each of them describes its theoretical and intellectual ideas about the aim of education and their approach to making knowledge claims. The traditional perspective on educational assessment can be linked to educational principles that are based on the philosophical thinking of seventeenth and eighteenth century ideas about childhood (Postman, 1985). Postman argues that "the idea of childhood is one of the great inventions of the Renaissance, perhaps its most humane one". Likewise, the post-colonial advocates of traditional African education who support pragmatic, communal, progressive and functional education (Fafunwa, 1974) have continued to argue for an African-centric approach to the organisation of educational programmes. In its traditional form, quality assessment seems to be inherent in the socio-historic perception of children as young adults and democratic approaches to child rearing.

As discussed in Chapter One, 'modern' perspectives lend themselves to quantitative approaches to quality assessment. It has continued to occupy the centre of empirical studies and political discourse on quality assessment, (for example studies carried out by (Whitebook, 1989, Hamre and Pianta, 2001, Currie, 2001, LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2007). Specifically, the field of early childhood care and education has witnessed an increased dependence on quantitative approaches of educational assessment and mainstream perspectives to quality assessment seem to reside with such modern theories. These often feature objectivity, rationality and technicality (Moss, 2007) in the assessment of quality education, usually in form of Anglo-American dominant voices (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, *ibid*). This discourse has occupied a focal point of quality discourse in global educational policy reforms and early childhood is not an exception (Sakai et al., 2004, Mashburn et al., 2008, Dunn, 1993).

In recent times, however, post-modern thinking has given more attention to the place of dialogue and meaning-making (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, *ibid*) in quality assessment in ECCE. This explores ways to reconceptualise early childhood assessment and its various components. This paradigm shift from the modern to post-modern perspectives is anchored to the recognition of the vital role of contextual factors and value judgements in understanding fundamental issues that surround education and care of children. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (*ibid*) in their post-modern theoretical arguments explore the possibility of quality assessment within the language of "meaning making", which embraces "contextuality, values, subjectivity, uncertainty, and provisionality" (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, *ibid.*). This post-modern

perspective identifies the intrinsic values within the socio-cultural matrix and institutional environment that shape relationships and interactions that occur in early childhood institutions. It is believed that the understanding of human actions and exchanges can be explored through “reflection, dialogue, argumentations, and documentation” (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, *ibid.*). In view of the importance of these postmodern theoretical ideas, and their contribution to the language of evaluation in early childhood care and education, it is increasingly acknowledged as a viable approach to a better understanding of quality assessment in ECCE (Woodhead, 2006b, Myers, 2005, Evans and Myers, 2004, Penn, 2009, Urban, 2008).

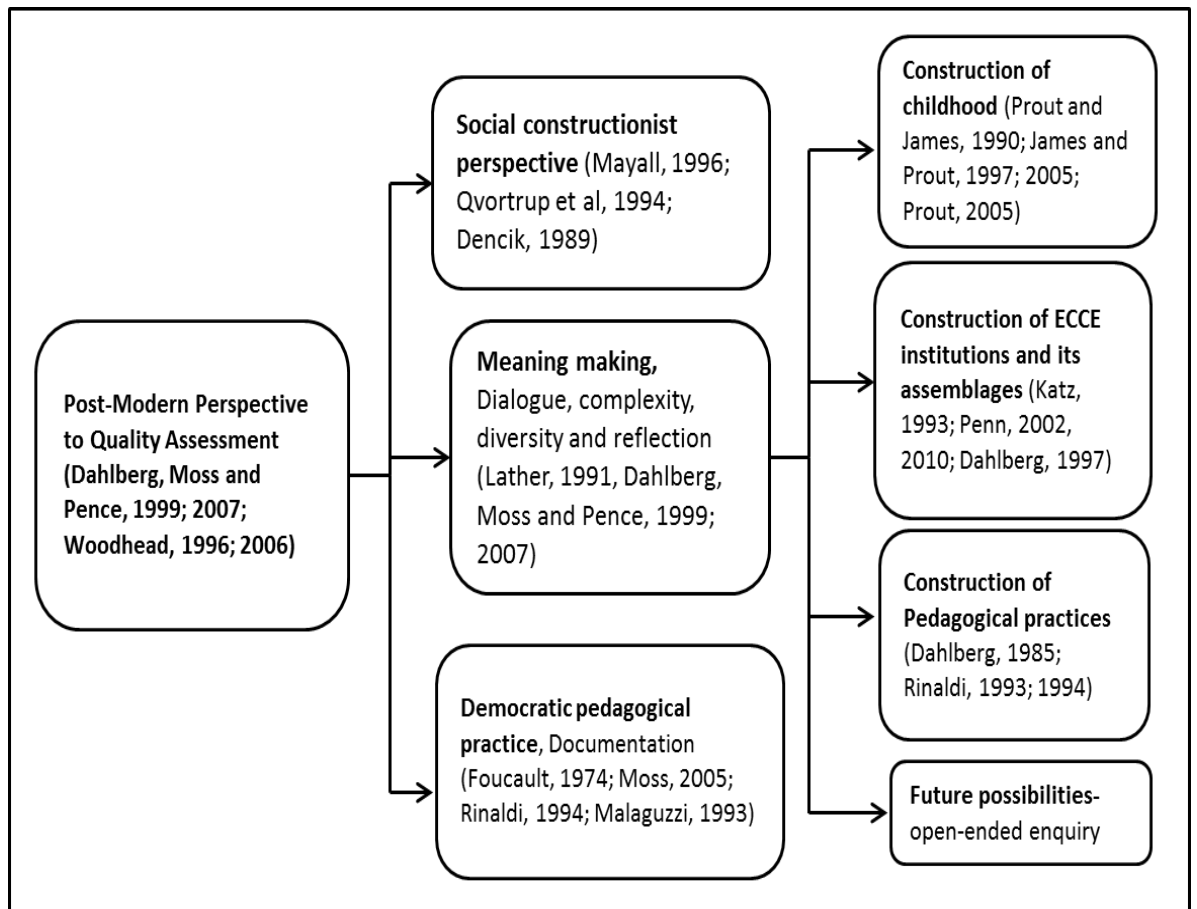
As Woodhead (*ibid*) argues, educational interventions, particularly in relation to early childhood services, are underpinned by relationships between children and adults, which are in turn shaped by values, beliefs and societal norms. In any ECCE institutions, the vital role of teachers as significant adults have been extensively recognised (Hamre and Pianta, 2001, Kontos, 1999). More fundamentally, human agency and the construction of childhood (Prout, 2005, James and Prout, 1997), seem to be good starting points in ECCE assessment. This is necessary in view of the peculiarities of ECCE in developing countries, with multi-cultural contexts, unorganised neo-liberal ideologies and the prevalence of International Development Partners interventions (Atmore, 2012, Lloyd and Penn, 2012).

## **2.2. The postmodern perspectives to quality assessment in ECCE**

The post-modern perspective advocated by writers such as Dahlberg, Moss and Pence accommodates “plurality, subjectivity, complexity and contingency” in understanding childhood, ECCE institutions pedagogical practices and future

possibilities. It is a project closely associated with resistance to the claim to be able to identify objective and absolute knowledge. It represents a school of thought, emergent since the 1960s, to embrace the role of *social construction* and *meaning making* in understanding the world and the relationships that exist within it (Hargreaves, 1994). While the post-modern perspective does not support “universal truth and scientific inquiry” of social phenomenon, its major idea is advancing a knowledge base through multiple perspectives that are context-specific and value-laden, that is the understanding of institutional and social phenomena through dialogue and discourse (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, *ibid*). This is often tentative and capable of opening many possibilities for further enquiries. The major theoretical approaches which constitute the post-modern thinking about quality assessment in ECCE are depicted in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Post-modern theoretical approaches to quality assessment in ECCE**



*Gbadegesin, 2016*<sup>5</sup>

The considerable variations that exist across countries in the Global South do not justify the adoption of a universal assessment template. For instance, assessment techniques in the Global North, usually characterised by prescribed guidelines, may not be easily applicable to the Global South, where there are cultural and social diversities that shape provision of child care and education. As Woodhead (2006) notes, contextual analysis of human behaviour and rationales behind such behaviour is germane to understanding

<sup>5</sup> Adapted from the theoretical writings of Dahlberg, Moss and Pence: Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care, Language of Evaluation. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 2007.

institutional environment like early childhood settings. In reality, many nations today exist as diverse societies with major cultural, religious and linguistic differences (Woolman, 2001). Thus, while the issue of contextual understanding of diverse society is problematized (Siraj-Blatchford and Wong, 1999, Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2005), the certainty of the unified knowledge promised by a modernist approach is contestable.

Furthermore, post-modern perspectives address the peculiarities of contexts and everyday life experiences that children and adults encounter, which constitute a social reality upon which meanings for actions can be generated. These experiences provide the basis on which subjective elements such as interest, beliefs, motives, values, norms and culture can be explored. In support of this view, Hargreaves (1994) in his study on post-modern perspective to teacher development avers that a purely technical approach to teacher development will only produce “a narrow, utilitarian exercise that does not question the purposes and parameters of what teachers do”. Therefore, the use of generic terms, through metrics and statistics, for child assessment across different contexts has been contested (Dahlberg and Moss, 2004; Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2009; Woodhead, 1998; Moss and Pence, 1994). Indeed, Moss and Pence (1994) argue for a broader view of the definition of quality assessment by prioritising the inclusion and empowerment of a wide range of stakeholders’ views as much as possible, through “a dynamic and

continuous process of reconciling the concerns of different interest groups” (EC Childcare Network, 1991)<sup>6</sup>.

This study employs a post-modern perspective to quality assessment as proposed by Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2009), upholding the understanding of contextual factors that influence quality and its assessment within a particular context. This provides opportunities to understand relationships that are particular to the society in which assessment takes place and determine the grounds for success or otherwise. A basic strength of this theoretical stance is that it allows the exploration of contextual elements that shape people’s behaviour and practices within early childhood care and education settings. As Dahlberg and Moss (2004) argue, social constructions create opportunities for dialogue and deeper understanding. Thus, a common theme in the post-modern perspective is meaning-making through dialogue and reflection. It suggests that opportunities to engage in dialogical-oriented activities can spur necessary reflections that can constantly shape quality assessment mechanisms. In other words, dialogue and reflection make room for diverse possibilities. As I illustrate in subsequent sections, this notion is projected by the idea that quality is value-laden and embedded in societal values, beliefs and practices.

### **2.3. Concept of Quality in ECCE**

In education, many definitions of quality exist, testifying to the complexity and multifaceted nature of the concept (UNICEF, 2000). This stipulates that any

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<sup>6</sup> European Commission Childcare Network. Quality in Services for Young Children: A discussion Paper. European Commission Equal Opportunities Unit, Brussel. 1991



definition of quality in education must focus on all the dimensions of system quality including the perspectives of learners, learning environments, content, process and outcomes. This is connected to the three-dimensional approach to quality assessment of the modernist perspective, which includes process, structure and outcome (Sylva et al., 2006, Phillipsen et al., 1997, Burchinal et al., 2000, Scarr et al., 1994). These authors argue that the process aspect comprises children's day-to-day experience in ECCE settings, while the structural aspect comprises physical inputs to children's experiences. The outcome is the output that comes from the combination of process and structural components.

At face value, quality is described as a measure of excellence or a state of being free from defects, deficiency and significant variations (Harvey and Green, 2006), and sometimes informed by consistent commitment to certain standards. According to Reeves and Bednar (1994), quality is sometimes described by terms relating to excellence, value, conformity to specifications, and/or meeting customer expectations. Greenway (2011) perceives quality as being connected to either fundamental philosophical and ethical issues or as complete compliance to a set of technical specifications designed for evaluation. Moss (1994) recognises two different meanings of the word "quality". The first is analytic or descriptive and the other is evaluative. According to Moss, in the former meaning, 'quality' is used to analyse, describe and understand the essence or nature of something; what makes it what it is. In the evaluative meaning of 'quality', what is being assessed is how well a service performs or, more specifically, to what extent it meets its goals or objectives.

Cloney et al. (2013) categorize quality in ECCE into structural and procedural aspects. They describe structural aspects to include the number of children in a classroom (group size), the corresponding number of adults (adult-to-child ratios) and the qualifications of the adults. Structural features are said to be associated with child outcomes in expected ways. The improved staff-to-child ratios, higher staff qualifications and smaller group size, which can be categorised as the environment criteria, are generally associated with better child outcomes (Snow & Van Hemel, 2008 in Cloney *et al.* (2013). These are aspects of ECEC that can be regulated, though they may contain variables which cannot be regulated (Taguma et al., 2013). For example, the aspects of staff qualification and working conditions are usually subject to the demand for early childhood education, especially in a private-sector led provision. On the other hand, the process aspects of quality are concerned with the nature of adult-child interactions and the activities and learning opportunities available to children. It consists of children's daily experiences – that which happens within a setting (Taguma, Litjens and Makowiecki, *ibid*).

Moreover, the Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report (UNICEF, 2012) posits that two principles characterize most attempts to define quality in education: the first identifies learners' cognitive development as the major explicit objective of all educational systems; the second emphasizes education's role in promoting the values and attitudes of responsible citizenship and in nurturing creative and emotional development. However, Cryer (1999) maintains that the subject of quality is complex, embracing a tension between "what" constitutes and "who" defines quality.

As discussed in Section 2.2, the dominant “voice” of the modernist perspective to knowledge claims seems to have produced a general agreement on the essential elements of quality ECCE in the Anglo-American context (Fenech, 2011, Myers, 2005). Indeed, Fenech’s study on the “paths” of empirical findings on quality ECCE in the period 1980-2008 found that one of the revealing details about quality is that the dominance of positivist discourse in ECCE quality assessment favours pre-schoolers over infant classes. Moreover, Woolman (2001) suggests that consensus on quality measures might be easier to achieve in most countries in the Global North where there are “political expressions of one culture” (Esping-Andersen, 1990) compared with many countries of the Global South. The reason might be the diversity of cultures and political orientations in the latter countries. However, some of the criteria that guide political decisions and institutional assessment of ECCE settings in the Global North have continued to feature in the quality assessment measures of many countries in the Global South, and sometimes without being critiqued. For instance, in Nigeria, the quality of ECCE programme is measured by how settings abide by internationally recognised “best practices”. Many of the nursery schools end their name with the phrase “international nursery school” to depict how compliant their services are with globalised educational ideas. Invariably, quality measures propagated through technological devices and policy directives have been passed to the school system through ideological transfer of positivist thinking. However, this consensus has not been without some contestations from the post-modern thinkers (Woodhead, 1998; Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999).

Post-modern researchers argue that quality in ECCE programmes is not a universal but a relative concept, which depends on cultural values and beliefs about the nature of children and childhood (Waller, 2015:133, Dahlberg et al., 1999). Britto et al. (2011) describe quality as a dynamic, flexible and adaptable construct contouring itself across cultures, settings, time and types of intervention. This definition is of particular relevance to ECCE given the range of programmes and interventions that are involved. The authors assert that though quality is the critical ingredient of programmes linked with child outcomes, yet it resists a simple and universally applicable definition.

Studies suggest that quality of ECCE services is indicated by multiple dimensions such as their cultural appropriateness, intensity and duration of the programme, the skills of staff, and features of the physical, social and learning environment (Penn, 2009; Greenway, 2011; Osgood, 2010). The complex interplay of these dimensions makes it impossible to have a uniform definition. There seems to be wide global variations in the types of ECCE programmes, ownership structure, actors, and target populations. These provisions are consequently influenced by institutional environment, within which quality needs to be understood. For instance, most of the children services in the Global North incorporate parenting programmes, home visiting programmes, nutrition intervention, and early stimulation and learning, while programmes in the Global South remain fragmented and private-sector led. Thus, given the importance of differences in culture and perspectives, it may not be possible to develop a single, uniform definition of quality that applies across even one nation, let alone across the globe.

Moss (1994) suggests that the analytic and descriptive meaning of quality requires the adoption of an essentially holistic approach which entails the distinctiveness and unique combination of characteristics. Quality as Moss (ibid) argues is what is under the surface, the persistent daily work done by the staff, which can be hard fully to recognize without being together with a group of children for a long time. With all the different definitions of quality, it is necessary to agree with Moss and Dahlberg (2008) that the word 'quality', therefore, is neither neutral nor self-evident, but saturated with values and assumptions, such that discussions on quality are often value-laden and sometimes difficult to understand. Hofer (2008) posits that when the definitions of quality are not consistent, general statements about the relationship between quality and other variables are made more difficult. In fact, Allen and Whalley (2010) stress the difficulties associated with the slippery concept of quality within the context of early childhood care and education provision. Therefore, sub-sections 2.3.1 and 2.3.2 below discuss quality assessment in ECCE and theoretical frameworks of quality assessment in ECCE respectively.

### **2.3.1 Quality assessment in ECCE**

As described in Section 2.3 above, the definition of quality has attracted both objective and subjective views. On this account, discussions on quality standards in early childhood have dominated many of the stakeholders' forums on the local, national and international levels. The notion of quality has to contend with the economic situation in many parts of the world. For instance, the recent global economic crisis and pressure on funding of education has emphasized the need for accountability and "value for money" in the education sector, including ECEC, and for other evidence-based policy development

(OECD, 2006). This can be said to be one of the premises on which the concept of quality in ECEC is based. Moreover, a compelling argument within the international communities on the returns from early childhood investment and its future gains, including the respect that accrues to societies that pursue ECCE provisions, has been a driving force for a pursuance of quality standards in schools.

The concept of quality assessment in early childhood services has become a subject of debate in the literature and is often fraught with controversies. Quality assessment in the field of early childhood education and care has been explored by various researchers across various disciplines (Moss and Pence 1994; Moss and Dahlberg 2008; Allen and Whalley 2010). While quality standards in ECCE in the Global North have been measured against a set of guidelines i.e. Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECER-S) (Harms et al., 2005, Sylva et al., 2004); Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) (NAEYC, 2003); Early Years Inspection Framework (DfES, 2004)<sup>7</sup>; and developmental outcomes (Gresham and Elliot, 1990, Clarke-Stewart and Allhusen, 2005, Network, 2005), its extrapolation to other countries has been criticised based on contextual limitations (Moss and Pence 1994; Woodhead 2006).

Britto, Yoshikawa and Boller (2011) state that the task of conceptualising, measuring and improving quality is an important exercise, and as such quality can be said to be a key feature of any successful policy. In Nigeria for instance,

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<sup>7</sup> DfES. 2004. Every child matters: Change for children. London: DfES.

quality assurance mechanisms have featured in all the educational inspection and evaluation schedules. However, these quality standards are in line with an objective approach to evaluating schools and the teaching-learning process. Quality assessment in Nigeria, in its present form, relies heavily on pre-determined metrics abstracted from policy guidelines and international standards. While the providers of ECCE have voiced reservations about the practicality of some of these policy guidelines in the Nigerian context (Alan *et al.* 2011), it is still the main method of assessing quality in ECCE. There is no doubt that this has posed challenges for assessing quality education at the preschool level. Some of these challenges are discussed further in Chapters Four and Six.

There is a general agreement that process quality dimensions that relate to interactions between children and staff form an important dimension of quality criteria in ECCE; one might assume a kind of interaction that is characterised with positivity, warmth, respect, sympathy and has a homely/ pleasant social atmosphere. When children feel the care and love from adults around them, they are able to express themselves, interact with their peers and adults, and bring out their potential. This further develops skills and attitudes that will enhance success in further studies and later life (Cryer, 1999). According to Moss (1994), the process aspects (see section 2.3) of quality in ECCE are usually studied by researchers because of their presumed or proven relationship with certain child outcomes. The child outcomes may be short-term or long-term, possibly educational attainment or some other indicators of later achievement or failure, but most often they only cover some aspects of child development. He concludes that the two meanings of quality- the analytic and

the evaluative (see section 2.3) - can complement each other, such that the understanding derived from the analytic or descriptive approach can be used to explain results attained from the evaluative approach.

In the opinion of Moss (1994), quality has become reified, treated as if it was an essential attribute of services or products that gives them value, assumed to be natural and neutral. He argues that the problem with quality, from this perspective, is its management. He queries whether quality can be discovered, measured, assured and improved and he questions whether goals achieved by technical means will enhance performance and increase value. He also notes that, for most people, quality remains a challenge, something to be achieved, rather than something to be questioned.

Furthermore, Cloney *et al.* (2013) posit that the quality of children's services is best considered as a product of the interaction between structural and process aspects and other factors that are not easily categorized such as the conduct of leadership and management and alignment with the values and principles of the community. Most importantly, they consider that the way adults engage with children within the child's family and community context generates most of quality experiences for children.

In summary, a meaningful discourse of quality assessment procedures in ECCE revolves around issues that relate to children's care, learning, well-being and development; giving a detailed consideration to the learning environment, teacher-pupil interactions, learning outcomes and pedagogical instructions, such as those explored in this study. Based on the overview of quality and



quality assessment above, the next section discusses theoretical framework of quality assessment used in this study.

### **2.3.2. Theoretical framework of quality assessment in ECCE**

The link between the core issues of social constructionist theorists and democratic dialogue (see Figure 2) on quality by Woodhead (2006) and Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999; 2007) are quite germane to the meaning-making of quality in early childhood care and education, especially in a developing economy like Nigeria. A body of evidence from the field of childhood studies, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and biology, suggest that early childhood learning and development can be enriched through an understanding of the existing social, economic and cultural context (Melhuish, 2001a) of children's lives, including the multiple environmental contexts that surround them (Evans and Myers 2004). The divergent opinions and interpretations given to the subject of quality by many stakeholders and experts in the field of child care and education are often reflected in the multiple perspectives that are usually brought into it, which Moss and Pence (1994) argue are dynamic and value-laden (see section 2.3).

Woodhead (2006); Melhuish (2001) and Moss and Dahlberg (2008) raise a caution about generalising quality measurement to all settings and reiterate that the current theories and practices in early childhood care and education should be placed within the context of the major processes of political, social, economic, cultural and technological change occurring in the world today. An understanding of the socio-cultural and ecological context of any educational practice provides opportunities for meaning-making of such practice within the specific period of time and context in which it applies (Keys and Bryan, 2001).

Goodnow and Collins (1990) and Maybin and Woodhead (2003) assert that children's development is partly influenced by the cultural beliefs and practices that allow them to acquire an independent sense of interest and priorities. Often, the quality of child care and education is based on values, norms, expectations and beliefs about what the society and adults in the life of children perceive to be appropriate for them, even in the presence of policy documents and guidelines.

Clark and Moss (2001) and (Moss 1994; 2002) describe 'quality' in early childhood services as a relational concept, not an objective reality. According to the authors;

“Definitions of quality reflect the values and beliefs, needs and agendas, influence and empowerment of various 'stakeholder' groups having an interest in these services (Moss, 2002:1).

He concluded that the process of defining quality with the involvement of stakeholder groups is not only a means to an end but is important in its own right. The author also warned that the word 'quality' is in danger of being rendered meaningless unless and until what was meant by quality is stated and at which point it becomes far more “elusive” (Moss, 2002). This implies that for a feasible definition of quality to evolve from its application, stakeholders' voices are germane to the negotiation of quality measures. Studies by Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999) recognize the impact of diversity of experience and socio-cultural attributes as the tool that shapes the perception of quality in early childhood programmes, despite the increased universalizing effects of globalization on educational programmes. I consider, then, that quality assessment in Nigeria requires a deep inquiry into the inputs and

processes, identifying the differences and shared understanding and interpretations that policymakers, providers and consumers of ECCE make of the institution.

Another facet of discourse in this study is the understanding ascribed to early childhood services and institutions, on which the nature of pedagogical practices in early childhood services are often adjudged, and which also predicts interactions that take place between children and adults (Dahlberg et. al, 1999). The meanings that children make from their home settings and the outer world should complement each other to provide varied opportunities to explore and contribute to the teaching-learning process, making knowledge open-ended. Thus, early care and education institutions become forums for the socialisation of children into the social, cultural and political orientations in a participatory manner. Policy initiatives at their implementation phase often contend with different interpretations that come from implementers' implicit beliefs and values. It thus follows that stakeholders in early childhood care and education perhaps engage in meaning-making through an understanding and exploration of the social and cultural context, and make a contextual adaptation of policy contents, including administration, instructional practice, pedagogical instruction and curriculum; what might be regarded as 'street level bureaucracy'.

Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999) support a paradigm shift from modern to post-modern ideas, drawing on some characteristics from the Reggio Emilia approach. In this context, children are viewed as not "becoming" an ideal personality through a child-centred pedagogy and the inculcation of skills,

values and norms that are only consistent with what the adults around them perceive as desirable, but as separate cultural entities in their own right, equipped with myriads of languages to express their ideas and potentials, capable of participating in the construction of knowledge with adults and other children in the society. Woodhead (2006) also posits that the deconstruction of quality in ECCE involves a process of meaning-making in contextual and collaborative efforts through a series of dialogues. In Nigeria, culture and family life present rich experiences and a knowledge base to impel dialogic interactions in the best interest of “what works” for children. This cultural heritage can also be used to explore children’s creativity and identity formation, while also creating avenues for feedback from children, parents and teachers. Specifically, the cultural value of communal way of life that African society is known for support such dialogues and interactions. However, the prevalence of modern ideals of assessment has not allowed the exploration of many of the cherished cultural values for quality assessment for children. Today, we have the “professional” approach to the individuality of a child that has substituted the kinship and community-based approach to child training.

This study is therefore situated within the discourse of quality advocated by Moss (1994); Woodhead (1998; 2006) and Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999), using their post-modern “language of evaluation”- meaning making as the theoretical framework for the understanding of quality criteria in the Nigerian ECCE settings (see Figure 2). Thus, this study utilises this to establish a contextual basis of the meaning-making of quality assessment of ECCE in Nigeria.

In summary, the post-modern ideology of knowledge claims and how they can be understood informs the theoretical underpinning for this study. Consequently, the next section presents the connection between global and local contexts of ECCE provision.

#### **2.4. International Comparison of Policies and interventions in Child Care and Education**

Provisions of early childhood care and education, ranging from childcare, education and welfare services, are not easily comparable across countries. These services are often categorised based on hours available, ages catered for and types of services provided (OECD, 2001, Gullo, 2005, Meziobi, 2006, Penn and Lloyd, 2007, Penn and Lloyd, 2013). For instance, the trend in early childhood interventions in many of the countries in the Global North has continued to evolve from a simple approach into a complicated network of policy strategies that address contemporary issues in child care, learning and development (Zigler et al., 2000). These interventions are informed by successive generations of philosophical thinking and theoretical stance that have been contested over time. As discussed in Section 2.2 above, the dominant theoretical viewpoint of modernism that has created educational ideals and framework for universal application on children's care and learning has been contested by the post-modern ideology. However, recent trends in the globalisation of educational ideals indicate the tendency of modernist perspectives to assume a knowledge "hegemony" in quality assessment of children's services across the globe (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence 1999), which trickle down to the school system through the political sphere. The transfer of the dominant neo-liberal ideals and policy directives through the modernist

claim for superior knowledge has necessitated alternative possibilities for constructing early childhood institutions and their purposes. This study concerns itself with these alternative possibilities through meaning-making and dialogue. The major impact of the globalised ideas on child care and learning in many of the countries in the Global South entails the re-orientation of child care and education, which used to be within the purview of individual households, to public budget and provision. Accordingly, the importance of early care and learning has become increasingly recognized across the globe, in its own right and as a means to an end (Woodhead, 2006b).

For the sake of global acceptance and relevance, so many countries in the South have replicated and measured standards across different dimensions that relate to the appropriateness of regulatory frameworks, the integration of care and education, and child well-being and professionalism in ECCE, most often against internationally recognised outcomes. For instance, the first quality assessment instrument (FME, 2010) for early childhood settings in Nigeria, which was formulated after the promulgation of Universal Basic Education (UBEC, 2004), is an offshoot of the Ofsted quality framework in the UK. The quality framework, though its successes and challenges have not been empirically explored, is generating interest and contestation among educational stakeholders. Despite the face-value appeal of ECCE policy directives in Nigeria, they have not been “embraced uniformly and supported consistently” (Zigler et al., 2000). The main obstacles are the precarious economic conditions and the socio-cultural issues that some of the basic tenets of such policy framework must contend with.

At the international level, a series of regulatory frameworks have trailed the provision and inspection of ECCE settings for effectiveness and adequacy. In the UK, we have the *National Childcare* strategy in 1998, *Every Child Matters* in 2003, and *The Ten Year Childcare Strategy* in 2004” (Greenway, 2011); *Free Pre-School Year* (FPSY) of 2010 in Ireland, and *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 in the USA, all of which are directed towards inclusive early intervention for children. However, such frameworks are not immune to the fundamental challenges that Zigler et al, (2000:3) suggest early intervention is bound to encounter. In the authors’ words, “*the challenge that faces early intervention services is to merge the knowledge and insights of scholars and practitioners with the creative talents of those who design and implement social policy initiatives...*” Undoubtedly, this might account for the fragmented nature of early years’ intervention (Penn et al., 2004) and gaps in policy-theory-practice links. Moreover, Greenway’s (2011) study revealed that inspection frameworks, though widely accepted as an important aspect of quality assessment in the UK, are faced with resistance from practitioners. Hence, Moss (2006) points out that no matter how appealing a policy framework might look, it is necessary to explore a democratic approach for its understanding and implementation. Invariably, the formulation of an inclusive policy initiative cannot assume a straightforward implementation process. Evidence from international studies reveal that early interventions have positive effects on children’s cognitive and social development (Reynolds and Robertson, 2003), with economic and societal benefits (Melhuish and Moss, 1991) for disadvantaged families, and all socio-economic backgrounds (Peisner-Feinberg, 2004). The early fear of the possible harmful effect of child care on children (Belsky and Rovine, 1988) has

been replaced with researches on various quality dimensions and characteristics that affect child's developmental domains and readiness for school (Melhuish et al., 1991, Myers, 1992, Arnold et al., 2008, Kagitcibasi et al., 2001). The benefits of early intervention across different contexts, as investigated by Nores and Barnett (2010), include cognitive, behavioural, health and schooling benefits. While these benefits seem to emphasize and concentrate on developmental and learning milestones in a majority of the countries in the Global North, countries in the Global South are contending with universal access and integration of all children. For instance, in Nigeria, early childhood education and care services are discussed as a condition for bridging urban-rural, rich-poor and educated-ignorant divide that is prevalent in the local communities. In fact, early intervention has been perceived to be a means of preventing or ameliorating problems in families with young children and in later childhood, breaking religious limitations to educational potential as well as protecting children deemed to be at risk. In Nigeria, the recent paradigm shift in early childhood care and education from child survival to holistic development has directed the research focus towards the impact and interactions of children's ecological context on developmental outcomes.

Notably, reforms and decisions on early childhood education and care programmes, put together as policy documents, are often made within a socio-political sphere, and are profoundly influenced by the culture and social context of a given society. The Universal Basic Education Act (UBEC, 2004) stipulates basic education in the Nigerian context as:

*“education aimed at equipping individual child, youth and adults with such knowledge and skills as will enable him to develop to*



*his fullest capacity, derive maximum social, economic and cultural benefits from his membership of society and fulfil civic obligations (UBEC, 2004:4)".*

The primary focus of the policy, which is the provision of universal, compulsory and free education for the first nine years of child's schooling, has been adduced as a major strategy for increasing access and equity. Invariably, this objective seems to be in line with international covenants, and often supports political campaigns and affiliations, sometimes with little adaption to the context for which it was prepared.

The historical root of early childhood intervention in many of the countries in the North in the early eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw child care as essentially home care by mothers, with some marginal use of informal care through other family members or neighbours (Tizard et al., 1976, Fenech, 2011). In these countries, there are some factors which seem to be turning governmental attention to ECEC issues. According to the OECD (2006), such factors include: the wish to increase women's labour market participation; to reconcile work and family responsibilities on a basis more equitable for women; to confront the demographic challenges faced by OECD countries (in particular falling fertility rates and the general ageing of populations); and the need to address issues of child poverty and educational disadvantage. It is believed that economic prosperity depends on maintaining a high employment population ratio and, therefore, the need to bring more women into the labour market as a key driver of government interest in expanding ECEC services. The OECD (2006) reported that European governments, in particular, have put into place family and child care policies to help couples to have children and assist parents to combine work and family responsibilities. They provide child

health, referral and other services, and contribute greatly to preparing young children for school. Also, support for the view that early childhood education and care should be perceived as a public good is growing, and has received a strong impetus from the research of education economists. However, the foundational historic, social mores and political culture still play a significant impact in the organisation and provision of ECCE services across countries in the Global North (Fenech, 2011; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Pringle, 1998). Indeed, Esping- Andersen described the economic and social ideologies embedded in the welfare regime of each country as the determining factor in the organisation and provision of children's services. For instance, while it can be seen that Europe has a culturally identical political system, each country's responses to children's services is often predicated on a particular welfare regime. Accordingly, the discussion below examines neoliberalism and early childhood care and education services and how it influences early childhood provision and intervention in Nigeria.

#### **2.4.1. Neoliberalism and Early Childhood Care and Education Services in Nigeria**

“...adopting a Foucauldian perspective, cross-national work can only help to think differently and therefore critically...” (Moss, 2000: 4)

An analysis of welfare regimes provides a way of understanding different pathways to quality assessment of children's services and other various social welfare programmes. ECCE provision and practice hinge largely on various governments' attitude and motivation for welfare support to families and children (Pringle, 1996). Though countries from the Global North have long-established social policy frameworks, the institutional, socio-historical and

political distinctiveness of each country/region (Grahl and Teague, 1997, Kleinman, 2002, Harvey, 2005) mediates between the formulation of social policy that guides children's care and education and actual practices (Pringle, 1998; Esping Andersen, 1990). Indeed, in Europe, welfare administration and their influences on the organisation of early childhood care and education, highlights the need to address social issues that surround interventions in children's services as socially constructed (Pringle, 1998, MacGregor, 2014). It is imperative to note that variants of welfare approaches do exist in different parts of the world and within different eras (MacGregor, 2014, Kemeny, 1995).

Neoliberalism originates from a perceived need to reconsider the feasibility of government's sole effort, without a collaborative effort of private and other agencies. Moreover, low public confidence and internal bureaucracies in state-provided services has encouraged private efforts. The pursuit of gradual withdrawal of government intervention in service provision and a paradigm shift from state-oriented to a deregulated, market-driven, and privatised operation has had a significant impact on the prospect of early childhood development programmes. Neoliberalism can be described as a resurgence of the unhindered capitalism which gained prominence in 19<sup>th</sup> century (Harvey, 2007) and was deeply operational in the US and UK from the 1980s onward (Harvey, 2005). It had since spread within and across Europe, Asia and Africa, which manifests in the form of reduction and abolition of welfare allowances, benefits and other welfare packages, and embracing of privatisation, deregulation and commercialization (MacGregor, 1999). It is an ideology that believes in a "market-based approach" to social insurance with less consideration for "social solidarity" (Pringles, 1998). In Nigeria, neoliberal principles manifest through

the involvement of private entrepreneurs, NGOs and international agencies in the organisation, funding and provision of children's services. In many regions of Africa, ECCE services are mostly characterised by some level of neglect, disparities and inequality due to government's inadequate commitment to social services and the redistribution of income.

Welsh and Parsons (2006) suggest that the one of the principles of a neoliberal system is centred on assisting an individual to reduce difficulties and challenges rather than overhauling the structural system that triggers such challenges, thus promoting an individualistic approach (Wiarda, 1997). Neoliberalism is thus an extension of market principles and mechanisms to areas of daily life and service provision previously based on state or voluntary organisations. In many policy programmes of the countries in the Global North, the neoliberal approach emphasises the modernization of public services for efficiency purposes, sometimes indicating the withdrawal of government from the main social service provision (Fairclough, 2002, Brown, 2003, Spolander et al., 2014).

In relation to the provision of children's welfare packages, the use of means testing, as well as demand and supply - market equilibrium, in allocating financial resources and social services is usually employed (Harvey, 2007, Mccashin and Considine, 2010, Barry, 2013). An example is the United Kingdom's approach to financial support with pronounced neoliberal tendencies such as - "reduced, stigmatised and less liberating" welfare system, exhibiting a "vertical redistribute effect" (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Pringles, 1998). This suggests that welfare packages are most likely to be taken up by

families considered to be in “need” or at “risk” in one form or the other, what Pringle (ibid) calls the “stigmatisation of benefits”. In a similar vein, the Nigerian government’s financial support to children and families is highly targeted towards families and children considered at risk, whilst neglecting others who are assumed to be doing well. Since the enactment of Universal Basic Education in 1994, public provision of welfare and educational services to children has been directed to poor families. However, poor patronage of these services by middle income social class puts the question of achieving social equity in children’s services in doubt.

Moreover, the principles of neoliberalism that emanate from the liberalisation of global market and free-trade policies (Harvey, 2007)), reduce public-sector intervention in “private” affairs (Springer, 2012, Pringle, 1998) in which case all that goes on within a family setting is considered “private”. In many regions of Africa, educational reforms and policy built on neoliberal principles threaten cherished cultural heritage and childrearing patterns that allow for solidarity and communality (Nsamenang and Tchombe, 2011). This might account for a notable discrepancy in the government’s commitment to funding/provision of ECCE and its actual practices. Undoubtedly, public intervention in early childhood services in many of the countries ruled by neoliberal welfare regimes is inadequate, not properly coordinated and tangential to efforts to maintain equity. This situation has become worse in countries with an unorganised economic system and an unstable political system. In Nigeria, ECCE policy strategy and implementation seems to support private efforts catering for a large percentage of income earners while a residual public provision is made for the low-income earners, constituting variability in the quality of services and

over-reliance on private provision (Pringle, 1998). This suggests that families as private settings are left to make choices based on their capacity, deepening the notion of individuality rather than communality (Kotz, 2009). In Nigeria, government-owned ECCE centres are characterised by deteriorated facilities and declines in funding. Moreover, low public interest in the quality of government's ECCE services encourages individual families to shift to private centres.

The issue of integrated services for children is difficult to understand because of the dichotomous view of care and education. Undoubtedly, public provision of care for ages 0-3 is problematized and often seen as an intrusion into privacy of family lives by the government. The Nigerian government's attempt to make a clear distinction between care and education seems to be based on the economic significance and contribution of the latter. The implication is that early childhood care and education is not part of the social welfare designed for social justice. Children's attendance in any school is largely dependent on the class and status of parents. Molyneux (2008) states that governmental intervention by a neoliberal regime, through controls and measures, cannot be considered a panacea to poor service delivery in the social sector. Thus, professionalism in ECCE is multifaceted and complex to dissect, relying on the government's attitude to childcare. In Nigeria, private effort in ECCE provision has brought about educational changes that problematize the professionalism and sustainability of children's services.

According to Rogowski (2011), the adoption of neoliberal ideals has had a profound influence on how children's services and other forms of social work

are organised. The impact of neoliberal principles on early childhood services and children's welfare support system bears heavily on childcare cost, availability (Pringle, 1998, Codd, 2008, Spolander et al., 2014) and issues that surround women's employment and participation in the labour market. The private cost of childcare, especially for children under three, is borne by parents, which further determines female employment take-up rate.

In the 1990s, Pringle's (1998) and Hantrais and Letablier's (1997) analysis of the UK's approach to social assistance and child benefit compared with other European countries suggested a good performance. However, Pringle (1998) contends that such good performance needs to be considered in the light of some fundamental elements like the liberating effects on recipients, family structure, race, and motivation amongst other things. A notable influence is oppression/discrimination due to an emergence of social class differentials leading to structural inequalities and poverty traps. While research evidence suggests that the idea of privatisation had brought transformation in educational reform in terms of choice, efficiency, accountability, audit, autonomy and fostering of tasks (Apple, 2001, Apple, 2005, Whitty et al., 1998, Robertson, 2000, Hatcher, 2003, Hatcher, 2005, Robertson et al., 2012), it has also contested the question of "equality" "quality" and "universal fairness" in the society (Gewirtz, 2003, Gillborn and Youdell, 1999), thus widening achievement gaps in schools and creating unnecessary hierarchies (Robertson, 2000, Ball, 1997). For instance, the Nigerian early childhood service is characterised by varying curriculum expectations based on location and ownership structure.

Moreover, Pringle suggests that public provision of day care services for children under three are stigmatised, targeting families in need, making publicly-funded childcare in the UK one of the least developed among other European countries (Pringle, 1998). He suggests that these services have continued to witness a drift towards the involvement of private and not-for-profit organisations. The resultant effect is that the notion of quality and its assessment is problematized. For instance, in a bid to ration resources and manage risk, child care and other social work have been subjugated to the demands of pre-determined outcomes with its focus on bureaucratic procedures. Bradt and Bouverne-De Bie (2007) and Mantle and Backwith (2010) reiterate that there is a general growing inequality and social injustice in childcare and other social work as a result of socio-welfare withdrawal and advocacy for the liberal market. Moreover, Mantle and Backwith (2010) suggests collective action in order to challenge inequitable social relations, and establish an anti-capitalist system that ensures emancipatory benefit. Nigeria is closely connected with the economic ideals of its colonist- Britain in which neoliberal principles has continued to feature in educational reforms. The implication is that the rather fragmented and piece-meal policy will continue to be challenged by the inequality that it creates in the society.

## **2.5. The institutional dimension of poverty on the construction of quality early childhood education and care.**

Children occupy a significant position in economic and other developmental aspects of a society and the level of attention given to them in social policy can be used to judge the welfare system of a society (Pringle, 1998). However, across the globe, children and women are often found to be vulnerable to



poverty and other harsh conditions (Atkinson et al., 2002, Hills and Stewart, 2005, Bradshaw and Finch, 2003, Roelen and Notten, 2011). In Nigeria, women and children form the most vulnerable groups because of cultural practices and traditional beliefs that limit their access to national wealth and social service (Caldwell and McDonald, 1982, Caldwell and Caldwell, 2002). This is the overarching premise on which this study is based. The influence of poverty on assessment of quality in Nigerian educational services seems to provide an overarching perspective to understanding the context of this research.

Over the years, there has been a growing public clamour for children's right (UNCRC, 1989) to participate in the society as "visible" individuals in their own right. These rights have been adapted into Global South's social policy. Thus, eradication of child poverty has been broadly advocated by various agencies to enhance children's development and their integration into the society (Duncan and Brooks-Gunn, 2000, Bradbury and Jäntti, 2001). Various authors have attempted to measure child poverty in the context of income and other contextual dimensions that relate to the culture of any particular society (Unicef, 2007, Camfield et al., 2013, Roelen, 2011, Alkire and Foster, 2011, Gordon et al., 2000, Bastos and Nunes, 2009). These dimensions include family income, consumption and non-monetary indicators such as social exclusion and deprivation rate (Bastos and Nunes, 2009, Gordon et al., 2000). Other dimensions of poverty in extant literature include health, food security, housing, care and love, social inclusion, access to schooling, freedom from economic exploitation, autonomy and mobility (Biggeri et al., 2010, Gordon et al., 2000). In Europe, the multidimensionality of child poverty incorporates financial and

material possession, housing conditions, parental skill level, access to quality education and family stability, parental health and neighbourhood conditions (UNICEF, 2005, Roelen and Notten, 2011, Richardson et al., 2008, Staff, 2009).

Issues that surround child poverty within extant literature (UNICEF, 2005), view child poverty from diverse perspectives, however towards the same understanding: the deprivation of basic human need for a decent living (Biggeri et al., 2010, Dickerson and Popli, 2015, Onibokun and Kumuyi, 1999, Gordon et al., 2000, Sen, 1999), such as quality education, good housing, health care facilities, material and social skills (UNICEF, 2006). Child poverty is context and time specific and is associated with different social, economic, demographic, political and cultural variables (Roelen and Notten, 2011). In other words, child poverty is a multi-dimensional and complex phenomenon difficult to dissect. Child poverty is endemic in many countries of the Global South and can be described as the cankerworm that damages three critical areas of a child; physical, cognitive and social development (Alkire and Foster, 2011, Unicef and UNICEF, 2015). I simply describe child poverty here as an antecedent of poverty of a nation when such a nation does not give appropriate attention to family and children's welfare, an indispensable component of a society, in its formulation of social policy and as such does not make them feel like recognised member of the society. A situation when a child suffers from inadequacy, insufficiency, deficiency, deprivation, neglect, mal-treatment, denial, malnutrition and un-even distribution of basic physical, social and emotional needs for cognitive, social and physical wellbeing.

Poverty, a global phenomenon with its objective and subjective views, has continued to generate debates in the literature and public discourse, as 'the poor' are not a homogenous group (UNDP, 1999). Various measures and indices have been put forward to define and measure poverty (UNDP, 1998; 2001; World Bank 2001; Onibokun and Kumuyi, 1996) from quantifiable perspectives. However, the incidence of scanty and unreliable data in the Global South makes it difficult to rely on these measures as Gordon et al., 2003 advocate for a socially constructed view. Indeed, a UNDP report states that poverty can be absolute or relative in nature depending on income level and access to basic amenities. However, the many definitions that embrace this concept implies that poverty can be perceived as a "cultural" and "socio-political dependent" construct. A World Bank report (2001) attests that poverty is a multifaceted phenomenon with context-bound specificity. A study conducted in Nigeria reveals that poverty is significantly constructed as a "social and personal isolation" brought about by a "breakdown of communality principles and reliance on individualistic notion of survival" (Ali-Akpajiak and Pyke, 2003). Individuals are forced to devise means of survival while also faced with competition and social injustice. This suggests that the "poor" see themselves as not recognised as part of the society. They see themselves as being socially excluded from a wider sphere of community life as they are not able to establish relationships outside their cycle. Thus, families begin to perceive education as a means for their children to join the few elite minority. Conversely, when there is no escape route through education, many families devise a means of initiating their children into vocational activities.

An understanding of quality education is interlinked with how society perceives public commitment to bridging disparity in access to national wealth and welfare approach through education, and how individuals position themselves within the existing economic ideals. I consider an understanding of the influence of various dimensions of poverty on educational quality assessment as an imperative approach to the constructing of quality education in Nigeria. Provision and access to “meaningful” and “functional” education has been perceived as a means of ensuring economic prosperity and escaping the poverty trap in many countries of the Global South (UNDP, 2001). On an individual level, education equips individuals with knowledge to manage changes, while on a societal level, educational attainment of a country’s citizens determines how such country is rated on a global development indexes (UNDP, 2001).

An interrelationship that seems to exist between the various dimensions of poverty and quality education can be linked to how a society approaches a commitment to social services and social justice, including fairness in the distribution of resources, and how institutional contexts are in turn influenced by poverty. Social services which include health, education and employment have witnessed a reduced governmental intervention in many countries that are influenced by a neo-liberal agenda (Pringle, 1998) with a significant impact on educational reforms /policy and implementation. Nigeria has followed a neoliberal approach in the development and organisation of early childhood educational systems. However, the outcome seems to present a problematic notion of quality education because of the variability of services and programmes for different social classes that neoliberalism creates. For

instance, in Nigeria, a skew towards neoliberal principles has led to a prevalence of private investment in children's care and education (Ali-Akpajiak and Pyke, 2003). This action has both positive and negative impacts on social services and human development. Nigeria is found to have made the least progress in child welfare since the inception of various neoliberal reforms of late 1980s (World Bank, 2000).

The depth of the driving factors responsible for child poverty in the countries of the Global North differ from the countries of the Global South (Roche, 2013). Moreover, the proportion of poverty among children varies across countries. For instance, in Finland and Denmark, child poverty rates have been evaluated to be low (Pringle, 1998). In France, Austria, Belgium, Greece and Luxembourg, the rate of child poverty is rated to be within average while in the countries like UK, Portugal, Ireland and Italy have the highest rate of child poverty in Europe (Del Boca, 2009, Unicef, 2007, Bastos and Nunes, 2009, Pringle, 1998). The vulnerability of children to poverty in the latter countries is attributed to low social welfare packages. A study by Dickerson and Popli (2015) posits that multidimensional poverty has a greater detrimental impact on children's development than income poverty.

In the Global South, child poverty trends grow in multidimensional forms, thus it requires multidimensional approaches to measure and mitigate (Bastos and Nunes, 2009, Biggeri et al., 2010, Wasswa, 2015, Harper, 2010, Unicef, 2011a, UNICEF, 2011b). According to Harper (2010), children in Filipino countries experience high levels of poverty at certain developmental stages when they should not lack proper nutrition and quality education that could enhance their development. In Afghanistan, child poverty is largely caused by several severe

droughts, political insecurity, bad governance and violence with resultant effects on children's growth and development (Biggeri et al., 2010). In Vietnam, Roelen's (2011) study reveals that child poverty is an issue in the context of money, food and multi-dimensional poverty. In Asia, Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, Pacific, Latin America and Caribbean, a study by Gordon et al. (2000) attempts to rigorously measure the multidimensionality of child poverty using food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education, information and access to services as measurement of child poverty.

## **2.6. The Concept of Early Childhood Care and Education**

The nature of early childhood care and education provision (Penn and Lloyd 2013) is paralleled by the different terms that are often used to define it. Countries and international institutions use different terms such as: early childhood care and education (ECCE); early childhood education and care (ECEC); early childhood development (ECD); and early childhood education (ECE). However, in the literature, the field is generally described as early childhood education and care (ECEC). This tends to create a divide between "education" and "care". The antecedents to the dichotomy between care and education is connected with public service administrations which have seemingly put the care of children below three years under a different ministry from education (OECD 2001). As discussed in Section 2.4., children's services reside in different departments and ministries with differing roles and levels of involvement. Moreover, in many other countries, early childhood "care" is restricted to household concerns and consequently experienced low levels of state intervention.

The widely-used term ‘early childhood care and education’ (ECCE) refers to a range of processes and mechanisms that sustain and support development during the early years of life, encompassing education and care (physical, social and emotional, intellectual stimulation, health care and nutrition) as well as the support that the family and community need to promote children’s healthy development (UNICEF 2012). According to OLRs (2012)<sup>8</sup>, this usage reflects an understanding of a continuum of care and the importance of both care and education throughout the early years- from birth and onwards. Liedloff (1985) describes child care as the action or skill of looking after children by a day-care centre caregiver, babysitter, or other providers. According to Liedloff, the achievement of optimal physical, mental and emotional development, especially for babies, is anchored on a continuum, which requires a variety of experiences such as constant physical contact, breastfeeding, and all processes involved in meeting children’s needs.

As discussed in Chapter One, Nigerian early childhood care services are associated with the care for children below three years while early childhood education is often associated with institutional programmes including some elements of educational activities for children aged three years and above. Many ECCE provisions are handled by private individuals and faith-based institutions rather than the state or public sector. This makes the provision fragmented and difficult to analyse. While some private settings employ the term “kindergartens”, others use the term “nursery”. The age range in these

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<sup>8</sup> Oireachtas Library and Research Service. Early Childhood Education and Care. Spotlight. No 4.2012 <https://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/media/housesoftheoireachtas/libraryresearch/spotlights/spotEarlyEd180412.pdf>

classes often varies according to location and prerogative of the owners. Moreover, issues that relate to integrated services, pedagogical practices and teachers' professionalism are problematized by the organisational patterns and perceptions about early childhood. For instance, the use of the term "early childhood care and education" in pre-school settings can be said to be a novel idea brought about by the contemporary usage of the terms in international discourse. The adoption of this term has drawn the attention of the Nigerian government to a holistic approach to achieving children's wellbeing and development. Thus, the term has continued to feature in programmes that represent the "official" showcase of children's services, such as policy documents, public official reports and pre-schools billboards. More importantly, classroom-based practices and the organisation of children's services at a societal level are shaped by the connotations of the concept Early Childhood Care and Education. Accordingly, section 2.5.1 presents theoretical discourses on integration, section 2.5.2 discusses pedagogy in ECCE and section 2.5.3 presents a literature review on the conceptualisation of professionalism in ECCE settings.

### **2.6.1. Pedagogy in ECCE**

Academic debates and empirical research on effective teaching-learning process in ECCE institutions are anchored in teachers' ability to document, reflect, perform, dialogue and deconstruct educational practices in order to ensure appropriate learning and development by children (Weikart, 2000, Dahlberg et al., 2007, Zigler et al., 2000, Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000, De Botton, 2010, Walsh et al., 2010, Woodhead, 1998). Central to the discourse on early childhood care and education pedagogy is the quality of interactions



that occur between a child and a teacher (Weikart, 2000). Furthermore, there are empirical literatures that support the fact that children's opportunity to play enhances healthy growth and development in early years. As children play, they learn to solve problems and develop fine and gross motor skills. According to Fleer (2009), play encapsulates children's entire world of activities and fun, and is a natural way of learning for them. The author opines that play activities for children's learning have received attention based on its historical, cultural, socio-political influences, functions and developmental outcomes. Lillard et al. (2013) and Goldstein (1997) also suggest young children's play as the most important learning and relationship building mechanism for children. They maintain that through play children "*learn how to learn*". Physical play in the preschool years often involves rough-and-tumble play. Older pre-schoolers engage in vigorous physical activity, testing the boundaries of their strength by running, climbing, sliding, and jumping, individually and in groups.

In Nigeria, there are ample resources within local communities which children can explore as playthings. However, as children's learning becomes institutionalised, the assertion of Postman (1985) holds true that institutional arrangement to child care and learning has brought about the reconstruction of play in children lives. Children are expected to engage in play activities in ways that adults approve as constructive and acceptable (Postman, 1985). Omoera (2011) asserts that the introduction of children's theatre into early childhood curricula can go a long way to improve the quality of learning experiences for young children. The author posits that since dramatic play constitutes a major aspect of children's socialisation, their participation in recreational and educational play will further enrich pre-school pedagogy. The implication is that

children should be seen as being capable of bringing into a teaching-learning process their innate potential and innovation to participate and formulate play activities that will further help them to explore their social and cultural environment.

Children can engage in active and exploratory learning when given the necessary resources and environment (Selbie and Wickett, 2010). Goldstein (ibid) suggest that play helps a child to develop physical skills, cognitive concepts, language skills and social skills. According to the author, if the amount of public space devoted to playgrounds and sports fields continues to diminish, reducing children's opportunities for active and social play, it affects the healthy lifestyle of young children. Play nourishes every aspect of children's developmental domains– physical, social, emotional, intellectual, and creative (Fleer, 2009).

Different learning approaches employed in many pre-schools today can be traced to various ideas put forth by learning theorists (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). For example, L. S. Vygotsky's (Smith, 1993), Piaget (Inagaki, 1992); Gunilla Lindqvist (Nilsson, 2009, Fleer, 2013) and the writings/ ideas of 18<sup>th</sup> century educational thinkers (Postman, ibid; Walsh et al, 2010). The debates on childhood curriculum and learning have been made on the ground that childhood is a stage in its own right and not a preparation for presupposed adult responsibility, and as such children should be allowed to co-construct meanings with adults (Prout, 2005). Early childhood pedagogy hinges on the interactions between adults and children in a preschool setting, which in turn inform educational practices.

Weikart (2000) suggested educational approaches to early childhood learning which are built upon the initiatives and roles that teachers and children assume in the teaching-learning process. The author avers that learning activities can be learner-centred in which case a learner takes high initiative with minimal guidance from the teacher, or it can be teacher-directed, which encourages a traditional didactic approach and gives the teacher control over the learning contents. The wide emphasis on learner-centred approach, which places the individual child's interests and needs at the core of learning activities, and often through play-based instructional methods, has been contested. The debate is often that ECCE services are perceived to be a preparatory programme for a rigorous formal school learning experiences in primary school. This is obvious in ways in which numerical, spelling proficiency and reading comprehension are integrated into the ECCE curricula across countries. Moreover, kindergarten has become much more skills-focused, utilizing seat-based activities that employ paper and pencil tasks along with drill and practice exercises in academic skill areas (Wesley and Buysse, 2003, Plevyak and Morris, 2002). The emphasis has shifted from play activities to cognitive activities and the focus of pre-school classes is now on literacy development as children who cannot read and write are made to repeat classes. However, Walsh et al. (2010) in their review of Northern Ireland transition debates raised the question about the inculcation of formal school learning into early childhood pedagogy. They maintain that the pre-school curriculum should reflect play and structured learning activities to ensure a smooth transition for children. Empirical studies also revealed the adverse effect of direct rigid formal instruction on children's progress (Schweinhart et al., 1986, Sylva and Nabuco,

1996). Furthermore, Siraj- Blatchford et al. (2002) in their assessment of effective pedagogy (EPPE) found that factors that maintain a balance between learner and teacher-initiated activities constitute an effective approach, and that any rush in an aspect of children's learning can be at the expense of progress in other developmental domains (Parker, 2013). The authors assert that early reading and learning standards that have emphasized academic rigour in children, are only short lived and do not last into future achievement. This is alluded to by Sylva & Nabuco (1996) when they argue that rigid direct instruction is inimical to effective learning and usually associated with anxiety and poor esteem in children. Edwards and Cutter-Mackenzie (2011) and Rogers (2010) maintain that putting up an appropriate pedagogy involves a joint meaning-making process and the professional knowledge and status of practitioners in relation to children's needs. This suggests that assessment of social and motivational elements of early years programmes are as important as academic outcomes.

However, a qualitative study carried out by CfBT Education Trust and Nuffield Foundation (Hillman and Williams, 2015) reveals that effective early childhood education programmes emphasise teacher-led practice supported by structured, child-chosen activities, and academic outcomes. Apparently, the crucial role of teachers in any pedagogical practice within ECCE settings cannot be overemphasized. Therefore, the consensus on the much-debated effective pedagogy in early childhood institutions seems to advocate play-based work with ample opportunity for the exploration of the environment and verbal communication; a pedagogical framework that combines children initiated activities and teacher directed learning.

Research has highlighted particular risks to young children from malnutrition, disease, poverty, neglect, social exclusion, violence, and lack of a socially stimulating environment, indicating that well-designed promotion, prevention, and intervention strategies during early childhood have the potential to impact positively on young children's well-being and future prospects. Thus, well-being and learning outcomes have been adduced as the benefits from any quality child early childhood care and education (OECD, 2001).

Child well-being can be understood in socio cultural and political contexts (Gabriel and Selbie, 2010). Child well-being according to (Moss et al., 2000, Dillon and Huggins, 2010) encompasses economic, health, nutrition and education, and their safety from abuse, neglect, exploitation and conflict. The ECCE field strives to ensure young children's overall well-being during the early years, thereby providing the foundation for the development of adults who are healthy, socially and environmentally responsible, intellectually competent, and economically productive (OLSR, *ibid*).

### **2.6.2. Professionalism in ECCE**

An increase in awareness and significance of early childhood care and education, including the nature of its provision and quality assurance, has brought about much attention on professionalism in ECCE. As in the case of quality itself, the concept of professionalism is subject to academic and political contestation. Arguments relating to how context-specific elements (Osgood, 2010) shape understanding of ECCE and the roles of teachers and institutions contribute in no small measure to debates about the notion of professionalism of ECCE. Yet, there are written scenarios in literature that undermine the field of ECCE as a professional path.

Earlier studies on ECCE highlight models of professionalism and how they relate to childcare and education (Katz, 1985, Becker, 1962, Caulfield, 1997). While Becker (1962) describes the models of ECCE profession in terms of high social and income status, public commendation and approval of commitment to moral character development, Katz (1985) insisted that these features are not realistic enough to defend professionalism in ECCE and required a set of scientific and result-oriented criteria. Saracho and Spodek (1993) advocate a need for reform in the form of educational training and the establishment of certification system in order to improve the level of professionalism among early childhood practitioners. Invariably, this might suggest that the inclusive nature of the models serves as the basis for understanding professionalism in caring and teaching of children. As these professionalism discourses dominate empirical research in ECCE, they also feature in public policy documents. For instance, in Nigeria, a general certification of teachers at colleges of Education and universities is still perceived to be sufficient for a professional career path in ECCE.

In both the general and the scientific conception of a profession, there are criteria which emphasise these conditions: social necessity and public recognition, acquisition of pre-requisite training and knowledge, altruism, autonomy, codes of ethics, distance from client, standards of practice and rewards or remuneration (Hayes, 2007, Osgood, 2006, OECD, 2006, Dalli, 2008). Indeed, Tucker (2004) and Urban (2008) relate professional identity to broader societal discourses using four quadrants that explain the link between values, personal qualities, ideology, relationships, status, training and qualifications. Acquisition of professional training and specialised knowledge is

one of the pre-requisite activities that makes for ECCE professionalism. Oberhuemer's (2011) study on “divergencies” and “emergencies” of the ECCE workforce across and beyond Europe in the dynamic context of early childhood research in Munich, reveals considerable divergences in terms of formal education, training and the desired professional identity in working with young children. These findings are reported to be orchestrated from lack of flexible and inclusive pathways linked to formal professional recognition, status for all practitioners in the field and non-inclusion of men in the task of caring and educating children in some areas.

Lack of consensus in the policy framework on specific educational requirements for young children's care and education practitioners across various countries constitutes one of the reasons for the dilemma in the professionalism of ECCE (Oberhuemer, 2005). It is important to note that ECCE policies and practices vary across different countries but there is a general consensus that indicates that the care and education of children demands some level of specialised skills and the understanding of important concepts of upbringing as embedded in professional epistemologies (Urban, 2008). Studies by Oberhuemer (2005), Mahony and Hayes (2006) and Urban (2008) posit that professionalism in ECCE is still weak considering different approaches in different countries, the problematic nature of the term ‘training’, ambiguity in split model of care, education, and system integration, and the lack of mandatory development programmes.

Recognition of the societal benefits derivable from a service underscore the feature of social necessity possessed by the ECCE profession (Katz, 1985).

Public recognition and societal mind-set are of paramount importance to ascertain the professionalism of ECCE. With growing trends in the indispensability of children's care and education internationally, the OECD (2001), has not only advocated proper staffing and impressive remuneration for workers, but also affirmed, similar to Forde et al.'s (2006) position, the imperative need for ensuring improved dignity, motivation and self-esteem for ECCE practitioners. As stated by Forde et al. (2006), personal and public orientation and perception of the professional status of ECCE play a major role in the professionalism of ECCE. Moloney and Pope's (2015) study on the experiences of graduates, with particular reference to the relationship between graduate qualifications and professional identity within the ECCE sector, revealed that ECCE professional status is undervalued with low wages and the demeaning impression of ending as a nursery teacher. One of the basic reasons for the downgrading of status is the low perception and respect accorded to teachers in the infant class as akin to their counterparts in primary classes at different school settings.

Moloney (2010) explored practitioners' insights into the professionalism status of ECCE in the Republic of Ireland on personal perspectives with children aged four to six in pre-school and primary school settings using qualitative methodology. The study revealed that practitioners' formation of professional identity is contentious and problematic. While at the pre-school level less attention to professionalism of ECCE workers is attributed to a lack of mandatory training requirements, there is compelling evidence that highly trained ECCE graduates are being lost to other education sub-sectors.



The critical debates on ECCE as a profession, split between a minority of teachers and a growing majority of childcare workers with lower qualifications, poorer work conditions, orchestrated by the diversity of policy directives spurred Moss (2006) and Urban (ibid) to conclude that there is an increasing recognition that the field is highly problematic, complex and requires enhancement through an advanced education. According to Moss (2006), there is a need for restructuring, rethinking, and re-envisioning of the ECCE workforce in order to enhance the concept of professionalism, away from the dualistic 'non-professional/professional' divide that characterises the discourse on professionalism in early childhood settings.

Altruism as a feature of professionalism, which involves a situation where a service is rendered for a sole purpose of social and moral promotion (Brock, 2014a) is a valuable concept that leads to the creation of an environment of trust and mutual respect inherent in the professional role (Brock, ibid). This is essential in ECCE and supports the rationale for government involvement in ECCE in a particular setting. However, for a service to be a profession, it is expected to be autonomous in the sense that the service should be to some extent free from client's dictation or choice. Brock (2014) argues that ECCE is expected to possess a recognised professional body, authority and voice. Expertise relating to ECCE are expected from the vocation. The foregoing attributes are reinforced by an established code of ethics that prescribes standards, modes of practice, and pre-requisite training and skills (Caulfield, 1997).

In the recent and current literature, the notion of professionalism in ECCE has taken different dimensions. For instance, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2005) in the UK describes the steps towards professionalization of ECCE as a workforce reform strategy necessary to create a world-class workforce for children care and education, and that complexity in the process arises when there is no uniform standard to ensure this goal. Evidently, the specific roles of professionals are itemised in different regulatory frameworks, highlighting the ethics of operation for best practices. However, Lloyd and Hallet (2010) suggest that such expectations might not necessarily meet professional criteria and may even be in contrast to other professions working with young children of different age groups, such as qualified teachers and social workers. This implies that there are different ways of understanding how the field of ECCE is perceived as a professional organisation. As stated by Urban (2008):

“These concepts are often limited, and derive from a structural-functional paradigm that is by no means appropriate for relational, dialogic and complex practices in early childhood. They are, quite often, a highly efficient means of control and normalisation of diverse individual practices, which, in turn, provokes resistance and non-compliance from practitioners”.

ECCE is also viewed as a profession situated within democratic processes. Moss (ibid.) suggests that ECCE is tending towards both market and political practices as a result of rising advocacy for policy at various levels of government, and expansion in ECCE services which incorporates many interest groups including children. Because of paradigmatic shifts in the language of assessing ECCE towards post-modern thinking, the

professionalism of the care and education of young children is determined by the nature and context of the society in the past, present and the future. The implication is that the education and care of children are shaped by the socio-cultural outlook of practitioners of childrearing and traditional identities of the community, which requires adequate knowledge of the system (Woodhead, 1996a). According to Woodhead, contextual exploration of the care and education of children within a particular societal culture and tradition, though influenced by global ideas and innovations, will to an extent describe ECCE profession. In other words, as ECCE rests heavily on the cultural context of the specific community, there is a need to understand the context within which care and education surfaces. Presumably, this is achievable through the exploration of stakeholders' mutual construction of what ECCE professionalism entails, which is what this study pursues.

In a broad description which involves multilevel definitions, Karila (2008) emphasises the influence of professional, socio-cultural and knowledge-based perspectives to the understanding of professionalization of activities and individuals in ECCE. This shows that the description of ECCE as a profession is a subject determined by the activity itself, its environment and the characteristic meanings constructed by the stakeholders involved. Karila (2008) premised his study on the same multi-level perspective using analytical tools that embraced the perspective of culture in Finland. It is found that Finnish day-care working culture and context, communal (field-specific knowledge), organisational (the employees' working environment), and individual phenomenon (the perspective of the professionals) determine the construction given to the notion of ECCE as a profession. It is also reported that the

interaction between the different elements of professionalism takes place in the culture of the society and is significant to what can be described as a profession.

## **2.7. Sociocultural meaning making of quality ECCE in Nigeria: A framework**

To explore the concept of quality as portrayed by Moss and Dahlberg (2008) and Woodhead (1998; 2006a), it is imperative to delve into the socio-cultural meanings of quality education in Nigeria. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the national philosophy of education is inspired by a number of principles, belief systems and aspirations, which are expected to be integrated into teaching–learning processes. In many countries across the world, education is considered a long-term investment, so much that it is used as an instrument for national and individual development (Igwe, 1989). The numerous policies and guidelines on early childhood education in Nigeria stress the vital role of education as a key driver for national progression and the preservation of cultural heritage, which culminates in an emphasis on education for “national development and self-reliance” (FRN, 2004). Several decades ago, Fafunwa (1982:10) referred to this kind of education as education for “continuity and growth”. The meanings that are made of quality education thus depend on the intention of the policymakers, interpretations of the members of the society and the socio-cultural nuances that such educational services are established.

### **2.7.1. Sociocultural meanings of the norms and values embedded in the concept of Omoluabi – Implication for quality outcomes in ECCE**

*Omoluabi* is an African philosophical idea of an individual who has developed through education, experience and training (Adeniji-Neill, 2012, Gbadegesin, 1994). This concept has gained prominence in the Nigerian society, from the

pre-colonial era to the present. The appropriateness of *omoluabi* is confirmed in the study conducted by Ogbu (Ogbu, 1995), where the participants confirmed that their cultural outlook, specifically the norm of *omoluabi*, had a lot to do with their educational success. Thus, the dimension at which the concept of quality learning and behavioural outcomes is perceived may largely be within the realm of the socio-cultural meanings that people give to educational outcomes in relation to their societal values. To elucidate on the concept of “omoluabi”, Bewaji (2004:159), posits that “*the concept requires that there is a demand for and expectation of responsibility in the attributes exhibited by an individual, and insightful use of the language is also reflected in all aspects of communication, be it in verbal salutations, musical constructions, poetic performances, religious and spiritual displays and utterances, or in the negotiations of important formal and non-formal pacts, deals, treaties and business, etc*”. Fayemi (2009) suggests that the concept of *omoluabi* probes deeply into the understanding of essential features that are constitutive of a person’s actions and attitude. The ideology is implicitly stated in the National policy on Education in Nigeria (FRN 2004:10; UBEC 2004), where it was stated that the goal of Nigerian education is to achieve self-actualization and national consciousness.

Omoluabi expresses a quality of composure and decency in the conduct of day-to-day activities with people and objects. It is often used in affairs that relate with children’s upbringing, national solidarity and inter-personal relationships. It can be used to judge the expected outcome from a setting. In other words, it might be sufficient to state that the entire educational framework in Nigeria is devoted to the development of “omoluabi”. What then is expected from

“omoluabi”, who are those involved in the making of “omoluabi”, what is the training that is involved in the process and how is it supposed to be done?

Regardless of the ethnic groups in Nigeria, the meanings that have been made of education for self-reliance and actualisation can be said to be wrapped up in the concept of *omoluabi*. Lagos, which is naturally a domicile of the Yoruba tribe, and primary centre of attraction to other ethnic groups in Nigeria, is often seen as a custodian of *omoluabi*. In Ndi igbo (i.e. igbo speaking people), it can be interpreted as *nwafo ala*. In the Hausa language, it can be expressed as *yana de anfani or mutunci*. As stated by Oyeneye et al. (1997:253), when people are described as cultured or uncultured, a general description is being given of a person's character as to whether or not an individual has appropriated the expected norms and values or deviate from these expectations within a given social setting.

It is important to note that it is not all children that grow up to become omoluabi. However, in the African setting, children who fail to live up to family and societal standards of behavioural expectations are regarded as *omo-ale*, meaning “bastards”, which does not necessarily imply being born out of wedlock. Rather, it implies that such children have deviated from the accepted norms of their families and community. The consequence of such deviations is that these children, and by extension their families, lose the respect of other members of the community. Fantuzzo et al. (2000) in their study on family involvement in their children's education found that the educational levels, belief system and attitudes of parents are determinants of involvement at school, home and home-school levels. Invariably, early childhood institutions reflect active interactions and collaborations of human agents with activities, context and

culture in which care and education occur. In many developing nations of Africa for instance, early childhood care and education services are determined by the individual parents' skills and exposure.

Parents play important roles in inculcating the right skills and values embedded in self-reliance and actualisation into their children. This training, which often starts at birth, is extended to other agents of socialisation, for example to an institution such as a pre-school, a social environment where many children spend their time in Nigeria. Thus, parents are interested in the manner in which important aspects of acceptable family and societal norms are transmitted to children by practitioners in ECCE centres. They want to know how practitioners instil moral instruction- socially and culturally desirable learning outcomes - in children. At this level of education, Mbebeb (2009) suggests that childhood learning activities and experiences play primordial roles in the formation of adult personality. Thus, the roles of teachers in bringing about the development of relevant skills and attitudes are germane to a functional education system.

The foregoing analysis of the sociocultural meanings of the different components, implicit in the philosophy of Omoluabi, reveals the level of education that every individual child, youth and adult, is expected to be equipped with, which entails such knowledge, skills and attitudes that will enable him or her to optimise to the fullest capacity his/her social and civic obligation (UBEC 2004). Also, the perception of these socio-cultural meanings provides a basis for interpreting quality outcomes of ECCE programmes (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence 1999; Moss and Dahlberg, 2008).

## **2.8. Gaps in the literature and opportunity for study**

Studies within the context of ECCE in Nigeria by various authors concentrate on problems of policy implementation in term of the administration and management of ECCE institutions and not on the links between policy-practice from a sociological perspective. The gaps I found in these studies provide an opportunity to explore my research interest in policy intentions and classroom-based practices in ECCE. Specifically, issues around administration, funding, the effect of political dispensation on ECCE programmes, teachers' behaviour, management of children's behaviours and parental involvement constitute many of the studies that I initially reviewed (Ejeh, 2006, Gbadegesin et al., 2014, Ajayi, 2008, Chukwura, 2001, Obumneke-Okeke and Anyachebelu, 2012, Akanbi, 2012, Ogunyinka, 2013, Fasina, 2011, Sooter, 2013, Adegbami and Adewole, 2013, Oniye and Durosaro, 2009). None of these studies looks into an analysis of policy documents in relation to quality assessment. Also, the extent to which teachers' socio-cultural beliefs influence classroom practices has not been sufficiently explored. Moreover, few of the studies were designed to assess the implementation of the country's policies on ECCE in certain aspects: strategies adoption (Viatonu et al., 2011a, Nakpodia, 2011, Agusiobo, 2007); literacy instruction (Oyinloye and Osalusi, 2014, Ajayi, 2008); teacher-pupil ratio, enrolment level, teachers' qualifications, adequacy of learning materials (Osho et al., 2014, Viatonu et al., 2011b, Nwanekezi and Onyekeru, 2014); and pupils' performance (Osakwe, 2009). However, many of the reasons given for the improper implementation of the policies fail to take cognizance of the socio-cultural context into which the policies are expected to be implemented.



Studies on quality assessment emphasize the structural aspects and teacher education (Chukwura, 2001, Onu et al., 2010, Olaleye and Omotayo, 2009, Agusiobo, 2007, Amakievi, 2013). However, the studies do not explore teachers' roles or expected roles in the classroom and how these roles are properly performed. The subject of quality is a relative and value laden concept (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence 1999), and as such it is important to take into account that a proper understanding of how it applies to a particular context should involve a co-construction of meanings. This study plans to address this, through the involvement of major stakeholders: parents, teachers, and policy makers through the use of observation techniques, focus group discussions, interviews and secondary data.

## **2.9. Research Aims and Objectives**

This study explores how various stakeholders of ECCE understand quality assessment within the context in which it is being provided. The overall aim is to develop a theoretical model that can be used in the development of an assessment tool of quality in early childhood education institutions in Nigeria. Hence, the specific objectives and research questions are;

1. To analyse the key themes of quality criteria that are captured in the policy documents. Thus, generating these research questions.
  - a) What are the key themes of quality criteria that are captured in the policy documents?
  - b) How do policy documents address the issue of children's care, learning and development?
  - c) How are these quality criteria related to cultural values about children's development, care and learning in Nigeria?

2. To examine the kind of interpretations that policymakers give to the intentions of policy statements about ECCE; including what shapes the policies, and their impact and priorities. It generates this research question:
  - a. How do policy makers interpret the intentions of policy statements about ECCE in Nigeria?
3. To examine how teachers' understanding of and attitude to the quality criteria are influenced by socio cultural meanings.
  - a. What do teachers understand about the quality criteria relating to: teacher-child relationships, learning environment, learning outcomes and pedagogical instruction in ECCE institutions?
  - b. How and to what extent are their perceptions related to socio-cultural meanings?
  - c. What are teachers' attitudes to the quality criteria in ECCE?
  - d. How does the understanding of the notion of quality education for children influence teachers' decisions and actions in the classroom?
4. To examine how parents' understanding of quality criteria are influenced by socio-cultural meanings:
  - a. What are parents' perceptions of quality criteria relating to pedagogical instruction and learning outcomes in ECCE institutions?
  - b. Are these perceptions related to family and community values, and to what extent?
  - c. What is expected of the school to inculcate in the child?

## 2.10. Chapter summary

This chapter has examined the theoretical framework for the study. It upholds the understanding of quality dimensions in ECCE from a post-modern perspective as postulated by Dahlberg Moss and Pence (1999, 2007). The theoretical stance perceives quality assessment through meaning-making, reflection and discourse (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999; 2007).

It also discusses the different socio-cultural constructions in which the notion of quality is entrenched, exploring the concept of ECCE and the socio-cultural meaning of *omoluabi*. It suggests that quality care and education for children can better be understood within the socio-cultural environment in which ECCE services are provided.

This chapter also highlights the global and local contexts of ECCE provision reflecting the influence of the Global North's welfare regime on Nigeria's ECCE organisation. The dialogue revealed that although ECCE provision in Nigeria is influenced by local ideologies, the adoption of neoliberal ideals seems to shape the notion of quality assessment of children's services. It presents the identified gaps in the literature and how the study intends to fill the vacuum.

This chapter ends by drawing on the theoretical framework and the identified gaps in the literature to highlight the research aims and objectives of the study. Consequently, the next chapter presents the research design and methodology for the study.

## **Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology**

“Quality is never an objective reality, to be finally discovered and pinned down by experts. It is inherently subjective and relative, based on values and beliefs, which may not only vary among and within societies, but will undoubtedly; vary over the time” (Moss, 1994:5)

### **3.1. Introduction**

In Chapter Two, I presented a review of literature that directs the focus of the study and informs its theoretical underpinnings and framework. I further argued that the use of a qualitative approach is a viable option for obtaining accurate data, with a view to co-constructing meanings of quality education for young children from stakeholders’ narratives. I also identified the gaps in the study of quality assessment dimensions in early childhood care and education field and how my study intends to fill these gaps. Specifically, I discovered that no previous studies within the Nigerian context have explored the use of qualitative inquiry in data collection.

This chapter is therefore a more detailed presentation of the methodology employed to answer the four research questions discussed in Chapter Two. I have organised the chapter into eight sections. The first section outlines the purpose of the study and the research questions. The second section describes the research philosophy and paradigm guiding the study. The third section provides a detailed account of the methodological approaches, which incorporates the research design and sampling procedures. The fourth section gives a succinct account of the stages of data collection. The fifth section presents the means I employed to achieve “trustworthiness” of the research process. In the sixth section, I explain the approach I used to carry out the

research ethical considerations. The seventh section presents the data analysis procedures and the eighth section summarises and concludes the chapter.

### **3.2. The purpose of the study and research questions**

As stated in Chapter One (see section 1.2), professional interest and personal experiences in the field of ECCE spur me on to empirical study that considers the concept of quality education. Moreover, in the course of the literature review for this study, I discovered that accountability in early childhood education provision rests with a number of stakeholders all of whom are interdependent as it relates to the provision of quality education for children. I also received revealing insights into the theoretical framework for understanding quality assessment within postmodern ideas on “language of assessment” in ECCE (Dahlberg et al., 1999) (see Chapter Two). This led me to adopt a qualitative inquiry through meaning making of stakeholders’ narratives, a relatively novel approach in the Nigerian academic context. As mentioned in the previous chapter, major advocacy of children’s services across the globe emphasizes access, equity and quality in the provision of ECCE for children. More specifically, the field of ECCE has witnessed academic and political debates on the issues that relate to the essential features of quality provision in this subsector. Coming up with my research questions started with a broad issue of quality education in ECCE. This was later pruned to specific research questions after a period of extensive literature review and brainstorming.

Therefore, this study explores how ECCE stakeholders- teachers, parents and policymakers, in Nigeria understand quality assessment through the co-construction of meanings. Specifically, the study explores these areas:

- What and how ECCE policies depict child care, learning and development;
- How policy aims and intentions are interpreted by policymakers and inspectors;
- What and how teachers and parents understand and construct quality education and its assessment;
- The socio-cultural meanings emanating from stakeholders' constructions of quality assessment; including areas of agreement and disagreement.

This study was carried out in Lagos state, south west Nigeria. Nigeria, a multi-ethnic country, falls within the context of a developing economy which has adopted the mandate of ECCE provision, as entrenched in EFA and MDG goals, by formulating policies and providing a one year compulsory linkage pre-school programme for children aged 4-5 years in all public primary schools. This has been facilitated through technical and financial supports from international development partners like UNICEF, DFID and WHO. This suggests that there are many players in the demand and supply of ECCE in Nigeria. However, this study concerns itself with the most proximal stakeholders: teachers, parents and policymakers. My interest in Lagos state is borne out of the diverse ethnic composition that Lagos houses, and a relatively well-organised ECCE structure in place, being the only state in the South West that is a beneficiary of technical and financial support from

International Development Partners (IDPs). The other reasons include availability of all intended research participants, familiarity with the terrain and the relatively safe environment it presents.

Having this in mind, I saw an opportunity for my research to focus on a number of stakeholders (policymakers, teachers and parents), who are germane to any discourse of quality education for children. Focusing on these stakeholders has allowed me to further explore:

- ❖ The kind of interpretations that policymakers give to the basic tenets of policy statements about ECCE; including what shapes the policies, their impact and priorities.
- ❖ The socio-cultural meanings that emanate from teachers' construction of quality education in ECCE
- ❖ The pedagogical decisions and classroom practices that back up teachers' notion of quality education
- ❖ The socio-cultural meanings that emanate from parents' construction of quality education for children
- ❖ The synthesis of ECCE stakeholders' constructions, highlighting congruence and contestations

Specifically, four research questions were raised for the study. They include;

**1. What are the quality assessment criteria described in Nigeria's ECCE policy documents?**

*This question is made up of the following sub-questions:*

- a) What are the key themes of quality criteria that are captured in the policy documents?
- b) How do policy documents address the issue of children's care, learning and development?
- c) How are these quality criteria related to cultural values about children's development, care and learning in Nigeria?

**2. How do policy makers interpret the intentions of policy statements about ECCE in Nigeria?**

**3. How are teachers' understanding of and attitude to the quality criteria influenced by socio cultural meanings?**

*This question is made up of the following sub-questions:*

- a) What do teachers understand about the quality criteria relating to: teacher-child relationships, learning environment, learning outcomes and pedagogical instruction in ECCE institutions?
- b) How and to what extent are their perceptions related to socio-cultural meanings?
- c) What are teachers' attitudes to the quality criteria in ECCE?
- d) How does the understanding of the notion of quality education for children influence teachers' decisions and actions in the classroom?

**4. How are parents' understanding of quality criteria influenced by socio-cultural meanings?**

*This question is made up of the following sub-questions:*



- a) What are parents' construction of quality criteria relating to pedagogical instruction and learning outcomes in ECCE institutions?
- b) Are these constructions related to socio-cultural meanings generated from family and community values, and to what extent?

### **3.3. The research philosophy and paradigm**

This section presents an overview of the philosophical paradigm that charts the direction for this study. A paradigm, according to Huitt (2011:3) could be explained as “the underlying principle that regulates the structure and model of something.” Also, Crotty (1998:5) defines research paradigms as “philosophical claims that structure any inquiry or investigation” and influence researchers' view of reality and knowledge claims (Mack, 2010). Hence, the author argues that a research paradigm is the philosophical stand point upon which research is based and this has implications for the method(s) adopted. This study explores how educational stakeholders think and form ideas (Thomas, 2013:75) about quality assessment in ECCE, and how meanings (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2007) are generated from these understandings. Indeed, Burns (1997:11) avers the meaning structures that educational research can generate and that “the rationale for educational inquiry rests within the criterion of meanings”. I therefore find it appropriate to adopt the interpretivist view to social inquiry that relies heavily on qualitative approaches. The sub-section below outlines the main ontological and epistemological assumptions of an interpretivist paradigm that guides this study.

### **3.3.1 Interpretivist paradigm**

The basic reasoning of the interpretivist paradigm assumes that knowledge in reality is socially constructed and developed through the subjective meanings of experiences (Creswell, 2003). Put differently, Thomas (ibid) argues that interpretivism as a paradigm acknowledges that knowledge is socially constructed and that such knowledge constructed informs others. In explaining this, the author maintains that this paradigm advocates the active involvement of researchers in the research process.

An evaluative–interpretive paradigm draws on phenomenological principles that aims to obtain shared meanings from investigator’s own interpretation and understanding of the social phenomenon being studied (Snape and Spencer, 2003:4), it also seeks contextually and historically based interpretations of the real world phenomenon (Crotty 1998:5). The phenomenological principles that are adopted in this study ensure that socially derived meanings of quality criteria from ECCE stakeholders for educating children evolve through a subjective, experiential engagement with the real world (Burns, ibid) (see Table 4).

**Table 4: Interpretivist Research Paradigm: Features, Activities and Assumptions**

<b>Features</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Assumptions</b>
Purpose	Exploration of ECCE stakeholders' narratives on quality in ECCE	Engaging ECCE stakeholders in making meanings of quality assessment criteria
Ontological principles	Reflections, direct experience, observations, interactive discussion, and subjective views with a considerable level of neutrality.	The understanding of quality education is linked with meanings generated from a specific context.
Phenomenological principles	Awareness and acknowledgement of researchers' position as an insider	The interference of researchers' preconceptions needs to be minimised
Research Methods	Semi-structured interviews, Focus Group Discussions, document searches and field observations.	Meanings and understanding relies on qualitative approach
Research design	Descriptive	Qualitative inquiry

This paradigm is very relevant to the qualitative aspect of my study because of the many voices that are involved and as Cole (2006) asserts, the interpretivist paradigm provides an opportunity for participants' voices, concerns and practices to be heard. These assumptions aid a qualitative researcher like me to justify some of the key features of the research methods I used.

Firstly, from an ontological argument, the interpretivist paradigm rejects the traditional positivist assumption that there is an absolute reality which can only be searched out through empirical or scientific inquiry. Blaikie (2007) and Morse et al. (1994) view reality as being constructed inter-subjectively through meanings and understandings generated by interactive discourses, analysis of texts, and observation of the researched. This study stands on this platform to

explore the meanings that are made from the interactions among human minds, while also focusing on the social and cultural contexts in which these meanings occur. This means that for a proper understanding of how quality education for children is perceived in a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria, as well as the underlying socio-cultural meanings for this, interactions and observations of research participants are imperative. It may then be sufficient to acknowledge the relevance of the interpretivist paradigm in my study; whereby meanings of quality education in early years are generated, constructed, deconstructed and renegotiated within social and cultural contexts (Woodhead, 1998; Moss, 2005). Thus, a qualitative approach which entails inductive reasoning is adopted for this study.

Secondly, from an epistemological perspective, an interpretivist paradigm is built on the assumption that researchers cannot separate themselves from what they know. The researcher and the researched are linked such that meanings generated during interactions “reflects the interplay between who we are and how we understand ourselves, others and the world around us” (Thomas, 2013: 43).

In the same vein, interpretivism is connected to the tenets of symbolic interactionism. According to Carter and Fuller (2015), drawing on the works of Blumer (1969), Kuhn (1964) and Stryker (1980), symbolic interactionism assumes that individuals’ interactions with people and objects in a particular social and cultural context generates meanings, which are continuously created and recreated through interpretations. Central to this point is the importance of the researcher’s reflective and subjective stance on the topic

being studied and the context in which the study is being carried out. I believe that the assessment of educational process should take reflexive and subjective approaches since there are many stakeholders involved. Throughout the course of this study, I undertook a reflective approach to understandings emanating from stakeholders' accounts.

The positivist paradigm, which is concerned with the formulation of hypotheses and testing, has been extensively used in the field of education and early years studies, although not without critiques from anti-positivist (Blaikie, 2007) and post positivist (Phillips and Burbules, 2000) schools of thought. I would argue that the positivist paradigm is not suitable for this kind of study because from a social constructivist perspective, the process of understanding quality, which is the focus of this study, comes from meanings generated from human reflections and narratives, not just an objective inquiry into the nature of quality as a pre-determined construct, independent of the way people think about it (Smith, 1996). Also, a positivist paradigm would warrant quantitative measures, sometimes, involving manipulation of variables in a controlled environment which can eliminate the social and cultural contexts that are very germane to this study. Consequently, interpretative ontological and epistemological assumptions guide the methodological choices, participant selection, researcher's role as an insider and data analysis.

Bearing this in mind, I was able to see individual stakeholders' unique contribution to the study as vital and valid information, with the possibility of many different interpretations and meanings. The different interpretations are perceived as social verities that guide stakeholders' actions in their daily

interactions with the world. This position spurred me on to an in-depth investigation into quality assessment in early childhood education with the intention to produce what stakeholders perceive as important to the delivery of quality education for young children within a multi-cultural context like Nigeria.

In a bid to create a reflective and subjective look into the subject of quality care and education in the ECCE subsector in Nigeria, this study adopts qualitative data collection techniques such as interviews, focus group discussions, observations and document analysis. Therefore, having highlighted the philosophical paradigms that this study adopts with their ontological and epistemological assumptions, the next section examines the research design and methodological techniques of the study.

### **3.4. The Methodology: Research design and techniques**

Every research process has a specific research strategy to provide answers to the questions posed in an appropriate manner, known as the research design. Succinctly, Creswell (2003) described a research design as the plans for a study which embrace philosophical assumptions, strategies of inquiry, and specific research methods. However, (Maxwell, 2005) extends the conventional view of research design by stating that qualitative design should follow a flexible and reflexive process drawing on researcher's prior preparations, experience and personal qualities.

Therefore, an interpretive qualitative study design was considered appropriate for the study. Njie and Asimiran (2014) define qualitative inquiry as an in-depth understanding of the peculiarity of a study unit, employing various data collection methods. Alternatively, Creswell (2007) gives an exploratory

definition of qualitative study as *“a variation of a research design which provides an in-depth exploration of a bounded system, an activity, an event, a process, or an individual, based on extensive data collection”*

In addition, a qualitative study’s outstanding characteristic manifests in the “scientific credentials and evidence base for professional applications (Zucker, 2009), and its applicability in a contextually based research leading to the development of educational theory” (Yin 2003). Specifically, Yin (2014:17) gives a specific feature of a type of qualitative study as:

“...an inquiry which copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result; relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, as any other result, benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection.”

In a qualitative study, primary and secondary sources can be used to explore the research questions raised for the study (Creswell, 2003), the use of interviews being the most common method employed. Accordingly, this study adopts a range of methods: interviews, observations, Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and documentary analysis to conduct detailed and in-depth investigations with stakeholders in the ECCE field in order to facilitate an understanding of quality assessment dimensions and how they are being practised in the classroom, for example, teacher-pupil and child-child interactions.

With this in mind, I consider the use of closed-ended questionnaires not suitable for this study because they restricts participants’ responses, thereby making it hard to get an in-depth knowledge of social reality and meanings. Also, the use of questionnaires would not give room for participants to express

alternative viewpoints or reveal any misinterpreted questions. Conversely, the use of interviews and FGD in this study provides an opportunity to explore various perspectives of participants' expectations, plans, and opinions on different aspects of the study. Kvale (1996) and Silverman (1997) describes interviews as active interactions between two or more people, leading to negotiated, contextually based results. For a qualitative researcher, the relationship is part of the process and the interviewer is a participant rather than a subject. The interviewer and the respondents in qualitative research form a partnership to negotiate a highly detailed and ecologically valid set of qualitative data which are both structured and unstructured (Robson, 2002). Semi-structured interviews therefore provide a means of exploring stakeholders' verbal and non-verbal expressions in detail (Richards and Sacker, 2003), thereby providing insights into the behaviour and beliefs behind certain actions. This study maximises this advantage by conducting extensive interviews with willing participants. However, (Ritchie et al., 2013) argue that interviews do not present as naturalistic research setting as do Focus Group Discussion.

The study therefore utilises Focus Group Discussions as a process of gathering data in a naturalistic setting, involving between four and ten respondents brought together to discuss the research topic as a group (Robson, 2002). In particular, putting participants of common interests together to shed light on research issue is at the core of FGD (Ritchie et al., 2003, Creswell, 2003). This study utilises this approach to explore areas of difference and agreement within



and across groups, and it also gives the opportunity for respondents to co-reflect.

However, FGD has also been criticised as a viable technique on the grounds that discussions can be dominated by a few individuals and might bring about a suspicious attitude among members of the group. However, during the fieldwork project for this study, the only observed difficulty I encountered was the challenge of forming and bringing together a heterogeneous group given the distance between each member in the group, and the tight schedule of stakeholders involved in this study – teachers, parents and policymakers. This was worked over by forming homogenous groups of participants. In this case, I have two groups consisting of teachers and a group of parents.

Creswell (2003) and Yin (2003) suggest that data generation using a qualitative study design is often accompanied by secondary data searches in the form of document analysis and classroom observations. Document analysis is the systematic exploration of the content of written documents in order to analyse the meanings and relationships of words and concepts, and then make inferences about the messages within the texts, the writers, the audience, the culture and the time it was created (Robson, 2002). Within the scope of this study, the public policy documents examined are the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004), various curriculum guidelines and the quality assurance handbook. As mentioned above, these policy guidelines are expected to guide the organisation of ECCE institutions in the country and they reflect the nation's aspirations, philosophy and goals for children's care and development (NERDC, 2013). An analysis of these policy guidelines provided

information on the implicit and explicit idea of quality criteria in ECCE. It also provided inputs for my pilot study and research interviews.

Observation was another method employed within the framework of research design in the study. Observation, according to Creswell (2008) is the data collection process that involves gathering first-hand information about people or places. In this study, observations allowed me to familiarise myself with the participants and establish a mutual relationship with them. It served as a means of triangulating data sources for this study. I was also able to verify information provided by the practitioners during interviews. More importantly, it allowed me to establish teachers' actual classroom practices against their accounts on quality assessment.

#### **3.4.1. Sample size**

The samples for this study comprise educational policymakers and inspectors, ECCE teachers, and parents of children attending ECCE institutions in Lagos state. Hence, the study was conducted within the following sampling framework:

- Policymakers and inspectors involved in policy formulation, curriculum development, supervision and monitoring of ECCE provision in Lagos state, Nigeria.
- Teachers involved in the training and education of children in ECCE settings;
- Parents of children attending ECCE settings

This study utilises two policymakers and four inspectors, twenty teachers and twelve parents (see Table 5).

**Table 5: Participants categories and size<sup>9</sup>**

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Number selected</b>
Policymakers	Staff involved in policy formulation	2
Inspectors	Staff involved in quality assurance and monitoring of ECCE	4
2 private pre-schools	ECCE teachers from Brownie N/P school	5
	ECCE teachers from BlueChip N/P school	5
2 public schools	ECCE teachers from Pinkcourt N/P school	5
	ECCE teachers from Genesis N/P school	5
Parents	Parents of children attending ECCE in the selected schools	12
<b>Total</b>		<b>38</b>

The sample size makes a total of 38 participants. A total of fifteen interviews, five focus group discussions and twelve observations were conducted for this study (see Table 5). The sample size considerations were based on literature review of previous work that has been done in similar area using a qualitative approach to data collection. These studies (Myers, 2005; Parker, 2013, Dahlberg et al., 2007, Smith, 1996, Fenech, 2011) all suggested that sample size could small because no statistical generalisation of findings will be done. Moreover, the choice of the sample size composition was based on inclusion criteria, availability, time and cost constraint and distance. The inclusion criteria emphasize participants' association with ECCE provision and utilisation.

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<sup>9</sup> Pseudonyms were used for the schools used in the study

Another basis for justifying the number of interviews and observations conducted in this study is connected with what Glaser (1967) refers to as data saturation. I found out that my interviews went through a cycle such that ideas, interpretations and information were clarified to the point that no new opinions were generated.

The qualitative approach adopted for this study does not involve statistical manipulations and control of variables. The study rather lends itself to the quality of the sample compositions and their relevance to achieving the research objectives. Indeed, Creswell (2007) and (Ritchie et al., 2003) argue that qualitative studies usually employ a small sample size, since its core features are its intensive and contextual exploration of the research issue. Thus, it is not appropriate to use a large sample size of participants within the scope of this study. Moreover, since the study does not aim to make generalisations but build up a theoretical model, a large sample size was not an option.

The sample selection within the framework of the research design for this study followed a stratified, purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling, according to Creswell (2003:181) is a sampling technique that chooses participants with an intention to gain a deeper knowledge of a key phenomenon. Likewise, Robson (2002) admits that purposive sampling allows the researcher to make use of discretion in the choice of participants in order to explore the research questions in-depth. Hence, sampling begins with a range of choices about “with whom, where, and how” a researcher wants to go about the research (Palys, 2008). In this case, I was open to approach the

sampling process with an intention to reach the necessary stakeholders that would advance the course of the study.

Teddlie and Yu (2007) as well as Palinkas et al. (2015) further note that purposive sampling as a sampling strategy often employs pre-selection criteria on a group of participants that are relevant for a study. This method has been used in studies ranging from the study of HIV-positive women and unemployed men in the city (Atkinson and Flint, 2001).

However, Patton (2002) and Palinkas et al (2015) observe that purposive sampling is not limited to the study of pre-selected criteria group participants only. They argue that purposive sampling, for qualitative data collection and analysis, when combined with other sampling strategies, produces samples that can provide viable information related to the research questions. The authors identify principles of using purposive sampling; that is, finding samples that are experienced and have adequate knowledge of the research study, and the willingness and aptitude for communicating opinions in a reflective way (Bernard, 2002).

Purposive sampling becomes stratified (Patton 2002) when groups display variation on a particular phenomenon but each of which is fairly homogeneous, so that subgroups can be compared. Furthermore, the reason for selecting the stakeholders for this study using purposive sampling is because the population to select from is large. Hence, the adoption of purposive sampling procedure.

In the study, I started with the selection of three Local Government Areas- Lagos Mainland, Kosofe and Ajeromi-Ifelodun, from 20 LGAs that make up Lagos state. These LGAs have been chosen because the three major ethnic

groups of Yoruba, Hausa and Ibo can be found in these three regions respectively. I purposely selected four nursery and primary schools from the three LGAs, out of whom two were privately funded (Bluechip and Brownie) and two publicly funded schools (Pinkcourt and Genesis<sup>10</sup>). The selection of schools was based on proximity and recommendations of SUBEB officials. I did not take account the ownership structure because I was not interested in comparing teachers' constructions based on the type of school that the participants are drawn from, but rather on groups' composition.

**Table 6: Participant overview<sup>11</sup>**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Data collection instruments</b>	<b>Number</b>
Educators	Teachers	Focus groups discussions, interviews and observation	4 focus groups consisting of 5 participants, and 5 individual interviews
Government officials	Inspectors	Interviews	4 individual interviews
	Policymakers	Interviews	2 individual interviews
Parents	Those in the PTA/ Centre management committee	Focus groups and interviews.	2 focus groups consisting of 6 participants, and 4 individual interviews
<b>Estimated total number of participants</b>			<b>38</b>

I purposely selected five teachers in the each of the four pre-school sections of the schools to form four FGDs. six parents were each selected from Brownie and Genesis for the study to form two FGD (see Table 6). The teachers were

<sup>10</sup> The names of these schools are pseudonyms to ensure anonymity

<sup>11</sup> Including the composition of focus groups and interviews

personally selected by the researcher. After conducting a week of pre-classroom observations in each of the school, I was able to identify teachers that met the criteria I have outlined for research participants by interacting with them during the pre-classroom observation visits. However, the teachers selected for the study cut across different age groups and they all have qualifications in education (see Table 7). Moreover, the composition of teachers' FGD display different ethnicity but the predominant ethnicity was Yoruba. This might relate to the geographical location of Lagos state which lies in the Yoruba region. I also observed that the scarcity of Hausa ethnic tribe in the teaching profession in this region. I presume this should do with the cultural belief of this ethnic group about the roles of women and education. The Ibo ethnic group are predominant in the teaching profession but as it was observed, their beliefs about education seem to be at par with their Yoruba counterparts.

The background of the pupils can be said to range from poor to average and above average. I observed that public schools are mostly patronised by parents from the low socio-economic backgrounds and record many pupils from poor backgrounds. Many of the parents in the public schools are not educated but desire that their children get educated. The class size in the two private ECCE centres was twenty-eight pupils with two teachers and one helper. The other two public schools have one teacher to about twenty-five pupils.

For the policymakers, their selection was done through a snowballing technique (Browne, 2005). This is consistent with the opinion of Atkinson and Flint (2001) that a snowball sampling strategy offers the opportunity of referral from privileged authorities, which in this case are the elitist ECCE "experts", to

other individuals who can provide required information on the research questions. For instance, a policymaker suggested an inspector because of his experience and knowledge about ECCE programme.

A pilot study was carried out in Osun state before the main research was conducted on the samples selected. This allowed me to make necessary adjustments to the research instruments and procedures before proceeding to the research field. Thus, it is noteworthy that a pilot study, a total of fifteen individual interviews, five FGD and twelve observations were conducted within a period of six months. This period was marked by interruptions due to school vacation periods, public holidays and other contingencies. Within this period, prior contacts were made with the participants and follow-up calls also made while some interviews appointments were re-scheduled. Furthermore, data for the document analysis involved in this study, which are secondary in nature, were searched out from schools, government agencies and ministries. In view of this, I believe that the sample size selected for this study has made possible the conduct of appropriate and thorough data collection procedures.

The tables below show the categories of the research participants, their background information, fieldwork time table and the flowchart of the research approach.



Table 7: Participants' Background Information

Participant	Size	Gender		Qualifications			Years of Experience			Age			Ethnicity		
		Male	Female	B.Ed	M.Ed	PhD	5-10	11-15	16 above	30-40	41-50	Above 51	Yoruba	Hausa	Ibo
Inspectors	4	2	2	1	3	-	1	1	2		2	2	3	-	1
Policymakers	2	1	1	-	1	1			2		1	1	2		
Teachers	20	3	17	1 6	4	-	5	6	9	4	1 0	6	13	1	6

Source<sup>12</sup>

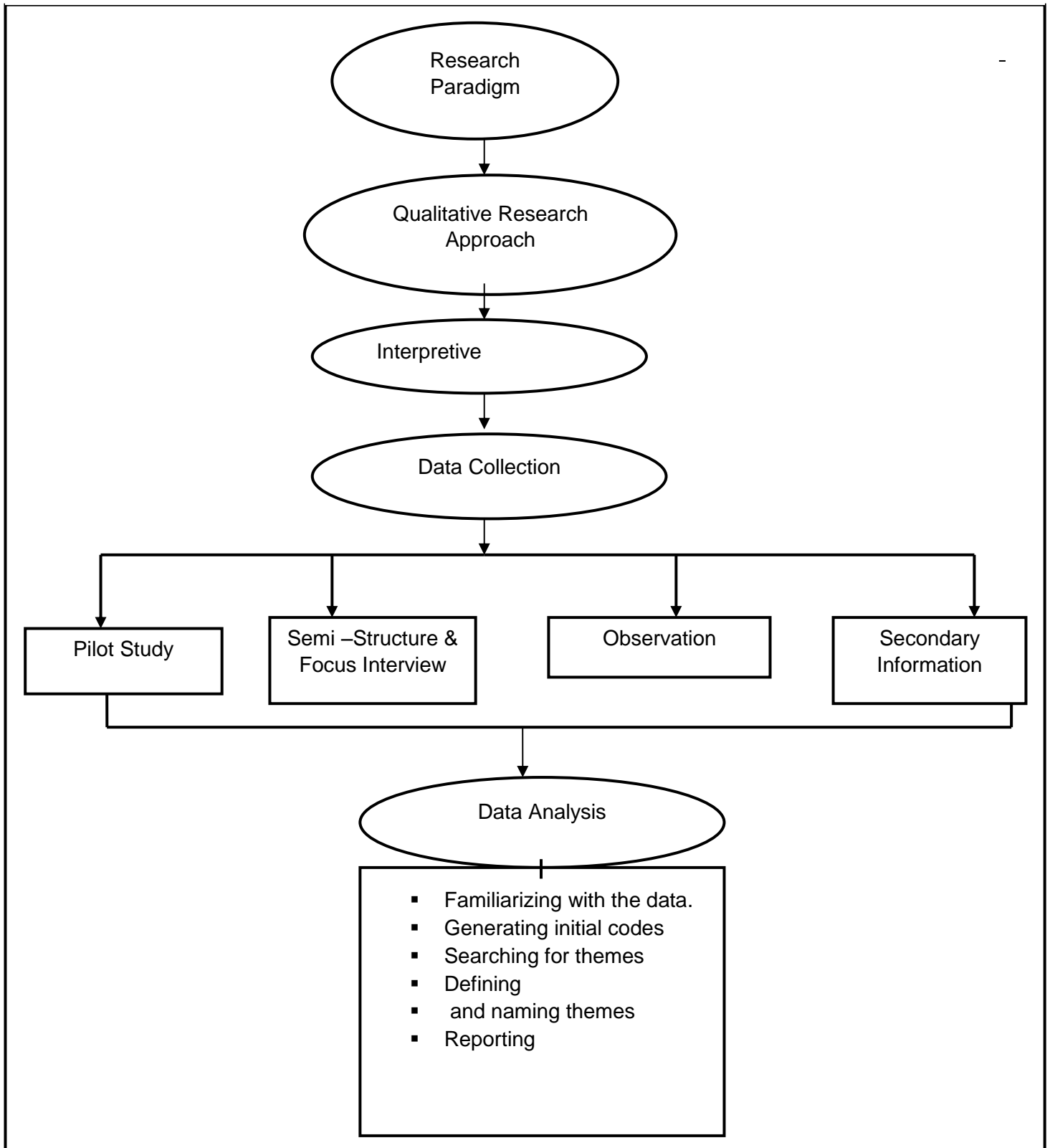

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<sup>12</sup> Gbadegesin, 2016

**Table 8: Field work time table**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Date</b>
Arrival to Lagos state, Nigeria	June 22 <sup>nd</sup> , 2015
Preliminary contacts with Lagos state SUBEB and other government officials (submission of Letter of introduction from the University of Leeds)	June 30 <sup>th</sup> , 2015
1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup> interviews with government officials in ministries and agencies.	July 6 <sup>th</sup> , 10 <sup>th</sup> 16 <sup>th</sup> , and 20 <sup>th</sup> respectively
Submission of letters of introduction to LGEAs, Lagos	21 <sup>st</sup> July, 2015
Pilot study phase in Ile Ife, Nigeria and adjustments on interview	30 <sup>th</sup> July 2015
Review of certain aspects of teachers and parents' interview guides	1 <sup>st</sup> - 10 <sup>th</sup> August, 2015
Preliminary analysis of policymakers and inspectors' four narratives	11 <sup>th</sup> -22 <sup>nd</sup> August, 2015
Visit to ECCE settings for pre-classroom observations	23 <sup>rd</sup> Aug- 1 <sup>st</sup> Sept, 2015
1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> , and 3 <sup>rd</sup> Focus Group Discussions with teachers	4 <sup>th</sup> , 11 <sup>th</sup> & 18 <sup>th</sup> Sept.
1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> Individual interviews with teachers	8 <sup>th</sup> , 16 <sup>th</sup> & 24 <sup>th</sup> Sept.
Preliminary analysis of teachers' narratives	29 <sup>th</sup> Sept -7 <sup>th</sup> Oct, 2015
5 <sup>th</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup> individual interviews on policymakers and inspectors	10 <sup>th</sup> October, 2015.
Collection of secondary data (policy document, reforms, handbooks) from SUBEB, Ministry of Education and agencies.	10 <sup>th</sup> – 11 <sup>th</sup> October
1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> classroom observations	11 <sup>th</sup> – 13 <sup>th</sup> November,
4 <sup>th</sup> , 5 <sup>th</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup> individual interviews with teachers	13 <sup>th</sup> – 15 <sup>th</sup> November
Recruitment and contacts with parents	16 <sup>th</sup> -18 <sup>th</sup> November
1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> FGD with parents	18 <sup>th</sup> - 20 <sup>th</sup> November
Preliminary analysis of parents' narratives	20 <sup>th</sup> -30 <sup>th</sup> November
1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup> interviews with parents	1 <sup>st</sup> – 20 <sup>th</sup> December
Return to Leeds	January, 31 <sup>st</sup> 2016

Figure 3: A flowchart of the research process



### **3.5. Stages of data collection and techniques**

The previous section establishes interpretive qualitative study approach as the main methodological approach for this study. It also gave a detailed description of the various approaches used for the study. In this section, I outline the various stages of data collection procedures that were employed for the study. The goal is to come up with a theoretical model that can be used for quality assessment in the Nigerian ECCE. Areas of agreement and disagreement among stakeholders' opinions of quality education for children in ECCE settings were noted. As such, an intensive and in-depth investigation is deemed appropriate, as it fulfils the demands of social constructivism and symbolic representation paradigms that the study advances. The research sites and specific order of data collection stages are discussed under the following sub-sections.

#### **3.5.1. Pilot study phase**

My data generation for the study started with a pilot study. A pilot study helps to test certain aspects of the research design, improve researcher's own practices and to widen the understanding of concepts and theories (Maxwell, 2005). I employed the use of FGDs, interviews and observations during the study. All participants were given participant information sheets and consent forms before conducting interviews on them. I used a voice recorder to record the interviews and also took some field notes during the observations. Some of the data collected during the pilot study further provided useful insights throughout the research process.

The pilot study for this research was carried out in Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria. Osun state is one of the states in the south-western part of Nigeria. Ile –Ife, is

a town well known in the South-Western part of Nigeria as the cradle of Yoruba origin. Ile Ife is an ancient town with a population of 506,035 (National Census, 2006)<sup>13</sup>, with a traditional cultural belief as ancestral home for all Yoruba ethnic group. The town houses one of the prestigious tertiary education institutions in the country and various nursery and primary schools. The pilot participants were drawn from Rosaline Nursery and primary school<sup>14</sup>, a publicly-funded school within the vicinity of the university. The selection of this pilot location was based on my professional affiliation with the setting. I had my tertiary education in the University and had established relationships with the nursery teachers in the selected school when I undertook my practicum project in the school in 2009. This school can be regarded as a “model” nursery and primary school in the university vicinity. The reason is that it was founded by the colonialist in the 1950s and had since independence been funded by the federal government through the University. The school serves the University’s workers and its environs. The class size is 30 children to two teachers, who are usually trained educators. The children in this setting, who can be regarded as gender balanced, were between ages 3-6 years and attended the school from 8.00 am to 3.00pm from Mondays to Fridays. The parents of the children attending this school are mostly working class and middle-income background. They work in government and highly paying private organisations. They are able to buy prescribed textbooks and educational materials for their children.

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.population.gov.ng/>

<sup>14</sup> Pseudonym used for the name of the pilot school

I visited the school for about a week, introduced myself to the headmistress and was thereafter granted a permission to conduct the study in the school. I later liaised with the Head of Department for the nursery section, who introduced me to the teachers I later worked with. I started with the organisation of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) which involved six female teachers and recruitment of parent participants for the pilot phase. The recruitment of parents was done through the help of the teachers. After briefing the teachers and introducing the subject of the project, I conducted interviews on willing teachers. I utilised the semi-structured interviews questions I had prepared for the main fieldwork.

However, during the course of the pilot study, it became clear that some questions were difficult or rather unclear. I later reframed the interview guides based on the clarifications I made during the interviews. I also did a literature review of the aspects that needed clarification. For example, there was this reoccurring theme about the state of childhood in the past and the present time. I also reviewed some of the documents that they use for teaching and learning. I would go to the schools every morning, observe the morning assembly with the children, meet with the teachers and pupils and some parents. The pupils are expected to come to school early, well-groomed and ready to learn. Some of the older age group are appointed as prefects and leaders.

After two weeks of conducting participant observations, I conducted a 30-minute individual interview on three of the teachers that formed the FGD. The interviews were audio recorded. I also observed specific areas that relate to my study, for example, teacher-pupil relationship, classroom practices, pedagogical instruction, and methods of teaching, teacher-teacher interactions

and child-child relationship. During this time, I was able to participate in classroom activities with pupils and teachers, ask questions about teachers' actions that needed clarifications and clarify my own pre-conceptions about classroom practices in this familiar setting.

Likewise, I conducted interviews with three parents. The interview provided useful feedback for the review of interview guide. However, I did not carry out a pilot study on policymakers because I did not see any need for it. Classroom observations during the pilot study also provided hints on how best to observe relationships and use the research instruments, for instance observing child-child, teacher-child, parent-child, and teacher-parent relationships.

### **3.5.2. Research site study**

The research site for the main study is Lagos state Nigeria. I chose Lagos as the research site because it is important that a research site for this study reveals the socio-cultural context and current situation of early childhood in Nigeria. Lagos, in its modern form, is a socio-cultural melting pot which has attracted a cross section of Nigerians from all over the Federation as well as non-Nigerians from other African countries and the rest of the world. It has various forms of ECCE services such as crèche, day-care, nursery and kindergarten classes. Throughout the study, I have referred to any organisation and provision of early childhood care and education in a private and public location as ECCE settings. I have decided to use the concept "setting" rather than institutions because I perceive many of the ECCE settings visited as a mini socio-cultural environment than an organised forum for children. The methods involved in the process of data collection in the research sites were similar to the one employed for the pilot study. Moreover, I represent what

Troman and Jeffrey (2007) calls the “primary research tool”. In order words, I personally accessed the research sites, took all the observations, conducted interviews and FGD on the participants.

### **3.5.3. Preliminary contacts with Research Participants**

In the light of the pivotal role that policy plays in the organisation and provision of ECCE in Nigeria, the preliminary contacts for this study started with the policymakers and inspectors. I had initially planned to recruit four policymakers for the study, but as I later realised, many of the government official in charge of ECCE were not involved directly in policymaking but rather inspection and monitoring. So, I ended up with two policymakers and four inspectors. Moreover, as at the time I arrived Nigeria for my fieldwork school were planning to go on holidays for two months, I had to start with policymakers while waiting for schools to resume.

My prior knowledge of the agencies in charge on ECCE policy formulation was proved wrong when I was confronted with a number of agencies handling ECCE within different offices. The first step I took was to identify the appropriate government agencies to select for my study. Hence, I approached the Director of Lagos State Universal Basic Education Board, which is the office in charge of overseeing Universal Basic Education programme in Lagos state. Introduced myself, gave her the introduction letter from the University of Leeds and later obtained a letter of permission to access schools in the three LGAs selected for this study (see Appendix for the letters). As stated earlier, the sample selection adopted a snowballing procedure, and the director later recommended three other ministries and agencies directly involved with ECCE provision in Lagos, which I was not fully aware of during the early stage of my



project. Thus, this study was carried out in four snowball selected agencies/ministries: Lagos State Universal Basic Education Board (LSUBEB); Lagos State Ministry of Education (Office of Quality Assurance); Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) and Lagos State Curriculum Services. Lagos State Universal Basic Education Board (LSUBEB) is in charge of managing and overseeing the operations of early childhood education programmes. Lagos State Ministry of Education (Office of Quality Assurance) is in charge of quality assuring all public and private ECCE. NERDC is a federal government agency charged with the responsibility of co-ordinating educational research programme at all levels and production of all policy materials; including policy documents, the National Curriculum and textbooks. Lagos State Curriculum Services is in charge of translating the National Curriculum into schemes of work, syllabi and the distribution of these to schools.

Navigating the city of Lagos in search of different government agencies in charge of ECCE official document formulation and monitoring of schools was not an easy task in the face of heavy road traffic, security threats, accidents and high cost of transportation. At times, I witnessed cancelled and rescheduled appointments after getting to the offices.

Many of the offices and schools are located far apart from each other and I had to visit the research sites twice before appointments were made. Worse still, some of these long approved appointments had to be cancelled and rescheduled. This added to the cost and risk implications of conducting an in-depth qualitative study of this nature. It also led to loss of time for other data collection procedure proposed for the study. For instance, I planned to conduct

a survey study with the use of open-ended questionnaire. However, because of time constraint due to the above limitations, I was not able to conduct the survey.

The second step was that I took the letter of permission obtained from LSUBEB to the three Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs), where it was stamped and approved. With this, I was able to gain access to the four schools (see Table 5). I used for this study. In each of these schools, five teachers were recruited for the study through familiarity with the teachers and the help of the Head teachers. I was also able to meet and discuss the research project with the teachers and parents that took part in the study. However, I could not start the research in schools immediately after this because schools were about to go on holidays.

#### **3.5.4. Recruitment and data collection from policymakers**

The snow-ball approach produced six directors from LSUSBEB, NERDC, Curriculum Department and office of Q/A, out of whom were two policymakers and four inspectors. These are senior government officials at the state and federal levels. The criterion for the selection of the directors was that they are directly involved in policy reviews and supervision of ECCE provision in the state. They all consented to being part of the study and were willing to supply necessary information to the best of their knowledge.

Specifically, the interview guide was directed to specific aspect of Nigerian ECCE policy–

- The policy development processes

- The core values and priorities that have shaped and informed ECCE policy development and reviews
- The aims and intentions of policy statements- what they are set out to achieve in the life of a child, family, community and the country as a whole
- The connection between policy statements and the socio-cultural values of the Nigerian communities

Four interview sessions were conducted with two policymakers and two inspectors. Two other interviews were conducted after the preliminary analysis of the first four set of interviews. Thus, the two major strategies adopted for collecting data from government ministries and agencies were interviews including informal conversations, and secondary data search. Each interview, which was conducted in an office atmosphere, lasted for an average of 50 minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded after the participants had signed consent forms and gone through the participant information sheets. The participants' attitude towards my research was quite encouraging as they all finished the entire interview periods.

### **3.5.5. Recruitment and data collection from teachers in ECCE centres**

As discussed earlier, gaining access to teachers was made easy by the approved letter from LSUBEB and LGEAs. I went to the Head teacher, introduced myself and the research aims and objectives. Throughout the fieldwork for this study, the Head teachers helped to recruit the teachers that were interviewed. However, I also used my discretion in forming focus group discussions by ensuring the recruitment of teachers with a range of

experiences and backgrounds. The two major methods involved are interviews/FGD and observations. I found it necessary to give a “thick description” (Geertz, 1994, Ponterotto, 2006) of ECCE teachers that I encountered in the course of this study. Indeed Ponterotto (ibid) described thick description “as the vivid description of contextual situation that guides interpretations of research data and ensure credibility”.

#### **3.5.5.1. Thick description of ECCE teachers in Lagos state**

In Nigeria, ECCE teachers are usually referred to as nursery teachers. They are adults in charge of teaching and training children between the ages of 3-6 years in ECCE settings. These teachers are expected to hold a minimum of National Certificate on Education (NCE) from a College of Education or a Bachelor in Education (B.Ed.). The role of the teachers is to care for and teach the children in a play-way oriented method and prepare them for primary schooling. They are also expected to act as guardians for the children in their care before their parents come for them.

However, there are few teachers who hold certificate in early childhood/ nursery education in my study. This suggests that this study was carried out within a system where there is a shortage of ECCE professionals handling children. While the public schools visited in Lagos state have a considerable number of certified teachers, I observed that teachers in the private schools fall short. Generally, there seems to be teachers with general knowledge on education rather than specific knowledge of child development and learning in many of the ECCE settings.

Thus, in reality, a nursery teacher in Nigeria is one who teaches in the nursery section of a school, not necessarily with a qualification in nursery education.

Invariably, many of these teachers do so with the hope of making a living, being recognised as employed or out of passion for children. These teachers, which are mostly female are usually called “Mrs ... then surname” or “Mr... then surname” if male by the pupils. I assume the settings are female dominated with few men because of the culturally ascribed roles that children are better handled by women than men. However, as I later found out in my study, the central distinguishing features of these teachers is not really about the gender gap but the generational gap between the old and young teachers.

The teachers in the age range fifty years and above are usually found in the public schools. They have been in teaching a long time and have taught in various classes. They have more than sixteen years of experience on the job. Their qualifications include the defunct Grade II Education certificate, which had been replaced with National Teachers Institute (NTI) Certificate and NCE. While two of my older participants have obtained a higher degree such as B.Ed and Masters Degrees, they seem to be content with caring for children in the nursery classes. The introduction of ECCE classes into the public primary schools drafted them into the nursery classes. For instance, in Brownie nursery and primary school, a public school, these older women were placed in the nursery section and were supported by the younger teachers. They seemed to be confident about every aspect of care for children and how to attend to their needs.

A second set of teachers are teachers within the age range 18-40 years. These teachers are usually called assistant teachers as they sometimes under-study the older teachers. They hold certificates in National Certificate in Education (NCE), which is the present minimum requirement for teaching in Nigeria, and

certificates in other field of study. Some of them also have a Bachelor degree in Education (B.Ed.) and a Master's degree. Their years of experience range from two to sixteen years. Some found themselves in the nursery classes because of unemployment and hope to leave as soon as there is better employment opportunity. Some are ad hoc staff and are there temporarily before they get admission into the higher institutions. These first set of teachers I call "older generation" and the second I call "younger generation" of teachers.

Briefly, the main study explores the following areas during the data collection process; teachers' narratives on childhood and pre-school education, the roles of pre-school education, quality criteria relating to teacher-child relationship and teaching methods and instructions in ECCE, attitude to quality criteria and the clarification of meanings and actions. Observational field notes and informal conversation notes of school climate, classroom activities and management were also taken.

There were four focus group discussions for teachers consisting of five teachers in each group and five individual interviews. For convenience, teachers in each school comprise each FGD group. I had initially planned to form a homogenous group based on ethnic affiliation, however, as discussed earlier, the Hausa ethnic group is not sufficiently represented in the schools I selected. Moreover, it was observed generally that the ethnic group are not inclined to take up teaching appointments. I was able to conduct an interview session with one Hausa nursery teacher in Brownie N/P School. So, I was only able to form four focus groups consisting of three Yoruba and one Ibo group.

Before each FGD, I established a form of rapport with the teachers, asked them few questions that relate to what we were going to discuss and their prior knowledge about nursery education. I did this in order to assess the understanding of the teachers on some terminologies that would be used in the study. Terms such as “ECCE, ethnicity, values and culture” were clarified. Since the FGD aims to explore groups’ narratives and viewpoints on quality criteria in ECCE, it was necessary to clarify any grey area that may hinder this. Therefore, I gave opportunity for the participant teachers of each group to form mutual respect among themselves, through some conversations on the subject matter of the research.

Each FGD lasted for sixty minutes. It was conducted in the schools’ computer rooms. Each FGD organised for teachers was able to provide useful information on the next one thus helping me to make adjustment before any other subsequent data collection process. All the participants signed the consent forms and participant information sheets.

The individual interviews were conducted on willing teachers who felt they wanted to talk more extensively with me on children’s learning. These teachers were recruited after each FGD. The five individual interviews were conducted on the teachers who showed keen interest in the subject of “quality” and “socio-cultural values”.

### **3.5.6. Recruitment and data collection from parents**

Sequentially to the permission to undertake the fieldwork for this research in schools, I was able to recruit parents who took part in this study through the teachers in two schools, Pinkcourt and Bluechip that were part of the research sites for this study. The teachers were willing to talk about my research topic to

parents as they came to drop their wards in schools. Thereafter, I followed up on this by introducing the research project to them. Two focus groups consisting of six parents each and four individual interviews were conducted with the parents. Out of the two focus groups, one was heterogeneous in nature consisting of three Yoruba, two Ibos and one Hausa participants, while the other group was mainly Yoruba. The reason for this composition is that most of the parents who were willing to participate in the study were from Yoruba ethnic group. However, I did not think this composition would affect the research because the main focus of the study is to obtain multiple perspectives on parents' perception on what constitute quality education for children, and not to compare them. Moreover, all the participants came from varied social and cultural backgrounds. This allowed me to explore the socio-cultural meanings and interpretations of various opinions of quality education for children in a Nigerian context.

### **3.5.7. Classroom observations**

Classroom observations explored teacher-child relationships, teachers' classroom management, pedagogical instructions and pupil-pupil interaction. Moss (1994) maintains that interactions between teachers and pupils constitute an important aspect of quality assessment. I arranged the observation calendar with the Head teachers and teachers of each school such that I did not distort the academic activities of the school. Many of the participant classroom observations did occur intermittently with teachers and parents' interviews. I decided to carry out the observations in this manner because I was interested in the explicit and implicit behaviours that underlie teachers' narratives and their classroom practices at the institutional and individual levels. Institutional



context refers to the influence of school climate on participants' responses. Individual context refers to participants' socio-cultural beliefs and values on classroom practices. In this way, Ritchie et al. (2013) suggest that researchers are able to understand subconscious behaviours that guide participants' actions. The observations were in two phases: pre-classroom and classroom observations.

The first observation was a pre-classroom observation which was in form of a non-participant observation. In this case, I observed teacher-pupil interactions, school environment and children activities like an outsider. I did this before the recruitment of my participants and within two hours twice in a week. The second observation was a participant classroom observation. I observed teachers' and pupils' interactions in the classroom, learning facilities, and classroom pedagogy. I did this by participating extensively in school learning and extra-curricular activities with the teachers three times in a week in each of the sampled schools. With this, I was able to get a clear picture of the classroom pedagogical practices. During this time, I spent ample of time with the teachers and the pupils. I was introduced as a researcher to the pupils and other teachers. I attended the morning assembly at 8.00am with the pupils, and the teachers and leaving the schools at 2.00pm as I did not wait for lesson period that usually lasted between 2-3pm. During the period of the observational studies, I acted as an assistant teacher to the teachers in the classes I observed.

In order to get information on the kind of activities that children are exposed to, how they are being taught and disciplined, I had to observe classroom activities in the morning and afternoon sessions. Observations also facilitated the

interview sessions. I was able to explore participants' meanings more deeply by recalling some observed behaviour during subsequent interview sessions. It also served as a means of triangulating data sources for this study. Triangulation is a vital aspect of ensuring credibility of a research process (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). Also, I was able to familiarise myself with the participants and establish a cordial relationship with them. Since some of these observations were video recorded, they provided avenues to test-run the documentation instruments that were used for subsequent observations i.e audio and video camera. In all, twelve observations were made for the study, out of which six were used for the study. The reason is that the observations got to a stage whereby new information was not emanating on the research questions. The observations were able to capture all the research questions.

I conducted interviews with children during these classroom observations. I also asked the selected pupils to make some drawings of what matters to them on a sheet of paper I provided. Also, the interview processes with other stakeholders- teachers, policymakers and parents gave me an opportunity to get information on children's likes and dislikes in a pre-school setting. However, I will not be presenting the analysis of these interviews because of the word limit for this thesis. However, I plan to publish the findings in a scholarly journal in the near future.

### **3.6. Trustworthiness of Research Instruments**

This study adopted the concept of *trustworthiness* in qualitative research as depicted by Guba and Lincoln (1989) and transactional validity in qualitative research (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). According to the authors,

qualitative research, with its rigorous data collection procedures can be measured as well for “reliability” and “validity”, terms often deployed in quantitative research. They further suggest four criteria - credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Lewis (2003) argues that all these criteria lie at the heart of reliability in its broadest sense and are germane to appraising the soundness of a study. The sub-sections below examine these criteria and how my study addressed each of them.

### **3.6.1. Credibility**

According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), credibility refers to “the level of confidence of a research finding”. This aspect of my study relates to ensuring the internal validity criteria advocated by positivistic research (Shenton, 2004). Specifically, Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggest that 'credibility' and 'transferability' translate more appropriately for naturalistic enquiry than 'internal' or 'external' validity. The strategies employed in this study are discussed below.

First, this study followed what Creswell (2003) and Lewis (2003) suggest as triangulation of data. The study accurately reflects the issue of quality education in ECCE by utilising four different instruments i.e. FGD, interviews, observation, and secondary data to collect both primary and secondary data for the study. These instruments captured all aspects of the research participants and were reviewed by my internal and external supervisors who are experts in the field. Moreover, data were generated from multiple sources: Education Ministries and Agencies, ECCE centres and the community. I also provided succinct account of the theoretical position which the study adopts.

Second, this research study was personally conducted by the researcher over a period of six-month June, 2015- January, 2016. The researcher spent ample of time on field observing, taking notes and forming mutual interactions with the participants. Guba Lincoln (1989) suggest that researcher gets a better understanding of the study by spending time in the field. I asked relevant questions which are based on an understanding of the research subject.

The context of the study was a familiar cultural environment for me which allowed me to have a proper engagement with the participants and establish what Guba and Lincoln (1989) call a relationship of trust, thus allowing me to do away with biases while my judgement from the academic perspective was also clarified. Moreover, as an early childhood educator and researcher and an ECCE stakeholder, I engaged in constant reflexive thinking throughout the data collection processes.

Third, I engaged in what Lincoln and Guba (1985) called member checking, which is the process of confirming the data results with participants, to see if the meaning or interpretation assigned is confirmed by those who contributed to it in the first place (Lewis, 2003). Member checking for this study was done through informal discussions after preliminary analysis of the initial data gathered from the participants. In the process, I was able to clarify some of the interpretations that I have made from stakeholders' narratives on quality education for children.

Fourth, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) concept of peer-debriefing was utilised in the study. The authors refer to peer-debriefing as the process of reviewing certain aspects of a qualitative inquiry by an independent third party during an

analytical process. I accomplished this by having sessions of discussions on certain aspect of the data with professionals from ECCE field who are less invested in the present study. For instance, I asked a colleague, who is also a lecturer, about policy issues in ECCE, he replied “well, when you talk of policy for children, our leaders have travelled far and wide and know what is obtainable elsewhere; they only come home to imitate what works there without looking inward to our peculiarities in Nigeria- like our needs, aspirations, diversity and socio-economic environment.” This suggests that to an average educated person, policy is influenced by external forces, but its implementation is encountered with internal orders.

### **3.6.2. Dependability**

This relates to reliability of the study. According to Lewis (2003), the reliability of findings depends on the likely recurrence of the original data and the way they are interpreted. Guba and Lincoln (1989) argue that achievement of credibility criteria reinforces the dependability of a qualitative study. It is how consistent the findings are and how they could be repeated. This study achieved this by presenting a detailed report of all the data collection methods and processes involved in the study. Additionally, a research design which allows for an in-depth coverage (Shenton 2004) has helped to establish dependability. Given the context that this study was carried out in, I hope other researchers will be able to carry out similar studies or adapt the methodology to fit any other context. In order to aid this, I have presented an explicit description of the nature of data generated from the participants and the interpretation given to the data.

### **3.6.3. Transferability**

This relates to the extent in which study findings can be applied in a wider context (Shenton, 2004) or used in different situations (Yin, 2014). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that transferability depends on the degree of congruence between the 'sending context' within which research is conducted, and the 'receiving context' to which it is to be applied. This was achieved through an extensive description of the research context in which this study was conducted, so that any interested researcher or reader can determine the areas which relate to their context and whether these apply to situations that they have or intend to research. For instance, this study can be replicated in any other developing economy or ones with similar participants in another context. In reality, many of the developing countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are multicultural and are faced with how to ensure quality education for their younger generation.

### **3.6.4. Confirmability**

This focuses researchers' objectivity. I reduced biases as much as possible by employing a reflexive approach to data interpretations. I also present transparent views of data collection and analysis procedures. Undoubtedly, the different areas of triangulation (see Section 3.4) and in-depth research design of my study also helps to achieve confirmability.

## **3.7. Ethical Considerations**

Ethical procedures in qualitative research seek to represent a set of moral principles, rules, or standards that guide a research process and moderate the relationship between the researcher and the researched (Boydell et al., 2012).

I observed ethical considerations throughout the research process that can be

likened to what Hopkins (1997) calls “procedural ethics, ethics in practice and relational ethics”. The procedural ethics for this study was done through a process of ethical approval for the study from the University of Leeds, School of Education AREA Faculty Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix). This was done after I had obtained an approval letter from Lagos State Universal Basic Education Board (LSUBEB) in March 2015, which allowed me to conduct the research in Nigerian ECCE centres. As much as the procedural ethic is important in a research process of this nature, Webster et al. (2013), as well as Boydell et al. (2012) maintain that the day-day ethical dilemmas that arise in the process of doing research cannot be underestimated. The authors argue that this often demands researcher reflexivity in order to establish mutual respect with the researched and construct knowledge from the research process. Subsequently, the key ethical considerations of this study are discussed.

### **3.7.1. Informed consent**

Informed consent according to Lewis (2003:66) is “the procedures involved in providing research participants with information about the purpose of the study, the funder, the research team, how the data will be used, and what participation will require of them, with an emphasis on voluntary participation”. According to Fritz (2008), protection of participants through an informed consent process favours formalized interactions between researcher and participants.

Therefore, before participants agreed to take part in this study, I gave them copies of a participant information sheet, which provided vital and detailed information about what the research is all about and what they would be expected to do. Also, I explained in detail what I would be doing and how it

would be done. I also gave room for questions and answers. This gave the opportunity for participants to either choose to participate or not. Participants were also made to know that they are free to withdraw their participation at any time of the study. For instance, two of the teacher participants withdrew from the focus group discussion half way into it because they felt they were not obliged to continue, while many of them only consented to participate in the FGD but not in an individual interview.

Moreover, consent was sought for observing classroom practices from teacher and pupil participants. I sought the consent of the pupils by asking them if they are happy to be part of the observational study. As a participant observer, I explained my research to the pupils and their expected roles. For instance, I told them by consenting, their voices and faces will be recorded and used as part of my study. I also told them that if at any time they do not want to continue, they should let me know. It was surprising that all the pupils in the study were willing and happy to take part in the research. Thereafter, I put a consent letter of permission in each of the pupils' bag for their parents to read and sign. The forms were returned and cross checked against each child before the commencement of the research.

Meanwhile, all the head teachers in the school used for this study gave me consent on behalf of the parents; since schools are seen as *in loco parentis* for the children (Lewis, 2003:67). Consent for conducting observation in the classroom setting involved asking participants to feel free to withdraw from the observation scene. However, all participants for the study voluntarily participated in the observation aspect of the study.



### **3.7.2. Confidentiality**

According to Lewis (2003: 10), confidentiality is referred to as “avoiding the attribution of comments, in reports or presentations, to identified participants” while anonymity is “identity of research participants not being known outside the research team”. I emphasized the confidentiality of the information provided by the participant. For instance, data collected were only shared with those who are part of the study team (Fritz, 2008), which in this study are my supervisors.

In order to ensure anonymity, pseudonyms were used for participants’ real names and the ECCE institutions used for the study. Furthermore, long quotes and any information that could be attached to any participant were restructured (Lewis, 2003). Moreover, in presenting the findings of the research, respondents’ quotes and data extracts, researcher’s field notes and informal notes obtained during the field work are used. The respondents’ quotes and data extracts are indented and italicised while the researcher’s field and informal notes are italicised. Each respondent’s quote is identified by a pseudonym in brackets, followed by the data collection group and line number in the transcript. This ensures that a participant’s response remains anonymous and such response cannot be identified with an individual.

### **3.7.3. Responsible Authorship**

I have the ethical responsibility to the research community to present the data generated during my study to the best of my ability, such that it can be useful for future research and researchers. The detailed description of the research design and method for this study is likely to help in this regard. I plan to present the outcome of my research in conferences and scholarly journal for the reach of wider academic researchers.

### **3.8. Presentation of the data**

The data analysis for this study followed frameworks within qualitative data analysis methods. The subsections below present the overview of how each data set was analysed.

#### **3.8.1. Analysis of Policy documents**

The first research question of this study concerns the exploration of the key themes of quality criteria that are captured in the policy documents. ECCE policy documents in this study include Extract of Early Childhood Education from the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004; NERDC, 2013) and Quality Assurance Instrument for basic Education in Nigeria (FME, 2010).

Starting with policy document analysis (see Section 4.5), Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) combined with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) methods were employed. According to Schreier (2014), QCA is a qualitative method of data analysis that identifies, analyses and reports selected aspects of a research material that only relate to the overall research questions and support an argument. Similarly, Hsieh and Shannon (2005) admit that QCA is a method used to analyse textual data, which can be in verbal, print or electronic form, through subjective interpretation, by the process of coding and identifying themes or patterns. The authors explore the use of QCA following three approaches: conventional, directed and summative, in a health-related study. This study has chosen this method because it is easy to identify contextual meanings in research materials and then categorise and interpret them. According to Mayring (2014), the hermeneutical approach to QCA, as enshrined in a constructivist theory, embraces a dialectical synergy between researcher's preconceptions and text interpretations. Moreover, the author

maintains that QCA also looks at the linguistic context of the text, thereby incorporating the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a method that was also used for this study. This does not really signify the use of two methods per se, as CDA is an aspect of content analysis, as explained by Gee and Handford (2013:1), as well as Fairclough (2013:10), as the study of the meanings given to language and the actions carried out when language is used in specific contexts.

Kiersey (2009) argues that CDA in policy analysis answers 'how questions' in a bid to understand the evolution of social realities and meanings, exploring "how, what and where" meanings come from. The author further maintains that a critical discourse analysis of policy documents pays attention to the social, cultural and political climate in which the documents were created, alongside a meticulous textual analysis of the linguistic properties of each text in order to discern the underlying ideology of the discourse. My analysis explored meanings embedded in written texts emanating from policy makers. Thus, the study looked at the contextual and linguistic meanings underlying ECCE policy documents.

Although QCA shares some features with CDA, the basic difference between them lies in the manner in which each one of them looks at the content of the research text. For instance, QCA adopts a systematic process of examining relevant aspects of a research material. In this way, Scheirer (*ibid*) maintains that the reliability of the data analysis is ensured, because researchers' expectations and assumptions are eradicated. On the contrary, CDA explores the linguistic meanings within research texts of a particular cultural context, which according to Fairclough (2014) vary according to time and place. I

therefore considered both approaches relevant to the understanding of values, intentions and meanings of ECCE policy documents in a developing economy and multi-cultural contexts like Nigeria.

Hence, I agree with the arguments of Schreier (2014), Hsieh and Shannon (2005) on QCA, as well as Fairclough (2014) and Gee and Hanford (2013:1) on CDA, which upholds these approaches as qualitative data analysis methods. Fairclough (ibid) suggests that CDA embraces a trans-disciplinary approach, which I observed in the field. There was the interference of economic, health and political issues in understanding stakeholders' construction of quality education for children.

Essentially, policy analysis for this study adopts Schreier's (2014) eight basic steps in QCA, which are (a) deciding on a research question (b) selecting material (c) building a coding frame (d) segmentation (e) trial coding (f) evaluating and modifying the coding frame (e) main analysis and (g) presenting and interpreting the findings while also juxtaposing frameworks within the studies conducted by Kiersey (2012) and Fairclough (2014) using CDA. Table 9 below shows the phases of the combination of QCA and CDA analyses used for this study.

**Table 9: Steps in QCA and CDA for the study**

<b>Steps involved</b>	<b>QCA</b>	<b>CDA</b>
Identifying a social problem	Deciding on a research question	Selecting a research topic and formulating research questions
Analyse relations between research texts and contexts	Selecting suitable amount of material	Selecting relevant texts in relations to social and political structure
Familiarisation with text	Reading until relevant concept is encountered	Reading and re-reading the text, noting the writing styles
Building coding framework	Generating main category and sub category	Collating categories that relate to themes and sub-themes
Segmentation	Applying categories to the entire material in a consistent manner	Reviewing coded themes and sub-themes
Trial coding	Applying categories of coding to materials in order to pilot it.	Not applicable
Evaluating and modifying the coding frame	Examining the results of trial coding in terms of consistency and validity	Not applicable
Main Analysis	All relevant aspects of research material are coded	Ongoing textual analysis-use of NVIVO if applicable
Presenting and interpreting the findings	Presenting the report in the form of coding frameworks, quotes, continuous text, and text matrices, examining the results for further data exploration, patterns and co-occurrences of selected categories.	Relating themes and subthemes back to the research questions.

Source: Adapted from Schreier (2014) and Kiersey (2012).

Since the focus is to explore the key themes of quality care, learning and development and how they relate to socio-cultural values within the Nigerian

context, the policy document analysis did not involve trial coding and the use of Nvivo.

### **3.8.2. Analysis of interviews and FGDs**

Analysis of interviews and focus group discussions was done using a thematic data analysis technique. Thematic Analysis (TA) is a foundational method of qualitative analysis which identifies, analyses, and reports patterns and themes within data in order to produce a detailed description of research data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Likewise, Aronson (1995); Marshall and Rossman (2006); and Marshall and Rossman (2011) suggest that thematic analysis collects, identifies, generate codes, combines related themes and patterns, finds alternatives explanations and analyses it for final interpretation.

However, Braun and Clarke (2006) maintain that thematic analysis is a “poorly demarcated, rarely acknowledged” qualitative data analysis approach. Specifically, the analysis of the data collected from this study followed a six-phase framework of conducting TA, as put forward by Braun and Clarke (2006), which are; (i) Familiarizing oneself with the data (ii) Generating initial codes (iii) Searching for themes (iv) Reviewing themes (v) Defining and naming themes and (vi) Producing the report. According to the authors, a theme represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set. It usually captures something important about the data.

The analysis was done in two parts; the preliminary and main data analysis. As discussed earlier, the preliminary analysis of policymakers’/inspectors’ interviews was done after the 4<sup>th</sup> interview. I gathered the recordings and transcribed them manually. I did not use Nvivo in this case because I was not yet familiar with the software application, and tried not to fall victim of the

warning of Roulston (2014) that researchers who take advantage of technological innovation for qualitative analysis must account for cues that form the focus of questions and answers in analyses. All the same, the preliminary analysis was able to inform subsequent interviews and informal conversations with policymakers and inspectors.

The preliminary analysis was done by reading through the transcripts generated line by line. Using a pen marker, I identified words that described similar line of thought from each of the stakeholders' narratives and assigned numbers to them. I later grouped them into categories and looked out for the key connective themes and central organising meanings that emanated from these narratives. These later helped me to clarify some of these meanings from the other interviews I later conducted. I was also able to clarify my pre-conceptions about policy intents from the policymakers. One of such clarification is the statement that was made by a policymaker about quality and standards in children's educational services. The policymaker had earlier stated that "as for the standards, the standards of education at the nursery level is higher than it used to be, but I think we need to put more effort on quality assurance because it is the main driver to uphold such standards". In clarifying this statement, the policymakers admitted that the term *quality* is not all about maintaining higher standards of learning for children and that quality assessment should probe into what really works for the whole community of learning and the society at large.

Likewise, the preliminary analysis for teachers' and parents' interviews and focus group discussions was done after I finished the 3<sup>rd</sup> FGD and 3<sup>rd</sup> individual interviews (see Table 6). I went through the FGD recordings over and over

again. I transcribed them word for word, correcting any grammatical errors, because English language was not the first language of the teachers. Moreover, since I was interested in meanings and not linguistic order of the discussion, I was able to identify key categories that reveal agreement among participants on quality education assessment in ECCE, using a manual process of thematic analysis.

The process started with familiarising myself with participants' responses and generating codes. The generated codes were then created into themes and subthemes. Further appointments were made with participant stakeholders to clarify some of the initial meanings generated from their narratives.

### **3.8.3. Main Analysis of Research Data**

As discussed earlier, there was a preliminary analysis throughout the fieldwork period. I undertook a fuller analysis of the research data after the fieldwork ended. As I was already familiar with the data, I re-played the recorded interviews, discussions and conversations over again and I transcribed every verbal and non- verbal expression of the stakeholders into written texts. Thereafter, I employed the use of Nvivo software to transcribe all the data corpus- stakeholders' interviews in the source menu of Nvivo.

The next stage I undertook was the generation of initial codes from the data corpus. I read through each of the stakeholders' transcripts-data corpus, and assigned basic meanings to each word, forming the initial codes. Coding according to Saldana (2009) is a process of assigning meanings to a word or a phrase from data items, which in this case means individual interview or observational field notes. A code therefore denotes a weight of meaning that a



word or sentence which a respondent's narrative carries in relation to the network of data collected (Patton, 2002).

Specifically, an inductive approach (Braun et al., 2014)) to data coding which involved the identification of meanings without reference to particular theoretical constructs was employed, notwithstanding I was fully aware of theoretical underpinning that guides the study. Put differently, (Strauss, 2005) and (Thomas, 2013) refer to coding as a process of creating "conceptual groupings from the data collected". I further extracted texts that were relevant for each code from the data item of each interview (see Table 10). For instance, even though my research is interested in establishing teachers' construction of quality dimensions that relate to teacher-child relationships, the coding did not generate any direct construct on teacher-child relationships but on the meanings that revolve around the notion of teacher-child relationship in the data.

Thereafter, codes generated for each group of stakeholder's data set, teachers' interviews, for instance, was grouped into categories. The different categories generated for each group of stakeholders were later used to form a connection of meaning structures and concepts called themes and subthemes. I did this by putting together categories of codes that generate similar meanings.

I sorted the different codes into potential themes and subthemes. I used my sense of judgement to consider how some initial codes relate to a particular theme. I did this by picking the codes one by one, looking out for the relationships between each of them, reading the data extract under each code,

organising similar codes into nodes and labelling them as each theme in the “Node” menu of Nvivo.

It is important to note that the process does not look as simple and linear as explained above. Initially, I generated codes that looked so disjointed and my data seemed so tangled. At times, I had to go over my data items and regenerate some codes. I suppose what seems to be the guiding principle is the network of meanings that they depict. The themes generated were reviewed three times before the final set of themes was arrived at. I also took time to look into the consensus and disagreement within codes generated for each group of stakeholders and also among the three stakeholders. These networks of meanings substantiate the interpretations I gave to the stakeholders' narratives. Finally, I present the reports of the themes generated in subsequent chapters by drawing on the individual and group data extracts under each theme while discussing the findings. Find below an extract of the analysis of teachers' narratives that I generated during the preliminary and main analysis.

**Table 10: Extract of the initial coding of teachers' data corpus**

s/n	Data item	Data Extract	Codes	Categories	Themes
1	Adelaide	<i>"... Recently, I was reflecting and trying to look back at my own upbringing. I found something very useful that I call communal responsibility and relationship".</i>	Quality may entail visiting what works in the past	Quality education for children is embedded in the past but cherished societal culture of extended family and communal responsibility	Quality education within conformity and individuality social-cultural framework.
2	Bode	<i>"How can I talk of quality education for children without referring to the "good old days' values? These are the values that we once cherished and lived by in this country</i>	The relevance of good old days' values		
3	Masara	<i>"The extended family is fast being removed from us. In some years ago, we have the extended family that caters for children Now, every child is locked up inside their flats. It is that individuality culture that has permeated our society"</i>	The roles of extended family in child care and education		
4	Ojo	<i>"I think we are throwing some things that make us Nigerians away from the children; we should not throw</i>	Communal responsibility ensures quality		

		<i>them away. That issue of extended family, communal responsibility, the issue of one person's being his or her brother's keeper"</i>			
5	Tinuke	<i>"I am always proud of some children that are well brought up in the cherished values of the society..."</i>	Imbibing the cherished values		
6	Sarah	<i>"What I grew up to know while I was growing up is that in a compound or clan, children upbringing is the responsibility of every adult in that community-making sure that any child is well trained and behaved".</i>	Children care and education-The responsibility of all		

### **3.9. Chapter Summary**

This chapter has examined the research design and methodology employed for this study. It discusses in detail the research paradigms and research process, including the data collection techniques and procedures. The theoretical underpinning which emphasizes co-construction of meanings justifies the choice of adopting a qualitative interpretive approach. This allowed me to be a part of the research process rather than being an outsider, however, my position was clearly stated.

It also provides an explicit data analysis procedure adopted for this study. It highlights the different stages of data collection and techniques, including the pilot study phase and recruitment of participants for the main research. It also discusses how the trustworthiness of the research process was ensured, including ways in which adherence to approved ethical consideration for the study was accomplished.

It concludes with an overview of data analysis procedures for the different research instruments employed for the study.

## **Chapter Four: Contextual Narratives of ECCE Provision in Lagos State**

### **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents ECCE stakeholders' accounts of the context in which care and education of children take place in Lagos state. It is important to establish how stakeholders make meaning about their contexts (social, cultural, economic and political), in order to have a comprehensive understanding of data and consequently its interpretation. The contextual information, whilst unveiling fundamental issues affecting quality assessment, also provides a platform to juxtapose subsequent research findings and clarify my own position and pre-conceptions (Thomas, 2013:109).

This chapter is divided into five sections. First, stakeholders' contextual accounts of the socio-cultural particularities of Lagos state are examined. This highlights specific social, economic, political and cultural conditions that are germane to understanding quality assessment in ECCE settings. The second section presents the position of Nigeria in relation to influences from the global processes and interest. It describes children's education and care as interconnected to these global processes. It also examines the structures and agencies that have emerged from these various influences. The third section discusses stakeholders' understandings of ECCE provision within the framework of African traditional cultural heritage on children's care and education. The fourth section presents the ECCE policy context in Nigeria, including an analysis of key themes that relate to children's care, learning and development. The fifth section provides a succinct summary of the chapter. In

doing all of this, interview extracts and materials gathered during a qualitative study of stakeholders' understandings of quality education for children in Lagos state are utilised.

#### **4.2. Socio-cultural particularities of Lagos state in understanding quality education in ECCE institutions.**

Understanding quality education for children within a multi-cultural setting like Lagos state is embedded in complex networks and cycles in various social, economic and political domains. Many of the respondents identified the internal structure of the political terrain in Nigeria, and specifically in Lagos state, as germane to quality assessment in ECCE. Activities and decision that emanate from the political system, which is pluralistic and complex, seem to have dominated assessment measures in early childhood institutions. Ibiyemi, a teacher, remarked, *“education has been politicised”*. During a further discussion with Ibiyemi, she described the controlling influence of politically minded officials in education thus:

*“When a politician without requisite skills takes over the work of a technocrat and starts dictating what is supposed to be done in schools, there is bound to be failure. Also, there are so many people who gate crashed into the teaching profession. We need professionals who will be able to give advice on the care and education of children” (Ibiyemi)*

There have been multi-layered influences of political interventions on educational programmes that have spanned through political parties' dispensations and ideologies in Lagos state. In the opinion of Wallin and Gunnar (1982), educational institutions are subset of political affairs, which are in turn susceptible to pressures from outside world. The implication is that

educational ideologies that emanate from the Nigerian political processes underlie ECCE provision and management and are significant to understanding quality in children's services. Moreover, the school system is perceived as made up of institutions where governments' aspirations and concerns for the citizens are established. This places the understanding of quality education in schools within the active role that government plays. For instance, school policies are subject to national and state policy directives, which are further influenced by global protocols.

Undoubtedly, over the years, educational services in Nigeria have continued to witness increased governmental intervention. This might be connected with the assumption of Baguma and Aheisibwe (2011:31) that education seems to remain chiefly a "global public good" because of government vested interests in international relations. It might be that government continued pursuit of this good indicates that they do not want to lose benefits from international politics and interventions in educational programmes. Odogbolu, a teacher naively talked about this by stating:

*"... ECCE in public schools is a new initiative in the state and the country. All state governments are making sure that we meet up with international requirements and standards."*  
(Odogbolu)

During a discussion with Odogbolu, it became clear that quality education can be understood within the framework of political intentions for the aims of education for young children at a specific time. All the teachers were aware of the import of political order on the notion of *quality* in any educational setting. The older teachers revealed this by constantly referring to changing and



different emphases of education. For instance, they talked about the roles of defunct school inspectors, emphasis on practical work in agriculture and creative art, high moral discipline and respect as opposed to high academic performance in the present era.

Specifically, the educational context of children's care and education in Lagos state can be said to have an entrenched admiration for the moral and intellectual essence of education. Young children, who used to be seen as naïve and feeble, are expected to be fixed into the formal order of acquiring knowledge in order to produce learned and economically productive citizens. Emphasis on learning achievements and standards through acquisition of measurable skills are the focal points of government's recent declarations (see Section 4.5 for more details). There is no doubt that the government's sole support for the formal aspect of schooling for children aged 5-6 years (NERDC, 2013) elucidates the perceived aim of education in contemporary times. Government seems to be interested in anything that can yield tangible results from objective evaluation. Over the years this has affected teachers' professionalism as public ECCE settings are handled by staff who do not have pre-requisite certificates in child development. Invariably, ECCE settings are seen as any other classroom learning environment for older pupils.

The representation of children as "young adults" and not "children" (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2007) appears to have permeated political and educational institutions, and caused a change in the socio-cultural perception of childhood. This can be traced to what Postman (1985) argues as "the disappearance of childhood through media and international relations" (see Chapter Two). For

instance, the National Policy on Education (NERDC, 2013) states that “education as an instrument for national development and social change... is based on the development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen”.

Many of the respondents perceived assessment as a formal procedure that often showcases government interventions and its concerns for unifying quality standards across the state; these standards are expected to be in line with international prototypes. A teacher stated:

*“You know.... One thing I discovered about early childhood education programme is that all over the world, the issue of ECCE is now very important; our government too are also buying into the idea. It achieves government’s goal of children being able to read and write” (Fuluya)*

Moreover, the dawn of modern realities signalled by significance of paper work has led to the neglect of traditional principles and skills in the Nigerian educational system. It looks as if the assertion of Dewey (1986) that “*the subject-matter of education which consist of bodies of information and of skills that have been worked out in the past*” does not apply to the organisation of young children’s learning activities. Over time, the aims of education and learning outcomes have been reduced to economic importance and labour market operations. In many of the classroom observations, children’s learning was characterised by academic activities in Literacy, Mathematics, and other subjects. There was minimal time for play activities. However, as relevant as this educational ideology may seem to be, postmodern perspectives on ECCE assessment have called for its criticism. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2007) argue that one of the dominant emphases of the modern approach to quality assessment in ECCE, which measures how much technically manipulated

knowledge a child has acquired, does not represent a *hegemony* of progressive education in every context. What I observed is that education as a means of pursuing a career and securing a better future has been rigorously pursued in Lagos state, Nigeria. Ayo, a parent, remarked:

*“Paper work is what the society recognises; society will judge you on how much paper work you are able to do and use- your qualifications. If that is what the society wants from the school system, then it has to be so... but note that there has been a distortion of values somewhere along the line” (Ayo)*

Another defining feature of the contextual particularities in Lagos state ECCE is the area of the socio-cultural value system. Lagos state ECCE settings are characterised by differentiated social and cultural attitudes to children care and education based on the cultural position of children’s families. Observational studies revealed that whilst traditional childrearing practices are mostly not being practised in schools, teachers relate to children based on their prior knowledge of children’s family cultural background. In other words, teachers relate with children according to parents’ stance on childrearing practices. There are different levels of social stratification based on class, economic background and cultural identity. However, I observed a divide between modern and traditional cultural practices. Fuluya, a teacher described the situation thus:

*“...it sometimes depends on the parents. There are some parents that will dictate the kind of approach they want the teachers teaching their wards to adopt in the classroom. For instance, I have some parents who even teach me on the latest modern way, while other will tell you to train them according to what the culture demands” (Fuluya)*

As noted by Kasongo (2010), culture syncretism, an amalgamation of cultures, is an aspect of globalization which has continued to evolve transformations in economic and social development across the globe, not least in relation to the cultural outlook of the affected community. In the opinion of Sijuwade (2006) and Baguma and Aheisibwe (2011), the importation of international cultural practices have brought some level of changes to childrearing cultural heritage in many African countries, which have consequently resulted in the concomitant loss of control over what goes on in ECCE settings. It can be adjudged that the educational context in Lagos ECCE reflects an environment of cultural anxieties and dilemmas in an attempt to achieve radical change towards a very modern way of bringing up children.

Parents and teachers at some points have had to reach painful compromises on the appropriateness of what constitutes quality education for children, while upholding socio-cultural values. Such compromises include discipline, language use, and the preservation of traditional music and art. From observation, it is clear that society is segmented along economic, social and cultural inequalities. Ade, a teacher respondent described the state of economic inequality that privatisation of education has brought into the educational sector and its consequent social stratification effect on the society and education of children as follows:

*“There is so much inequality in the country now. Everyone is just trying to find their levels when it comes to education, the rich have their own schools and the poor know their levels; the rich knows what is good for them and can afford it. The poor accepts whatever they are offered as suitable” (Ade)*

The same view was also echoed in Nifesi’s statement:

*“... As a nation, we have always been struggling with how our educational sector can really meet our needs. More so, during this economic downturn period, I hope we will get it right one day” (Nifesi)*

From these teachers' perspectives, economic decisions within the political sphere affect the ways to think through quality education for children. They referred to the deplorable state of facilities in schools, inadequate funding and late payment of teachers' salary as some of the challenges.

Furthermore, a remarkable feature of ECCE in Lagos state is the distinction in educational and care delivery between public and private schools. It was observed that although both service providers follow the same guidelines for teaching and learning, public providers do not give attention to modern ECCE practices like their private counterparts. In many of the public pre-schools, there exist traditional ways of child's training. Many of the respondents admitted that though there is increased government intervention, private provision will continue to take the lead in delivering contemporary ECCE services.

#### **4.3. Educating children in Nigeria: Exploring global processes and interest on ECCE provision in Lagos state**

Discussions on quality assessment in ECCE in contemporary times are coming to realise the importance of contextual reality that is embedded in nation states' history; including the social, economic, cultural, and political milieu of the state of such nations- particularly the ones that surround young people and shape the perceptions of their world (Nsamenang, 2011, Nsamenang and Tchombe, 2011, Woodhead, 1998, Myers, 2005, Pence and Nsamenang, 2008, Pence and Ashton, 2016, Evans and Myers, 2004). These differences in contextual

features can be perceived as a matter of time and path differentials that are peculiar to each society. This notion is, however, subjected to further reasoning. The theoretical shift from a modern to a postmodern paradigm in evaluating quality assessment in the context of early childhood education as propounded by Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999), Woodhead (1996) and Woodhead (1997) directly addresses issues relating to social, political and cultural contexts in the construction and meaning-making of early childhood institutions and quality assessment. Contextual information thus becomes an important clue because of its contribution to our understanding of any paradigm shift in theoretical thinking.

In the context of childhood care and education, globalization is often described as conflicting and/or complementing traditional childrearing patterns. During the preliminary analysis of stakeholders' narratives, it became clear that discussions on quality dimensions in ECCE revolve around both global and local contexts. It is striking to note that interviewees often talked about quality with remarkable reference to the position of Nigeria in the wider context of a global community and its influences on various aspects of the societal institutional structures and teaching practices. Thus, when it comes to defining what is good for children at schools, the position of the country in relation to the global structure has a great influence. A teacher interviewee remarked:

*“If we look at the environment now, we are in a global world; things are changing. There seems to be just a single world. Whatever happens in Lagos is known elsewhere. The way parents are bringing up their children now is different from the way we were brought up.” (Odogbolu)*

In Lagos state the influence of global ideas on every facet of the society-economic, social, cultural and political, and more specifically the care and education of children is significant. This was clearly observed in the study area with the ubiquitous influence of western educational thinkers on the organisation of ECCE institutions. In the metropolitan centre, it is very common to find educational ideas of schools patterned after Montessori and other international models of ECCE. These services which provide institutionalised training for children are evidence of a marked difference from the traditional childrearing practices that were previously used. A significant influence is the increased role given to parental choices and an emphasis on receiving value for expenses spent on their children (Penn, 2011, Harvey and Green, 1993, Ferguson, 1991, Cheong Cheng and Ming Tam, 1997). Undoubtedly, the neoliberal mentality has infiltrated the organisation of ECCE. For instance, private schools are mostly patronised for these services and since parents pay fees, they care so much about how much contemporary exposure their children get from schooling.

Moreover, the impact of knowledge and technological movement has become more visible in local/national educational programmes. For instance, National Policy on Education states that “Nigeria, like most other countries of the world is undergoing rapid social, economic and political reforms” (NERDC, 2013). The implication is that the dawn of new ways of viewing children’s care and learning is instrumental to quality assessment in ECCE. For example, a respondent admitted that limited restraint on policy borrowing has continued to shape educational programmes in Lagos state:

*“...when we talk about policy in Nigeria, we need to understand the kind of environment that we call Nigeria. It is such an entity with a multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious identity...however, our government has always been too quick to accept policy from other countries” (Gbangba)*

Specifically, this impact of globalisation is most experienced in the form of policy transfer on children’s care and education from the Global North to the Global South (Penn, 2005; 2011). For two decades, reforms and policies have been used to address the universality of experiences for children across the globe (Prout, 2005, Hendrick, 1997, James et al., 1998). For example, there is the intervention of government into children’s learning, care and development from rights-based perspectives (Keiersy, 2009), mandated through the establishment of education as the right of every child which government must provide (Dakar Framework, 2000). This is marshalled by international conventions which argue that all school-age children should be in school, and that learning begins at birth (UNESCO, 2000). However, field observation revealed that pre-school provision in Lagos state creates tension between its provision as *benefits* and *rights* of children. This is discussed further in subsequent chapters.

In general, respondents’ accounts of the socio-cultural dimensions of quality education in relation to global influences divide within the generational shifts that occurred around what can be referred to as the post-colonial period (1960 to date). Many respondents placed their understanding of quality education for children on structural progressions from a pre-modern to a modern era. A similar feature in stakeholders’ narratives is the affirmation of a modern society with its objective approach and technological transfers which produce opposing



educational ideologies of children's care and learning. The first is the demands and challenges of educating children in the present time when ideas in the global community do not seem only domineering but tend to submerge values that emanate from the social contexts where children are raised. For instance, core cultural values on childrearing like language usage, informality of learning, communal and shared responsibility, character training, kinship and extended family support amongst others have remained in the background. The second relates to the influence on the whole system of education. The implication is that the impact of dominant global values on ECCE provision is germane to the construction and practice of quality assessment in Lagos state. For instance, many of the interviewees who had witnessed an emergence of independence and renaissance of a new nation called Nigeria post- independence in the 1970s, who are referred to as older generation (see Section 3.5.5.1), repeatedly provided narratives of how child care and education had evolved from the traditional and primitive society to a modern approach whereby children's progress is not mainly measured against their *local* standards but also *international* ones. There is no doubt that this has brought about a clear-cut distinction between the "locally" and "globally" relevant provision. The impact of these pluralistic influences within the African and global community are significant in the construction of quality education for young children.

Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999; 2007) conceive the notion of modernity as historical, cultural and industrial transformations, which manifested in form of objective and technical appraisal of knowledge and are assumed to be value-free and universal. A succinct description of stakeholders' narratives reflects a tripartite classification of pre-modern, modern and postmodern periods (Prout,

2005; Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999). A relevant way of understanding the periods of global influences on ECCE in Nigeria may have to borrow from the assertion of Pence and Ashton (2016) on Sub-Saharan Africa's watershed period, characterised by increased global visibility of African's Early Childhood Development (ECD) in the early 1990s. The authors maintain that events that marked these periods include the spread of international conventions like the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 and Education for All (EFA) of 1990 (UNESCO, 2000), which generally addressed issues concerning children's social equity in relation to education and welfare services, coupled with technological transfer from the Global North. The emphasis of these protocols, they suggest, might have been instigated by the great breakthrough that Sub-Saharan Africa made in child survival rates, as depicted in the writings of Myers (1992). The focal point of attention, thus, shifted from survival to learning and development. The second aspect of the watershed featured increased social awareness of the influence of modern society on indigenous values, and consequential advocacy for "Africa-centric" early childhood care, learning and development, which recognise and celebrate African children's agency (Nsamenang, 2011).

Many of the respondents felt that this new order of civilisation and globalisation have brought about a change in the economic, social outlook and gender roles in the society. For instance, provision of care and education that meets up with societal expectations requires financial capacity and access to contemporary information on child care and education. Yarinya, a teacher stated:

*"There is a new order for child's training in this generation, because in the olden days, mothers do not work, they stayed at*

*home. Now since our economy is getting hard or worse, every woman wants to work and have to keep their children somewhere while they are in the workplace. So, they discovered it is not only caring that children need, they also need to be learning to prepare their minds towards entering primary school. The curriculum for ECCE now includes rudiments of numbers, letters, colour, and shapes so that by the time they enter primary school the atmosphere won't be new" (Yarinya).*

Another teacher, Gbajo, echoed this view when she stated:

*"There are so many differences now. One, there used to be gender differences in my time. Women were supposed to stay with their children and train them before they are ready for school. Children do not start school until parents know that they are ready for school. I did not start primary school until seven years old. Two, there were no many ECCE centres then. I attended public school because public schools were very ok then. Now, there are ECCE centres all around and parents are all working class" (Gbajo).*

From observation, the most significant impact of international intervention in Lagos state ECCE services is the funding and training activities undertaken by UK DFID- through Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN) programme. The presence of this International Development Partner (IDP) has generated Quality Assurance Instruments and mechanisms that are being used in the assessment of basic and secondary education in Lagos state. This programme, regulatory in nature, is handled by the Office of Quality Assurance in Lagos state, which is similar to Ofsted in the UK. It may be sufficient to state that quality assessment in Lagos state ECCE institutions are immersed in what Moss (2005) call "highly regulatory and managerial standards". This might suggest why there is a minimal influence of traditional socio-cultural values in the formal educational system that ECCE programme is expected to fit into. In the opinion of Penn (2011), quality standards have continued to provide

palliative measures and control in the era of accountability and standardisation of children's care and education.

According to the Quality Assurance Instrument Handbook (FME, 2010), quality assurance in the basic education sub-sector can be defined as:

“An all-encompassing concept which includes all processes, policies and actions through which the quality of Basic Education is developed, improved and maintained. It goes beyond quality control and lays more emphasis on the quality of the end-products with the presumption that minimum standards exist. Hence, Quality Assurance involves all the processes that contribute to the success of the end-products (the learners) in terms of their learning outcomes” (FME, 2010:5).

From the statement above, it becomes clear that QA seems to exist on a presumption of pre-determined measurable outcomes. This might be regarded as a means of universalising children's experiences through a chain of quality assurance mechanisms that fit into an intended global competitive advantage for children, and more so, an attempt to universalise learning standards across a multi- ethnic society like Nigeria. This has established a significant level of political presence in ECCE. The implication is that quality assessment in ECCE will have to contend with a tension between imported ideas and socio-cultural values that are specific to a multi-ethnic society like Lagos state. In this case, the earlier opinion of Fafunwa (1982) that decried full adoption of contemporary learning contents in the school system becomes relevant in easing out this tension.

Specifically, interviewees were of the opinion that Lagos state is only a minute fraction of the global system. Of particular interest to the respondents is the impact of activities that go on in the global community in the country's socio-

political sphere. These trickle down to the individual community, influence people's values and belief systems over time, and subsequently, these values are propagated by the school system. Some parents argue, in their assessment of global influence on children's training that the educational system is a medium of transfer of global ideals in the first instance, because the transfers are usually in languages that are understood by the school system. Ruth, a parent to a nursery school child, remarked:

*"From my own perspective, this formal education came through western missionaries. We are still pursuing the purpose at it progresses there as well. For instance, you (the researcher) are pursuing higher degree in the UK, because you have passed through western education at some points and when you come back you will come and implement recent discoveries in educational practices" (Ruth).*

From Ruth's interview excerpts above, it became clear that Nigerian educational value is assessed in relation to how well it can adapt to international standards and serve such interest. International relations and their contribution to economic, technological and ideological transfer, arguably, are necessary for modern day progress and civilisation. This explains why children's education is continuously driven by global initiatives. This is supported by comments from two policymakers - Gbanga and Sean. They stated; *"we cannot be crawling while others are flying"*, and *"Nigeria is part of the world politics"*. Likewise three teachers said; *"times and seasons have changed"*, *"we are in a jet age"*, and *"this is an era of reasoning"*. Generally, stakeholders repeatedly talked about the importance of globally recognised measures through statement like *"we need to move towards international best practices"*. Paradoxically, in Lagos state, pre-school settings that have been

impoverished by neglect and lack of funding are assessed against internationally recognised measures adopted from affluent nations.

Stakeholders' expressions are, no doubt, indications of a more sophisticated approach to childrearing practices that are informed by global ideals, and which have been subjected to some theoretical criticism (Moss, 2005; Prout, 2005; Penn, 2011; Woodhead, 2006, Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2007). Such authors rebut dominant representations of "Anglo-American" quality assessment ideologies which have often been perceived as prototype. This has also led to the suppression of the majority world's social and cultural contexts.

Labimi, an older nursery teacher explained this view by stating:

*"Our political leaders do travel to other parts of the world which are more developed than ours, when they come back, they try to replicate the same thing in Nigeria because they do not want us to be backward" (Labimi)*

This implies that the political system has been a vehicle for transmitting global ideas into the educational sector. ECCE initiatives in their modern form have articulated a redefinition of roles from a democratic community of practice within a child's immediate community to a public idea of a central government decision on how and what children should be taught.

Another defining feature of ECCE, observed during the interviews and observational studies, is the predominance of private ownership and provision. This suggests that the global economic structure entrenched in neoliberal ideologies (Esping- Andersen, 1990; Pringle, 1998) (see Chapter Two for details) has brought about the emergence of reduced government

interventions, money economy, and increased demand for ECCE services for working class women. Government's reduced public funding justifies the involvement of private efforts in the provision of children's services. For instance, Nigerian ECCE remains the least funded sector of public provision in the country (Imam, 2012). While some respondents believed that the involvement of private sector has been beneficial in the educational sector, others considered its unmonitored involvement as catastrophic. These two views were argued over during a FGD thus:

*Masara: "Private sectors have really helped in providing education for children in Nigeria. If you get to some private schools, they have everything that children need to learn and develop while the public schools are not well equipped"*

*Adaeze: As regards the level at which private individuals get involved in ECCE, I see it as a failure of the government. There used to be publicly funded schools that functioned well in Nigeria because everybody abides by the rules. For instance, I went to a public school throughout my childhood period in the 70s. The emergence of private schools has been an undoing to us in Nigeria. This private school that came up- because they are not properly monitored and guided. They employ a graduate for as low as 15,000 naira per month. How do you expect that kind of teacher to give you anything good?*

Many ECCE institutions in Lagos state are for-profit enterprises, patronised by working class and business professionals. By contrast in some developed countries, for example in the UK, services are provided through a tax system, although with limited hours for children aged three (Moss and Penn, 1996) and this implies that the activities of private sector are often made unprofitable and less prominent (Penn and Lloyd, 2007, Lloyd and Penn, 2014, Penn, 2013).

Odinko et al. (2009) claim that “the Nigerian government’s perception over the years of this level of education was that tax payers’ money should not be used in the provision of such services”, suggesting the existence of structural flaws in the organisation of the market system in a developing country like Nigeria. This is coupled with different periods of precarious economy and increased structural inequalities among the citizens. There is no doubt that globalisation has produced a complex market system (Alan et al., 2011; Penn, 2005) in Lagos state which makes universal access more difficult to achieve. Undoubtedly, post-colonial Nigeria ECCE services contend with a tension between *rights-based* and *policy-based* perspectives in response to social justice and equity. The enactment of a series of policy measures from a capitalistic orientation makes it difficult to assess the equal rights of children to services.

While it can be acknowledged that neoliberal ideology may not be negative in itself, its influence on educational values for young children and its tendency to create more inequalities through class and status in Lagos state was evident. Many of the stakeholders expressed their dismay over this influence on the socio-cultural outlook of the society and priorities for children’s education. For instance, children get access to schools based on the socio-economic status of their parents. Children from poor homes are found in public schools, while children from rich homes attend private schools.

Accessing a particular form of ECCE setting - either private or public - in Lagos state is the sole responsibility of parents who wish to send their children to schools. However, in recent times, the National Policy on Education (NERDC,



2013) advocates increased governmental intervention in the provision of ECCE services to children aged 5-6 years, which is the formal aspect of ECCE services. This might account for an emphasis on achievements and standards in teaching and learning as contained in Quality Assurance Instrument for Basic Education in Nigeria (FME, 2010). ECCE services provided under the Universal Basic Education Act (UBEC, 2004) are usually utilised by families within the lowest socio-economic backgrounds, which the document suggests are the target population.

According to many of the teachers, the influence of globalised ideas of formal schooling for children demands a new system of childrearing in Lagos state. For instance, while teachers acknowledged the formality of child care and education in a school-like environment, they did so with mixed feelings about private and public domain roles in assessing quality. Some of the mixed feelings can be said to evolve from nostalgic narratives about some of the traditional value systems that the present structure of child care and education does not incorporate. A parent respondent noted:

*“When we talk of quality education for children, I think you know that we are in a new set of generation, for instance, we now have a generation of parents that were themselves not exposed to our traditional culture. What you do not have, you cannot give” (Allen).*

More specifically, many of the respondents mentioned some societal value of parents and extended family roles in the socialisation and training of children, resilience and doggedness that training instils in children, freedom in learning and other values like respect, hard work, diligence and discipline. Sijuwade (2006), thus, suggests that the knowledge structure emanating from the global

community requires avenues of common understanding for effective internalisation in developing countries.

ECCE in Nigeria is rooted in two ideologies; in the first instance, the stakeholders opined that the practice of an ECCE system should mirror the context of what is obtainable within the global community of Europe and America. This is often premised on the position that a developing nation like Nigeria should not be left out of the drive of globalisation. Put differently, the idea is that children's training should normatively follow international standards in order for them to compete with their counterparts from other parts of the global community. It is often posited that a country that fails in this will go backwards. In the opinion of Ayo, a parent:

*“Nigeria is always a willing signatory to many of the international protocols that we have. In fact, to almost all of them- and it is not enough to just sign. When you agree to a protocol and you are not actually doing it or implementing it, then it makes mockery of the whole participation in the first place. I feel it is not compulsory for them to participate if they know they do not have the structure to support it. I think what they (government) should pay attention to for now is the wreckage that civilisation and modernisation has brought upon our educational and value system” (Ayo).*

On the other hand, many of the interviewees did not lose sight of the importance of some indigenous practices of children's training. ECCE in Lagos state is still anchored in the position that a teacher maintained as “charity begins at home”. An older teacher, Fuluya, stated *“a child that is not well trained within the culture of the society where such child is being raised has not acquired the essence of education in any form”*. Globalisation seems to exert pressure on indigenous childrearing practices which in turn propel ECCE

stakeholders to find a path through which balance can be maintained. Thus, inculcating the traditional ways of training a child in Nigeria within the cultural pedigree of the nation is also important in children's development. This agrees with the concept of "path dependency" (Penn, 2011) which states that long established societal norms, history and values will continue to have significant impact on the organisation of children's care and education.

Overall, features of the global influence on ECCE were recognised by teachers and parents. First, the new order has to a great extent influenced the value system of the society through technology, migration and economic exchanges. Thus, there is a re-organisation of societal order and value through what Scholte (2002) calls "reductions in barriers to trans-world contacts and a shift in social space". Second, there has been an unprecedented rural-urban migration and expansion of ECCE services in the developing world due to rapid urbanisation (Odinko et al., 2009). The effect is that there is no such thing as a complete culture; every aspect of the culture has been influenced- as claimed by Tangwa (2011) that no culture is "intact and pure". A respondent observed:

*"We are imbibing another culture into our culture. There is no more a complete culture anywhere in the world. For instance, all the books we use for the children come from the western world- Peter and Jane, story books. In fact, the whole idea of this western education comes from there and it has continued to shape our lives and values. That is why the northern region has been finding it difficult to embrace it in its entirety" (Segbe).*

#### **4.4. ECCE stakeholders' understanding of quality assessment within African cultural heritage**

The history of children's care and education in Nigeria is rooted in the age-long culture of African society (Nsamenang, 2011). It begins from the day a child is

born and continues till adulthood. It is deeply rooted in cognate kinship ties within African and specifically Nigeria cultural heritage. A very important aspect of stakeholders' perceptions of quality education for children revolves around a complex negotiation of the state of the nation with its allegiance to a multi-cultural community and its consequences for providing quality education for children. Nigeria is a multi-ethnic society with over 250 languages and ethnic groups (Imam, 2012), a pluralistic society with unity and developmental concerns. Nigeria, often called the giant of Africa, is a country that has strong ties with African culture. African countries have a community of practice for children's care and education that reflect some common ground rules for the member states. The study by Kasongo (2010) suggests that in African tradition, the process of personality formation starts from childhood through direct contacts with parents, collective/group socialization from school and religious organizations. Through these routes, specific beliefs, values, norms and attitudes are instilled.

The continent shares commonality in the ways of caring and preparing children for future life. The notion of recognising the importance of African identity is often found in many of the teachers' statements, for example, "*we are Africans*", "*in a proper African setting*", and "*African culture is different from...*" It implies that an exploration of any institutional practices like childrearing and training must be situated within the construction of what teachers perceive as appropriate in a setting in which they see themselves as a subset -African culture, which is a pluralistic community with peculiar cultural linkages. A good number of values within African culture are moral values, such as the extended family/communal spirit, perseverance, social responsibility and solidarity,

respect/care for the elderly, love of children and parenthood, loyalty to parents and local traditions, collective responsibility for the upbringing of the young, modesty, love of harmony and mistrust of dangerous knowledge (Fafunwa, 1974; Tangwa, 2011).

The teachers believed Africans bear a cultural heritage that portrays a comprehensive mode of training children for all the member states. Indeed, African member states share the same economic situations and socio-political compositions (Fafunwa, 1982). This might be connected to the common place they share, colonial affiliations, cultural heritage, skin colour, language and religious practices. Thus, quality education starts from the understanding of how African children should be brought up. Some quotes below show particular views that respondents described as cultural ties with African child rearing ideologies:

*“In an African setting, a child is still someone under parental or guardian care. They need direction and counsel” (Adelaide).*

*“...We are Africans; we have rich and diverse cultures. As for the training of the child, we have common ways of training children” (Fuluya)*

*“Training for children is preparatory and participatory in Africa. Children learn by doing and watching how adults do things” (Masara)*

*“In a proper African setting which I believe is very relevant in this school. As much as children learning and care can be fun, it is moderated by strict rules and discipline” (Elenu).*

Moreover, during classroom observations in ECCE settings, it was revealed that teachers and parents still embraced some forms of training that characterise African culture. For instance, children were expected to show

signs of respect for their teachers and elders, to have done their home-work diligently, dress neatly for school, form relationships with peers and children in school, imbibe togetherness through common activities like school assembly, and the older children were expected to take care of the younger ones.

One of the most conspicuous aspects of training for children in all the schools visited is respect. Respect was extensively discussed by teachers and parents as a way of life; it is displayed by respecting diversity in languages and culture, elders and seniority, and promises. It is expected to be reflected in one's dealings with humans and things. It is expressed through reverence for elders and allegiance to a common cause and it has overt and the covert dimensions. The overt aspect has to do with greeting gestures, verbal expression and body languages. For instance, the female folk were expected to kneel down to greet the elders and run errands for them, while the male folk were expected to prostrate. The covert view of respect is the idea that respect should be internalised and carried about within each child. This aspect of African cultural practice is expected to be inculcated to children through social networks and communal activities such as family engagements, ceremonies, rituals, song, dance, folklore, and language learning (Fafunwa, 1986). The various comments given by teachers are highlighted below:

*“There is one thing we cherish in Yoruba land, it is respect. Respect for elders. As a child, you wake up to greet your parents. That is why we are called “kaaro oojire” meaning people that value greetings (Nifesi).*

*“Respect for elders is a very crucial aspect of the culture. If you do not do it, it will earn you punishment. It is such that when you see anybody older than you, you are expected to give them due respect, even if it just one month old. You have to call the elderly one with respect by putting brother or auntie. If you do not do*

*that, it can even cause a clash between elderly ones. They cherish it so much. With the dictates of the changing times, this aspect is changing day by day” (Segbe).*

*“We value respect in our culture, we value age. For instance, when we look at respect in a society like ours, it is something that the society value so much. The way they teach respect in school is a matter of greetings and courtesy, whereas respect goes beyond that. Respect is not only when you say good morning, or you put sir or ma, show courtesy when you are given things like thank you, or you say please when you are seeking assistance. Respect in African culture is a way of life. It goes more than an attitude that is imbibed for a moment or restricted to a place. In Yoruba tradition, there is the belief that for everything you are doing, there is a form of respect attached to it. That is why there is a greeting for every aspect of life- when you are sitting down, when you are just coming in, when you wake up, in the market, doing your hair, when you are eating, anything. Just to show us that whatever circumstance you find yourself, there is an idea of respect” (Ayo).*

Stakeholders were of the view that children’s training should incorporate this cultural value because respect breeds discipline. To many of the teachers, quality is embedded in our value system. However, they are of the opinion that our cherished cultural values have been tampered with, and that we now live in a society that is culturally impoverished and socially divided. An interviewee commented *“We have lost respect - It has implications for the future”*, some of which they ascribed to the present economic and political situation in the country.

Although it is acknowledged that some value systems within the African culture are not in tandem with learning skills that the contemporary society demands, stakeholders argued that as such it had been eradicated from the school system. For instance, the adoption of learner-centred learning has encountered barriers of traditional learning styles. Others issues that relate to gender

discrimination, forced feeding and child abuse have been contextually resolved.

#### **4.5. An analysis of ECCE Policy document**

This section is concerned with answering the first research question that seeks to explore the key themes of quality criteria as captured in the policy document through content analyses (see Section 3.8.1). Specifically, I explore how the notion of children's care, learning and development is addressed by policy documents. It starts with the exploration of the Nigerian ECCE policy context and a review of ECCE policy development (2004-2010). It further presents the underpinnings and rationale for ECCE policy in this context. It concludes with an analysis of the policy documents.

##### **4.5.1. The Nigerian ECCE policy context**

Socio-political atmosphere combined with cultural milieu has significant influence on policy formulation in Nigeria. Nigeria is a peculiar country with about 25 political parties and over 250 ethnic groups and languages (INEC, 2014)<sup>15</sup>. The influence of the predominant political ideologies, their relation with internal and external forces and the economic order has continued to shape national policies. Rizvi and Lingard (2010) maintain that policy statements often reflect political actors' interests and aspirations to meet international conventions and national objectives.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.inecnigeria.org>



Specifically, Section 1 of the National Policy on Education (4<sup>th</sup> edition) (FRN, 2004) stipulates that *“a nation’s policy on education is government’s way of realising that part of the national goals which can be achieved using education as a tool”*. The quoted excerpt puts forward the significant role of government and public official document in a bid to achieve national goals. A national policy specifically highlights the intentions, objectives, ideologies and influence of professional and political *elites* about children’s care and education. Educational policy formulation in Nigeria solely lies within the purview of the Ministry of Education.

Awanbor (1995) states that National Policy on Education in Nigeria is an important document that contains good intentions and plans of the government for the educational system of the country. For instance, the Action Group Manifesto of Free Education in the 1960s, led by Sir Obafemi Awolowo, gave rise to the formulation of Universal Primary Education (UPE). Hence, the public sector largely dominated the provision of educational services in the 1960s. This programme, however, was largely directed to primary schooling and did not give recognition to ECCE services.

Also, the People’s Democratic Party’s clamour for universal access in 2000 led by Obasanjo’s administration gave rise to the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme. This was the first programme that included ECCE in government funding and provision. This programme could not achieve its total aim as public confidence in public provision of education has reduced drastically and the private sector has taken over the provision of ECCE services. This might account for the observation that public ECCE services seem to be reserved for

children from poor socio-economic backgrounds who cannot afford private education (researcher' field note). A similar observation of Streuli et al. (2011), in their study of Andhra Pradesh, (India) ECCE provision confirms this. The authors found out that enrolment in private schools for early childhood is greater than public education and that public schools were attended by disadvantaged groups. In Nigeria today, there are inconsistencies in the manner in which the UBE programme is being implemented. While some state governments provide linkage schools in the form of pre-school classes, others are yet to implement this.

It can be said that revision and reforms in policy content seem to be motivated by adjustments that each successive political party had to make to the existing policies in order to accommodate new cultural ideas, global trends and political philosophy. Educational policy in its entirety has undergone four revision exercises by different social and political groups since its first publication in 1977. The fourth edition which was produced in 2004, and was necessitated by some policy innovations and changes, is the first to cite early childhood education and care. This might make one wonder if ECCE has ever been a matter of priority within the political cycle. Nigerian cultural settings present a society that values the primordial role of parents in the training and education of children. Mothers in particular were expected to be at home with their children until they are of school age. Government's acceptance of institutional care for younger children has implicitly been seen as encroaching on an aspect of duty meant for family members.

Also, the economic order in which policy is being formulated has over the years been transformed from public funding to capitalist ideology. In fact, a comprehensive review of literature and policy framework research reveals that the operation of ECEC practices across developing countries is appropriately positioned within the context of neoliberal framework. In the policy context, it is specifically stated that government shall encourage private efforts in the provision of pre-primary education (NERDC, 2013). The rapid increase in private pre-schools initiatives have significant influence on policy reforms, which are discussed in subsequent chapters.

Another very important context in which policy is grounded is the multi-ethnic nature of the Nigerian society. There are so many languages in Nigeria, out of which three are recognised as mediums of instruction in schools: Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba. Despite a concerted effort by the colonial administrators to develop Nigerian local languages into a written form (Bisong, 1995), English has continued to shape educational programmes in Nigeria. Mastery of the English language has been perceived to give children an international competitive edge. Rizvi and Lingard (2010) assert that historical traces of colonial rule have continued to impact national policy and transform people's sense of identity and belonging. For instance, policy maintains that one of the three major languages should continue to be a medium of instruction for children in ECCE settings and the use of English should only be a complement to ease understanding. I observed a tension between language policy that encourages cultural and literacy learning and the use of mother tongue, as mandated for children between 0-4 years by public document to promote social cohesion and cultural learning (FGN, 2004; NERDC, 2013). The use of English

language has continued to dominate learning activities and as a medium of instruction in Nigeria (Bisong, 1995).

Moreover, there are many different religious affiliations in Nigeria. However, the general outlook of formal education in Nigeria lies within the purview of Christianity. The most appropriate reason for this might be connected with the works and intentions of the British Missionaries who brought “western education” into Nigeria. Thus, the legacy of education seems to favour the Christian faith over other religions. ECCE policy in this regard has been silent on the issue of religion because of its sensitivity in the present time, and rather emphasizes access by all, irrespective of religious background. For these reasons, this study does not dwell much on this issue.

At face value, it seems reasonable to state that the ECCE policy response has been to regulate the structure and organisation of private ECCE settings. The private sector is seen as an essential vehicle through which children access universal child care and education, as enshrined in the international protocols (Dakar Framework, 2000). Undoubtedly, the private sector will continue to play a significant role in the provision of child care and education in Nigeria so that it might be necessary to integrate this sector into policy formulation in a more inclusive way.

#### **4.5.2. The notion of children’s care, learning and development as depicted in the policy document**

The document presents pieces of information on different aspects of early childhood care and education in a scant manner. The policy’s ambivalence about key themes of quality criteria is clear after several readings of the

document. For instance, the analysis reveals a dichotomous and confusing view of care and education. It further suggests that care has not been given proper attention in the documents. While the 2004 edition of the National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004) does not include care in the definition of early childhood, care features in the basic tenets of its purposes. According to the document;

“Early childhood/pre-primary education as referred to in this document is the education given in an educational institution to children prior to their entering the primary school. It includes the crèche, the nursery and the kindergarten” (FGN, 2004:5)

The statement above suggests that decisions on early childhood education do not include an explicit explanation on the age range and the care aspect of institutionalised services for children. Usually, it depicts a haphazard compilation of policy statements on child care and education following the UBE Act, 2004. In the 2009 edition, the definition was restated as “*education given in an education institution to children aged 3-5 plus prior to their entering the primary school*”. I, however, observed that “education” is often provided alongside “care”. In fact, this seems to be in line with the OECD’s (2001) declaration of “care” and “education” as inseparable concepts and quality services for children. In the 2013 edition, there is a clear distinction between child care for 0-4 years and early childhood education for children between 5-6 years. Thus, going by an age differentiation of 0-4 for child care and 5-6 for pre-school education, it can be said that government’s ownership and participation seems to appropriate the “education” aspect and that sufficient acknowledgement is not given to the care of children.

Moreover, the EFA document (Dakar Framework, 2000) does not give an explicit explanation on the different aspects of ECCE provision to be pursued by each member state and equivalent quality standards to be set up for provision. More emphasis seems to be on the group upon which the services are to be directed- disadvantaged and vulnerable children. Describing ECEC policy in Nigeria, Makinde (2005) remarked that policy directions on “free education for all” as entrenched in EFA goal seems over- ambitious for some of the southern states in Nigeria.

Specifically, the 2013 edition of the policy (NERDC, 2013) gives a more explicit definition of early childhood care and education by differentiating between care and education, though with the use of various terms. The document states that;

“Basic education... encompasses the **Early Child Care and Development Education** (0-4 years) and 10 years of formal schooling. **Early Child Care and Development Education** however, is segmented into ages 0-4 years situated in day care, crèches, fully in the hand of the **private sector** and **social development services**, whilst ages 5-6 are within the **formal education sector**” (NERDC, 2013: section 2.4) (keywords highlighted)

The use of terminologies like *Early Child Care and Development Education* and *social development services* in the policy look complicated for a professional to understand let alone a layman. This appears to be an attempt to feature all the key words that are associated with contemporary children services. It sounds rather like rhetorical statements put together to satisfy a political commitment to a foreign course that does not capture the reality of the Nigerian society.

However, the excerpt from the 2013 edition above gives a better clarification to the age range and the notion of care than the earlier edition. It suggests that government perceives the care of children, which falls between ages 0-4, to be

a “private” affair. This might be tied to the socio-cultural mentality of childrearing patterns in Nigeria which sees the exclusive care of children as the responsibility of parents (see Chapter One). On the other hand, it depicts a non-participatory approach to understanding the intricacies of children’s care that is entrenched in a communal approach to child rearing and culturally specific to the Nigerian context. This is evidenced by the greater emphasis placed on government’s agencies to see to its implementation than any other stakeholders. The tendency is for government to choose a particular age range that is economically feasible to fund, which in this case is 5-6 years.

Moreover, government ownership of formal schooling for children supports the earlier versions of the policy. There is no doubt that policy statements about child care, as iterated in the public official document between 2000 to the present, has continued to revolve around private provision. Moreover, this dichotomous view suggests government’s allegiance to economic neo-liberal ideals (Esping-Andersen, 1990) which seem to push provision of services onto private individuals. Considering the need for a universal access of children to ECCE programmes in Nigeria, encouragement of private provision for ages 0-4 years will further create inequality and tighten the tension between a rights-based approach and beneficial access to ECCE provision. Consequently, this will not achieve equal rights for all children to these services, and even less the integration of care and education. The findings of Kiersey’s (2009) study that reveals that ECEC policy, more often than not, does not take a right-based approach holds true. For instance, the propaganda on the provision of universal access is not matched with government’s willpower to provide comprehensive services for the benefit of children. It is important to note that the document

also specifies government responsibilities as promoting the training of qualified teachers, the development of suitable curriculum quality assurance, establishing linkages of pre-schools to the existing public schools and integrating care and education through a multi-sectoral approach (FGN, 2004; NERDC, 2013).

From my observational studies, the areas of focus in practice seem to be provision of educational services and establishing a quality assurance mechanism to monitor and assess provision. Educational content, which is expected to incorporate literacy and cultural learning, is emphasised in the policy. While the learning content and methods of teaching for both early child care and education does not vary, the language of instruction does. The early child care stage (0-4), which is handled by the private sector is expected to employ the use of mother tongue, while the policy is silent on the language of instruction for pre-primary (5-6). This is supported by the inclusion of preschool classes in the quality assurance ranking scheme (FME, 2010).

Generally, the document's stance on children's care, learning and development is underpinned by a lack of direction as to "how" and "what" care, learning and development entail. It also does not address the institutional concerns that relate to social welfare and child poverty reduction through the vehicle of education.

It also does not clarify social, economic and cultural concerns that relate to building of children's capacity for a sustainable future. More importantly, the specific roles of teachers and caregivers are not explicitly stated. This indicates that ECCE policy documents have not sufficiently taken into consideration



important socio-cultural particularities that can be explored in the best interest of Nigerian children. A more comprehensive and inclusive approach to the preparation of ECCE policy document may be required.

#### **4.6. Chapter summary**

This chapter has examined the underlying contextual features that guide the provision of ECCE in Lagos, Nigeria. It shows the fundamental social, cultural, economic and political contexts that influence how children are perceived and treated in the society. It discussed the socio-cultural values that stakeholders uphold as essential elements of quality dimensions. It also unfolds the various impacts of global processes and interests, including policy frameworks that impact quality assessment in ECCE settings. The context seems to present a complex transition from the traditional era to the modern period and its associated challenges in the care and education of children. The significant impact is the structural inequalities and the state of poverty that permeate children's lives.

It also discussed an analysis of policy documents by highlighting the socio-political contexts and exploring their importance for children's care, learning and development. Using a cultural and contextual lens, the chapter places ECCE provision and policy framework in Lagos state within a complex context with various influences on the existing traditional practices. It specifically highlights the policy stance on child care, learning and development.

## **Chapter Five: Teachers' meaning making of quality assessment of children care and education**

“... meaning making ... is inscribed with certain values and assumptions ... welcomes contextuality, values subjectivity, uncertainty and provisionality... opens up to evaluation as a democratic process of interpretation... subject to reflection, dialogue and argumentation...and diversity and uncertainty treated as important values rather than weaknesses to be controlled for or eradicated” (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2007: 10)

### **5.1. Introduction**

Having examined the contextual narratives of ECCE provision in the preceding chapter, this chapter presents the findings from teachers' narratives on quality assessment. It explores their constructions of quality education within the socio-cultural framework of pre-school provision in Nigeria. This chapter relies on the theoretical underpinnings discussed in earlier chapters and which emphasize evaluation to quality assessment in ECCE through meaning making and understanding of the existing social, political, economic and cultural contexts (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999; Woodhead, 2006 and Melhuish, 2001a). The authors suggest that dialogue and reflection provide avenues of understanding the contextual basis upon which quality can be assessed.

My analysis is built on collation of stakeholders' narratives of quality education. Thus, I will present information obtained through interviews, focus group discussions (FGD), observations and document analysis from four ECCE settings in Lagos state, which I call “Bluechip”, “Pinkcourt”, “Brownie” and “Genesis” (see Table 5). I used the data collected from each of these research settings to project the collective “voice” of teachers on quality assessment in ECCE.

I had initially planned to explore teachers' meaning making about quality education for children based on their understanding of quality criteria that relate to teacher-child relationship, learning environment, pedagogical instruction and learning outcomes from the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria (Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba). The group composition was adopted with the intention to explore each group's opinions and perception of quality education in a multi-ethnic society like Lagos state. However, in the process of my pilot study, I discovered that the data generated from teachers' narratives did not have much to do with ethnic composition as I had expected. All the participants, whatever their ethnic group, believed that teachers should work together to achieve common goals as laid down in a prescribed scheme of work and curriculum. Rather than differences based on ethnicity, teachers' construction of quality education revealed a generational gap between the older and younger teachers. These two generationally-related perspectives are not necessarily mutually exclusive but any given teacher can mix both perspectives at a point in time.

It is important to note, as discussed in Chapter Three, that two main categories of teachers emerged during the data collection procedures- the younger and older ones. Thus, meanings that emanated from ECCE teachers' narratives present a complexity of understanding quality assessment within a generational shift and progression of educational aims and values. I therefore abstracted the important themes of the socio-cultural dimensions of quality assessment from the tangle of ideas within teachers' narratives. I also delve into deciphering what might be important aspects of each of these two sets of teachers' constructions, highlighting the areas of agreement and disagreement. In doing this, I will draw out teachers' shared understanding of quality

dimensions in order to delineate quality dimensions that are relevant in the present time.

As a teacher educator myself, I had always thought of myself as an insider in the early childhood field. My preconceptions about quality education were however pushed aside when confronted with some of the dichotomous views on various aspects of child care, learning and development between the older and younger generation of teachers. A key insight from the findings is that the process of understanding quality and its assessment is a construction within the tangled relationship between local practices/belief and global influences. I would suggest that quality is often characterised by negotiating such diversities and commonalities. I further explore meanings that emanate from the triangulation of my data collection procedures and the reorganisation of my research data and literature reviews.

During the preliminary stage of the data analysis, teacher's narrative analysis yielded the following themes: *understanding quality education in terms of teachers' responsibilities, children's responsibilities, establishing boundaries between home and school, strict compliance with formal guidelines, transmission of informal and unwritten cultural values, the emotional task of extending societal childrearing values, cultural understanding of schooling, and support for teachers and children.* However, having examined the teachers' contextual narratives and their influences on quality assessment, I further explored the underlying rationale for teachers' classroom practices in their day-to-day interactions with children by incorporating field notes that I took during classroom observations into teachers' narrative analysis. In the process of

reconciling the commonality and differences, I discovered that some areas of teachers' narratives do not necessarily suggest a sharp duality of opinions between the young and older generation of teachers. This is an area that has not been properly explored in quality assessment.

Consequently, I was able to generate six key themes for this chapter. They are quality assessment as understood within "*communality versus individuality, cultural knowledge versus technical knowledge, education versus care, learning versus play, formal versus informal learning and professionalism in ECCE*". My aim is to present a range of provisional perspectives and models that can open up many other possibilities for matching policy with practice in the Nigerian ECCE settings. I present the constructed meanings from each of the themes and in accordance with the research questions outlined in Chapter Three, utilising an interpretative, qualitative approach. The findings are informed by these research questions:

- What do teachers understand about the quality criteria relating to teacher-child relationship, learning environment, learning outcomes and pedagogical instruction in ECCE?
- What are the socio-cultural meanings emanating from teachers' accounts including areas of agreement and disagreement?
- How does the understanding of the notion of quality and its assessment influence teachers' decision and actions in the classroom?

## **5.2. Theme 1: Social Conformity and Individuality**

As discussed in the preceding chapter, stakeholders' narratives on the state of the nation can be placed within the social, economic and cultural contexts that

occurred within the post-colonial period (see Chapter Four). These involve complex challenges of translating from pre-modern to modern society. During focus group discussions and interviews, I began the exploration of teachers' understandings of quality education for children in relation to the notion of those (child and teacher) on whom assessment is expected to be performed. My intention is to understand teachers' positions on the human interactions that take place within an institutional environment like ECCE settings. In a Focus Group Discussions with a group of teachers, I asked the group specific questions that relate to quality education for children, they were all quick to remind me of the changing outlook on childhood, with the implication of a generational shift in how children are perceived and cared for. I could place their understanding of the quality dimension that relates to teacher-child relationships within the cultural knowledge of what it means to care for a child in a way that conforms to the socio-cultural notion of childrearing patterns that are specific to a Nigerian society. I found out that teachers seemed to be divided about the rapid changes that have occurred in the institutional arrangement of children's care and education. The line of division is in two phases; a separation of the perception of childhood at home and in the school system, and construction of adults' roles based on the generational shifts that the rapid changes have brought about.

Moreover, my identity as a researcher with a Yoruba ethnic affiliation provided me the opportunity to understand the position of many of the teachers whom I interviewed. I discovered that many of the teachers' narratives tilted towards the basic elements of Yoruba childrearing cultural beliefs. This might be attributed to the fact that Lagos state is essentially a Yoruba ethnic

environment. Though the city is influenced by other belief systems, there is a strong affinity with Yoruba traditional cultural heritage (Olukoju. 2004).

I will start with the older teachers' interview extracts. I noticed that their expressions captured my attention during the preliminary analysis of the research data. They resonated with memories and reflections that so many different aspects of children's care, learning and development are embedded in societal values. This includes how children's training is perceived and the roles of various agencies that surround them. Bode, an older teacher said:

*“How can I talk of quality education for children without referring to the “good old days”? These are the values that we once cherished and lived by in this country. The society was ok with values that were built on respect for elders, dedication to service, communal responsibility, honesty, peaceful co-existence and discipline” (Bode)*

It was the above question raised by Bode during a focus group discussion that aroused the interest of two other older teachers in the group. Miye and Masara gave similar remarks. Miye stated:

*“That is it. ... You cannot see Mr. A's son misbehaving and overlook it. You inject discipline at once. Another aspect to this communal responsibility was when my father died, my aunt took over my education, took me to Lagos with her and took care of me. Less privileged parents were not left alone with the care of their children. There is always someone who is benevolent to take some responsibilities or give helping hand. There was this family tie that endears people to each other with the spirit of togetherness” (Miye).*

Masara added:

*“The extended family is fast being removed from us. Some years ago, we have the extended family, so if both parents are working, an aunt, uncle or grandma will be there to see to the care of the child. But that system is being taken away from us. Nobody wants to send their children to go and live with another*

*person again because of the risks that the present society presents. The society is becoming endangered every passing day. In those days you can go out and call your neighbour or the members of your extended family to look after your child without any iota of fear. You will be rest assured that she is going to feed her, bath her if necessary, take care of your child and give her proper discipline. Now, everybody is locked up behind their flats. It is that individuality culture that has permeated our society” (Masara).*

In a similar interview conducted with Adelaide, a pre-school teacher in a private school, she reflected on what she felt should constitute quality education in this manner:

*“... Recently, I was reflecting and trying to look back at my own upbringing. I found something very useful that I call communal responsibility and relationship. What I grew up to know while I was growing up is that in a compound or clan, children upbringing is the responsibility of every adult in that community-making sure that any child is well trained and behaved. Children have to protect the name of the family wherever they go. There was always an opportunity to model and discipline a child, and the guardians or biological parents of such child will not see it as an offence. The mother might not even be around or may be around. It worked very well then, and children’s character was shaped to suit the societal norms. Nowadays, we are not allowed to do this even in school because we believe in individuality. It bothers my mind how we have taken this “civilisation” hook, line and sinker- the bad, the evil and the ugly.”(Adelaide)*

These narratives and comments suggest that meanings associated with quality assessment in ECCE are shaped by specific sets of local phenomena that surround children’s conformity to standards and expectations of what is deemed appropriate for them. According to the older teachers, they felt that children’s successes are supposed to be monitored through a report system that involves members of the immediate family and community in order to



ensure that children are properly seen as members of the community. These are some of the values that are not in line with the western childrearing patterns. For instance, the Nigerian National Policy on Education stipulates that one of the core objectives of ECCE is to “*develop a sense of cooperation and team-spirit*” (NERDC, 2013), depicting a sense of community that schooling should achieve in an individual child. In a situation where children’s successes solely depend on individual performances and less interactions with the community, there seems to be less cooperation and team spirit in such achievements.

The older teachers believed quality measures should view the children as members of an indivisible community and not as individuals. Children were expected to wear common school uniforms, assemble with teachers every morning, participate in different activities on the assembly ground and do their homework appropriately. Taking a reference from my field notes, the following scenario was observed in Genesis, a privately-owned pre-school.

*“Fuluya, a nursery teacher asked a parent why the daughter’s homework was not done, the parent replied that she would not force or beat a child to do her homework. The teacher asked “is it the child that dictates what she wants or you? The parent replied “the child has a right to make decisions on her assignment; the assignment is meant for her not me”. The teacher later told the parent that her child will be given strokes of cane for not doing her homework and the parents consented saying it is her life”.*

This indicates that the present structure of quality assessment measure in early childhood settings creates tension between traditional view of the level of conformity and a western individualist approach to children’s learning and

development. For instance, hitting a child with strokes of cane means that child's right issue has not been given a necessary attention. I understand this to reflect an oppositional stance to the dominant universal standards to quality assessment as portrayed by the "Anglo-American" ideologies of childhood and ECCE institutions. Regardless of how appealing and convincing quality assessment measures are, they produce collusive practices that need to be synchronised in the best interests of children. Masara, an older teacher, was particularly vehement in expressing her dismay on the decline in the communal training as follow:

*"I think we are throwing some things that make us Nigerians away from the children; we should not throw them away. That issue of extended family, communal responsibility, the issue of one person's being his or her brother's keeper. That issue of disciplining children without waiting for parents to come is fast diminishing from our society, and it is dictating how we view children's care and learning" (Masara).*

I later conducted a personal interview with Masara. She believed emphasis on a child's autonomy which upholds the principle of children' self-development and individuality, as opposed to the communal and shared responsibility, can separate children from the connections with the community networks and make a child live only for himself or herself. She was also of the opinion that such individualistic view is generating competitive comparisons for children's achievements in the present time. This is opposed to a cultural heritage that emphasizes that the success of one child is the success of the community. She gave instances of situations when parents do not want teachers to discipline their children or relate with specific people in schools. She also revealed that teachers' participation has been removed from Parent Teacher Association- a

forum that would have provided a platform for collaborative efforts in child care and learning. She concluded with *“In my time, every elderly woman in the compound is my “mummy”; and all was on the lookout for every child’s success. That is how I believe children should see their teachers”*. She felt that a professional approach that characterised institutional learning for children has caused a sharp distinction of children’s learning from the assemblages of societal cultural heritage. She later called for collaborative efforts from the community, homes and neighbourhood in this manner:

*“Well... the point is that you cannot hold school responsible for a whole lot of issues. You first ask if these values are still in the home, community and neighbourhood. In many homes, a child sees you, as old as her mother and just walk past without greeting you, and then the mother is there and sees the child does that and just forget it. When we were young, we were taught the culture! How many parents are really transmitting the culture to the children again? Fine, there is a limit to the correction that the school can do. If we teach them moral and courtesy in schools and they go home and their parents are not enforcing it. For instance, by the time the pupils go home during the weekend and come back on Monday morning, you will find out that you may have to start all over again the moral training, not to talk of when they now go on a long holiday. So, the community should complement the efforts of the school”*.

From the Masara extract and observational study, communality means that children cooperate and conform to standards that the community perceives as the right way to live. Thus, in relation to quality assessment for children in Lagos state, a vital aspect of the Nigerian culture is the level of conformity to societal cherished values that is expected from children. These values include the way children perceive the role of adults in any learning process, obedience to rules and regulations, respect for elders, diligence, attentiveness, self-control and a

positive approach to learning. This requires a level of dependence and discipline on their part. Mide, an older teacher, while describing the level of dependence expected stated: “*We care for them as humans with limited ability for now*“. Thus, the older teachers perceived that in order to reduce children’s vulnerability in this regard, teachers should serve as a model agency through public advocacy of children’s needs in the community. The vital aspect of care for children is to ensure their safety and security (Jalongo et al., 2004). In this context, quality education is the education and care that takes children to be children indeed and not adults, though in a society with its own peculiar expectations. For instance, in Genesis nursery and primary school, there was a register for parents or guardians to sign while dropping or picking up their wards. Also, children were not allowed to wander beyond the reach of teachers. Any child found roaming about was instructed to go back to the classroom. In Brownie School, a public school, a gate man was assigned to the school gate and children were not allowed to go out during school hours.

The core feature of conformity that I observed is that children are constantly reminded of values that make them acceptable citizens in the community. Children are taught to be hardworking, respectful, responsible, and to be content with whatever they have. These values, which the older teachers were very keen on, summarise the essence of being educated and is implicitly embedded in the principles of “Omoluabi”, a concept explained in Chapter Two.

According to the older teachers, the principle of communality embraces adults’ participation in children’s care and learning. It behoves adults to ensure that children imbibe behaviour that is consistent with socially accepted conventions

and norms. For instance, children's personal views are constantly subjected to adults' monitoring because children are expected to be brought up and guided by adults. Children are supposed to be taught the "what" and "how" of everything they need to know by significant adults. This is with the purpose of inculcating values that endear community ties into children. Adeyemi and Adeyinka (2002), in their writings on African Traditional Education, argue that education is "the process whereby the adult members of a society carefully guide the development of infants and young children, initiating them into the culture of the society". It is believed that the success of any child's training is dependent on the involvement of social networks (family members, neighbour and community members) within the immediate community that surrounds such child. In that way, the success of a child is acclaimed as the effort of the whole community. It means the child is expected to conform to the community of social and cultural practices in the society in order to be accepted as someone who has received what the teachers called "eko to ye koro", which translates into quality education. Such children that conform to these standards are commended. For instance, different occasions like prize giving day, inter-house sports, cultural day and open day provide opportunities for the community members to come into school environment to relate with children. I personally observed an open day in Genesis Nursery and Primary school, where parents came in to see how their children were doing at school. Teachers were able to tell parents what they felt about their children's behaviour and learning. Likewise, during a prize-giving ceremony in Brownie preschool, children who have conformed to expected values were rewarded with different prizes. Some of the values rewarded were punctuality, neatness,

respect, diligence and intelligence. Some parents also showed appreciation by presenting gifts to teachers. It was a show of communal culture.

Another obvious way that I observed that the principle of communality still holds was the morning assembly that engaged both teachers and pupils in singing, dancing and praying together. It was also an avenue to reiterate school rules and regulations to children. During the assembly, children were expected to raise songs that interest them, conform to rules and regulations that guide the gathering, and participate by responding appropriately. In PinkCourt School, children and teachers who were celebrating their birthday were made to come out to a platform, children went up to celebrate and take pictures with them. I consider this observation an aspect of quality dimension that is peculiar to the Nigerian society. I remembered this was the only occasion that allows for a greater level of freedom for children in this school aside from the break time. In the classroom arrangement, children were expected to conform to societal rules that include obedience, respect for elders, diligence and hard-work.

Labimi, an older teacher, while describing this principle of communality stated:

*“I will have to take perspectives from my ethnic background and affiliation, which is Yoruba. There is an adage that says “owo kan lo n bimo, igba ni o bani wo” meaning that it takes a parent to give birth to a child, but the community to train such child. Talking about my background, that is exactly how I was raised up. It is not only my parents that trained me or sent me on errands. People from the neighbourhood did correct me. They may even report me to my mother and my mother will appreciate it. It makes us to fear adults around not only my parents. It brings togetherness. It is not so common in this society again. It is affecting us. What we see now is that children are kept indoors with Television and different satellite stations”.*

Apparently, the older teachers felt that the excessive quest for western modes of childrearing will need to be moderated by the school system so that it will not further reinforce cultural imperialism and inequality. As such, the present quality assurance measures will need to provide clear guidelines for children's learning in a way that is consistent with cherished societal values.

In many of the classroom settings I observed, classroom observations revealed that the older generation of teachers still held on to the roles that the principle of communal responsibility assumes that an adult in charge of child care should play in a child's training. These teachers were often seen treating children with a homely disposition, correcting them when necessary, petting and caring for them in ways that seem traditional to some of the younger teachers' perspectives. An older teacher stated:

*“Childhood stage is an interesting stage. Children at this stage are joyous and lively. They see teachers as parents and depend on them for guidance and instruction. Whatsoever you tell them to do, they do. They see female teachers as mothers and male teachers as fathers”.*

The older teachers understood school as an extension of a home-like environment and that child training should be perceived as a continuum of cherished societal values and norms. A certain level of home-like discipline is expected from children within the school environment. An example is a situation where children are constantly made to comport themselves well during classroom lessons. The classroom observation showed that children were expected to ask for permission before going outside the class for any reason, raise up their hands and wait to be called before answering any question and

must obey the teacher's instructions precisely. Any child that disobeyed was seriously frowned on.

The younger teachers also believed in this principle but their actions did not indicate its use in their daily interactions with pupils. When I asked Buke, a younger teacher about what she believed about this aspect of training, she replied:

*"I have been taught that as a teacher, I am to act as in loco parentis capacity for children in my care, but there is an extent I can go because children have to be aware that school environment is different from home. So when children are not ready, there is nothing I can do".* She added; *"I am answerable to the parents and school authority with respect to the children learning and care".*

I observed that these teachers were always quick to remind pupils that they are not at home and should behave in ways that show that they are ready for learning. While many of the older teachers took time to reflect on the workings of communal principles and how training received in schools was an extension of some experiences that had been encountered in the community, the younger teachers did not engage much in such reflections. Specifically, during an observational study in Red Rose School, Fuluya, an older teacher, asked children to demonstrate appropriate way of greeting, asking for permission and answering questions in class. Thus, the older teachers perceived cultural values that emphasize conformity to societal norms as essential elements of quality education while the younger teachers emphasized children's individual ability for self-development.



The observational study also revealed that younger teachers' approach to understanding quality education emphasized children's autonomy and ability for self-development and innovation. Comments like *"In this kind of education, we are just training them to be independent"*, *"Children should be allowed to think for themselves"* were common phrases used by the younger teachers. Many of these teachers were more concerned about the body of knowledge that children need to achieve independence for further learning. During one classroom observation, a teacher wrote a certain aspect of the lesson on the board and asked the children if they know what she was about to teach. A child shouted, "I know it" and gave the correct answer. The teacher commended the child. She later told me that in her time, she dared not tell a teacher she knows an answer before the lesson is taught. They considered quality education as relationship that is characterised with confidence and enthusiasm for learning. Confidence in children is considered as a means of overcoming social phobia and a tool to develop cognitive behavioural modification in a child (Spence et al., 2000). This they believe will ease the tension between teacher's authority over knowledge structures and children's participation in their learning. Apparently, quality education is about bringing out children's innate ability for autonomy in learning. This was described in Agnes' argument of quality education thus:

*"An exposure to quality education involves the refinement of children's behaviour and general outlook to life. As for the learning, one might not be able to get 100% but a quality education should prepare the minds of the nursery pupils to a certain level that the primary teachers can take up from there (Agnes)".*

During an informal discussion with a teacher, she said *“children are not so naïve as we had thought way back; they recognise what is going on around them”*. The core symbol of children’s autonomy to many of these teachers is the greater level of freedom and exposure that children enjoy in the present time. Teachers generally used proverbial terms such as: *“there is no more childhood”*, *“there is a fast lane for children”* *“children are not only leaders of tomorrow, they are leaders of their world”* *“children have got rights to say...”* *“Do not think they are too young”*. Thus, younger teachers’ construction of quality education is about seeing children as being capable of self-discovery.

In Brownie pre-school, children were usually put through a task and thereafter left alone to finish other similar tasks. Buke, a younger teacher described children’s capabilities for self-development in this way:

*“Children are able to chart a course for their lives by themselves. Gone are the days when children have to be taught everything. A child is now able to think for himself” (Buke).*

However, given the fact that children now have increased opportunities for self-development and autonomy, the younger teachers are more concerned with how to move ahead with children’s training in the global competitive environment focusing on the individuality of each child. Moreover, a teacher was of the view that she has been taught to deal with individual child and not a whole group as one. The younger teachers have embraced the innate ability in each child to make decisions on certain issues concerning their learning. They allowed children to make rules that guide classroom and playground behaviour. I observed a young teacher telling the parents of a three-year-old to allow her child carry her bag to the class. They were also not so keen on children

conforming to cultural values. Their major concern is on how children can explore their world through the varied level of knowledge that is available in the contemporary times.

According to many of the younger teachers, the traditional values seem to be obsolete and the contemporary time requires a new approach to child care and learning. The younger teachers were interested in how much independence a child can achieve. For instance, Biola, a younger teacher, saw a child struggling with how to lace his school sandals. The teacher said *“you should be able to lace your shoes, do not expect me to do that for you”*. I was surprised to see an older teacher come in, without prior knowledge of the conversation, went to help the child to lace his shoes. The older teacher later added: *“I treat them as if they are my children”*. Children in this school seemed more relaxed and comfortable with the older teachers than the younger ones. The relationship suggests that a certain level of dependence on adults is expected from children, and they tolerate “childish” acts from them. They often said that children should be children and need to play. It is often characterised by surrogate responsibility for children’s care and learning, somewhat like mother-to-child relationship. While the older teachers have accepted the dawning of more sophisticated ways of dealing with children’s care and learning, they still treat children in their care bearing in mind the principle of communality. However, the younger teachers have come to terms with “progressive” nature of institutional learning for children. However, Dewey (1986) contends the extremes associated with “traditional” and what can be regarded as the now “progressive” education thus:

“The subject-matter of education consists of bodies of information and of skills that have been worked out in the past..., the opposition, so far as practical affairs of the school are concerned, tends to take the form of contrast between tradition and progressive education” (Dewey, 1986).

Each of these extremes produces a form of experience that can be built upon. According to Dewey *“all principles by themselves are abstract. They become concrete only in the consequences which result from their application”*. He suggested that a plausible approach will be to do away with stereotypic ideas on traditional and modern educational ideals but accept that each can build on each other to produce contextually relevant resource for children training.

The younger teachers in Lagos state are forward looking and felt that quality education is about allowing children to explore their worlds. For instance, I will refer to a relevant scenario from my field note:

*“On resumption from school holidays, a parent came and insisted that her child be put in a class that is handled by a younger teacher. The head teacher persuaded the parent to let her child stay in a class handled by an older teacher, she would not be convinced. Then, the parent voiced out, “I prefer the younger teacher because she teaches to details and would not enforce children to conform to any local values” (researcher’s field note).*

The excerpt from my field note above indicates the influence of global culture on children’s learning and care. The head teacher stated that many parents, who were themselves taught to conform to societal values, do not want their children to imbibe the values. She concluded *“These values made them what they are today”*. The younger teachers are not against societal culture *per se* but seem to be more driven by modern ideas of childrearing. Therefore, value

orientation and its redefinition constantly feed back into what is deemed appropriate for child care and learning. Tinuke, a younger teacher, cited reasons connected with personal skills such as communication and self-esteem as important aspect of child care and learning. In her words, she stated:

*“It is better we allow children to develop values that are consistent with what is happening all over the world. If we look around, how many people are actually abiding by “iwa omoluabi” (Omoluabi principles) again? Some of these values are actually gone...I mean I do not believe there is anything that is fully good for the now. I believe values change with time; those things that are valued at one point might not be valued at another. For now, things I value depend on so many factors. Things I value might not be things that people from my own tribe value”.*

Mike’s response, a younger teacher, corroborated Tinuke’s expressions as follow:

*“Nursery education is just to shed light on the path of children, as they grow up they will be able to decide for themselves”  
(Tinuke)*

This implies that the younger teachers perceived quality education as a kind of education that is beneficial to an individual child more than its social relevance. However, both group of teachers agreed that both forms of educating children have their inherent attributes; quality through cooperation and quality through individuality, which should be harnessed and channelled properly for children’s care, learning and development. It can be likened to putting the options on a weighing scale and trying to find a balance in order to come up with the right word to describe “quality”, with which children’s learning and development should be based. There is no doubt that the older teachers seem to have found

themselves at the crossroads- the value of cultural knowledge and contemporary learning contents in child education and care. This crossroads can be detected from the words of Masara, an older teacher. She echoed her concerns this way:

*“I am always proud of some children that are well brought up in the cherished values of the society... What will have now is basically education, it is more desired because it will illuminate their minds. They will be able to use the technology in a positive manner. It will not allow them to be backward from their age mates. It helps them to be matured and prepare for their future”.*

The conception of how relationships are shaped during the teaching-learning process is connected with teachers' beliefs, values and knowledge systems (Pajares, 1992; Raths, 2001 and Woods and Bennett, 2000). I could place meanings associated with the quality dimension that relate to teacher-child relationship within the socio-cultural notion of the roles of adults in children's lives. In conforming to societal values, it is believed that children's behaviour should be monitored and guided. While the issue of conformity is perceived as a traditional approach to childrearing which does not provide opportunities for reflective and innovative teaching (Hargreaves, 1997), it is still being held with a measure of uncritical acceptance by both groups of teachers. For instance, in many of my classroom observations, children were asked to close their eyes and face the wall for bullying or noise making. Some of the teachers used the cane on some of the children as the last resort. The distinction lies in both groups of teachers' beliefs about the level of control over children's misbehaviour. For instance, when a child removed her school sandals and placed them on her table, a younger teacher used the cane on the child while

an older teacher privately corrected the younger teacher that she should have helped the child wear her shoes and told her not to remove them again rather than beating her. This points to the controversial child's right issue on children discipline that needs to be clarified and enforced in school settings.

Many of the teachers had sticks of cane on their tables. When asked what it is used for, they admitted that they often resort to cane when a child has been reprimanded several times but is not willing to change. One of the younger teachers stated:

*"Discipline controls the classroom. Once children are disciplined and they display it in the classroom. The easier is the job for the teacher. Our culture says beat, when a child does not want to conform to rules. I beat sometimes. Today, they tell us not to beat the children, and it is telling on the children. They no longer obey the elders".*

This teacher who teaches in a public school was responsible to take care of and teach thirty children. I could see stress and frustration on her face as she was always shouting at the children "stop making noise, who is that fighting?" She used the cane more often to scare and control the children. When I asked a group of teachers how they are expected to discipline the children. They replied in this manner:

***"Ranti:** ...Like now, they say teachers should not use cane in the school; no more corporal punishment in the school. Instead, they have introduced counsellors to the schools. If a child misbehaves now, he will need to see a counsellor. The counsellor will be able to talk with the child and know the cause of his or her attitude and behaviour. If you know the cause the solution is not far-fetched.*

***Anne:** Any child that misbehaves, we will call the parents to know if it has to do with the family composition. We interview parents. We use the parents as watch guards for them at home.*

**Labimi:** *We have moral talks twice in a week for all the pupils and teachers. What I observed is that since we have been doing moral talks, there have been improvements in students' behaviour- in their dressing, the way they conduct themselves. We do not use cane, we use talk. It has been working".*

Some older teachers insisted that cane is not supposed to be used so that children will not run away from schools. Jose, an older teacher stated:

*"Everything is not about beating. Sometimes when you look at children, they understand what you mean. I engaged my pupils to make rules and regulations in the classroom. It will surprise you the kinds of rules they make, as if they already know what to do and what not to do. They will fish out those who break the rules themselves. The areas you are supposed to discipline them, do it in love" (Jose).*

During an individual interview with her, she was of the opinion that so many teachers who undergo workload stress sometimes transfer their aggression onto the children.

I also observed that canes were frequently used in over-crowded classrooms with only one teacher to about thirty children. The teacher often asked the children to put their heads on the desk and sleep or start reciting alphabets or numbers while she was marking children's class work. In general, it was observed that children in classes handled by teachers who embrace the principle of individuality experience minimal disciplinary action. This indicates that discipline in ECCE geared towards conformity is moderated by teachers' belief, knowledge, values and work condition. This is however subject to further investigation. I suggest that necessary support system and work condition for ECCE teachers need to be considered.



It may also be necessary to state that my classroom observations revealed a teacher-centred approach, which is in consonance with the conformity principle described above. However, Baguma and Aheisibwe (2011) and Omona and Matheson (1998) argue that African children's socialisation fosters self-education in participative learning processes in their families and communities, especially in the early childhood. This implies that conformity does not mean that children will not participate in the learning process, but that human exchanges and relationships during learning should follow culturally acceptable norms. A document analysis from many of the ECCE settings indicates the rigidity and formality of the pre-school system that requires accountability and a sense of control from teachers, such that children are not given any freedom to choose what is of interest to them. For instance, many of the teachers admitted that as far as instructional decisions are concerned, they should be in control because quality assurance measures are not directed to the children but to them. So, the teachers felt that they were constantly responsible for everything that children have to learn. They designed the learning contents, the learning materials and the learning methods in the classroom. The children were just expected to follow teachers' directives.

In all the pre-schools observed, each morning as children arrived from home, the only freedom they had in their learning was the choice of play they engaged in before morning assembly. Some children would go running about, playing with building blocks and other playthings. After the assembly, they had to settle down in the classroom. Since they do not have clues of what and how the day's learning will go, they usually sit and wait patiently for their teachers to start off the learning process. Sometimes, they are not allowed to talk to their peers as

it generates noise to the teachers. Thus, the children looked to teachers for direction and guidance. Elenu, an older teacher stated “*In a proper African setting, a child does not dictate what he wants to learn*”. This is a situation which is not the norm in ECCE settings in many of the western societies. In many of the schools observed, the prevailing option for many of the teachers is to take control of the teaching and learning process and make the child more passive while it is often the other way in many western societies. For instance, in many of the western societies, children in ECCE settings are given a level of freedom to choose what interest them.

An example is found in Pinkcourt pre-school, normal school activities for children began with rhymes suggested by the class teacher, which was usually followed by recitation of alphabets and numbers. Thereafter, the children had to look up to the board and repeat each word pronounced by the teacher. They would later copy words written on the board by the teachers on their notebooks or sometimes from the textbooks. This process usually takes the first hour of the day's teaching-learning process. Afterwards, the teacher, who may have been exhausted by this effort, goes back to her seat and starts marking children's homework while the children are busy copying from the board. This was usually followed by more classwork. The teacher would write in each child's book the class work for the day. This work is expected to be done by each child without any assistance from peers. The teacher would later go around and mark the class work. At the end of this exercise children were expected to go out for break. During the break period, the teacher was already tired and could not supervise children's play activities, so children were left to play on their own. I asked this teacher why she thinks she has to go through

this process every day without involving children in any decision concerning their learning. She replied:

*“teachers should be in control because she is the one that understands the curriculum, the children don’t. If we ask these children to dictate what they want to learn, they will only want to do colouring and painting every day. So, I make vital decision like how children are supposed to behave and conduct themselves in the school” (Labimi).*

A younger teacher in the same class added this;

*“It is all about them. That is why we have head girl and head boy. They represent the school and the other students. We observe them to know their strength and weaknesses. We give them free hand to decide- where to sit, what to eat. However, we are the managers and are in charge of the class. You see, children are not trained to be teachers; a child is only learning how to learn. If they fail, my head teacher will query me for not teaching well” (Miye).*

Many of these teachers did not really have time to answer many of my questions because they were always busy with paper work. They would teach all the subjects to the children.

Some of the teachers did not seem to understand the meaning and feasibility of a child-centred approach given their socio-cultural perspectives of children’s training and the formality of learning, a condition which entails that teachers take responsibility for children’s success and curriculum delivery. During a focus group discussion, the following dialogue was made:

**“Researcher:** *How do you go about inculcating skills in your daily interactions with the children?*

**Tinu (a younger teacher):** *It is through child-centred approach.*

**Researcher:** *Can you describe how a child-centred approach is used in your daily activities with children?*

**Tinu: (giving a theoretical definition)** *Child-centred approach is an act of teaching that you take more consideration on the pupils and the pupils participate actively rather than the teacher domination- their interest and desires should be incorporated. The children should be part of the decision making otherwise the teachers might have problems*

**Shade (an older teacher interrupted):** *I do not even know what child-centred mean? There is no way it can be child-centred; is it that the child is teaching or giving me instruction? It should be teacher-child centred; a participatory approach. The child should be allowed to speak out and contribute in any decision that is related to his/her learning, but in areas of specific instruction, the child should be made to obey and conform. For instance, after teaching, I ask questions or call out a child to come to the board and solve some questions”.*

After a period of argument and contestation among the focus group participants;

**“Researcher:** *What do we all agree about child-centred mean and how do we think it should be practised?*

**Labimi (an older teacher):** *From my own point of view ...For instance, if you want to teach a topic, do not assume that the pupils don't know anything about the topic. They can give more than what you need. There was a time we wanted to teach simple command. I was amazed with the different kind of phrases they were saying. For instance, “good boy”, “sit down please”, “can I have my tea please”. You allow the pupils to contribute to their own learning process”*

**Tinu:** *That is exactly what I meant by child-centred approach”.*

The FGD excerpt above implies that many of the ECCE teachers, both old and young still struggle to connect the theoretical aspects of the child-centred approach to its classroom application. It may be necessary to state that my observations revealed that all these teachers made use of rote-learning and teacher-directed approach in their classrooms. They usually stand in front of the pupils, write on chalkboard and expect children to memorise concepts,

repeat them several times, copy them in their notebooks, and sometimes go around to cross-check children's written work and mark them. During an informal conversation with Tinu (the younger teacher) later on after the FGD, she was of the opinion that a child-centred approach is not feasible considering the present state of the learning environment in many of the government-owned ECCE settings, the rigidity of learning contents and older teachers' orientation about children's learning. She concluded; *"hopefully, when the older generation of teachers retire and younger ones come into the field of ECCE, we may be talking of child-centred approach"*.

The understanding of a child-centred approach and its implications on quality assessment, with a greater number of teachers being allied to traditional methods of rote learning, suggest that many teachers especially the older ones are biased towards an entirely child-centred approach that the western theoretical thinking about children's education demands. The formality and highly-structured approach (Pearson, 2011) to learning for children is a major challenge to the full embracing of a child-centred approach in many of the ECCE setting in Lagos state.

### **5.3. Theme 2: Cultural Knowledge and Technical Knowledge.**

*"... I grew up in Lagos. I know for an average Yoruba person, respect is very important: girls kneel and boys prostrate. Now, the modern-day parents do not want their children to kneel; they tell them get up, do not worry. Their major concern is that the child must have good grades in the nursery school. The issue of mother tongue is another way in which we are losing out, modern day times is witnessing a drastic decrease in our mother tongue usage, even in our local community. Everyone wants to speak English (Ibiyemi).*

I consider Ibiyemi's interview extract important in the understanding of how the quality dimension relates to cultural and technical knowledge. Ibiyemi, an older teacher, is a head teacher from the Ibo ethnic group. She considered the inculcation of knowledge of the workings of the immediate society in children as an important aspect of quality education. She added "*education for children is now about academic excellence and it is causing decadence on our moral values*". In a similar vein, Fuluya supported this with her words; "*Children's orientation is now towards passing exams and choice of professional careers. This has implications on our moral values and societal norms. Some parents do not even want their children to speak native languages or kneel down to greet elders*". They were of the opinion that children need to understand cultural knowledge that will aid their learning.

All the teachers I interviewed admitted that child education should be for learning and character formation. Learning involves not only the transmission of skills and technical knowledge but also the character and culture in which the skills will be used. In its present form, technical knowledge develops skills that will help children to achieve social and economic relevance in the community. During class lessons, children were asked what profession they would like to pursue in life and they would mention their desired profession.

I often observed that older teachers were more concerned about how much cultural knowledge children display. For example, on a particular morning, an older teacher was approaching the classroom and a child ran to meet her, knelt down to greet her and helped her with one of her bags. The teacher was so impressed and said in her mother tongue "kare omo mi, o gba eko" meaning

“thank you my girl, you are well trained”. When I asked the teacher why she said those words to the little girl, she said “the little girl has just displayed what it means to be well trained in our culture, respect for elders. Everything about education is not about reading and writing, children’s behavioural displays really matter. At this stage they must also learn the cultural norms so that they will not become educated but uncultured deviants”. It may be sufficient to note that as much as all the teachers emphasized cultural knowledge as a vital aspect of children learning, there is no documentation to back it up. There are no training manuals to guide its consistency. It is just assumed that children will learn them as they grow into the society. Children are usually given a report card after each term, these cards only give recognition to the intellectual ability of children and not to cultural knowledge. There are no textbooks about folklore, proverbs, music, drama and dance that are culturally-based. A teacher stated *“I do not write down children’s behaviour, I have a record of their grades. I know each child’s behaviour and how well trained they are”*.

The Nigerian National Policy on Education (NERDC, 2013) has projected the image of a child as moving from being a once feeble individual to an active agent of socialisation by advocating institutional training that “provides the child with diverse basic knowledge and skills for entrepreneurship and educational advancement” (NERDC, 2013). This implies a new status for children, upon which assessment is done. This status suggests that children are expected to be exposed to knowledge that can make them socially and economically relevant to national and economic development. This change in the status of childhood has implications for how quality education is perceived and assessed. In Nigeria today, children are not only seen as leaders of tomorrow

but as individuals that are entitled to fundamental rights to education and protection. The local community is expected to see them as individuals with opinions and their own rights. One of the basic principles of government intervention in children's education is to ensure social justice (Dakar Framework, 2000; UNESCO, 2000) and produce children who are equipped for primary schooling. A teacher stated "nursery education helps the children. It prepares them for the primary section. It achieves the government's goal of children being able to read and write". Another teacher admitted; "pre-school education is just a preparatory stage for the normal school system to make sure that children are ready, the discipline they need, the preparation for hard work, how to obey elders, how to be neat and how to do their work on time. That is where they prepare them. The future begins from now. What they will become in life, this is where we discover them- their talents, potentials and weaknesses and their creativity. We guide and tailor them towards what they will become in the future".

Since it is assumed to be preparatory, it implies that such education will require a measure of skills acquisition on the part of children. This seems to be why early childhood settings in Lagos state place so much emphasis on technical skills acquired through learning contents like mathematics, English and science rather than cultural learning contents like proverbs, folklore, music and drama. In many of the classrooms that I observed, children were expected to learn predetermined contents that strictly allow them to progress to further schooling. However, the analysis of schemes of work and other documents that teachers used revealed that while many of the learning milestones vary from school to



school, the learning contents were similar. It was observed that public school teachers were not so keen on how many technical skills children acquired in a short time but that the private school teachers rushed children into learning contents. Some of the teachers used the books meant for Nursery One for Nursery Two pupils. When I asked them about this, they were of the view that the children in their care have the capacity to learn concepts. For instance, some children were not allowed to observe their break periods because they did not achieve the learning milestones meant for a day. For instance, if a child was expected to write numbers 1 to 20 before break time, the child would not be allowed to go out and play until he or she finished the task. Some of the children would start crying while writing. The teachers felt that they were being paid to make sure that children learn these contents.

In the light of the great emphasis that has been placed on learning skills that will prepare children for primary schooling, many of the cherished cultural values have remained in the background, such that children's assessments were solely based on the amount of written work that a child achieves. For instance, the use of mother tongue, respect, discipline and local songs/music has reduced drastically such that ECCE settings have been perceived as the reservoir of "technical skills" for children. The children are taught in English language and were expected to speak the language always. Children were constantly reminded not to speak mother tongue through expressions like "*stop speaking vernacular*" "*who is speaking Yoruba there?*"

This is in contrast to the National Policy on Education which stipulates that children should be taught to use the language of the immediate environment.

However, in many settings, any child that was found speaking in the mother tongue was strictly warned and punished. Nevertheless, I observed that teachers constantly conversed with each other in their mother tongue in the school environment. I witnessed a scenario where a boy was narrating a story about how his mother went to the market and bought stuff for him to his attentive friends. The class teacher overheard him and shouted in her mother tongue “talo n so Yoruba nibe yen” meaning “Who is that speaking in vernacular?” She later used the cane on him. When I asked the teacher why she had to beat the boy, she replied “in this school, we do not allow children to speak vernacular. The boy (*pointing to him*) likes to speak it all the time. I beat him so that he will not influence other children”. I then told her that she just corrected the child speaking in her mother tongue. She defended herself by saying she is the only one allowed to speak the vernacular. However, some of the older teachers in public schools were of the view that the use of mother tongue should be part of children’s learning. For instance, Janet, an older teacher stated “... *we call our local languages vernacular, but I do not think it is vernacular because we are not barbarians. If a child speaks local dialect, she is always shut down. So it is conventional for children to speak English language all the time. All the same, I still want our local dialect to be part and parcel of children’s learning*”. This suggests that all-round development that emphasizes language development seems to favour the use of English language for children in schools. As asserted by Cremin and Arthur (2014:65), language is a powerful tool for cultural learning. Personally, I learnt many of the societal customs and value systems through exposure to my local language. Some of these values are still part of me. Gladys, an older teacher gave this

narrative in a bid to describe the usefulness of mother tongue for cultural knowledge:

*“I grew up under my grandparents in a little town in Ogun state. Although I was taken to school, I developed a mentality that you can only relate with your local community through language. I learnt in my mother tongue in my primary education, but I was also taught English language. Speaking English language at home seems to make you alienated and foreign. Whenever I get home and I want to express myself in this foreign language, it is not acceptable. Many of the comments use to go like this “are you coming to tell us that you have gone to school? Are you coming to show that you are more educated than the other person? Are you trying to show off to your friends and siblings that you could now speak English? Even though, you have a good understanding of what you are going to do or speak in English Language, you had better get a good version of it in Yoruba language so that you can drive home your points. What we have now is that English Language is everywhere. Even if you try to speak local dialect to a child, the parent will correct you to please speak English”*

Also, Fuluya, an older teacher made this comment;

*“I went to school in Ghana. It was an experimental school for dental clinic. I was taught by white men. When I was a child, I can still remember that my parents taught me vital aspects of our home country culture- like food and language, with the hope that if we come back to Nigeria, we will not feel strange and it really helped me when I came back home. Many of the cherished values like respect, discipline and morals are not imbibed by children because children are not exposed to our local languages anymore. They learn English in school and speak English at home. For example, children L1 is primary and helps in further understanding and interpretations. As a Yoruba person, English Language is L2 and foreign to me. I need to understand what I am being taught in my L1 so that I can interpret appropriately any L2 vocabulary I come across; I can have a reflection and merge objects. For example if you want to teach a child about dog, that is “aja” in our mother tongue. The child sees “aja” on the street every morning. I can tell such a child that dog is aja. That is a major problem I see in the present*

*time. If I do not understand my own, it is going to deny me of the appropriate knowledge I would have gained in my community”.*

While the older teachers acknowledged the importance of language in the contemporary economic and social situations, the younger teachers affirmed the use of English language in formal setting like ECCE institutions. So, in the public schools, where many of the teachers belong to the older group, the use of mother tongue is more allowed than in many of the private schools. Evidently, the use of English language for children’s learning is the preferred medium of instruction in the nursery and primary schools in Nigeria. It is more likely that the government’s policy on language usage is in contrast with the social realities of the global influence on children’s learning. It might also be that technical knowledge that the present society demands for comparative advantage is better accessed in English language. In fact, many of the teachers are of the view that many uneducated parents send their wards to pre-school for them to receive the social status that the English language confers on children. Anne, a younger teacher in a private school stated: *“uneducated parents do appreciate when their children are able to speak English language with ease, even at this stage”*. She continued *“One day during an open day, an uneducated parent exclaimed “omo mi n so oyinbo”*”; meaning my child can speak English language fluently. Since the use of English language is everywhere among the elites in the society, it has become desired by many parents that their children must be exposed to it early in order to belong to a “class” of the learned. Here is an extract from a focus group discussion:

***“Fagbamiye (a young teacher): “... Their foundations are very important, what you put in them. If you allow them to learn***

*Yoruba in this stage, they may not be able to cope with the demands of English Language later in life. At least I have spent three years in the job. I discovered that there are some pupils that speak mother tongue at home, when they get to school, they find it difficult to cope. If a child does not understand English Language, it may be difficult to learn other subjects”.*

**Orisun (an older teacher):** *“I don’t quite agree with her. When I was growing up, we were taught in our mother tongue and we were not found wanting anyhow. We should bring back mother tongue to children training in schools”.*

**Margaret (young teacher):** *I discovered there are different tribes here. So we may not be able to use mother tongue as the main language of instruction. If children do not understand English language, how to learn mathematics will be difficult*

**Akinnifesi (older teacher):** *“I do not think the use of mother tongue as a full language of instruction is possible in Nigeria because of the diversity of languages in the country. We can encourage children from other ethnic groups who find themselves among us to learn our language but we cannot force our language as a medium of instruction on them. Everybody wants his children to speak English language”.*

This discussion reflects the dichotomous view of language usage in early childhood education institutions in Lagos state, which can be said to exist within the post-colonial dispensation in Nigeria. This is a phenomenon that a multi-cultural society like Nigeria contends with at all levels of educational programmes. Specifically, quality education in the light of learning contents within the post-colonial era has experienced rapid changes. However, the main argument is that the inconsistency of the language policy makes it infeasible. For instance, the policy states that children should be taught with the mother tongue in early childhood and lower primary education and the use of English should be adopted in the upper primary classes. The teachers were of the opinion that children who have been exposed to the use of mother tongue purely from early childhood to upper primary might find it difficult to cope with

the rigour of learning English in the upper primary classes. So, they all agreed that the use of both languages should be encouraged.

Consequently, English language supremacy in formal dealings condemned mother tongue to inferiority, which some of the teachers felt has made it difficult to instil cultural values in children. Also, some older teachers argued that children's use of their mother tongue can aid better understanding of learning for children because they are able to relate easily with what they encounter in the environment. Ola, an older teacher remarked:

*“Children who can speak their mother tongue understand English better. At the nursery section, we do not teach using mother tongue, but at the primary section, we do teach the mother tongue. We teach them songs and rhymes in Yoruba language in the nursery sections. They build on that when they get to the primary classes. Most of the things we teach them, we interpret using the local dialects for local examples- For instance our fruits, animals. We enlighten parents on the need to allow their children to be exposed to their mother tongue” (Ola).*

She continued:

*“We have a better chance for language usage in schools, but the government is not helping us to modify it for our advantage. Children can learn both in the school system. Government is getting to realise that we need to bring some things back from our past. There is now emphasis to bring back our mother tongue compulsory in primary school. A child in this environment must be able to take Yoruba as a subject”.*

Here is the trend at which teachers commented on the use of mother tongue:

*“Mother tongue is important because it endears you to your cultural heritage and identity. If you travel out and see anybody speaking your language, you associate with the person and you are happy. Mother tongue should not be forgotten” (Dupe).*

Elenu stated:

*“I am aware of the National policy on Education and the one that describes ECCE. One of the basic things that it emphasizes the use*

*of the mother tongue- that children should be able to understand their mother tongue. We cannot shy away from the fact that western culture has crept into our culture. For example, the whole idea of educational programmes is a western ideology. However, we have to preserve our local language because it can go far and wide and helps secure identity. It is not being used in the nursery section but we are bringing it in gradually now. Even the children need it" (Elenu).*

She continued:

*"Lagos belongs to Yoruba land. It is the place where these children are being fed and brought up. The child is to conform to the norms and values of this place. He should learn their language and general way of life. For the past six years, I have not been to the eastern region, so I must learn how to integrate into the society I have found myself so that I can relate well with the people. I have seen parents who send down their children to Lagos from the Northern part because they want their children to learn Yoruba culture".*

Adaeze state:

*"It depends on the school system and location. In this school, this is Yoruba land, every pupil must learn Yoruba language as an addition to the Official language- English. Yoruba language is the native language for this school vicinity. We do not have Ibo and Hausa teachers. No pupils will say because I am not Yoruba I will not learn Yoruba. That is what is in the scheme of work. All of them learn Yoruba. They can then diversify into other languages when they get to secondary schools where we have teachers for all the languages" (Adaeze).*

Some of the teachers agreed they can only make meaning of mother tongue usage in the school system as a clarifying language; it can only be used when there is any grey area that needs more clarifications for the children. For instance, a teacher commented:

*"We teach with English Language. The children are already speaking in English from home. Nowadays, many parents are educated. We have to build on it in school. However, we use mother tongue sometimes to clarify concepts for them" (Dupe).*

Anne, a public pre-school teacher, states:

*“We use both. If we use pure English some of them from the village will not understand what we teach them. We have to use both. They later cope with English as time goes on” (Anne).*

Justina, a younger teacher, also stated:

*“We use English language. Whereby they don’t understand we have to change to vernacular or local dialects” (Justina).*

*“All I know is that we are all crazy about speaking English language. What I will suggest is that let children speak Yoruba or what have you at home and English in the school since it is a formal setting since there is no more emphasis on mother tongue” (Bode).*

*“We do not encourage them to speak Yoruba or vernacular. In fact, once anybody speaks it, others will pinpoint such person. I will then correct the pupil “do not speak vernacular, this is school. You have to speak in English. Even if you cannot speak it well, just try”. However, if we have new pupil, we may give him or her allowance to learn our culture. I personally believe they can learn mother tongue at home that is what their parents use to communicate with them. In school, they should speak English” (Labimi).*

A good number of the older teachers acknowledged the need for cultural learning. The consideration for cultural learning is premised on the perception that any meaningful quality standards should take into cognisance differences in social and cultural attitudes of the society. The school system should thus be a place for the harmonisation of the essential social and cultural elements of the different ethnic groups. However, in practice children have to drop their cultural identity when they get to school because the school system does not make provision for cultural learning and documentation.

Furthermore, the older teachers felt that advances in technology all over the world are one of the major reasons for emphasis on technical skills for children. They did not tolerate the use of any technological device by the children in their



care. There was a case whereby a nursery pupil in Elenu's class came to school with a technological gadget that teaches alphabets, the child would run to the teacher each time the device stopped working. After a while, the teacher seized it from the child and told the child to come for it after school hours. Probably, this teacher did not know how to operate the device. However, during an interview session with her she said:

*"...children are learning more from outside than inside. The new phase of development that technology has brought is really affecting our system. Nigeria used to have clear guidelines for children's training in each ethnic setting, but nobody knows what is ideal again, because of the level of exposure that the modern way of life has brought".*

Many teachers perceived little difference between children's learning potentials and adults' because of the influence of technological gadgets. Technological devices have ushered in ideologies and knowledge claims that shape the educational system, and specifically children's care and learning. This suggests that as a result of the increase in knowledge and awareness of the power of technology, there has been a proliferation of technological gadgets for children's use at home and school. Global ideals on child rearing are gradually exerting pressures on existing cultural values. For instance, in Bluechip pre-school, children were not allowed to use the computer rooms. However, the primary pupils were allowed.

Conversely, in recent times, the dominant discourse on the use of computers, tablets, screens, projectors and web services in the Nigerian ECCE provision is centred on the need to improve quality standards and achieve international comparative advantages in children's learning. In fact, an important aspect of

the quality assessment mechanism is to ensure that schools are equipped with computers. Although many of the schools visited claim to have computer rooms, they were either locked up throughout the day or equipped with malfunctioning computers. ECCE settings in Lagos state aim at ensuring that children's learning is in tandem with global trends and adopt the use of technology for teaching children. These are mostly private schools charging fees ranging from 50,000 to 200,000 naira, an equivalent of £500 per term, which only the well-paid working and middle-class families can afford. In many of these schools, children were made to watch the screen most of the time learning songs and rhymes, keeping them busy whenever they were not writing. In Genesis pre-school, a younger teacher was proud to say that she gets most of what the children learn from the internet. In fact, many of the younger teachers felt that the present demand of children's learning may not require so much of the "old days" values but the knowledge required to keep abreast with the developments in the global community, which can only be obtained through technology. Layo, a younger teacher in Brownie preschool described the influence of technological transfer on children learning thus:

*"...we do not really tell so many stories these days. This day, all those stories have been turned into rhymes, book series and cartoons. We tell the pupils stories and they watch other stories on the screen. That is a lot easier".*

The implication is that technological gadgets have helped to provide children with new opportunities for autonomy as they create conditions in which children's voices and potentials are identified, and children's ability to explore their own world. In classrooms where screens and other technological devices

are used for children, the younger teachers were prone to turning them on as soon as possible. It might be a way of relieving them from their workload. There was a case of a young teacher who turned on the screen for pupils to watch as they came into the classroom in the morning. Masara, the head teacher was taking me round the classrooms for familiarisation when she discovered that children were watching rhymes from the screen. We came into the classroom but the children were so engrossed with the rhymes that they did not greet us. Masara ordered that the screen be turned off and asked the children to recognise my presence and greet me properly. They all stood up and greeted me. She then said: *“This new generation of teachers and children love technology. You can imagine! She has turned on the television for children early in the morning”*. The use of technology in ECCE is however subject to debates and further consideration because of the peculiarities of the Nigerian context. Extant literature in this context sheds light on the influence of technology on children’s training in Africa (Aduwa-Ogiegbaen and Iyamu, 2005, Okebukola, 1997, Agyeman, 2007, Pudaruth and Bahadoor, 2011).

Meanwhile, I discovered that some of the older teachers felt that it is not about how the influx of external influences, which are inevitable because of their various advantages are felt in the society, rather it is about how children’s care and learning has been shaped through them. These teachers reiterated that though there is no doubt that modern life is dominated by technology, the intricacies of children’s care and learning cannot be fixed with technology and technical knowledge. This originates from the belief that children are expected to learn from adults and peers in the immediate community in order to function effectively. For instance, they talked extensively on the resultant effects in the

form of family disintegration, individual lifestyle, and value degeneration, all of which relate to this aspect of children's care, learning and development. An essential aspect of children's care and learning is the social and cultural skills that they imbibe while learning. Older teachers felt these skills are better learnt in the process of forming relationships with adults and peers.

During one of the interviews conducted, I asked teachers about the use of technology in teaching and learning. They were of the opinion that while it is necessary that children learn through technology, its use will not allow children to learn important skills which further learning can be built upon. Masara, an older teacher stated:

*"When a child stays in front of the television all day, she is not learning any relationship skills that she needs for the real life. If we are not careful, the values will go into extinction. There is no more respect. Technology is in vogue now. What we see now is that children are kept indoors with television and satellite".*

In a similar manner, Onyinye, an older pre-school teacher, supported this by stating:

*"Technology is very good, but as good as it, it is affecting children's loyalty to parents. Some of the things they watch, see on the internet, etc. even if they do not go out, the handset they hold will teach them many things right inside the home. It is causing a lot of disobedience in the society" (Oyinbo/FGD03/15).*

The implication is that technological gadgets have helped to provide children with new opportunities for autonomy as they create conditions in which children's voices and potentials are identified, and children' ability to explore their own world is enhanced. Thus, the older teachers felt that technology use

should be moderated and tailored towards the solidification of the Nigerian cultural heritage and not otherwise.

All the teachers interviewed were of the view that the sudden surge in children learning more skills than previously should not lead to the submergence of a social and cultural outlook of the society. Fuluya, an older teacher, described her personal interpretation of quality education in this manner: "When a child is sent to school, it is quite different from apprenticeship. In apprenticeship, the child is just to learn technical skills and not necessarily the character, in teaching the children, I teach them both the skills and character that will assist them to put the learning into proper use." She continued "*...I cannot say because there is the need for children to learn how to read and write, I will not teach them the proper way of behaving in the society. They must learn our culture and learn how to read and write*". Also, Adaeze, an older teacher stated:

*"There are generally acceptable values in our society- like greetings, punctuality, good health habits, respect, hard work, togetherness and honesty. We teach them these in school. Like we take Yoruba culture as a theme for our cultural day- whether you are Ibo or Hausa, you have to dress like a Yoruba pupil that day and participate in all the activities. Parents can then teach other specific values within each ethnic group to their children at home". (Adaeze)*

Another important aspect of cultural knowledge for many of the older teachers is the level of discipline that it entails. Any improper behaviour was addressed through mild disciplinary actions. Quoting from my field note: "John, a nursery pupil wanted to give his teacher a pen, he pointed the pen to his teacher with a left hand, the teacher quickly corrected him to put it in his right hand before handing it over to her. When I asked the teacher why she reacted that way, she

said “It is part of our culture and I have to teach him””. However, many of the younger teachers are not so particular about details of cultural knowledge. The main concern of the younger teacher is how children can assimilate a body of knowledge which can ensure progression to the next stage of schooling. A younger teacher admitted, “As they go through pre-school, they will be able to read and write and channel a course for their lives. It is through education they can know maybe they want to be a teacher, doctor, engineer or so”.

Although cultural knowledge does not have a laid-out curriculum, it was implicit in older teachers’ daily interactions with children. The older teachers were of the opinion that the transmission of technical knowledge to children requires conscious efforts on the parts of teachers and children in order to achieve prescribed objective. Conversely, cultural learning embraces children’s use of observational and participative systems as they grow into the networks of the society. What I observed is that children were made to sit in classes for formal instruction and any other aspects of cultural learning took place during classroom instruction. For instance, one of the older generation of teachers, Ruth, said this during my classroom observation:

*“As I came in, you saw they all stood up and greeted me. That is part of our culture. They have learnt it. It is not written black and white in any curriculum. This morning, we had sung both in Yoruba and English languages”.*

According to many of the older teachers, the holistic view of the child which sometimes excludes the cultural aspect of children should be considered in a multi-ethnic society. Cultural learning plays a significant part in children’s care, learning and development.

#### 5.4. Theme 3: Education and Care

*“There is a new order for child’s training in this generation, because in the olden days, mothers do not work, they stayed at home. Now since our economy is getting hard or worse, every woman wants to work and have to keep their children somewhere while they are in the workplace. So, they discovered it is not only caring that children need, they also need to be learning to prepare their minds towards entering primary school. (Yarinya)*

This excerpt was Yarinya’s contribution during a FGD on education and care of children. According to her, education and care are two simultaneous events that take place in early childhood settings. This was confirmed by the manner in which she ensured that each child in her care is properly monitored and supported. She would check children’s lunch boxes, dresses, nails, teeth, tongue and temperature before their parents leave after dropping them off. When I asked her why she does that, she replied:

*“...I would say that many of the parents are not there anymore to relate with the children. The mother is out there and the father is out there, and in the Nigerian society, the extended family is fast being removed from us. So, the school system has to come in to provide both care and education for children”.*

My observations confirmed her words as many parents were dropping off their children as early as 7am with the expectation that they will be appropriately cared for. Children were usually picked up at 4pm. Some of the teachers had to help with feeding the children in the morning, afternoon and in the evening. So, children would take their breakfast, lunch and sometimes dinner at school. Some children were only given money to buy food as their parents did not have time to cook for them. Some were not properly groomed and the teachers would

have to adjust their clothes and sandals for them. However, teachers only did what they could do practically as there were some children without basic needs like sandals, school uniforms and food.

According to the teachers, given the present demands on labour and the money market economy on parents, ECCE settings have had to take up the roles of child care and education. Care, according to many of the older teachers, is an essential need of children. My observational study revealed that in the Nigerian socio-cultural context, care and education in ECCE settings are inextricably linked such that any quality assessment must deal with both and not see them as necessarily mutually exclusive. For instance, there were arrangements by parents with some teachers to drop off their children in school, where care and safety were provided before school resumed. On the other hand, education has been perceived as a tool for individual children's social and economic integration into the society, an attempt to give children a sense of worth.

A child care arrangement in its traditional sense embodies a sensitivity to the mothers' role and to how girls and boys are cared for in a culturally acceptable manner. As mentioned in the preceding section, childcare in Nigeria is characterised by communal efforts from immediate family and the wider community. The immediate family is expected to make sure that children are well taken care of before they are old enough to start schooling. This might inform the less attention given to the funding and organisation of early childhood care and education in Nigeria. For instance, government continues to play a regulatory role, probably in order to fulfil international protocols. Many of the ECCE settings in Lagos state are owned by private individuals. Publicly



owned ECCE settings are not properly equipped and are more concerned with education than care.

In Lagos, ECCE, unlike any other sector, is predominantly considered as an appendage of the primary section (NERDC, 2013). However, all the teachers interviewed were of the view that more recognition should be given to the subsector because they combine both care and education of children. Many teachers admitted that they often care for and teach children in ways that they deem appropriate because many of the regulatory frameworks do not explicitly take the care of children into recognition. Mide, a younger teacher, stated: *“whenever there is inspection to schools, they just ignore the children section because they felt there is nothing much about their learning, what of their care?”* Thus, quality assessment which has more often favoured the “education” aspect should also include the “care” aspect. The next section will highlight how these perspectives influence teacher’s meaning making about professionalism in ECCE.

Arike, an older teacher, remarked: *“...a vital aspect of quality education is the care we give to children. It should start from the home. However, many parents do not have time to care for their wards. So, when they get to school, we have to start all over”*. Children’s care involves making sure that children eat well, they wear appropriate clothes for the weather, they do not play with dangerous objects, they sleep if they are tired. So many of the children in my observational study were more likely to turn to older teachers for any request and enquiry rather than the younger ones. For example, during a classroom observation, when a child was crying profusely because her mum had dropped her off in

school, I discovered that a younger teacher started writing on the board and teaching the whole class while the girl was still crying. The teacher told her that she would have to take her outside if she did not stop crying. The teacher later told the rest of the class to sing a funny song to her to make her stop crying but the little girl would not stop crying. Some minutes later, an older teacher entered the classroom, carried the girl, wiped off her tears, rocked her in her arms, and reassured her that she will soon be with her mum. This suggests that to many of the younger teachers, child care interferes with their education.

As discussed in the preceding chapter, education has been perceived as a way out of the many structural inequalities in the economy. Children are not exempted from this perception. During a school assembly, children were made to sing this song: *“Eko dara pupo ...ma baa awon eeyan nla nla, joko sipo nla nla”*, which translate into “Education is good ...it will make me join the social class of the elites”. All the teachers agreed that children should not be left out in the new wave of increased knowledge in a competitive world, where education is the only option out of poverty. Adaeze, an older teacher, stated:

*“Education will illuminate their minds. They will be able to use the technology in a positive manner, so that they will not be left behind. It will not allow them to be backward from their age mates. It helps them to be matured and prepare for their future” (Adaeze).*

The implication is that many teachers perceived quality education in the light of the rapid ways in which the society undergoes changes and thus considers education an essential aspect of integrating children into the contemporary society. For instance, I observed that children were made to take their studies seriously and any areas of concern were discussed with parents. Children were

constantly reminded that the only way to make their parents happy is to make good grades. It seems that, according to teachers, the present structure of quality education and care for children has been based on the degree to which children are exposed to educational contents that will prepare them for economic opportunities in the future rather than children's wider care.

#### **5.5. Theme 4: Learning versus Play**

*"There is time to play and a time to learn in school. If a child is supposed to be learning when he is playing, I will be blamed for it" (Tina)*

Learning and play are two elements of quality assessment in ECCE that seem to be mutually exclusive in Lagos state. Quality requires a pedagogical strategy for achieving pre-determined and technical skills in children. The most commonly mentioned form of teaching method was play way method which involves children to learn through play. This might be connected with the theoretical understanding of play as the universal language of learning for children. Indeed, Prochner (2002) described children's play experiences as one of the common experiences of childhood that has been introduced into the formal school system. Play has been acknowledged as children's innate natural capacity for learning. Smidt (2014: 65), for example, defines play as "what children do when they are able to follow their own interests and create their rules". Studies have extensively looked at the importance of play in children's learning within the western context of early childhood education (Bennette Woods and Rogers, 1997; Duffy, 2006; Walsh 2010; Rogers and Rose, 2014; Lindqvist 2006). However, there is a dearth of literature on the socio-cultural meanings ascribed to play specifically within the Nigerian context. My findings

suggest that teachers agreed that play is an important aspect of children's learning. However, my observational studies revealed that play as a pedagogical method has underlying socio-cultural connotations than I had never considered. It became clear to me that I needed to clarify the meaning of play in children's learning.

Teachers' narratives on contextual factors and status of childhood which have been discussed in the preceding sections inform the socio-cultural meanings that they ascribed to play and learning. What I observed is that "learning" was demarcated from "play". While break time is assumed to be a time for children to play, any act of play displayed by children during classroom lessons was frowned upon. In fact, in Brownie, a publicly-owned preschool, play materials were kept in the assistant head mistress office for children who came early to use before morning assembly. When I asked the teacher why play materials are kept away from children's reach, she replied "*...apart from children spoiling the materials or taking them home, there are few of them available. They can be playing with them before classroom learning begins*". Thus, play and outdoor activities are gradually being removed from children's learning. Some children were not allowed to play beyond the classroom veranda during break time. Sometimes, this was due to the limited play spaces and materials in some schools, and teachers' reluctance to monitor children's play. Teachers would warn children before leaving for break "do not climb the climbing frame, you may fall, play around this place" (pointing to the front of the classroom where there are no play materials).

While the older teachers felt that the present structure denies children the pleasure of learning in an outdoor atmosphere, they seemed to have little or no idea of how children's learning can be improved within the academic atmosphere that children find themselves in. Schools' outdoor environments have limited space for children's explorative play, and where there are sufficient play spaces, there are no play materials or only dilapidated ones. Nsamenang and Tchombe (2011) maintained that teaching within African settings perceives children as active agents of their own learning and development in such a way that they are not expected to follow rigid stages of formal instruction. For instance, a child who has an interest in drumming is often seen beating used pots and spoons in order to produce sound. Thereafter, such a child starts to observe other adults and eventually becomes a good drummer without having to follow predetermined lessons. John, an older teacher, corroborated this by stating:

*“...I would say I grew up in a community where adults did not really put conscious efforts into children's growth and learning; to them, it occurs naturally within the environment and so whatever you achieve as a child do not matter, what matters is that they could see improvements in areas that relate to physical and behaviour attributes”*

The way in which older and younger teachers perceived the two sides of the nature of the play-way method and learning within the child-centred framework indicates the influence of implicit conventions and norms that characterise teacher education programmes on one hand, and the social-cultural contexts in which the play-way method is being practised on the other hand. For instance, Tina, a younger teacher, expressed her anxieties about play in children's education in a FGD:

*“My own concern is that there seems to be a clear difference between how we practice early childhood in Nigeria compared to some developed countries. They do not normally teach them in a formal way like this, they just allow them to play with toys. All I know about children coming from these countries is that they are very wise (intelligent). (Giving an instance), like a child that came from the USA, this boy is not able to write alphabets and numbers. Do we then say we are not the ones getting it right or we do not understand?” (Tina).*

I want to suggest that Tina is more concerned about what teachers and providers adjudge quality in comparison with other countries than local practices that teachers adopt in pre-schools. Jose, an older teacher, answered Tina in this manner:

*“It is the way we perceive play. ...When I was a child, we used to attend “jekileosimi” meaning “let the house be at rest”. Of course, the purpose is to mix with other children while our parents can also do other things at home and not to learn any rigorous academic activities like we have today- I think what can be regarded as a kind of play group. We would be there playing with all manner of local things till our parents would come for us. But you know everything has changed now- it is now more than “jeleosimi”, as children have to learn a great deal now. Many parents also want to see evidence that their children are learning”*

In this study, the older generation of teachers admitted that the pleasure of childhood is the level of freedom that children are given to play on their own. There was a case when a child took two pencils and started to beat an older teacher’s table. The teacher started singing and the rest of the children sang and danced that morning. Then, the teacher said “alright, we have all danced and sung; it is now time to learn our books”. The children seemed happy and fulfilled because they had their way. While the younger teachers were always keen to talk about the play-way method as the appropriate method of learning

for children, I did not record any of the approach being used in their classrooms. This might explain why a child-centred approach is still a mirage in many classrooms because of the connection between the play-way method and the child-centred approach. While classroom observation revealed that teachers gave various constructions to the meanings of play in learning, the traditional approach- which involves memorisation, the use of board and chalk is still prevalent in many ECCE settings. A good instance is a situation where children were expected to copy from the board and read from textbooks during classroom lessons. Here is an extract of an observational field note during a typical classroom lesson:

**Teacher:** *Hello children, how are you doing?*

**Children:** *(all chorused) we are fine ma.*

**Teacher:** *(goes to the chalkboard) everybody look up! Drop your pen and close your books. (The children all did that). She then drew some lines on the board and wrote some letters of the alphabet on them. Now, you are all going to write the same on your exercise book 2D. Make sure it is written exactly the way I have written mine. Do you understand?*

**Children:** *Yes ma”.*

The teacher later went around to make sure that the children all did the same thing, and any erring child was assisted until such a child got it right. Also, children were made to sit individually during examinations with minimal assistance from teachers.

Generally, both older and younger teachers’ construction of the play-way method seemed to depart from the theoretical thinking of the father of kindergarten (Froebel) on teaching methods in pre-school institutions. It

becomes imperative to look into the mismatch between theory and practice. As stated earlier, it might be ascribed to the low number of qualified teachers in pre-school settings, and possibly the influence of teacher training programme that pre-service teachers undergo; as the saying goes: “teachers tend to teach the way they have been taught”. Also important may be teachers’ own beliefs about the play-based approach (Prochner, 2002). Here are some of the comments that teachers made about the play-way method during a FGD:

*“Here, we use a play way method. We do our learning as if we are playing. Like if I want to teach tens and units. You put them in different group. They will be happy for that. For example when you know that one pupil is good at reading, you can make such pupil a leader of a reading group. When you make anyone of them a group leader, they do not want to fail. We are already building the leadership traits in them. We do picture reading and sing” (Ola).*

*“It is play way method. As they play, they learn. It sticks better in their memory. I tell them stories. They love stories because it makes them happy. Though, in a play way method, they gain something” (Dupe).*

*“It must be a constructive play way method. It must be related to what they are doing and supposed to be learning” (Elenu).*

*“It is play-way method. Children are playing and learning. Child-centred learning cannot start from this level. It starts from primary one. They are matured by then. Children can also learn in many ways. Like the use of technology and do not have to sit down and learn all the time” (Nifesimi).*

*Children learn by seeing and through practice. I use play-way method (I think that is the best method). (Miye)*

*“I employ play way method- through rhymes, songs and dance. It makes them happy. I also use stories, new songs and rhymes every day” (Bode)*

While all the teachers agreed that play is essential for children’s learning, the measure of control of play to satisfy learning seems to be a bone of contention



between the older and younger teachers. Dupe, a younger teacher thought that play in children's learning should accommodate learning contents and outcomes. She said: "*It must be a constructive play way method. It must be related to what they are doing and supposed to be learning*". She continued "*I have a boy in my class, once you give him an opportunity to play, he just loves climbing everywhere or wants to climb my tables or write on the board. I understand that it is his age, what I do is that I will say hey boy behave yourself, remember you are not at home, it is not time to do that, it is time to learn, you are not even allowed to climb*". The appropriateness of the play-way method is therefore judged by the teachers' ability to use it as a tool to achieve their aims rather than children's.

I suggest that the older teachers' ways of constructing children's play in a formal setting is to achieve fun in learning, usually centred on the child, while the younger teachers are more concerned about how play can really help them to achieve the learning contents to which they are answerable, making it a means to an end and not an end in itself. Play in children's learning in many of my classroom observations involved a tension between achieving learning outcomes and playing for the fun of it. The former, whilst often involving teachers' reflective ability, mandates the teacher to achieve the prescribed curriculum content by manipulating children's attention span towards learning through play. A teacher admitted "*play is good for children, but if we allow them to play all the time, the Maths, English and Science will die (meaning children will not want to read). They will only want to paint and colour, and parents will withdraw their wards from the school*". The preference for technical learning contents over cultural learning might account for this. For instance, children

were forced to learn things that do not interest them and that are beyond their cognitive ability.

I observed that playing for fun among children happened during self-developed and child-child activities and usually at free play and mid-morning break. In this case, children invented their own play, playing freely with their friends, often without or with only minimal teacher intervention or established rules. One of such observations was a situation whereby children between 5-7 years divided themselves into two groups, assigning letters of the alphabet to each member of the groups from A-J, called out to each other by the letter that had been assigned to each pupil to form a two or three letter word as follows:

*“Pupil 1 in the first group bearing letter B called out: Come over, come over, let letter A come over;*

*Pupil 2 in the second group bearing letter A ran to meet Pupil 1 bearing letter B, they both called out: come over, come over, let letter G come over;*

*Pupils 3 ran to meet Pupils 1 and 2 and they formed B- A-G”*

I observed children engaged in many other forms of play that relate to the concepts they had encountered in the classroom. However, these children had to go back to a rote learning process after the play. During an informal conversation with Fuluya, an older teacher, she commented on the reasons for the adoption of a traditional method as follows: “It is not that some teachers do not know how to teach children through the play way method, but there are no play things in school. Our leaders (government) should also intervene. They emphasize the play way method as a teaching technique in preschool, where are the play facilities? That is why learning for these children has been reduced

to “whiteboard and marker technique””. In a similar manner, Elenu, an older teacher, stated; “Sometimes ago, we were invited for a seminar on Montessori Method of play. It was a wonderful training session on play and children’s learning. ... but when we came back to the school, there are no materials to implement what we have learnt”. This might be a kind of cultural aberration which assumes that play should follow a foreign blue print in children’s learning. African childrearing practices are known to be built on indigenous playthings. The idea that play for children’s learning must be fully implemented with foreign materials seems to dominate teachers’ narratives. It is surprising that there were no locally made playthings in many of the schools visited and their use has not been encouraged through any policy measure. I observed that some older teachers improvised learning materials from straws, cardboard and clay. However, there seems to be over reliance on foreign toys and playthings for children’s learning.

It is noteworthy that teachers felt that since privately owned pre-school education is at a cost to many parents, quality education for children follows parents’ expectations of a formal instructional mode for children. This might be connected with the demand of a successful life in a city like Lagos, where education and good grades are perceived as the avenue for good jobs and a secure future. A teacher stated: *“He who pays the piper dictates the tune”*. She continued *“if you open school today and you tell parents that their three or four years old children will be playing from morning till they come for them. I am sure you will not see any customer to patronise you”*. The early exposure of pre-school children to formal education has necessitated the introduction of a rigid structure of academic work. For instance, children in Nursery 1, aged 4-5

years, are expected to learn how to read and write numbers 1- 100 and A-Z, while children in Nursery 2, aged 5-6, are expected to read and write 100- 200 and the lower and upper-case letters including their phonic sounds. There are other subjects like basic science, social studies, mathematics and English. Each of these subjects has a textbook. Children are usually given homework from the textbooks, so every child is supposed to have textbooks. Ibiyemi, a head teacher stated “a child that wants to get promotion from nursery classes to primary should be able to read and write. He must also be able to copy from the board. Reading is very important. If she gets to the primary school, she might not be able to cope”. Masara, a private school head teacher, however, is of the view that play is a vital aspect of learning for children. She stated:

*“I would say children have to be children and they need to play. Let me say because parents pay so much for school fees, they have authority to demand and their major demand is that their children must learn all the time. But if it is a school where they know their work and the right thing to do, they know that children should have time to play, part of learning is that children learn more things when they are playing than when they sit in the classroom. Like when we were children and we went out to play, I know that I dare not go home with sand on my hair, and I would go outside and play with my friend, outside in the sand. One of the things we learnt as children is to begin to agree on some things while playing- no throwing of sand and we begin to negotiate and re-negotiate among ourselves without anybody teaching us. But we know that our mummies will beat us if we pour sand on our hair. That is an aspect of learning for children. Every aspect of learning does not have to be a, b c and 1, 2, and 3. Children learn social ethics when they play, which is a very vital foundation for other further learning. If you take play away from children, you are taking a huge act of learning away from them because that is where they learn to negotiate, relate with other pupils and associate learning with real life experience. When they sit in the classroom on their individual desk, they are not learning any social skills there, but when they go out and interact with peers and teachers, that is when they learn social skills. That is why play is very important for them”.*

This extract demonstrates the influence of societal values on the importance of play, mainly emanating from the parents' expectations and curriculum demands. It may be necessary to state that the private pre-school where Masara is a head teacher does not really allow children to play except during their break sessions. It seems the parents' voices have implicit influence on ECCE pedagogy in Lagos state. However, during a focus group interview with parents, many of them claimed that teaching methods depend on the curriculum and they may not be able to say much as to the appropriate method since they are not teachers. Parents also insisted that they would like to see little overt formal education in their pre-schoolers. Possibly the only way that they feel their children are learning is through what they do, write, recite and practise, which is a status symbol associated with western education at any level.

More precisely, teachers agreed that there is no one method that can be used for teaching young children because of the variability in children's socio-cultural identities and character. A more subtle way is to study each child's needs, strength, weakness, character and personality, and then organise the classroom and instructional experiences to suit each child's needs. Janet, a younger teacher, remarked: "Children are not equal. They have differences in learning and temperaments. We study them to know the suitable approach for each child". She reiterated "There is no one appropriate method of teaching children. I study my pupils and look out for ways to ensure that each child is learning in his or her own way". However, teachers' practices seem not to follow what they acknowledged as appropriate practices. This I observed in the way

teachers made effort to satisfy parents' concerns for their children's academic performance. For instance, Janet, who professed to study children and meet individual needs of the children, did not actually do this in her classroom practices, but rather ensured that every child was learning the same learning content at the same pace. I presume she was not able to do this because she was handling 20 pupils all alone; she is also answerable to specific learning milestones that children should achieve.

## 5.6. Theme 5: Formal versus Informal Learning

*“When I was growing up, mothers were expected to take care of their children or find jobs that will allow them to cater for their wards. During this time, children were gradually made ready for schooling activity. I remembered I was taken to a nearby school by my parents at age six, I cried so much that day that my father thought I was not ready for school. I did not start primary school until the next year. It was a public school. There were not many nursery schools like we have today. My school was located in a big compound with trees, flowers, flags, and many things to learn from. The most exciting aspect of my going to school was the morning drums and songs. Oh! They were interesting and fulfilling. Both teachers and pupils would sing and dance together.*

*By the time I started school, I was already taught the norms and values of the society. My mother was a petty trader and she always make sure that there is food to meet at home when I come back from school, she also helped me with my homework. I played together with other children in the neighbourhood and observed how adults behaved in the immediate environment. By the age of seven, I already knew my parents' business acumen. As an “ijesha” child, I was born into business and every member of the family is expected to know how to buy and sell. ...Hun ...I think the whole idea of the present early childhood education came as a result of women's increased participation in the labour market, many women are curious and want to work because men are not bringing enough resources home. The economic situation demands this, but it has implications on these children (pointing to the pupils). I think the women are more into labour market than men. I think is a good initiative for*

*children to learn but it is affecting children in so some ways; like their home training, care and behaviour wise.” (Gbajo)*

This is an account that Gbajo, an older teacher in a public early childhood institution, gave of her childhood experiences and process of growing up in Ilesha in the 1970s. It reflects how she was introduced to the school system, the fascinating things about growing up in the formal and informal settings. This story gives a clear notion of what she understands to be the roles of adults in children learning and the level of obedience that was expected from children. The story uncovers her perception of redefinition and modification of adults' roles and its implication on children. According to her words, the essential aspect of learning for children was in the neighbourhood. It endeared children to their local community values. Children may not need to learn so many concepts because some would have been encountered in the vicinity. During an individual interview with her later, she was of the opinion that the present system is denying children childhood pleasures that are found in their local community. To her, quality seems to be associated with moulding children's lives after the pattern of the local environment while also building on knowledge for global acceptance. I observed that Gbajo constantly displayed her belief in the process of teaching children under her care. She would take children round the school compound and allow them to tell her stories. She would then teach them lessons from their stories. In my presence, Jude, a nursery pupil narrated this story:

*“This morning, my dad's car broke down on our way to the school; he called the car mechanics and was just shouting on him. The teacher said, “What did you say?” The pupil said, “I thought for a while and then said -daddy, please stop this bullying. My mum was*

*just looking on". She did not say anything. When the mechanic came around, my dad now said sorry to him and thanked him when he finished repairing our car. The teacher later taught them about the three magic words- Please, sorry and thank you.*

As stated in the preceding chapter, care and learning arrangements for children have emerged from informal settings like home and neighbourhood into formal settings like the nursery classes of today. During the data analysis procedure, I identified the formal and informal aspects of early childhood care and education as important ways of understanding quality assessment. During interviews and group discussions, teachers felt that as children's learning is a vital aspect of quality measures, the formally prescribed scheme of work has continued to feature significantly in early childhood settings. I observed children's learning following a stricter formal procedure than would have been expected. For example, I observed that children within age range 3-5 years were undertaking examinations based on a prescribed curriculum showing a high level of independence.

Though the older teachers admitted the necessity of a formal approach to children's care and learning, they also employed an informal approach. For instance, the older teachers treated children in their care without too much reference to guidelines and protocols. They helped to adjust children's clothes properly, toilet training and lacing of shoes, which they thought should precede formal learning. Amina, an older teacher admitted: *"a child of two years is still a child of two years and should be cared for as such. He may not be able to reason like a child of ten years but has got more grounds to express her potentials in this present time"*. This might inform the rate at which children



were expected to learn concepts in a classroom environment. Teachers were always going around the classroom to make sure that children conformed to rules and regulations of learning in a school-like environment.

While the older teachers felt that formality of learning has reduced children's learning to paper work, they also acknowledged the importance of a relaxed and friendly environment that should go hand in hand with the formality. For instance, teachers allowed children in their care to sing and participate in drama. This is what I presume to be an intergenerational approach to child care and learning which blends the regulatory with informal learning. Jane, a private nursery teacher, while speaking on the formality of learning stated:

*"Paper work is encouraged because it is easier and faster to assess and grade. It also makes children to be busier than usual. It appeals to our orientation of preparing people for the labour market. ...Nowadays, even though there are better innovations, they are not really meeting up to standard- they are not really bringing out the best in the children. Not all children can understand paper work, they are some that like practical and the doing aspect of learning. In fact, in the traditional African setting, that was the norm; children learn through participation"*

Jane's comment above confirmed how busy both teachers and children were in many of the early childhood settings that I observed. Children were constantly given paper work to keep them busy and the head teachers were always there to check if the teachers and children were busy. Moreover, I observed that too much paper work seemed to make the teachers looked stressed and tired. They marked pupils work, gave them class work and homework by writing on each child's exercise book, and wrote lesson notes every week.

However, as much as the load of paper work seems to burden the teacher, it is only centred on the cognitive achievement of children. To my dismay, none of the teachers did any documentation about other features of their children. When asked, a teacher replied “it has not been part of us to write down every detail about our work, moreover, the workload is too much”. Documentation, according to Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999) is a vital tool of a democratic and reflective practice, which has been greatly explored as a tool of evaluation in Reggio Emilia’s early childhood services. However, it might be necessary to investigate the socio-cultural dimension of documentation in early childhood in the context of Lagos state, because teachers tend to say so many things about their reflective practices which are not documented. Moreover, this might be associated with the way that teachers have been taught to carry out their daily activities in the classroom. For instance, many of the school practices that showcase the societal cultural heritage and history were not documented. A good example is the traditional cultural day, where children, youth and community engage in participatory forms of cultural activity like history, drama, sports, theatre and music. This brings to mind the end of the year/prize giving and inter-house sports celebrations in my early years schooling. These used to be intensely prepared and involved teachers, children, parents and the whole community. During this period, there was always a participatory form of learning that was fun and interesting. This form of documentation can further be archived for later reference, and could even form part of children’s library collections.

This implies that teachers in Lagos state have to come to terms with the fact that quality assessment in early childhood education and care has been

reduced to a formal procedure of integrating young children into school culture, which to them is a global trend in modern society. Formal education for children is expedient because it provides an ease of accountability and the reporting systems that recent quality assurance measures require.

As mentioned in the preceding chapter, the economic situation in the country, which attaches great importance to paper qualifications, is also a major factor. The distinguishing factors between younger and older teachers' views seems to be the important influence on children's training packages. While the older teachers felt that the sudden formality of child care and learning seems rigid and demanding on children's cognitive skills such that the cherished societal values are endangered, the younger teachers are concerned with learning values that are relevant to the contemporary era, somewhat different from how they were brought up. A younger teacher stated; we all want the children to be better off than us, for instance, the use of phonics is really aiding their reading, which we did not enjoy during our time".

### **5.7. Theme 6: Teachers' construction of professionalism in ECCE**

ECCE teachers' pedagogical practices in Lagos state are products of professional training, personality, socio-cultural values and global influences. The influence of early childhood teacher education in the pedagogical practices of teachers has been extensively researched by many scholars in different contexts: Early et al. (2007) in the USA; Zhu and Zhang (2008) and Hu and Szente (2009) in China, Mbugua (2009) in Kenya; Odinko et al. (2009); Harwood Harwood et al. (2013) in Nigeria, Canada and South Africa, Li (2004) in Hong-Kong. Their writings crystallised contextual issues in understanding

theory and practice; the nature of relating teachers' socio-cultural contexts to professional development; and the extent to which teachers make use of local values in school systems. In view of the weight of relevant literature on Western ideologies on teaching and professionalism in ECCE (Payler and Locke, 2013, Chalke, 2013, Simpson, 2010, Adams, 2008, Osgood, 2006:2009;2010, Siraj-Blatchford, 1993), professionalism in the Nigerian ECCE parlance remains relatively unexplored.

Fundamentally, a case has been made for professional education in the Nigerian National Policy on Education. According to the National Policy on Education, 6<sup>th</sup> edition (NERDC, 2013): "in recognition of the pivotal role of quality teachers in the provision of quality education at all levels ... the minimum qualification for entry into the teaching profession shall be the Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) and that professional qualified and registered teachers shall be allowed to practice at all levels". Likewise, According to Quality Assurance Guidelines (UBEC, 2012), an effective teacher is "a mentor, a role model, guide and facilitator and he/she is exemplary, committed and loves his/her job. He/she plans, organises and directs the teaching-learning process. He/she always acts according to professional ethics, knows and observes the teachers' code of conduct".

However, the level of commitment given to the field of ECCE suggests that its professionalism is open to debate. This might be connected with the emotional and traditional approach in which the field is submerged. For instance, ECCE teachers, who are often female, perceive their roles as carers and educators, which are both germane to quality assessment. Labimi, an older teacher,

attested: *“I do both care and teaching every day”*. She added: *“Sometime ago in this country, it was a thing of pride to be a teacher because the society appreciated our efforts. This has become the thing of history. This country has so much downgraded teachers as if they don’t exist. Our children do not want to take up teaching appointments in this generation- teaching is only a last option now”*. Generally, teachers felt that the teaching profession and specifically ECCE has not received deserved attention.

Also, the greater emphasis that has been laid on the learning aspects by quality assessment tools suggests that the care aspect has been perceived as what Taggart (2011) referred to as taken-for-granted skills in defining ECCE professionalism. In the Taggart’s view, early childhood education and care (ECEC) should be conceptualised as a ‘caring profession’ like others such as nursing or social work, defined by a moral purpose, while Moyles (2001) argues that the emotional side of ECCE teachers’ professionalism sounds rather controversial. ECCE teachers understand their profession to include intense emotional work that demands inner-directed values, which many of the theoretical aspects of teacher training has ignored, including the recent Quality Assurance Instrument. When I asked a group of teachers about what they think is appropriate for pre-school teacher training, here is an excerpt from the discourse:

**Anne (Older teacher):** *“...I attended the defunct Grade II teacher training college, Grade II Teaching Certificate was in vogue then, but it was loaded with so much details about what teaching and caring of children entail. Today, many of our young graduates from university and colleges of education behave as if they have never passed through the faculty of Education in the university”*

**Dupe (younger teacher):** “... No good government plays with the educational system of its nation, but our government plays with everything. Any government that throws its education to the hands of the private sector is bound to experience what we are experiencing today. They have turned upside our value for education all in the name of profit. They are the ones dictating what is supposed to be. They are more often concerned about the profits and not the learners. They would hire people who do not know anything about education let alone child care and learning.”

This implies that assessing teacher quality cannot be separated from what the society deems fit for acceptable childrearing practices, which are often not subjected to theoretical knowledge obtained from any certified programme but are embedded in the culture. For instance, there is the constant reference to aptitude and attitude of teachers in children’s care and learning. Thus, many of the older teachers were of the opinion that appropriate teaching methods in ECCE settings of Lagos state remain within the traditional system of knowledge transfer. Authority is given to teachers to direct the course of instruction and learning.

Teaching according to many of the participants is a profession which requires competence in specialised knowledge through academic training and a commitment to professional ethics. Professionalism in early childhood is a controversial issue; a subject of political and academic debates (Balduzzi, 2011, Osgood, 2010, Brock, 2014b) especially at a time when the differentiation between education and care seems confusing and vague. Osgood (ibid) asserts that the alternative exploration of the professionalism is in its socio-cultural construction, in which identities are formed through narratives and acute awareness of “self” in the profession. Professional ethics involve how the

influence of teachers' vocational training has influenced many of the decisions they take in the classroom, including their performance standards and requirements as laid down in teacher education programmes of the colleges of education and universities. The marking of registers, preparation of lesson notes and teaching from known to unknown are vital aspects of teachers' professional ethics. Teachers admitted that their professionalism, whilst also involving certification, is made manifest through the manner in which they provide "care" and "education" for children, the combination of these tasks make them specialists in their own right. Here are some of the extracts to support educational certification as a necessary yardstick in defining professionalism in early childhood education:

*"Trained teacher will always remain a professional. One cannot just put anybody to teach children" (Mide).*

*"I went through the defunct Grade II teaching certificate course. I got more interested in teaching because it was loaded with knowledge about child's care and development".*

*"In Nigeria, holding a National Certificate in education certificate plays a significant role. To be candid, nursery teachers need to be trained and nursery education is a specialisation in its own right. People are just going into what they are not supposed to go into because of unemployment" (Fuluya).*

*"It is important that teachers obtain teaching qualifications. Those who have qualifications present their lesson notes and teach well than those without qualifications. The minimum standard is NCE even at the National level. Most times I do find that many of the qualified teachers have rough edges to smoothen out. No matter how interested you are, if you do not have the basic training to achieve, you may teach the children but there are some things that we call language register and teaching ethics- they will be absent because what you do not have, you cannot give it. Yes, there are people who take interest in teaching later on, but it is always advisable that they go for training- like PGDE. I read education, you cannot tell me to go and give somebody injection no matter how passionate I am in*

*saving lives. I cannot do it because that is not my calling” (Ibiyemi).*

*“In Nigeria today, if you want to be accommodated in any formal organisation, the first thing that will speak for you is your certificate. If you do not have certificate, even if you have all the qualities for the job, you will not get it. That is the orientation of our present day Nigeria. Some of us started this teaching as an interest. Then later went to add certificate. First thing is your qualification” (Miye).*

*“Qualifications also matters. I started with Grade II then NCE. She has to be trained in the college of education or the faculty of education in the university. It is not just anybody that can just come and teach the children. We need professionals. There is a place for experience” (Nifesi).*

The older teachers believed that the present teacher education programme does not equip pre-service teachers with enough information on the “care” aspect of the profession. The older teachers see the younger ones as being so absorbed in the formality of children’s education that they do not take cognisance of the vital aspect of being professional: the provision of care and learning. During a classroom observation session, most of the younger teachers were very keen about how much a child has to learn. There was the case of a teacher who was rushing the class lessons on number work for the pupils, an older teacher had to correct her to go over the last lesson before moving to the next lesson. When I asked her about it, she said the new teachers are so interested in meeting up with curriculum and the scheme of work because they are not specialist in nursery education. I was able to reflect on my role as ECCE teacher educator. I noticed that most of the pre-service teachers do not want to undertake their teaching practices in the ECCE sections of their posted schools because they are not sure of their knowledge in the care of little ones in the nursery schools.



I witnessed a scene where a younger teacher felt incapable of continuing with the children in her class because a pupil vomited on her. She had to be encouraged by an older teacher. Proper socialisation of young teachers coming into the profession through induction, training and re-training, and mentoring programmes, is thus an important aspect of quality assessment. Eleni, the older teacher, stated:

*“...I always say to people, your qualification is just a gate pass, it is when you begin to practice- when you go into the classroom that is when your training starts. All those things and theories that your lecturer told you back in the University, you will begin to see them happening and then you will begin to find out for yourself how to really deal with them. So, there is one thing to have a paper qualification, there is another thing to have training and the training is a continuous thing- never ending. That is what makes you professional”.*

The implication is that quality education for children is built on support systems for teachers in their attempt to define their identity as a member of a profession, organisation and a community, where relationships with children, parents and colleagues play significant roles (Balduzzi, 2011). It might be necessary to look into the support systems needed for ECCE teachers.

Another vital aspect of professionalism that teachers talked about extensively is the notion of “self” with its aptitude and attitude in the care and education of children. While teachers admitted the importance of certification in constructing professionalism in ECCE, they did it with slight contempt. The implication is that a child’s care and education requires not just knowledge but skills that are innate. Ojo, a teacher in a public school, described the influence of personality on professionalism thus: *“certification becomes important if you are ready to*

*apply what you have learnt” (Ojo); another stated, “acquiring a certificate is necessary but it will only show what you have gone through and not the “stuff” you are made- that is, what you can do” (Anyafulu).*

According to many of the teachers, if there is going to be any quality education in respect of teaching, there is the need to look into what it takes to be a specialised teacher in ECCE of today. The most frequent words used are “passion and interest”. These are the intrinsic qualities in professionalism that involve care and education of children. They believed these are closely associated with traditional societal values in which Nigerian child rearing practices were based - communal responsibility. They call it a “mother role” for the female teacher and “father role” for the male teacher, something similar to acting in loco parentis capacity for school children. This impacts the form of relationship that takes place within the classroom which cannot be measured with any metrics. Adelaide expressed this attribute in her words:

*“The passion is the number one thing. Dedication to work without looking at the remunerations as such. I love children. When I was growing, I love children very well. I really cherish them. The only thing that I believe was the best in this world is a child. If someone should give birth in the neighbourhood, I was always there to give a helping hand. But never thought of ending up as a teacher. How I met myself in teaching I cannot explain. Let me just say destiny ordained it. I really loved this job. I have got my masters but still want to remain a nursery teacher” (Adelaide).*

In a similar interview conducted with Fuluya, she agreed:

*“The aptitude and passion for the job have always been motivating me; my “take home” (Salary) has never been able to take me half the way home. ... I also think we should start to consider the aspect of passion for this job. Such people with passion can then be trained” (Fuluya).*

Also, two younger teachers stated:

*Teaching children requires endurance and passion. One must have passion for the job. Through patience and endurance. I do not need to rush them” (Janet).*

*“I came into teaching because of the love I have for children. I feel children should be comfortable. I started with the baby class. I trained them how to use the potty. You have to be their friends, come down to their levels, do not shun them” (Nifesimi)*

## **5.8. Chapter summary and conclusion**

This chapter has presented the analysis of teachers’ narratives on quality education for children in Lagos state. It highlights the major constructions from these narratives by drawing on the outstanding generational differences in teachers’ belief about quality education and how it should be assessed.

The major highlight of the older generation of teachers is the communal approach to children’s care and education as embedded in the socio-cultural values of the Nigerian society, which they believed should inform learning contents, teacher-child relationships, pedagogical instruction and their professional identity. The findings revealed that the younger generation of teachers’ beliefs about quality lean towards contemporary values of addressing a child’s potentials as embedded in an individualist approach. In all, there seems to be no or an inconsistent framework upon which the cognitive, social and cultural learning of children is based in Lagos state coupled with the prevalence of private ownership. Private ownership encourages variability of quality measures and practices that seem to clash with cherished cultural values as expressed by the older teachers.

## **Chapter Six: Policymakers' meaning making about quality assessment**

### **6.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings from interviews with staff at three policy units in Lagos state- NERDC, Office of Quality Assurance and Curriculum services - and answer the second research question (see Chapter Three). As discussed in the policy analysis section, ECCE policy units in Lagos state are expected to oversee the formulation and implementation of policy statements and quality measures in schools, including early childhood settings. The basic tenets of the National Policy on Education (See Appendix) seem to be pertinent to the regulatory frameworks and quality measures that guide school inspection and evaluation.

I decide to reflect the discussions of two categories of “experts” in their own rights. The first set of experts is the policymakers, who are directly involved in policy measure formulation and review at state and federal levels and are capable of offering professional judgements on educational matters. The second set is the inspectors, many of whom have passed through the educational system and had inspected the system over a number of years. This set of experts, who claimed to know the “ins” and “outs” of the workings of educational inspection, are not necessarily specialists in ECCE and have to report to political office holders. Out of the six respondents, two were policymakers and four were inspectors.

A salient feature of the organisation of ECCE policy units in Lagos is its fragmented nature of operation and location. The office buildings are located in

different parts of the state. Also, there seems to be lack of synergy and cooperation between departments and ministries handling ECCE policy documents. During a discussion session with some inspectors and policymakers, it became clear that the office in charge of curriculum development did not seem to know much about the policy development processes. I had to visit four differently located offices that seem not be fully aware of what the supposedly “sister” office is doing. This does not, however, undermine the credibility of the whole process of policy formulation and implementation. Rather, I would strongly concur with findings from early years research in the Global South (Kiersey, 2009; Penn, 2005; Moss, 2005) that such disconnection is a reflection of the controversial nature of government intervention in ECCE policy and provision.

Although regulatory frameworks have become a vital aspect of quality assessment, they are largely not enforced in the Nigerian ECCE settings as in other sub-sectors of education. As pointed out in Chapter Four, many of the teacher participants reported no or little awareness of regulatory publications in schools. In developed countries, the role of policy reforms in early childhood assessment has been extensively researched (Penn, 2006; 2009; Prout, 2005; Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2007; Ang, 2010; Kiersey, 2012). For instance, Penn (2006) shows that policy making is a not a straightforward approach but rather a multidimensional process that involves experts’ choices of resources and matching ideologies. Although this analysis does not lend itself to specifics of the policy development processes, they do however feature in it, and it is my aim to delineate policymakers’ stances on the position of policy in early childhood provision, while also highlighting the intention of ECCE policy

statements. This study therefore presents the shared understandings among policymakers and inspectors on what informs policy measures and its intentions.

Three key themes were generated from these stakeholders' analyses. The first theme presents policymakers' and inspectors' understanding of ECCE policy measures and their implications on quality assessment as concerned with universality versus specificity of provision. The basic highlight of this section is the aims of ECCE policy measures as they relate to the nature of provision of ECCE services within the influence of the local and global contexts. The second theme discusses policymakers' beliefs about social justice and equality in the provision of early childhood care and education. The third theme presents policymakers' construction of quality care and learning in ECCE, highlighting the aim of education and care within the socio-cultural context of Lagos state. The chapter concludes with a summary.

## **6.2. Theme 1: Policymakers and the universality and specificity of ECCE provision**

As discussed in Chapter Four, ECCE policy measures in Nigeria reflect consideration for protocols emanating from the international community, which seem to target the upgrading of child care and learning to globally acceptable standards. In Nigeria, the recent National Policy on Education (NERDC, 2013) acknowledges the position of the country in responding to the mandate and meeting international deadlines. It is important to note that this policy projects a subset of a global agenda to ensure a universal experience for children. Thus,

policymakers and inspectors seem to make meaning of policy measures in relation to the position of the educational sector in the global picture.

A visit to the Office of Quality Assurance revealed that the quality assessment instrument which includes early year settings is an offshoot of Ofsted in the UK. Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills that inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people, and services providing education and skills for learners of all ages ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)). I presume this is adapted from this particular country because of the colonial affiliation and international assistance that the state gets from it. For instance, the document adopts a school ranking system that is similar to Ofsted (DfES, 2004); rank ranges from outstanding, good, fair, poor and very poor. It also highlights the same milestones that are expected from teachers and learners. This suggests that the necessity to ascribe objective judgement to evaluation in order to produce result-focused yardsticks is at the core of government's policy measures. While assessment based on objectivity at the ECCE level has been criticized (Nutbrown, 2012; Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999; Penn, 1996; 2007), an assemblage of statistical data has proven to be useful for funding and planning purposes in Nigeria. At face value, it will also help to produce palliative measures in meeting international mandate.

It may be necessary to investigate whether an educational template from another context can fit into the Nigerian educational structure for children's care and learning. Undoubtedly, how such an adopted ranking system will bring about an informed decision in children's services remains a puzzle given the predominant private-sector led ECCE provision (Harma, 2011). While the

Ofsted ranking system can be said to lead to parental choices and government spending options<sup>16</sup>, Nigerian Quality Assurance measures have only little impact in this regard. For instance, parents have continued to make choices based on affordability and other factors, and not particularly on school ranking. It may create further social stratification of children's care and learning. This is not to say that ranking in itself is not a good quality assessment exercise as it lays pressure on providers to ensure appropriate safeguarding and development of children. However, I suggest quality within this framework can best be described more as a "sentiment of assurance" than a social reality. This is because policymakers and inspectors do not seem to give due consideration to what goes on in the minds of teachers and caregivers who are expected to implement these measures.

This push for international recognition and accountability behoves the government to regulate and organise nursery schools in the best interests of children, and ultimately secure the government's standing in the international community. For instance, Lagos state's aim, as one of the beneficiaries of DFID-ESSPIN in Nigeria, is *"to develop effective planning, financing and delivery systems that will improve the quality of schools, teaching and learning"*<sup>17</sup>. An inspector affirmed that *"parents or teachers cannot dictate, policy should dictate what happens in the classroom"*. In this view, government publications become a tool of controlling human resources within the school

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.esspin.org/about-esspin>



system. However, the policymakers were not able to talk on specific aspects of the measure that have been adequately applied to early years' provision.

Whenever I asked the policymakers and inspectors about what informs and shapes ECCE policy in Nigeria, it took time for them to respond. However, the trends of responses point towards the influence of protocols from the global community. International mandates to which Nigeria is a signatory include EFA and MDGs; both emphasize the access, equity and quality of ECCE. Gbangba, a policymaker, described policy measures with these statements thus:

*"...uhn (a long pause)...You see, education development in any country cannot be done in isolation. EFA and MDG goals have implications in reforming education in Nigeria. These goals gave birth to some of the educational programmes we are now running. For example, many countries in the world are now running basic education programmes. This does not just come out of the blue..."*

He continued:

*"The international conventions emphasize access to basic education including ECCE. The essence of this is to catch them young. Putting government on their toes to formalise and liberalise education for children. ...We do not have to commercialise education especially at the basic level. Advocacy is vital in this regard. ...In the area of access, government have enacted a law that prohibits any child from dropping out of school before the 9 year basic education level. It is now a criminal offence to drop out of school. There are now tuition-free schools for children".*

Thus, many of the policymakers made meaning of quality assessment measures in the light of what is obtainable in the international scene. In explaining the influence of the international community on the recent Quality Assurance framework in Lagos state, I would like to quote Sean's excerpt, Sean, a policymaker, stated:

*“...At the moment, the Office of Quality Assurance in Lagos state is a newly created agency and we are very much like Ofsted in the UK. We are solely in charge of all the private schools. We work with schools below tertiary institutions; we do registration of schools for nursery/primary, secondary and vocational schools. We quality assure them, which is what was not happening before. We also quality assure the public Nursery and Primary schools now. In the last seven month, we have been able to review policy that supports us to quality assure schools. We have come up with an evaluation schedule- like an instrument we use for all schools to be able to understand us; what our needs are, what they need to meet in different schools, what our expectations will be, so that everyone is crystal clear of what we are looking for when it comes to early years education. We have also been able to sensitize schools with these expectations. Basically, this evaluation schedule is very similar to the last evaluation schedule in the UK” (Sean).*

She continued:

*“Nigeria is not an island when it comes to the organisation of educational programmes. We are running Universal Basic Education (UBE) programmes in the country. These programmes include tuition-free ECCE services. We also have our international partners like UNICEF and UNESCO. Specifically, in Lagos State, we have the technical support from DFID in the UK. DFID introduced an initiative in Nigeria called ESSPIN, ESSPIN helps to develop handbook on Education Quality Assurance, build capacity of old inspectors to be able to implement the Q/A approach in Nigeria. Lagos state is one of the beneficiaries of ESSPIN support” (Sean).*

The excerpts above suggest the demands of international protocols and the role of the government and international community in ensuring quality assessment in schools. The new phase of public nursery provision in Lagos state demands new ways of thinking through access and quality standards and regulations, in a way that matches the contemporary approach. This has led to the restructuring of the inspectorate section of the Ministry of Education (MoE) to the Office of Quality Assurance.

Necessary international assistance has been given to this newly created office to be able to reshape and professionalise inspection for holistic evaluation procedures. This is an improvement over inspection procedure that characterised the post-colonial era. The main reason for the professionalization is “to avoid dragging of feet and at least catching up with other nations like USA, Australia, Thailand, China etc. by 2020” (FME, 2010: 60). One significant influence is the production of a training manual and a handbook for inspectors and supervisors to be used for Quality assurance in schools. Wole, an inspector, described the new approach thus:

*“It is the total evaluation of schools. In other words, every aspect of the school is evaluated. What makes it beautiful is that it is holistic in nature. It involves external and internal evaluators. Unlike when we had the inspectorate, it was only the inspectors that were doing the evaluation and inspection. Now, every stakeholder is involved. The school would have evaluated themselves before we do our evaluation. We just move in to do ours in order to discover the area of similarities and differences. The stakeholders like teachers, learners, community leaders, friends of the school. It is called evidence based. It is carried out through ODD meaning evidence through observations, discussion and documentation. For instance, we look at the conduct of morning assembly, play time behaviour, teaching and learning...” (Wole)*

It appears that the government’s interest in quality assessment of ECCE can only be understood within the regulatory frameworks that are linked with contemporary progressive assessment techniques. Policymakers’ and inspectors’ major concern is how Nigeria and specifically Lagos state should position herself to measure up to a standard that can be considered as “universally acceptable” for children care, learning and development. The

common phrases used among them include “*meeting international standards*”, “*measuring up to global best practices*” and “*achieving international protocols*”.

These phrases denote that whatever efforts that have been put into the organisation and regulation of nursery education are steps towards receiving proper global recognition (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010). This presents ambiguities in understanding the motives behind adults’ public intervention in children’s services (Lee, 1999). In applying Lee’s notion of distribution of ambiguities within policy frameworks and childhood, the Nigerian ECCE policy development process presents the distribution of the “legitimacy” and “appropriation” of these seemingly “new” measures of assessing the universality and specificity of ECCE provision. For instance, all the six respondents agreed that the new quality assurance mechanisms have been participatory, research driven and culturally sensitive. Although there is no formal documentation of the research-based recommendation for the quality measures, it does not rule out the legitimacy of the document. Jude, a policymaker, while describing policy development process stated:

*“We have a participatory policy development. Well, as far as the preschool level is concerned, decisions are often made between the Ministry of Education, UNICEF and NERDC. However, with the scope being expanded within this new quality framework, it is going to be more participatory since nursery education has been formalised in the public schools. We need to involve the critical stakeholders henceforth, the National Association of Proprietors of Private Schools (NAPPS) must be represented and others...Then our focus of research will be re-directed to key areas”*

This view was echoed by Sean in these words:

*“It has been participatory. We invited all the stakeholders. We had National Union of Teachers (NUT), in all we had Association leaders of 16 different associations represented”.*

As stated earlier, this study does not delve into policy development issues. However, it might be necessary to investigate stakeholders' level of participation in policy making. Moreover, since the ECCE policy framework on quality assurance is a relatively new idea, it has not been explored in the literature. However, this study utilises reports that have been generated based on this quality assurance mechanism.

The basic motivation for the appropriation of ECCE policy measures seems to rely heavily on the active involvement of IDP's technical and financial support. This assures that ECCE services are included on school evaluation schemes and a uniform evaluation schedule is used for all schools both public and private. This appears to put pressure on state governments to ensure that the expectations of the international partners are met. Little wonder why recurring statements such as *“Lagos state is taking the lead...”* *“We are working tirelessly with the International Development Partners to ensure that Lagos state...”* and *“Lagos state is the centre of excellence and we must ensure that we meet up...”* featured frequently during the interviews. Probably, this pressure is likely to produce a double-edged effect, positive and negative in nature. The positive side is the “forced” appropriation of children's services in the best interests of the society at large. The negative is the neglect of the local socio-cultural outlook. Thus, Lagos state's specific quality measures, which were made in conjunction with the technical assistance from IDPs, will need to provide sufficient contextual ground upon which these policies will work in the best

interest of parents and children. Therefore, it may be necessary to investigate the extent of success rates of these IDPs in their activities.

The evaluation schedule which starts with the registration of schools for approval and inspection once in three years, requires prior notification and internal evaluation by the school. There seem to be variations in the inspection approach to the public and private sector. While there are a number of standards expected to be met in the Quality Assurance instrument, it is more enforced in private schools than public schools owned by the maker of these standards. All the private schools visited by me affirmed that they had been visited, while the public schools were preparing for the visit. In Brownie nursery and primary school, a government-owned school, my observational study coincided with their preparation. There was an extensive programme of preparation for the inspectorate team. The staff were trying to put their books right and put on a “show” by preparing instructional materials for the children.

The concentration of quality assurance visits to private schools indicates that government could only appropriate and internalise quality standards in ECCE by further encouraging neo-liberal ideas of school provision through private enterprise. This tends to make the level of governmental intervention unclear.

Sean, a policy maker, stated;

*“Quality Assurance Agency is solely in charge of all the private schools. We do registration of schools and we quality assure them. ...Before this time, private schools were not regulated. Individuals were opening schools because people are just conscious of the money they can make. Now that we are there, it is making them to be on their toes. We need to give the best of education to our children” (Sean).*

My observation is that given the yardstick for achieving a good and outstanding school ranking system and the present state of government-owned schools, it may be necessary to excuse the government schools from the ranking. This is because some of these schools are not adequately staffed and lack basic infrastructure and amenities. It suggests that the ranking system is meant for private schools. An inspector admitted that the private schools are working hard to abide by the “rules” of quality assurance. She continued:

*“Private schools are really trying, if you get to some of these schools, they provide all these things we have listed down. The public schools are coming up too. However, in the area of infrastructure, we may need to double up our efforts. The children need more facilities in public schools. The classroom and environment need to be cosier for them to enjoy school. With the efforts of our IDPs, Lagos state government is trying to put all these in place”.*

Sean, a policymaker, while describing the role of the private sector admitted:

*“There is no doubt that the private sector has helped Nigerian education sector when Nigeria went through problems. We have had hiccups in our educational sector and private sector has really supported us in closing the gaps. But at the same time, what my own office is preaching is that even though you are supporting us, you have to do it well. Give the children the right standard of education. Private schools should give age appropriate learning content to the children. Some of them are out there to make money and name. There are so many gaps will still have to fill in terms of the teachers they employ. Their reaction has been positive and they are complying” (Sean)*

I was privileged to attend an informal meeting with the proprietors of schools. The most featured complaint is the expensive yearly subscription rates for operating nursery and primary schools they are made to pay in order to continue operation. Also, during one of the interviews, there were constant sightings of proprietors coming to pay one due or the other. The proprietors on the other hand are free to charge parents for school fees once the yearly

subscriptions have been paid. This further creates inequality in the society. However, policymakers agreed that the private sector will continue to play a significant role in the provision of early childhood services in the country, especially for age range 0-4 years. However, policymakers maintained that any unregulated activities of the private sector will place the care and education of children at the mercy of entrepreneurs who are mostly non-professional. Policymakers were of the view that an attempt to regulate the activities of private owners necessitated the quality assurance instrument. This view was supported by Jude's comment on curriculum development. He stated:

*"There has been a pressure from the private schools to develop a curriculum because they have been into this business for a long time. But the sudden awakening of the government to ECCE programmes also warrants that similar thing must be done. When government enact a one-year compulsory pre-school education, we have the mandate to develop the corresponding curriculum for the programme".*

He continued:

*"...In order to formalise education at this level, we have developed the curriculum, teachers' guide and other materials that will support ECCE in Nigeria. This curriculum is expected to be used across all public and private pre-schools in Nigeria. We also went into aggressive book development to drive the curriculum".*

Moreover, the quality standards set for ECCE seem to address general assessment areas and policymakers seem to brush over questions that relate to the specifics of these standards but rather talked about the role of the school in ensuring that the standards are met. Also, the same quality standards apply to both ECCE and primary schools without much consideration of the "care sentiment" that goes along with ECCE.



The primary aim of formalising and liberalising ECCE is to achieve the government's aspirations of boosting formal school settings. For instance, inspectors were of the opinion that the government's commitment through linkage schools is a step in the right direction towards achieving higher enrolment figures in other classes, which in turn will yield economic and social development in the long run. Jude stated:

*“The main aim of linkage schools, I mean the ECCE services, is to catch them (children) young. This has put government on their toes to ensure that the next generation of learners are prepared prior to primary schooling. They will then act as “feeders” to primary school enrolment figures”*

### **6.3. Theme 2: Social justice and equity in the provision of quality ECCE**

One of the central notions of international protocols such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, EFA and MDGs of many developing countries hinges on achieving social justice and equity, especially for disadvantaged children (Dakar Framework, 2000; UNESCO, 2000). While the issue of who and what really constitute disadvantaged children and situations has been contested in the literature (Heckman 2006, 2007; Prout, 2005; Penn, 2011), educational attainment has been perceived as one of the means of bridging the gap created through various structural inequalities. In achieving this, policymakers emphasized the role of government in making sure that children have access to pre-school education. I therefore find it necessary to examine any link between this notion of social justice and its implication on quality assessment of children care and learning.

A notable aspect of liberalising ECCE provision in Lagos state revolves around a social justice view of universal access to pre-school experiences. The implication of universal access to pre-school education calls for the government's more active role in providing a uniform standard of measuring learning achievements and encouraging both community and private participation. It looks as if justification for a quality assessment begins with an equality of learning experiences for children in ECCE settings. Thus, quality assessment and inspection of nursery schools are necessary to ensure that children are treated to the same learning contents and status within the school environment. Audrey, an inspector, stated:

*“Universal access is beneficial; indigent pupils that wouldn't have had access to education are now well known for excellent academic performance. They have attained scholarships on merit. Due to the insurgency in the country, everybody wants to come to Lagos state. Government must accommodate them because we are pursuing education for all. Government supplies textbooks to all schools” (Audrey).*

Gbangba, a policymaker, stated that the whole idea of tuition-free education at this level is to encourage parents to enrol their children in school so that they can start learning. Also, an inspector was of the opinion that linkage schools have created opportunities to regain public confidence in government-owned schools at the basic level and placed every child at a common start for a lifelong learning. Gbangba stated:

*“In the area of access, government have enacted a law that prohibits any child from dropping out of schools before the 9 year basic education level. It is now a criminal offence to drop out of school. There are now tuition-free schools for children. We want to reduce child abuse, hawking and social vices to the minimum”.*

Jude, an inspector, also stated:

*“...Well, the notion of access is a reflection of the state of our economy and orientation...where parents are concerned is that they want to patronise education that appeals to their sense of what meets up with the contemporary time. That is why they would rather go to private schools which charge exorbitant fees than government schools. So, many people have lost interest in public education as the best option. ...Lagos state government is really waking up and trying to bridge the gap. At least, by establishing linkage schools, although the quality may still be questionable to many parents, which is tuition free and affordable. The IDPs are also working on these quality measures to ensure that local communities have access to early childhood education and care. ...The situation is not bad as it used to be.”*

Sean’s contribution to the issue of achieving social justice and equity in ECCE was stated thus:

*“Advocacy is a step in the right direction in order to achieve desired result in ECCE. There are some cultural inhibitions that will always work against this aim. For instance, if the schools are provided but parents are not bringing their wards. Like the case we have in the northern region. ...Parents should intervene. There is nowhere in the world where education is free. Parents will still have to provide books, food and writing materials.”*

However, I find it difficult to associate social justice with the recent National Policy on Education’s (NERDC, 2013) stance on government’s strict ownership of the institutionalised system of education, which only caters for children aged 5-6 years. Specifically, the National Policy on Education (NERDC, 2013) specifies that “Early Child Care and Development Education is segmented into ages 0-4 years, situated in day care or crèche, fully in the hands of the private sector and social development services, whilst ages 5-6 are within the formal education sector”. Possibly, the reason for this might be the entrepreneurial nature of provision and low funding allocation to ECD in many developing

countries (Penn, 2011). Odinko et al. (2009) allude to the fact that the Nigerian government's perception of ECCE provision seems to rely on private efforts rather than economic rationale in the provision of care and education for children within 0-4 years range. This suggests why some state government's willingness to appropriate ECCE to their political manifestoes is problematic.

Another defining measure of social justice is the formulation of an integrated early childhood and care programme which emphasizes a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach to children's care and development. The Federal government of Nigeria in a bid to ensure the implementation of this approach formulated a policy called "National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD)" (NERDC, 2007). As discussed in the policy analysis section, integration in this case is supposed to combine efforts from various agencies to ensure that children have access to a holistic treatment within the school system (Agusiobo, 2007). According to the document, the main purpose is to "expand, universalise and integrate the efforts of various sectors for effective intervention and coordination of programmes and the optimal development of children from birth to five years of age"(NERDC, 2007).

Observation of the administration and organisation of Lagos state ECCE policy units revealed minimal integration processes among the ministries as encapsulated in National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Development in Nigeria (NERDC, 2007). The programme, which is meant to be a multi-sectoral pursuit, connecting interventions in health, nutrition, care, stimulation, protection and participation of the child (NERDC, 2007), does not seem to be fully in operation. Early childhood care and education is handled by the Ministry

of Education under different offices, as mentioned earlier. Kiersey (2012) maintains that the fragmented nature of important early childhood policy units is counterproductive to the integration of care and education. Therefore, integration of care and education can be said to be more rhetoric than reality; it is more a paper policy than in real world practice.

The contestation of the implementation of integrated services (Penn, 2004) was confirmed during the interviews with the policymakers. Policymakers were not able to say much about what other Ministries and sectors are doing in order to ensure that children receive required care. While the policymakers and inspectors applauded their efforts in maintaining “quality” and “equity” in ECCE, they seemed not to be aware of what is going on in other Ministries. Integration at its present state is geared toward educational provision for children within the school setting. Its assemblage and coordination, within a location- the school system, becomes more problematic in a situation where government is only interested in the school-aged children (5-6 years) and the policy covers age 0 to 5 years. It suggests that the feasibility of achieving social justice will continue to lie within the discretion of private owners of schools.

However, the policymakers perceived integration as a definitive decision that involves a careful analysis of activities for each sector of the economy to get involved in child development. This rather arbitrary and haphazard process does not consider the feasibility of integration in privately-led early childhood services that mark the country. It will be rather difficult, if not impossible, to request that private entrepreneurs involve all the sectors of the economy in their private business of providing early childhood care and education for profit.

The financial cost of accessing integrated services (Penn et al., 2004) for children might further create the inequality that unregulated private sector activities may promote. On the other hand, it might be a way of ensuring Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) (Robertson et al., 2012) in children's care and education, which according to the authors "involve a cooperative institutional arrangement between public and private sector actor ..." It is however a bone of contention in a society like Nigeria.

My own view is that integration should come in the form of the interactive workings of various agencies in order for a child to have a holistic experience. Integration will also be seen in the local centres in terms of the ways these children access tangible benefits of an integrated system. For example, a child in a centre that is being attended to by a health worker will benefit from the health sector. If such child's rights have been breached, the Ministry of Justice should be there to take it up. The present situation in schools where children cannot access adequate medical, legal aids and social welfare, there can be said to be little or no integration and social justice in ECCE.

Policymakers affirmed that some of the integration measures have been incorporated into the quality standards. They often talked about requirements that include the availability of sick bays in schools, first-aid boxes, a fenced environment and nursery nurses. Many of the schools I visited have these in place but they are sometimes not properly used (as discussed in Chapter Four). The other option adduced by policymakers is the formulation of an integrated curriculum that includes all aspects of various agencies; however, private

providers may face constraints, including financial ones, in implementing such a curriculum.

The holistic view of achieving social justice and equity within the present institutional arrangements seems ambiguous and demands further deliberation on ways that it works or fails to work. For instance, the supposedly “holistic” approach does not take into consideration the totality of children’s experiences within and outside the school setting including, for example, parental education, and social welfare. It looks rather like a decontextualized idea about child rearing within a Nigerian context. It may be that National Government’s reaction to issues that undermine integration has rested on a discretionary policy of multi-sectoral approach promoted solely on political grounds.

As discussed in the Chapter Five, integration from teachers’ perspectives emphasises democratic activities involving everyone in the community. Their view is embedded in the socio-cultural values of the communal responsibility of Nigerian society to childrearing. It appears that “what works” may not necessarily be an imported idea but requires a reorientation of the present value system from the western ideas on childrearing. For instance, it may be difficult to achieve integration when an individual that is supposed to protect and care for children does not imbibe the culture of togetherness and communal training for children. Calder (2015) in ESSPIN Report on education and child protection states that, *“schools are identified clearly as places where children often encounter violence and abuse”*. The document further recommends the development of a Children’s Charter for different states, to be adapted at school level. Advocacy of grass roots level integration is a step in

the right direction in a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria. The whole idea of integration will only hold if those concerned are taken along from the beginning and made to realise the intended aims when the idea is being nurtured.

A good illustration might be one of my classroom observations. I discovered a nursery pupil had an open wound. I called the attention of the teacher to it and the child was taken to a first aid officer, who asked "Didn't your mother see this wound before bringing you to school this morning? The teacher replied "I think the most important thing is to cover up this wound to avoid further damage rather than apportioning blame". This raised a question: how will integration work if individuals are concerned about who is supposed to do what? Contemporary approaches to integration are not a novel idea to achieve holistic care and education for children. The principle of integration is ingrained into long-established traditional values of childrearing in Nigeria. However, my classroom observations revealed that it is becoming difficult to maximize such traditional values in the best interest of children care and education.

Thus, the subject of social justice/equity and its implications for quality assessment do not appear to be simple to decipher. It becomes more complicated to define in a situation where there are varied services ranging across the private, voluntary and public provision (Penn et al., 2004) and many policy documents and guidelines, which government perceives as the blueprint to quality care and learning for children. The authors aver that the word "integration" in early childhood care and education has a contextual connotation within the political, economic and social sphere to which it is being applied.



#### 6.4. Theme 3: Quality care and learning in ECCE

This section discusses policymakers' understandings of the aim of ECCE services in Lagos state. It also presents their meaning making about quality assessment within a socio-cultural framework of childrearing in Nigeria and specifically in Lagos state. Policymakers' meaning making is in congruence with the EFA declaration (Dakar Framework, 2000) which states that *"learning begins at birth. This calls for early childhood care and initial education"*. The increased interest in early childhood services for social and economic stability (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005; Penn, 2011) needs to be understood within the contextual clues that a multi-cultural society like Nigeria presents. Gbangba, a policymaker, admitted that the educational system needs to match up with learning achievements by stating:

*"In terms of standard, the standard of education for Nigerian children is high. When I was in primary school, did I do maths and phonics that children are being exposed to today? It shows we are moving towards international best practices. But in terms of quality, we need to strive hard to be on top. We need to improve on the quality of teachers, teaching materials and infrastructure"*.

In recent times, the aim of education has been perceived as a viable route to economic and social progress for children. Thus, emphasis has been on the development of practical skills and learning content that are relevant to labour market operations. According to Desmarais and Baker (2012) and deMarrais (1995), there is therefore a need for learning environments which advance the development of literacy and numeracy. For instance, Lingard (2010) and Rizvi and Lingard (2010) argue that the pre-eminence of literacy and numeracy in a national system of schooling reflects the influence of globalisation in the

reconstruction of the aim of education. This indicates that ECCE services are an important aspect of the educational system of any country.

Since children have been officially drafted into classroom learning environments, assessment of their learning has become a vital aspect of quality assessment. Policymakers' shared the idea that it is mandatory to produce an evaluation schedule and statistical reports about children's learning outcomes in order to showcase the quality dimensions in ECCE. This might be connected with the level of accountability and financial commitment that the implementation of the international mandate requires. Therefore, policymakers understood the intentions of ECCE policy to be driven by quality assurance mechanisms for improving academic standards across all levels of education in the state.

Government seems to be interested in financing the formal aspect of education for children while the care aspect has been reserved for private individuals. This "education" aspect seems to follow the modern perspective to assessing institutionalised training for children because of its objectivity, uniformity and certainty (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005). This discourse has been contested as a dominant influence in early childhood discourses, creating space for the postmodern notion of diversity and subjectivity in the assessment of education and care (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2007).

Consequently, there have been reports on school improvement since the intervention of DFID through ESSPIN programme<sup>18</sup>. For instance, a report on

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<sup>18</sup> ESSPIN Annual Report 2011-2012-Report Number: ESSPIN 058; ESSPIN Annual Report 2012-2013-Report Number: ESSPIN 065; 18th Quarterly Report Jan-Mar 2013; 20th Quarterly Report July-

quality assurance evaluation in Lagos state (2011-2012) depicts an improvement in the overall number of good schools from 17% in 2010 to 30% in 2011. Specifically, the report stipulates that:

“Quality assurance approach to evaluation of schools is designed to assess the quality of education focusing on outcomes for learners. It lays emphasis on impact of teaching on learning rather than on teaching itself. The concept requires teachers, school heads and managers to take responsibilities for the quality of education they offer to learners in their care. It analyses the ability of school leaders to drive improvement in their schools. All stakeholders now have a part to play in improving the quality of education in schools<sup>19</sup>”.

The excerpt above indicates that the essence of quality assurance has the tendency to shift responsibility to teachers by framing measures that are directed to teachers and private owners rather than children, thereby potentially blaming teachers for whatever goes wrong within the school system. Quality measures seem to be result-focused rather than child-centred. The distinctive need of children which revolves around care and attention has been put in the background. It seems not to lay emphasis on the peculiarities of Nigerian children’s needs but rather on the modification of teachers’ professional roles in the care and learning. For instance, policymakers reiterated the crucial roles of teachers- their competencies, abilities and certification. Jude stated, *“we are having problem in the quality assurance aspect because there are no qualified teachers in ECCE classes- when you do not have qualified teachers, how do you talk about quality assurance?”* Sean described teachers’ competencies thus:

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September 2013-Report Number: ESSPIN 066; ESSPIN Annual Report 2013-2014 (Incorporates July 2014 Quarterly Report data); ESSPIN Annual Report 2014-15: Building Lasting Change

<sup>19</sup> 2011 and 2012 State of Education Reports in Lagos State (Quality Assurance Perspective)

*“A competent teacher is the one who has got the teaching qualification, knowledgeable and have a passion for the job”*

Presumably, the Nigerian Government’s attempt to differentiate care from education, a novel ideal throughout the initial policy document that merges care and education, indicates that allegiance to the integration of care and education requires a socio-cultural perspective and may be perceived as a socio-cultural project. At present, integration can be perceived as a move toward the global trend of early childhood care and education to be dichotomised. While highlighting the purpose of the new reform in the National Policy on Education (NERDC, 2013), it states that: *“the impetus for these changes derive from the nation’s commitment to the implementation of such international protocols as the Education for All (EFA), the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)...”* Since the policymakers perceived that the main aim of pre-primary education is to prepare children for primary schooling, children are expected to be exposed to the basics of literacy and numeracy as part of their learning process. Alex stated:

*“When we talk of quality...it is important that children should learn how to communicate effectively and be introduced to learning skills that will improve their cognitive ability to carry out simple mathematical calculations”*

It is a global trend in child care and education that children are exposed to learning content prior to primary school. For instance, Hu and Szente (2009), in a study of quality early childhood education in China, observe that nursery education was found to focus on numeracy and literacy. Likewise, in the UK, Ofsted measures expect that children are learning content, thereby potentially compromising the pleasure of learning in childhood.

Formal education has been perceived as a tool to achieve the growth and development that the 21<sup>st</sup> century demands. Examining the policy document, it states:

“ ... strategy plans in education have engendered an expanded role for education as an investment for economic, social and political development; an aggregate tool of empowerment for the poor, and the socially marginalised groups; an effective means of developing the full capacities and potentials of human resources, as well as the development of competent work force through the acquisition of practical life skills relevant to the world of work as a veritable means of developing sound intelligent learning societies, fit and relevant to the 21st century” (NERDC, 2013).

Policymakers’ and inspectors’ responses to assessment of care and learning seem uneasy because of this dichotomous view about care and learning. Jude, an inspector, admitted that assessing children in the nursery section has not been given thorough attention like that given to primary schools. He expressed his opinion in this manner:

*“Children in the nursery section are still small, so we do not really put so much emphasis on their assessment. We just look at how safe the environment is, what they are learning and how certified their teachers are”*

As discussed in chapter four, nursery classes are still regarded as appendage to formal schooling because of the “care” environment they represent. However, it is surprising that the same quality assessment instrument (FME, 2010), which emphasizes achievement and standards in teaching and learning, applies to nursery and primary schools’ assessment. Specifically, Section 1 of the Quality Assurance Instrument (FME, 2010) outlines the evaluation areas to

include outcomes for learners, the quality of provision, and leadership and management.

Therefore, the theme that recurs repeatedly during the policymakers' discussions is the need to raise learning achievement in schools to a standard that is internationally recognised. As stated earlier, the major quality assurance policy instrument being used nationally was formulated in conjunction with technical support from international partners. Sean, a policymaker stated:

*“.. This Quality Assurance Mechanism is all about getting teaching and learning right. When it comes to teaching and learning, we are looking at triangulation; how children are being taught in schools, what the coverage of the lesson is (is it appropriately challenging to the level of the child?), how assessment is being done and how it feeds and informs well into teaching and learning. We are looking at the environment; at the moment we are making schools to mentor each other. We are looking at achievements and standards over three consecutive years especially in literacy and numeracy. We work on care, guidance and support for children due to the insurgent activity in the country through safety measure, guidance and counselling and provision of sick bays for the children. We also look out for the leadership and management system in the school” (Sean).*

In achieving the desired learning outcomes for children, policymakers and inspectors were of the opinion that quality assessment must be based on a national structure, which is the curriculum. Thus, quality assessment ensures that the scheme of work and the curriculum are strictly followed and implemented to the letter, in assessing teaching and learning processes. Specifically, teachers are expected to do what is deemed appropriate as stated in the curriculum, which involves teaching to the details. Alex, an inspector, admitted:

*“... We have to talk about the curriculum. The curriculum, which is the framework of what we are doing in education really matters for quality. Then, the regulatory policies are also important. We are aligning our teaching to what the practices are elsewhere. We are part of the global society. Nigeria has always been in the fore front of signing up for international protocols e.g. Rights of the child, EFA, MDG etc.*

He continued:

*“Policy is driven by quality assurance mechanism, that is, inspectorate division, seeing that the curriculum is implemented to the latter, assessing teaching and learning- putting teachers on their toes to do what is right.”*

Jude, a policymaker, stated:

*“Curriculum is a vital instrument of quality assurance. In order to meet up with international standards, we have put up a curriculum for all levels of education” (Jude).*

Ajegbe, an inspector, defined quality education in terms of the curriculum content:

*“...When it comes to quality education, we are talking of the teachers being competent enough, we are talking of what constitute the curriculum; how many teachers understand the curriculum content? Has the curriculum been broken down into scheme of work? Are lesson planning appropriate for the children? It is an inclusive education that caters for all children. The children have to understand what the learning objectives are and must be able to contextualise it; an education with a sense of purpose. Using good learning techniques, and linking teaching to future learning”.*

Policymakers admitted that as good as the international mandates are, there remain some fundamental issues that need to be taken into consideration. It is important to point out that policymakers are aware of the impact of socio-cultural peculiarities on policy formulation and implementation in the state. For instance, they talked extensively about the issues that concern them about language, religion, providers, maintenance and expansion. Makin, a

policy maker, stated that *“When we talk about policy in Nigeria, we need to understand the kind of environment that we call Nigeria. It is such an entity that has multicultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious societies”*. He continued:

*“I think the issue of universal access will take a very long in this part of the world. In a country where we have different tribes, diverse religions, cultures. There are elements that may not make it work or that will slow down the rates of success. When you go up North for instance, you will realise that the issue of girl education is still a challenge. Many of the girls’ parents do not even believe that a girl can even access education. Then inclusion and equity becomes a challenge. Some of them are already apprehensive, they don’t want to send their children to school and get them kidnapped. For instance, the chiboks girls, I know it would have been difficult to get them to be interested in education, now that they are interested, look at what they are facing. These are some of the things that will actually be making mockery of our commitment towards universality of our global commitment now.*

Jude also commented:

*“...religion is playing a major role in the education sector. Nothing concerns Britain or America with Islamic studies, but we have to include it because our brothers in the North will clamour for the inclusion of Qur’anic studies. In fact, religion is an important aspect of quality education for children in Nigeria. Any education without religion is like a cup of tea without sugar. Religion moderates and complements social norms. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.”*

Policymakers seemed to be contending with how much of cultural context an educational policy should accommodate in a multi-cultural society like Nigeria. According to the policymakers, curriculum development is a means of driving basic tenets of the national policy home to the level that take cognisance of the peculiarities of the society and the needs of the learners. Thus, the necessity for universal standards has to contend with the socio-cultural peculiarities of Lagos state. At present, policymakers and inspectors consider the influence of



cultural factors on quality instruments at varying levels. While the inspectors are more concerned about the details of the aim of quality mechanisms about learning, the policymakers maintained that ECCE policy document and publications have considered the socio-cultural peculiarities of the nation. For instance, Audrey, an inspector, echoed the intention of the measure thus:

*“We do not mind if a school is located in any peculiar place or affiliated with any religion. ...we are not after any of such thing... All we are concerned about is that as far as learning is taking place in an appropriate way, then quality is assured”.*

This was supported by Glory’s comment that goes thus:

*“... What we look basically for is improved learning. However, it is definitely reflecting the socio-cultural values of our society”.*

Meanwhile, Alex, a policymaker, stated:

*“The adoption of foreign curriculum is a crazy idea. They want to train children for export as against being useful in their fathers’ land. If these people (private providers) want to run an American curriculum, they can go and establish schools in America. That is not the type of education we want for our children. Nigerian culture is rich and can be adapted to any society that the child finds himself or herself. Children should be taught the norms and values of their immediate environment. The policy and curriculum development have reflected all of these societal values but it lies in the implementation”.*

However, Sean considered the adoption of a foreign curriculum as an additional knowledge to children’s experience but thought that it should not be considered as superior to the National Curriculum. She stated:

*“Foreign curriculum does not affect our culture. It should just be an addition to children’s experiences. Even though some schools adopt British curriculum, but they still use Nigerian examples. With that, they are actually making it to be relevant to the needs and context of the children. For instance, you might be talking about Vikings, bring it to the level of the children to understand Viking. Use examples of Nigerian warriors as well. If you are teaching the Victorian time, it has got to do with the UK, what of the “Obas” in Nigeria. Even if you use a week to*

*teach the Victorian time, the teacher can use the next week to teach traditional history of our Kings” (Sean).*

With regard to the socio-cultural peculiarities of Lagos state as a diverse society, quality education and care for children is assumed to follow a contemporary approach. While some policymakers admitted that the quality measures have taken care of the socio-cultural peculiarities in principle, others were more explicit on the areas that need to be worked upon. For instance, moral instruction used to be a vital aspect of learning in schools, which at a point was side-lined and excluded from the school curriculum. Knowing now that the society is full of all kinds of problems, they have reintroduced it in the form of civic education. Hence, it can be said that social and cultural values do have mediating impacts on policy and practice in early childhood services. However, the mediating influence has been minimal because of the technicality that is required in scientific knowledge (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005). Jude voiced out his concern emphatically thus:

*“...the act of disciplining a child is where we are having problems. When I was young, my neighbours or teachers would discipline me and my parents would thank them for doing so, but that is gradually facing out because of urbanisation and westernisation. For example, when I was in Australia with my children, I caned them for any act of indiscipline. That is our culture. They are Nigerians and must be trained in a way they will suit into the system”.*

*“Communal child upbringing is not a common phenomenon; everybody is now to himself because we have so many problems to contend with. What we are experiencing presently is political and economic; I believe it is ephemeral and it would soon fade away when people’s living conditions are improved”.*

Evidently, policymakers are faced with the reality that Nigerian socio-cultural values are important for quality early childhood education. The main concern is how the present demand and complexity of institutional arrangements forms learning for children, with its emphasis on “technical practices” (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005), often targeted at creating minds who can compete globally. This might inform the recent promulgation of language policy, which restricts the use of mother tongue in learning to the first four years of basic education, handled by the private sector (NERDC, 2013).

The National Policy on Education (NERDC, 2013) acknowledges that the country’s home-grown programmes are necessary for the successful implementation of the policy. One of such is the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). The document states that this “.... was informed by the need to improve and refocus education quality and service delivery for the accelerated attainment of NEEDS goals of social and economic transformation, wealth creation, poverty reduction, employment generation and value reorientation”.

Moreover, the requirement for quality of instruction at all levels of education was stipulated in the policy document thus: “...respect for the worth and dignity of the individual; faith in man’s ability to make rational decisions; moral and spiritual principles in inter-personal and human relations...” Ajegbe, an inspector, succinctly perceived quality education in Nigeria as an all-encompassing structure that builds on nested elements within the socio-cultural environment that the country offers. He stated:

*“Quality education impacts everywhere- home, governance and all areas of human endeavour. It starts from the home*

*where there is an unequalled parental involvement in the care and guidance of children. Then, teachers' quality is very important- in terms of their qualifications and natural aptitude for teaching; in terms of determination to succeed, desire and doggedness. Teachers need to be highly motivated because the curriculum in the hands of poorly motivated teachers can only produce disastrous results. Then, we have the outcome of schooling; this type of education will produce disciplined children. It is the kind of education that engenders productive capacity through positive use of technology”.*

Ajegbe's comment above upholds the interconnectedness of local and global dimensions to understanding the intervention of policy documents in children's care and education in Nigeria. Invariably, quality can be better understood within the purview of stakeholders' shared understandings of the intentions and impacts of public policy.

## **6.5. Chapter summary and conclusion**

This chapter has examined the major findings that came from policymakers' and inspectors' accounts of the intention and impact of public official documents on children's care, learning and development. It also discusses what informs the formulation of these documents and how they intend to address quality dimensions within the Nigerian socio-cultural framework. This chapter revealed that policymakers agreed that policy statements on ECCE are influenced by international conventions and mandates and as such its provision should uphold globally acceptable standards. Although the intentions of the policy statements about children's care, learning and development were not crystal clear from policymakers' accounts, they nevertheless believed that policy statements are full of good intentions to bring about quality provisions in ECCE settings.

## **Chapter Seven: Parents' constructions of quality assessment**

*“Quality education for children requires joint efforts from parents and teachers. It is the kind of education that begins from home. Parental involvement is very important” (Gbajo).*

### **7.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings of parents' narratives which explore their understanding and construction of quality education for children in Lagos state Nigeria. I consider parents' discourses important because first teacher of a child is the parents. Moreover, the transition of children from home to school requires the efforts of parents as well as teachers. Three key themes inform this chapter. The first theme discusses parents' constructions of quality education and relationships that take place within the socio-cultural framework of communality and individuality. This is discussed within the socio-cultural meanings that emanate from the exclusive and intersecting roles of home and school structures. The second theme explores parents' beliefs about quality education as cultural knowledge versus technical knowledge. This topic is discussed with a view to understanding the essential elements of quality that relate to formal and informal approaches to children's care and learning. The third theme presents what parents believed to be quality education and care for children in the contemporary time. The chapter concludes with a summary.

### **7.2. Parents' constructions of quality education within the private and public domains of childhood**

In view of the importance of parental belief systems about the role of education and family structure in childhood care, education and development, studies have explored the economic (Fapohunda and Todaro, 1988), medical (Ware, 1984; Cleland and Van Ginneken, 1988; Caldwell and McDonald, 1982)

psychological (Harness and Super, 1996) and socio-cultural (Olufunke and Obafemi, 2011) implications of children's survival in many developing countries. It is surprising that many of these studies do not examine the socio-cultural perspective of parents' understandings of quality education, care and wellbeing, which this section addresses. The notion of quality assessment from parents' perspective is germane in the Nigerian society because of attachment to long-established traditional values that uphold the role of the home front in children's care and education.

I consider childcare practices of parents as foundational elements in understanding quality care and education for children. In Lagos state, the saying that goes by "*charity begins at home*" seems to be a watch word for children's training. Children are believed to be brought to the world through a parent, who has the responsibility to care and nurture the child at home before the rest of the responsibility is passed to teachers and other members of the wider community. It is usually thought that parents have a key role to play in the education and care of children. The basic priority of this role is the inculcation of societal values and attitudes in children (Alhassan, 1993; 2013; Akinboye, 1992).

It is expected that home and school training should exist as a continuum in which learning contents complement rather than contradict each other. For instance, the traditional view of a child's training assumes that the responsibility of every adult member in the community is to care, teach and nurture every child in the community with little or no distinction between the private and public domains of children's lives. Many parents admitted that the only distinction

between home and school should be the school's role in teaching academic learning and skills that place children on the path of wider knowledge about their world. Thus, parents emphasized the teacher-child relationship that imbibes the cultural values of communality and conformity to set standards. Simon, Timothy and Mary, parents to nursery pupils, commented on this aspect during a focus group discussion thus:

**Simon:** *“My parents were not educated but they valued education. They believed they did not have access to some things because they were not educated. I remember my mother took me to my teacher and handed me over to her saying help me to train him, he is now your son. Our parents then were rest assured that the training that teachers give us is like a continuity of home training”.*

In a similar manner, Allen added this:

**Allen:** *“...In addition to what my colleague has said. Schools were expected to continue the moral and cultural training that home environment has provided for children. There is an adage in Yoruba that says “ile la ti n keso rode” which translates into “proper training begins from home”. Talking about quality education, that is exactly how it is supposed to be”.*

This was supported by Mary's expression:

**Mary:** *“That is it. There was this family tie that endears people to each other with the spirit of togetherness. What I really cherish from my socio cultural values are honesty, dignity, and solidarity- I mean sharing both goodness and otherwise. For example the issue of communal training worked perfectly back then. Teachers were seen as the second parents, they have the authority to train and discipline children”.*

These perceptions might explain the reason why many parents in the study area perceived teachers' roles, practices and relationships as significant dimensions of quality assessment in ECCE settings. I often saw parents call the teachers by their family name as a sign of respect and authority over children's care and learning. On resumption from holidays, I observed many

parents wanted their children to be in classes where they could easily build relationships with the teachers. According to one parent, teachers who are friendly, open to suggestions and disciplined are preferred. The major reason she gave for this was that she will be able to get useful feedback on her child's performance. This implies that quality education embraces mutual consideration by parents and teachers of the best interests of children. It suggests the need to share ideas on how best to explore parent-teacher collaboration in improving children's care and learning, ensuring that children are cared for and taught in ways that are acceptable to the Nigerian context.

The observational study in many of the schools visited confirmed the great extent to which parents entrust their children's care and learning to teachers. They would drop their children in classes, and relay any concerns to teachers with the hope that teachers could handle them. When parents come back to pick their children, they expect feedback by asking question like "how did it go today? Is she improving?". I witnessed how some parents might go on to suggest how best they feel there can be improvement. Undoubtedly, parents' voices can contribute to the feedback system and local policy frameworks in schools.

For example, every morning, I observed how Buntua, a parent to a nursery pupil, would go round the classes to visit other teachers usually saying, in her mother tongue, to the teachers, "mo ti mu omo yin wa o", meaning "I have brought your daughter". By implication, this parent was trying to involve all other teachers in the training of her child. During an individual interview with Buntua, she stated in Yoruba that "eko to joju fun omo, ti gbogbo oluko ni", meaning



“quality education involves the joint efforts of teachers”. It was evident that Buntua is not as educated as some other parents who would drop their children in classes and expect teachers simply to do their part. However, I do not assume that Buntua’s level of education plays a significant role in this act, rather what is key is the generational group to which she belongs. I also suggest that this act characterised the actions of many parents that believe in communal training for children. I also observed a situation in Genesis, a private pre-school, when an older parent brought packets of whiteboard markers and distributed them to four classes including her daughter’s class. She was of the opinion that quality education is not just about her daughter’s success but the school’s success. It became evident through observations such as these that many parents perceived that children’s care and learning should assume a communal aspect and a shared responsibility.

Many of the older parents also believed that children’s success should be constantly monitored through such a collective approach. This was seen in the measure of authority and control that parents assume teachers ought to have over children and their ability to give a detailed report of children’s progress. A parent described it this way: “whenever my child wants to misbehave at home, I always tell her that I will report her to her teacher and she will behave well. She knows her teacher will discipline her”. I observed that many parents enforced this cultural value of respect for elders by asking their children to kneel down or prostrate to greet their teachers. A parent reminded her child by asking: “Have you greeted your teacher this morning?”. It suggests that the older generation do not want some of the cherished traditional cultural values to become extinct. Invariably, many of the parent respondents believed that

these values form educational principles that are progressive in themselves and help children to acquire the right attitude to which other educational skills can be used in the society.

However, while some parents would want their children to recognise the presence of other children and teachers, others would not. I observed a parent telling her child: “go straight to your class, do not talk to anybody”. The child walked to her classroom and did exactly what her mother said. I observed that this attitude is more common among the younger generation and the more affluent parents. By ensuring that a child does not relate with others in school, this parent was teaching the child to ignore other individuals who may contribute to her care and learning. It was also common to see some parents insist on a particular teacher that they felt should handle their children. For example, I witnessed a situation when a parent came to confront a teacher in school over the discipline of her child. The teacher was not the child’s class teacher but corrected the child’s bullying attitude by giving him a stroke of cane. The parent felt that the teacher did not have right to discipline the child since the child is not in her class. The matter was resolved by the teacher apologising to the parent. I was later told that there are some children in the school that teachers do not interact with or talk to because their parents disapprove of school discipline. This presents a problematic nature of cultural discipline that clashes with child’s right Act.

It is important to note that parents’ emphasis on teacher’s relationships with pupils feature the most in their narratives. While parents claimed to be sparsely

informed about what should constitute appropriate curriculum and learning, they maintained that once the relationships that children have with teachers is cordial and loving, children will benefit maximally. Many of the parents felt that teachers are not as dedicated to children's care and learning as they expect. They felt that the new generation of teachers are the ones demarcating homes from the school training. Simon, while describing the attitude of teachers, said that most of the time teachers pass the buck of children's care and learning back to the parents. He gave instances when teachers often complain of children's behavioural displays, school readiness and intellectual ability. He stated:

*“..If children do not achieve the training milestones in school, then it is the fault of the teachers. I brought a child to you like a plain slate to work on. In as much that I am inculcating the right culture into my children from home, I expect the teachers to do their part in school. Most of the time we even do so many of their works, they bring so much assignment for them that you even wonder if they teach them anything in school. There was a time that my child's teacher told me to intensify the training for my four year old boy. I had to tell the teacher that “what are you been paid for then? If I still have to be doing all the training from home and the teaching from home”. This child will be with teacher between 8am and 4pm, and still has not learnt reading and morals. Is it when am already exhausted from work in the evening, I will have energy to teach reading to him?”*

Simon's observation above might be connected with the expectations that parents have concerning teachers' active role in children's care and learning. As discussed in the preceding chapter, children's care and learning in Lagos state is yet to be fully handled by certified ECCE professionals, thus, many are not able to offer appropriate guidance and advice to parents. I observed that parents sometimes made demands that could be considered not beneficial to children but many of the teachers seemed not to have sufficient training about

how to educate parents on these. An instance I witnessed was a situation where a parent came to complain that her child said that her teacher usually speaks in their mother tongue whenever she wants to give examples. The young teacher had to apologise. However, I came in to explain the importance of teaching children in their home language in addition to English to the parent and she was happy with the information. Adesola, a younger parent to a nursery pupil, while describing the importance of teachers' attitudes stated:

*"...The school environment must be the one that is conducive and comfortable for the child to learn. Like the case of my son, the former school he was going, he had a class teacher he was not relating with. Probably because she is a kind of woman that she is not supposed to be teaching nursery classes because she is not patient enough. She is always complaining about my child's behaviour. I think children at this stage needs patience and tolerance; they are at the development aspect of their lives. Not all of them can develop at the same level; some are faster than others. I complained to the head teachers and the teacher had to be changed. This reflected in my son's academic performance; it improved. The new teacher was friendly and patient"*

Another defining aspect of quality as perceived by parents is the level of relationship that is deemed appropriate given the formality of learning for children and changes in the cultural outlook of the society. My observational study suggested that the demands that some parents make on children's care and learning in school is based on the principle of individuality in contrast with the communal approach discussed earlier. As a way of illustrating this, Shina, a parent, would come to school to help his four-year old boy copy work on the blackboard after school hours, suggesting that benefits accrued from educational experiences had been understood as primarily about individual

progress. The following excerpt was captured from a FGD conducted during an open day in Brownie, a public pre-school:

**Researcher:** *What do you think that this type of education should achieve in the life of a child?*

**Buntua:** *I really want him to do more than me. I want him to be somebody great in the future. That is why I encourage him to start early. I assist him with his assignment so that he can learn fast and face future challenges. I want him to be more than his mates in the class- I mean whenever I am coming to pick him, I want his teacher to tell me that he is really outstanding in the class. I will be so happy.*

**Ayo:** *I want the teacher to teach my child very well. I try to look at his work after school too. I discovered he is not writing well and still not there yet. I hope he will be helped so that he will not be left behind.*

**Olokun:** *For now, it is the first stage; I want this stage to develop exposure and interest in my child. Like my son said he wants to be an engineer; he loves playing with electronic, he dismantles and reassemble them. I have been observing his interest, the pre-school should be able to pick him up on the interest and build it up. I want my child to have a good foundation for life. An improvement over what I could not achieve.*

Every parent at the school's open day was concerned about his or her individual child's achievements. This is aided by greater freedom that parents have over the choice of school and services, whilst therefore, it became clear that many parents would prefer that children's training incorporates a communal approach, the predominant view was characterised by their individual child's success. This implies that quality education is open to contestation about educational skills for social and communal development in the contemporary Nigerian society. There seems to be a subordination of traditional values and cultural knowledge. This might be associated with the global influences and the prominence of "context over contexts" (see Chapter Four). What seems to be guiding quality measures from parents' perspectives

is how much their children are helped to see their individual worth in the educational sphere and the society. This has led to a situation whereby parents associate quality dimensions in children's learning and care with the prevailing social and cultural outlook of the society. Allen, a parent, remarked:

*"...Those who conceive education at the first instance threw out our culture and considered it primitive, and archaic. This is not true; it is not everything in our culture that is bad. They will tell you that our culture is devilish and backward, but we can remove the bad ones. The school system can help to refine them not abolish them. We still have our social values which are very important and that can be regarded as the best in the world for children training. A child can then be proud to be an African".*

Allen's comment above suggests that contestation about values in children's education can examine how social and cultural innovative practices might be used to enhance quality education. For example, character and values development in children can be enhanced through African literatures and ICT. I suggest this can be achieved through dialogue among stakeholders, emphasising cherished cultural values and how they can be transmitted in contemporary times through technological devices and direct instructions in classroom settings. Narratives and arguments that occurred during many of the FGDs suggest that the Nigerian ECCE settings can maximise contemporary innovative pedagogy to transmit cherished cultural values to children.

### **7.3. Parents' beliefs about quality education as cultural knowledge versus technical knowledge**

As established in Chapter Four, the subject of quality education in early childhood settings is relevant to the determination of children's future participation in social and economic activities. In the study that I conducted, I was able to discern a number of important issues which indicate parents'

expectations of the roles of school system in children's care and learning. Parents seemed to believe that early childhood care and education in contemporary times demands more visible evidence than it has ever been asked to show before. A parent said with high admiration "...*last week, I gave a pen to my four-year old and told him to write whatever he likes; he wrote some of the things that he was taught in schools lately. I was quite impressed*".

Thus, academic results and performances were accorded priority by parents in early childhood settings. For instance, parents were of the view that children in ECCE have become part of the school system and their cognitive performance should be recognised as a vital aspect of quality education. I observed that all parents wanted their children to be able to read and write while in the nursery classes. This indicates that while the issue of a standard curriculum is generating debates among teachers, parents seem to set academic standards for children's learning by their insistence on seeing learning outcomes. They are more concerned that teachers impart a great deal of relevant information and knowledge that is consistent with their expectations. Ola, a parent that I interviewed during an open day, stated:

*"I just want to say that the reason I am here is to see to it that my children's learning is up to taste. What I mean by that is that they are doing their assignment, every day I check their books, and they have the sufficient number of notebooks and textbooks so that they will not be left behind, and they will be able to achieve something from the school system. They have a sort of working scheme that outlines things they are supposed to be doing. We are here just to make sure that they are doing it"*.

This perception of the school system as the haven of technical knowledge informs the dichotomous view of training structures for home and school. Some

parents stated that they have brought their children to school because they believe children achieve more learning in school than home. The resultant effect is the pressure on the school system to produce a child that is able to conform to universal standards of knowledge. I observed this in the way parents expressed concern over their children's academic performance in English language, phonics, number works, science and letter work. A parent remarked *"I want my child to learn phonic sounds very well; she must know how to read and write before nursery two"*.

As discussed in Chapter Four, many of the private pre-schools have to conform to parents' wishes in order to continue to receive their patronage. The major demand from parents is that teachers must assume a role more as educators than as carers, and that teachers should be able to quantify and take responsibility for learning outcomes. A parent stated:

*"Decision making in the classroom should be made by the teachers. Teachers will have to demonstrate that he has the right attitude and subject knowledge to make children succeed in their studies. I do not think children will be able to make any decision at that stage. At the nursery level, teachers should decide for them"*.

The implication is that emphasis on ECCE teachers' subject knowledge and teaching to details will continue to influence the socio-cultural outlook on childrearing. For instance, adults' broad roles of inculcating cultural knowledge, moral standards, and intellectual contents in children have been transformed into transmission of technical knowledge. The value of children's care and education is how much knowledge children are able to gain within a specified period of time, which in this case is the school term. Children have textbooks



designed for their learning and milestones that they are supposed to achieve in order to be promoted to a higher class. Parents were of the view that any education that does not guarantee this promotion is of poor quality. In fact, many parents do not want their children to repeat a class because of its implication on the success race that technical knowledge requires.

Another reason for this might be connected with the general perception of quality assessment as an evidence-based exercise. Many of the parents stated that the only way they can know that a child has received quality education is through the report cards and the works that the child displays. Allen stated, *“What gives me the assurance that my children are in schools is what they are able to reproduce back in terms of their learning”*. For instance, many parents came around during the end of a session to collect their children’s report cards. In Bluechip, a private school, where collection of children’s report cards was attached to payment of school fees, I saw many parents paying instantly in order to have access to their children’s report cards. This suggests that skills acquisition for children is not just for learning in itself but in order to further their opportunities in later life.

Many parents who claimed not to have adequate knowledge of “what” and “how” children should learn in schools emphasized that learning to read and write should be the vital aspect of children’s education. Reading and writing skills have been emphasized in official pronouncements because of their preparatory usefulness. Mirroring this, parents, especially younger ones, wanted ECCE settings to concentrate on developing reading and writing skills. They emphasized the acquisition of cognitive skills development, response

prompting and communication skills as the current trend in children's educational achievements. I observed this to be a strong determinant in the choice of schools for children. In Genesis, a private school, parents stated that they patronised the school because of the academic excellence that the school is known for. Ayo, a parent, made this statement during an interview:

*“The society celebrates academic excellence. It has the tendency to help children to join the success lane. It fits perfectly into what the society is painting of success. For instance, your child becoming a professional in the future is a matter of academic excellence. Many parents would want to work out that for their children as early as possible. So, it now becomes competition. I would say labour market and economy really play a significant role in the way we organise our educational programme.”*

Moreover, as discussed in Chapter Four, the status associated with schooling and the pressure from the international community which mandates learning to start from birth (Dakar Framework, 2000) can be said to be contributing factors. In the Nigerian ECCE context, parents' assessments of children's learning follow the assumption that children can only take their places in the contemporary society if they are exposed to skills relevant to integrating them into the global outlook on learning. This was evident by the way in which parents make demands on their children's learning outcomes. The reoccurring reason given by many of the parents was that any children's educational services that are not oriented towards technical skills will only lead to backwardness. So, many parents do not want their children to be exposed to the same learning content and styles they experienced themselves. The common phrase they used to describe this was: *“I want my child to be learning so that he will not be left behind”*. This perspective which suggests a form of

progressive educational achievement is a reflection of global influence as discussed earlier (see Chapter Four).

However, it is also important to note that as much as parents are influenced by modern ideologies of learning standards for children, they attached the strict determination of children's success to cultural practices and value systems that Nigerian society presents. For example, they talked about values like doggedness, resilience, perseverance, and determination to succeed as vital elements of quality training for children. However, some of the parent respondents are doubtful if the present structure of learning for children will not bring about discouragement rather than giving a further boost to cultural values. For instance, Bosede, a parent, observed that an over-emphasis of the acquisition of technical skills to the detriment of cultural values will only produce a child that will rebel against the kind of society that Nigeria presents. She stated:

*"If a child is forced to always stay in the classroom to learn abstract concepts from this stage, such a child is only taught to hate the real world he or she belongs".*

I think that Bosede, who is an engineer, was trying to see the Nigerian society as a country that has not given proper consideration to the application of knowledge to solve the fundamental economic and social issues like poverty, hunger, and social vices. She said there was a time when she had to give her child's teacher a cane in order to help discipline her child. She stated:

*"I went to give my child's teacher cane because I discover they do not discipline children anymore. Learning without culture is like a cup of tea without sugar. Children must be taught the culture of the society she belongs to. What has happened to music, drama and creative art in our schools?"*

Her view was supported by Ola's statement below:

*"In a school setting, it is the role of a teacher to ensure that children under her care are disciplined. It is a vital aspect of education. In my own time, I went to a public school where teachers were allowed to discipline us and it paid off. What we have today is that some private schools do not beat their pupils because of the school fees they paid and a strategy of retaining such children in their schools. That is not part of our culture".*

Many of the parents who supported cultural knowledge reiterated the significant impact of music, language, drama and art in children's learning. They were of the opinion that music and drama should be important aspects of nursery learning contents and not just memorisation of numbers and figures. Creative work and music are entrenched in traditional learning styles, which some parents believe are still very much relevant in today's learning. "Music does not only soothe the body, it helps in brain development" stated Ayo, a parent. The issue of age-appropriateness does not come up when the use of music is employed. Ayo continued:

*"There are so many things children can learn at this stage. Anything that can be taught should be learnt, but not necessarily written in a book. When we talk of any reasonable thing that is not beyond their reasoning limit- I mean music, drama and art. Now, we pay more attention to paper work at the detriment of our cherished creative work and music. Children can learn different languages in music format. Music should be a necessary part of learning for children. This is where the curriculum should amend."*

However, I observed that the major forms of music in nursery classes of today are rhymes which have international undertones. For example, children were usually asked to recite rhymes like "Jack and Jill; Rain, rain, go away, Twinkle, Twinkle little star" every morning. Children in the public schools seem to be the only ones who are exposed to traditional songs on the assembly ground and in

the classrooms. This might be attributed to the usage of English language in the school environment for any form of communication. Many parents are comfortable with this form of learning while also appreciating cultural knowledge – parents' dilemma in a nutshell. Buntua stated:

*“What I see presently is quite impressive. My child understands most of the things that she is being taught. At her level, she can read basic words, write, identify and communicate. She knows colours. Then, she also has moral upbringing. She often tells me that her teacher would always say “Do not be lazy and do not tell lies. She learnt that from the school. I think the school is also moulding their behaviour, apart from the academic work”.*

Thus, though learning skills are necessary for children, they could be made more relevant to the Nigerian context, and not a stereotype of it. Many of the older parents complained about the decline in moral and cultural values in a bid to reckon with international practices. Ranti, a parent, remarked: “I do not know why we have to follow other developed countries, they have gone far ahead. I think we have to grow at our own pace”. This statement made by an older parent during a FGD aroused argument on the essence of the present structure of children's services. Parents will continue to push for the inculcation of technical skills, given the rate at which Nigeria has continued to emulate international community policies, but this will be in tension with traditional aims and methods.

Meanwhile, some younger parents were resolute in their determination to allow children to be exposed to skills that are required for the twenty-first century. They pressurised teachers by threatening to take their children away from a school if their children failed to achieve learning milestones they deemed appropriate. They also stretch children by involving them in extra mural classes

after school hours. Children's learning risks having been reduced to a status symbol when parents pride themselves on children's achievement in intellectual ability and when the inculcation of cultural values has been perceived as of lower importance. Ayo, parent to nursery pupil, while responding to a question regarding children's learning and cultural values, stated:

*"There is loss of values and culture all over the world. It is general. However, from this stage, children should be encouraged to imbibe few ones that are still relevant for the 21<sup>st</sup> century so that they will not be left behind. It is not a bad idea to encourage children to be part and parcel of the learning society"*

However, the older parents were of the view that for any meaningful training to occur, children's learning should be based on the cherished cultural values. Children should be exposed to cultural values that will sustain their learning skills. Character development is a conscious attempt to develop a personality that reflects the core principles and values relevant for an ideal and democratic society founded on positive attitudes and behaviour well cherished (Brooks, 2001; Prestwich, 2004; Tyra, 2012). For instance, Yoruba ethnic society, to which Lagos state belongs, is founded on the principles of "omoluabi" (See Chapter Two). The proverbial expression, "*Iwa lewa omo eniyan*" which literally translates as "*character is the beauty and personality of a child*" still holds. The implication is that good conduct is expected from every child in Nigerian society. It is believed that it is the duty of adults to ensure this. Akin, a parent, stated: "*quality education will show good character, learning and behaviour. We must see it in the lives of the children before we can say that they have obtained quality education*". Sharon corroborated this by this comment:

*“Good behaviour is a must. However, the purpose of taking children to school these days is to socialise and learn English language properly. So, a child must learn there. A child must be helped to live a balanced life – physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual. It is in the child’s behaviour we will be able to see all these things”.*

Sunday, a parent, narrated the story of how valuable the cultural knowledge is to children learning. He stated:

*“...In those days, stories are usually created from tortoise, Yanibo, dogs, lion and all forms of animal. After each story, children themselves usually come up with lessons that the stories have taught them. One thing I noticed about this is that it used to capture our minds as little children and it is very good to teach morals than just coming up with rules for children. The way the elders developed the stories were interesting, we believed it so much and we want to follow it. We also contributed to our own moral learning too”*

Also, Sharon remarked:

*“... I was exposed to folklores, stories, proverbs and local songs while I was growing up. Those things were very interesting. We learnt so many things that will solidify the culture and endear our heart to the society in which we live. Such things that will build that respect culture, integrity, culture of hard work and cleanliness. Some we also learnt later through Yoruba literature books and social studies. If our parents do not want you to do some negative things as a child, because they know you may not know the full implications of doing such thing- so they will create a kind of story around the issue to create a fear in you or deter you from it. For instance stories about somebody that lied and how he ended up or a particular taboo in the society. For instance, there was one that I can still remember. My mother wanted me to lay my bed after waking up and before sleeping at night, so she told me a story about a particular man who did not lay his bed, just jumped into it, not aware that a snake or scorpion was under the rough bedsheet, was stung and taken to the hospital and spent many days there. Since then, I have been very orderly in life - always laying my bed. What has happened to all of these nice stories and folklores?”*

Sharon's interview excerpt above depicts a typical traditional mode of transmitting knowledge to children. However, teachers' accounts about children's care and education revealed that they believe that parents expect too much learning too soon (see Chapter Five). Teachers were of the opinion that parents want children to learn like adults and that they monitor children's learning more than the care aspect. The analysis of parents' narratives confirms teachers' concerns about the pressure that quality standards about children's learning place on children's care. Sunday, a parent, attributed this to the economic conditions and orientation of the country whereby both parents have to work and there is a strong preference for "white collar" jobs. These factors push towards the early integration of children into the school system. Also, children's education has been perceived as a worthwhile investment for old age. Akin stated:

*"...the only issue we have in this time is that parents do not have time for children again. For instance if both parents are bankers, they have zero time for children. I am talking from experience, my wife is a banker- she leaves for work as early as possible and comes back late in the night. Both parents just have to work in order to live an average live. Children of nowadays need guidance and time for their training because the world is not simple again like in our own time. When I was growing, my mother was not a working class, she was only a trader so she had time to monitor us very well. It was my father that was working. Even though she was not educated, she trained us to behave well, and was always there for us.*

Sharon added:

*"In many instances, the care of children is left to the hands of house helps and nanny especially by the civilised ones. The reason is that to live average life is difficult. It is a reflection of our economic condition- poverty, inequality and structural disequilibrium here and there. The only way that we will know*



*that our children are doing well is by checking their learning so that they will become better person in the future”.*

This suggests that parents, who often claim to have insufficient knowledge about children’s services, have implicit influence on these services, through the societal influences- both local and global (See Chapter Four). During the FGDs, they stated that they are not in the best position to say what constitutes a good curriculum or syllabus for children. However, they expect the teachers to provide the necessary support system for children in their care. It can be said that as the society’s outlook to childrearing changes, parents react and the school structure responds accordingly. Invariably, ECCE settings respond to the prevailing value preference from many parents, thus unintentionally weakening the prevalent cultural norms and values for childrearing. Apparently, what seems to matter for the present time in the assessment of quality education is the academic achievement required to secure a place in the future.

#### **7.4. Parents’ construction of quality care and education for children**

*“...Let me say that education is the best legacy you can give to your children. It is through education they will be able to get a job and a career. I will also be able to eat from the labour of my hands” (Oyinbo)*

Oyinbo’s statement above can be said to summarise what many of the parent respondents stated about the role of education in ECCE settings. I observed that the whole essence of the relationships that parents built with teachers on daily basis was to ensure that their children’s education was at par with the current trends across the globe. For instance, many parents often ask their children’s teachers every morning, “how is my child doing in class work?”. This

suggests that children are not exempted from the dividends that education is perceived to impose on learners. Thus, nursery education has come to be perceived as a vital aspect of the national educational programme.

I observed that parents see themselves as stakeholders in children's learning. They actively inspect and monitor school progress towards achieving the aim of pre-school education. Many of the parents' understandings of the relationship they need to build within the school system suggest a "child-centric" approach. For instance, parents' trust and confidence in teachers are often connected with how they can improve their children's learning. This has an implication for how adults' roles are shaped in a society like Nigeria. Many parents would judge children's teachers with the child's educational attainment as the sole concern. Many of the parents indicated that nursery education, as a preparatory schooling, goes a long way to determining children's success in subsequent classes. When I asked Sharon what she felt should constitute the aim of pre-school education, she replied:

*"The aim is to prepare children for the future ahead. The future is before us. This is the foundation and it is important to monitor it. I am responsible to do that. Nobody should do that for me. If your child succeeds in life, it is for your good" (Sharon)*

In a similar way, Janet stated:

*"When you say that children have achieved quality education, they should be able to come out well through the knowledge that the teachers have imparted into the children"*

As discussed in Chapter Four, Lagos state reflects a society with differing social and economic status. Education has been perceived as an instrument of liberation and integration. So, many parents want their children to start as early

as possible. Buntua stated that she wants her child to achieve academic milestones that she could not achieve. What this suggests is that the younger generation seems to identify valuable privileges that the older generation did not have access to because of their inability to be educated. During many of the classroom observations, parents came around to discuss their major concerns about their children's learning with teachers. During an open day in a school, I discovered that a greater number of parents came for the nursery pupils than for other classes. The main area of concern for parents was children's academic work and performance, making the education of children a yardstick for school success.

Nigerian education will continue to be given top priority given the colonial legacy that identifies education with social and economic development. Parents have continued to pursue this by taking responsibility for their children's educational attainment. The whole essence of their involvement seems to be predicated on the degree to which their children are made to conform to contemporary learning outcomes. It is noteworthy that the uneducated parents would come around to check their children's academic progress. They would express their worries over children's writing and reading levels, which they do not understand themselves. They were of the view that nursery education has come to stay because of its many advantages to the society and the family.

Moreover, one definite feature of quality assessment lies in the differentiation of ECCE programmes based on the type of provider. Education for disadvantaged groups is often associated with public provision of nursery and primary school levels. It is surprising that this type of education, which is tuition-

free, teaches the national curriculum and has qualified teachers, does not fit into the kind of education that many parents perceived to be quality education. Many of the low-income families would rather drain their purses to send their children to private schools than to public schools. A high patronage of fee-paying private schools rather than tuition-free public schools seems to be a paradox. This pattern might be attributed to the low level of commitment that government give to nursery education. Allen while describing the government attitude stated:

*“Government has not been interested in nursery education right from the onset. So, it cannot fulfil the purpose ... of course, when you look at the private school, they are more efficient than public schools. I think private education will continue to cater for a moderately quality education until government is ready to stay true to their commitment to the provision of education”*

Ayo added this:

*“...the private schools find time to choose the best teachers but getting a teaching job in public schools is through politics. Once you know someone, you will get your way into teaching job. That is why we have so much lackadaisical attitude among public teachers. They have not put right persons in the classroom”*

Sunday also stated:

*“Personally, I do not see any hope in the public elementary schools. In a situation when we have a nonchalant attitude to education from the government because the leaders do not have their children around here. They do not care if teachers go on strike for five years. There is no quality. How will I send my children to a school that is even worse in condition than what I attended in my time? The schools are not in proper shapes- the buildings are dilapidated, no facilities, no motivated teachers.*

However, Sharon was of the opposite opinion, stating that the public schools can still be regarded as a prototype of quality education that the Nigerian society requires for children. The rush for private education was attributed to

the deplorable state of public schools. Parents would prefer to patronise the sector they see as giving “value for their money”. Value in this sense is part of how they see quality in education. This suggests that any quality education should be at a cost to the receiver but the question is whether the cost should be borne individually or communally. As discussed in Chapter Four, unlike developed countries, the Nigerian government has not put up a measure to address this aspect. However, they have been quick to adopt policies emanating from the international community. It suggests that while the present structure of ECCE provision seems complex and open to many interpretations, there is a need to consider the past and project the kind of education that will be beneficial both to the individual child and to the society at large. Parents felt estranged from government policies as many of them did not have sufficient knowledge of them. The only way I observed parents take charge of their children’s education was to get involved through private education where their voices can be heard.

As for the care of children, parents expect that quality education should take that into consideration. In fact, a parent stated that the main reason why she has chosen to put her child in a school is the care that children receive. She said, “I like the way the school ensures that my child eats her food every day. They also make sure that they do not harm themselves”. Parents’ choices of ECCE services seem to be influenced by the intricacies of care that the school offers.

## 7.5. Chapter summary and conclusion

This chapter has examined parents' narratives on quality assessment in early childhood care and education. It discusses parents' constructions of quality education within the private and public domains of childhood, including parents' beliefs about institutional child care and learning, and quality education for children. It ascertained the key roles of parental involvement in the provision of quality care and education. Parents' constructions of quality education emphasized cherished traditional values and school learning as a continuum with home rather than a separate event for children.

Parents' constructions of "*quality*" further revealed the influence of contemporary societal values that embrace the inculcation of technical knowledge which prepares children for the world of knowledge and integrates children into a wider society. The findings also revealed that although many of the parents interviewed did not have knowledge of the public official declarations and pedagogical practices in early childhood care and education, they maintained that the formal approach to children's education required that children are exposed to knowledge that is universally relevant.

## **Chapter Eight: Summary of findings and conclusion**

This chapter provides a summary of the study and its major findings. It reflects on the various constructions that were generated from policy documents analysis and ECCE stakeholders' narratives on quality assessment and discusses the limitations of the study. It presents a provisional theoretical model drawn up from the findings generated from stakeholders' narratives and discusses how this model will be tested in practice. It further explores the contribution that the research findings can make towards a theory of quality assessment within the policy and practice of ECCE. It also highlights the implications of the findings for policy and pedagogical practice in ECCE settings and discusses the implications of the findings for future research on quality assessment in the Nigerian ECCE settings.

### **8.1. Overview of the major findings**

“The anxiety about young people in the present day is such that the political and social condition of whole societies is now gauged by the status of their children” (Boyden, 2015:188)

This section presents an overview of the findings from three stakeholders - teachers, parents and policymakers. As stated in the research objectives section, the central focus of this study is to highlight the specific areas of contention and cooperation among stakeholders on key themes generated from the data analysis. Therefore, I have organised the discussion of each theme to reflect the interview or focus group quotes of each of the participant stakeholders. Responses from teachers across the four pre-schools denote a collective voice from teachers, and likewise for policymakers and parents. I also utilise secondary sources of data from policy agencies to provide more insight into the discussion of each theme.

As stated earlier in Chapter Four, the data generated by my study present a tangle of diverse views which I abstracted from and delineated participants' positions on quality dimensions that relate to teacher-child relationship, pedagogical practices, learning environment and learning outcomes. Although the stakeholders' data as a whole reflect a range of complex and diverse perspectives to quality and its assessment, this chapter presents what constitutes the connective networks of meaning on the themes generated, including shared and contested meanings.

Thus, comparisons will be drawn based on the following themes generated: *quality assessment as understood in terms of communality and individuality; care and education; cultural versus technical knowledge; learning and play; formal versus informal learning; and professionalism in ECCE*. The line of discussion goes in this order: the first set of stakeholders will be ECCE teachers' narratives, followed by policymakers and then parents. The findings generated for each theme are summarised at the end of each section.

#### **8.1.1. Theme 1: Quality assessment from the notion of communality and individuality**

The research objective related to this theme explores stakeholders' understanding of quality criteria relating to teacher-child relationships and all other forms of human exchanges that are specific to the Nigerian ECCE parlance. This includes how teachers perceive the child he or she is responsible for; how policymakers understand the intentions of policy on relationships that involve teachers, family and the child; and how parents make meaning of relationships that are formed in the process of seeking ECCE services for their children.



**Teachers' construction of quality education**

Many of the teachers were of the opinion that quality assessment should take cognisance of community ties that are specific to the Nigerian cultural heritage. This involves accepting children as members of a community in which every adult is responsible for the roles of mentoring, caring and educating. According to them, the society shares a common culture that perceives children as not just individuals but also members of a community, which is responsible to them and also to whom they are responsible. As such, quality guidelines should be inclusive and participatory as much as possible. While this notion has been contested by the younger generation of teachers, because of the modern setting in which children's care and education take place, a majority of the teachers upheld the quality assessment measure for children in ways that are consistent with communal training.

**Policymakers' construction of quality education**

Policymakers and inspectors were of the opinion that while ECCE services exist within the socio-cultural matrix that embraces a communal approach to childrearing and practices, the reality is that the provision of these services is influenced by policies and ideals emanating from the western world which sees the child as an individual entity with their rights and privileges. This corroborates the outcome of policy analysis which perceives policy intentions as informed by international ideologies. For instance, policy analysis reveals that the provision of these services is seen as only a means to certain ends, including: meeting international mandates, preparing children for primary schooling, improving enrolment figures, getting international development

partners' assistance and future development. This suggests that a group of "experts" are made to come up with a tool of assessment. They also said that in principle, these guidelines and tools have taken care of the socio-cultural values of the society. They were of the opinion that it is important to have a form of assessment that reflects what happens around the world.

### **Parents' construction of quality education**

Many parents spoke extensively about the need to explore cultural values that are embedded in a communal approach to child training as an essential dimension of quality assessment in ECCE. For instance, they talked about the fact that societal and school values should not be treated as mutually exclusive. They referred to a teacher-child relationship that imbibes the cultural values of communality as vital to quality. However, some parents argued that the school system is different from home and as such some values should not be emphasized in school.

### **Summary**

Although most of the stakeholders were at a crossroad as to the level of societal values that should be incorporated into children's care and education, it became clear from the analysis that they believed that relationships within ECCE settings should be guided by societal values that are entrenched in communality. This was widely acknowledged and used among teachers in their day-to-day relationships with children and parents in ECCE settings. However, the policymakers were influenced by official procedures that give attention to children's assessment based on performance metrics and checklists.

Although all the stakeholders agreed that the official educational assessment schedules, which demand that a checklist of items are met for individual children, is necessary for assessing children in schools, these schedules should incorporate measures that are consistent with the prevailing social and cultural values. This suggests that such stakeholders' dilemmas demand a new way of thinking about quality assessment in ECCE, in accordance with the assertion of Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2007:7) that the involvement of multiple stakeholders in various capacities means that quality assessment of ECCE institutions is a "project of social, cultural, political and economic significance", thus making it difficult to reconcile with the claimed universality of existing assessment mechanisms. This does not in any way undermine the importance of an assessment framework *per se* but suggests that quality assessment mechanisms in Nigeria seem to be operating on an inadequate model. In incorporating societal values into an ECCE regulatory framework, it becomes an end and not just a means to an end. Hence, quality assessment presents multiple perspectives that can be problematic for "outsiders" to dissect and fully comprehend.

The consensus among stakeholders on the need for a communal approach to child care and education is greatly influenced by generational gaps based on age and years of experience. For instance, the older generation of stakeholders were of the view that when children are seen and treated as part of a larger community and not just an entity existing on their own, the formulation of quality measures will advance a more participatory and democratic process. Then, regulatory frameworks will not project a "foreign" ideology and a balance can be reached over the exact mixture of societal values and modern protocols that

need to be incorporated into quality measures. In other words, this might be connected with the assertion of Fafunwa (1974), which was later reinforced by Nsamenang (2011), that best practice within African educational programmes is not about compromising a cherished cultural heritage but rather reaching a consensus on how best to harness contemporary educational interventions in the best interest of children within their local community. For instance, it might be also necessary to look into international agreements about child's right and inclusion of children's perspectives in policy and practice.

On the other hand, the younger generation of stakeholders seemed to be greatly influenced by the contemporary global approach to quality assessment which encourages competition, ranking and precision. They viewed quality assessment as an exercise that showcases the level of conformity with practices elsewhere across the globe. Thus, relationships that exist within ECCE institutions are directed to building children's capacities towards individual lifestyles, as opposed to the traditional norms of communal upbringing.

#### **8.1.2. Theme 2: Quality assessment as cultural and technical knowledge**

This theme addresses the research objective that relates to pedagogical instruction in ECCE. This involves all aspects of learning contents that children are exposed to in school settings. It discusses what stakeholders upheld as suitable learning contents for children and considers what teachers believed to be an appropriate curriculum.

### **Teachers' construction of quality education**

Most of the teachers spoke on the need for children to be exposed to knowledge of the workings of their immediate environment. When asked about the present learning contents, the older generation of teachers felt that folklore, music, language learning, drama and dances should be part of children's curriculum. Although all the teachers acknowledged the necessity for measurable and contemporary learning contents that prepare children for further studies, they did not think it should constitute the entirety of children's learning. The line of difference between older and younger teachers seems to centre on the perceived aim of education and the educational approach to achieve this. While the older teachers agreed with the younger teachers that pre-school education has become an essential aspect of preparing children for further learning, they contested the pressure that academic learning has laid on children's wellbeing. They seemed to be advocating an approach that is characterised with a synergistic blend of cultural knowledge within the immediate reach of children and contemporary learning content. Their main argument is that children can relate to and transfer knowledge that they encounter in their immediate environment to other contexts in a creative and a more meaningful way.

While the younger teachers acknowledged the impact of cultural knowledge for children, they find it difficult to implement in the classroom. The younger teachers seemed to be affected by the pedagogical responsibilities that they are obliged to take in the classroom and their own professional knowledge. As Brock and Thornton (2014) suggest, the quality of the educators' own knowledge, thinking and decision making are germane to any reflective

pedagogical practices. For instance, the younger teachers often talked about their accountability to a body of structured and pre-determined knowledge, measurable and objective, which children are supposed to learn to get promoted to higher classes. Conversely, cultural knowledge is subjective and not measurable with no value for promotion to higher classes. Thus, cultural knowledge is grafted onto school learning through school rules and regulations that children have to observe.

### **Policymakers' construction of quality education**

When the policymakers and inspectors spoke about what the formality of learning that institutional ECCE entails, they maintained that children should be exposed to learning contents that prepare them for primary schooling. When asked about what should constitute the learning content for children, they often said that the curriculum has taken care of that. Thus, government official documents, such as the curriculum, scheme of work, and syllabuses, demand that some measure of formal learning take place in ECCE centres. They all were of the opinion that the basic rudiments of numbers, letters and shapes should be introduced to the children at this level. These learning contents are easy to assess in ways that are compatible with international mandates, thus improving techniques for the formulation of the school ranking system that is based on children's learning outcomes and has been a constant pursuit of policymakers and inspectors. Policymakers' expression of quality assessment of children's learning can be said to be predicated on what Boyden (2014:187) called the "official version of childhood", which perceives childhood learning experiences as universally valid rather than socially construed (Moss, 2005).

The ranking system has been published between 2010-2014<sup>20</sup> in official documents and on the internet. However, the success rate and the impact of the ranking system have not been established through any empirical studies.

### **Parents' construction of quality education**

Many parents were of the view that as much as cultural knowledge is important, technical knowledge should form the core of children's learning. Their main reason is what they see as the demand of the contemporary times on educational outcomes and accountability for money spent. Parents also want to see results, which in this case are the marks and grades that their own children obtain in various subjects. Indeed, most of the parents confessed that whilst they do not know what constitute the essential learning contents for children in preschool, they feel confident that the school system is well informed about what children require. They would only need to follow it up at home to ensure that their children are fully integrated into the learning environment. This finding is consonant with many other studies from around the globe: Greenway (2011) in the UK; Zhu and Zhang (2008) and Zhang et al. (2009) in China; Kisitu (2009) in Uganda.

### **Summary**

All the stakeholders agree to an extent that the essence of bringing in children to the school setting is for learning to take place. However, they differ in what and how children should learn. In principle, the policymakers stipulate that children should learn social norms and the rudiments of numbers through a

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.esspin.org/resources/reports/lagos>

play-way method. In the same vein, the teachers believe that children should learn both cultural and technical knowledge contents through a series of methods that suits children's individual interests and learning contents, part of which are play-way and practical methods. Parents do not seem to have much to say about the appropriateness of any method. All the stakeholders perceive that a desirable outcome can only be achieved by aligning human and material resources with international best practices observable across the globe. This signifies that they all advocate a synergy of cultural and technical learning for children.

### **8.1.3. Theme 3: Quality assessment in terms of care and education**

This relates to the research objective that examines meanings that stakeholders give to the assessment of children's care and education. It unfolds the socio-cultural views of child care and education with its various assemblages.

#### **Teachers' construction of quality education**

Teachers believed that quality assessment measures should acknowledge the care aspect as well as the educational aspect. According to many of them, meeting children's "care" needs is a vital aspect of their work with children. As such, it is important to have a continuous assessment procedure to consider this aspect rather than a once-in-four-years assessment schedule. Child care, according to the teachers, involves feeding, ensuring safety, taking children to toilets, looking after them while playing and making sure they wear appropriate clothes for the weather. They were of the view that the care that a Nigerian child requires is specific to the environment and the family setting. For instance, provision of welfare services within the school environment for the needy,



provision of food and food supplements to children, sleeping areas and other necessities of life through an advocacy for a community-wide involvement in the organisation and provision of ECCE services.

### **Policymakers' construction of quality education**

The policymakers were of the opinion that institutional training for children is meant to achieve proper care for children even when government is yet to adopt this fully. For instance, the policy document (FGN, 2004: 11) states that one of the aims of ECCE is to “*provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work (on the farm, in the market, offices etc.)*”. Moreover, the umbrella term “integrated early childhood development” (NERDC, 2007: 3) has been adopted from the international community to depict an allegiance to the provision of care and education. From observation, there seems to be a glaring difference between government allegiance and implementation. However, policymakers talked extensively about the need to ensure that children are cared for in school settings. This was also confirmed in the quality evaluation schedule which places children’s care, guidance and support as one of the evaluation areas for quality assurance (FME, 2010).

### **Parents' construction of quality education**

Many of the parents interviewed were of the view that quality education for children entails the combination of care and education in a single setting. Indeed, many of the parents interviewed said that care, health and safety for children are important quality dimensions which they look out for in school. While the care aspect was agreed to be the responsibility of both teachers and parents, many of the parents believe that their children’s education should be at par with contemporary knowledge. Thus, parents talked more extensively

about children's educational attainment in various subjects than the care aspect.

### **Summary**

It is evident from all the stakeholders' accounts that they all believe that the care of children is an essential aspect of quality assessment. Although the assessment plan for ensuring proper care for children has been put down in official documents by the policymakers, teachers believed that this official recognition should take cognisance of the structural inequalities that exist within the Nigerian context and address children's needs in school settings. Moreover, parents' accounts revealed that adequate care and education lies within the ability of teachers and parents to collaborate on efforts towards quality assurance in schools.

#### **8.1.4. Theme 4: Quality assessment in terms of formal versus informal learning**

This section addresses the research objective that considers the learning contents and environments in which children's care and education take place. It also probes into how ECCE is perceived within the purview of the policy directives and organisation of ECCE services.

#### **Teachers' construction of quality education**

Teachers believe that since children's care and education evolved from the informal settings of home and neighbourhood to ECCE settings, learning should assume both formal and informal approaches. While the teachers acknowledged the importance of formal guidelines in children's learning, they often employed informal means in dealing with the children. For instance, teachers often pointed out some of the activities they engaged in that are not

written in “black and white” in ECCE guidelines. Thus, this suggests that a quality assessment approach that utilises metrics and checklists should also mediate between the formal and informal aspects of learning for children.

### **Policymakers’ construction of quality education**

All the policymakers and inspectors placed the organisation and provision of ECCE services within the regulatory frameworks that emphasize a formal approach to children’s care and education. For instance, there are quality standards, such as the minimum standards for opening ECCE centres, quality assurance instruments, curriculum guidelines, schemes of work and National Policies, all of which emphasize a list of requirements that must be met in order to consider any ECCE service effective.

### **Parents’ construction of quality education**

Most of the parents interviewed talked extensively about the role of the informal setting of the home in inculcating societal values into children. According to many of them, the values that are essential for further learning can be best taught at home by the parents. They also believed that these skills and values must be built upon by teachers in school. As many parents are busy with meeting the economic demands of the present time, they seem to expect teachers to accomplish many different things, which may be difficult to achieve.

### **Summary**

Both the formal and informal approaches to child care and education are germane to quality assessment in ECCE. All stakeholders agreed that quality assessment should take a formal approach. However, teachers were of the view that the intricacies of children’s care and education will have to adapt to the unofficial and unwritten approach of traditional day-to-day activities with

children. Therefore, the informal approach in itself may not be sufficient to produce quality outcomes that are at par with international best practice. Moreover, the school system, which children are being integrated into, is officially a formal environment.

#### **8.1.5. Theme 6: Professionalism in ECCE**

Who should be in charge of children's care and education? This question came up during interviews and focus group discussions among the different stakeholders. This theme relates to how the ECCE profession is constructed by each of the stakeholders. While all the stakeholders were of the opinion that specialised knowledge is required for the profession, they also acknowledged the intrinsic value of innate ability and cultural practices in constructing ECCE teachers' identities. Such values include passion, interest, motherly disposition and love for the children.

##### **Teachers' construction of quality education**

Most of the teachers maintained that although specialised knowledge is required for children's care and education, it involves emotional aspects such as passion and interest for the job. Moreover, the care aspect of the job, which is often overlooked, is an essential aspect of constructing their professional identity.

##### **Policymakers' construction of quality education**

The policymakers maintained that ECCE teachers are supposed to have a specialised training in education. They also talked about teachers' personality traits like passion, commitment and interest.

### **Parents' construction of quality education**

Although most of the parents interviewed did not speak about what constitutes a professional teacher in an explicit manner, they spoke about their expectations concerning teachers' roles, which include caring, teaching and modelling. They also talked about the need for teachers to show commitment and dedication to the care and education of children.

### **Summary**

It is clear from stakeholders' beliefs about ECCE professionalism that this subject matter has continued to evolve different opinions among stakeholders. This is not peculiar to Nigerian society. As Osgood (2006) asserts, ECCE professionalism is a highly contested subject matter that is difficult to dissect without an exploration of contextual elements which surround its definition. For instance, the emphasis on "care" as an integral aspect of ECCE profession is sometimes used against the profession because of the emotional consideration it carries. Generally, all the stakeholders agree that professionalism in ECCE has extrinsic and intrinsic aspects. The extrinsic aspect includes certification and the specialised knowledge that teachers have acquired in childhood studies, while the intrinsic aspect relates to attitudes and aptitudes that teachers bring into the teaching profession. Overall, they believed these two aspects will manifest themselves in the "professional" approach that teachers adopt and the way they relate with children in order to produce desired outcomes in learners.

### **8.2. The limitations of the study**

Every research pursuit has internal and external limitations. This study is not an exception to various limitations that are peculiar to qualitative research

endeavours. Therefore, this section discusses the limitations of the study and suggests possible directions for future research in early childhood care and education.

First, this study adopts an interpretive qualitative approach that supports the use of small sample and contextual understanding of the subject of quality assessment among ECCE stakeholders. While the use of a small sample encourages an in-depth study of the subject of “quality” through interviews, focus group discussions and observations, it does not capture the representational data for Lagos state considering the number of stakeholders, the nature of provision and the geographical span. The detailed study of six pre-schools, six policymakers, 18 teachers and 12 parents may not be taken to form an aggregate “voice” for each group of the stakeholders, thus making statistical generalisation and extension of findings to different contexts impossible. This limitation is inherent to qualitative inquiry, which this study adopts.

Moreover, the contextual analysis and meaning making (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2007) of stakeholders’ narratives on quality in Lagos state confines the findings to the domain of the contexts in which it is being studied. The analysis is even more likely to be influenced by the researcher’s position, biases and preconceptions. This limitation is a result of the weakness of the theoretical underpinning adopted for the study as discussed in the earlier chapter. Thus, the detailed contextual understanding of quality assessment in ECCE, which is the main advantage of this framework can, in a way, be said to also constitute a weakness. For instance, data generated reflected two extreme contexts

which were difficult to dissect at first. Thus, there were the challenges of conducting a research in a “poor” area and merging data obtained with the “rich” areas. The data analysis therefore took some time to be completed.

Second, participants’ accessibility and attitudes towards data collection procedures constitute limitations. This study relies heavily on narratives from stakeholders at various levels of involvement in ECCE provision. The major limitations in obtaining qualitative data from them are the status of some of the proposed participants and their attitude towards providing verbal information to outsiders. For instance, some of the intended participants were not accessible because they were busy with one official duty or another, while others did not display a positive attitude towards the data collection procedure. Even after assuring them that the information will be solely used for research purposes, some of them disallowed the use of recording instruments and often wanted to be reassured that the information provided would not be used against them, while others doubted the importance of this kind of qualitative approach. This might be due to the fact that many of the stakeholders are not used to a dialogic approach - or the use of interviews and focus group discussions. Some of them deliberately withdrew from the focus group formations and some requested a form of questionnaire to fill in instead. For instance, more teachers were recruited during the second phase of data collection to adjust for those who rescheduled interviews and ultimately withdrew from the data collection process (see Chapter Three). Moreover, this suggests that a study of this nature might want to consider the use of other data collection procedures such as open-ended questionnaires, life histories and teachers’ documentation.

As discussed in Chapter Three, the word limit of this thesis did not allow me to include a chapter on teachers' educators and children's perspectives on quality education. However, some of the issues raised by children have been incorporated in the findings reports. I hope to write an empirical article on this to be published in a scholarly journal. Also, if there had been more time, I would have interviewed officials working in International Development Partners offices in Lagos state. This would have been an opportunity to explore their notion of quality provision including their success rate and challenges.

### **8.3. Contributions towards the theory of quality assessment**

In this section, I present the major contributions that this research will make towards a theory of quality assessment. Specifically, it discusses how the result of my research findings will contribute to the field of early childhood care and education. It also discusses how I see it being implemented specifically in Lagos state.

A major contribution of my research is the extension of the knowledge base of the methodological approach to studying early childhood care and education in the Nigerian context from a quantitative to a qualitative approach. This study will, I hope, initiate a new wave of empirically driven considerations of quality assessment in Nigerian ECCE through qualitative inquiry. This is an approach that has been widely explored in many countries of the global North. For instance, Greenway (2011) researched the "Quality of Nursery Provision" using qualitative and quantitative methods; Osgood (2010) adopted a qualitative approach to exploring professionalism in ECEC. I will encourage academics and students in Nigeria to explore the use of qualitative approaches by presenting my work in posters and conferences, and organising a regular



ECCE policy-practice discussion group in Nigeria. I hope this will also see a resurgence of interest in sociological perspectives on policy and practice in ECCE, which has not been fully explored in many academic writings by Nigerian authors.

In addition, the adoption of post-modern theoretical underpinnings that embrace meaning-making, dialogue and diversity (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999; 2007) contribute novel ideas to understanding quality assessment in the Nigerian context. This is necessary because a study of this nature, in a multi-ethnic setting where there are tendencies for pluralism of perspectives, creates opportunities for dialogue and meaning making. Moreover, it became clear whilst completing a review of the literature for this study that sociological thinking about childhood and its various aspects has not been given sufficient attention at the institutional and political levels. Many of the academic writings and empirical studies on early childhood are greatly influenced by other fields of study such as psychology, medicine and economics. The best known sociological work on education and childhood in Nigeria is by Fafunwa in 1960-1980s and Nsamenang in 1992-2011. Moreover, there is only a small literature in this field and my work adds to a field that should be extended.

Another contribution of this study to the theory of quality assessment within the Nigerian socio-cultural matrix is the understanding of specific contextual information that is germane to the provision of early childhood care and education. The perception of childhood varies across countries and there is no universal childhood experience (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2007). My study evoked critical reflections from stakeholders on their actions and what shapes

them. For instance, teachers constantly reflected on their own childhood experiences, beliefs and values and the influence of these on their classroom practices and the care of children.

More importantly, my study exposes the reflection of other “contextual elements” from external pressure on the Lagos state context, given the increased internationalisation of educational experiences. This problematizes the notion of “contextual understanding of quality” (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2007: 7) in a pluralistic society like Nigeria. This will provide a point of controversy for many academic writers to reflect on global interconnectedness and its implications for the context for child care and education. It will help to strengthen collaborative efforts in providing quality education for children by reflecting on how global ideas can be harnessed in an appropriate measure in the best interest of children.

My study revealed that the integration of care and education is a possible way of thinking about *quality* in ECCE settings. I will, therefore, suggest a case for an interdisciplinary approach to studying childhood and its various components. This is because the tension between discourses on policy directives and practice in early childhood care and education can be eased through an interdisciplinary approach to studying quality assessment. This supports the implementation of integrated services as laid out in the Every Child Matters (DfES, 2004) document in England about how to balance specialist and universal services. Finally, I have developed a provisional theoretical model (see Figures 4 and 5) that can be used as assessment tools in ECCE

setting in Nigeria. This is necessary because there is the dearth of literature on the qualitative-based model for assessing quality education in Nigeria.

#### **8.4. Provisional theoretical tool for assessing quality early childhood care and education in Nigeria.**

As discussed in Chapter Three, qualitative study works towards the generation of theoretical models rather than statistical generalisation of research findings. I believe that the several connections of quality dimensions and their constructions within the socio-cultural framework of Lagos state pre-school provision have provided a ground upon which a provisional theoretical tool for assessing quality education in Nigeria can be proposed. This tool is predicated on the gaps identified within the literature on quality assessment in ECCE. There is the tendency to continue to rely on quantitative measures imported from other contexts which focus on metrics and statistical reports. Firmly established within the qualitative data that addresses stakeholders' accounts of quality education, this study provides a broader basis for the much-contested notion of quality in a multi-ethnic setting. As argued by Moss (2005), the notion of quality from the global North should not become a hegemonic language that enforces itself over other languages of evaluation. Thus, this tool is put forward within the consideration for a societal rather than an individualist approach to quality assessment.

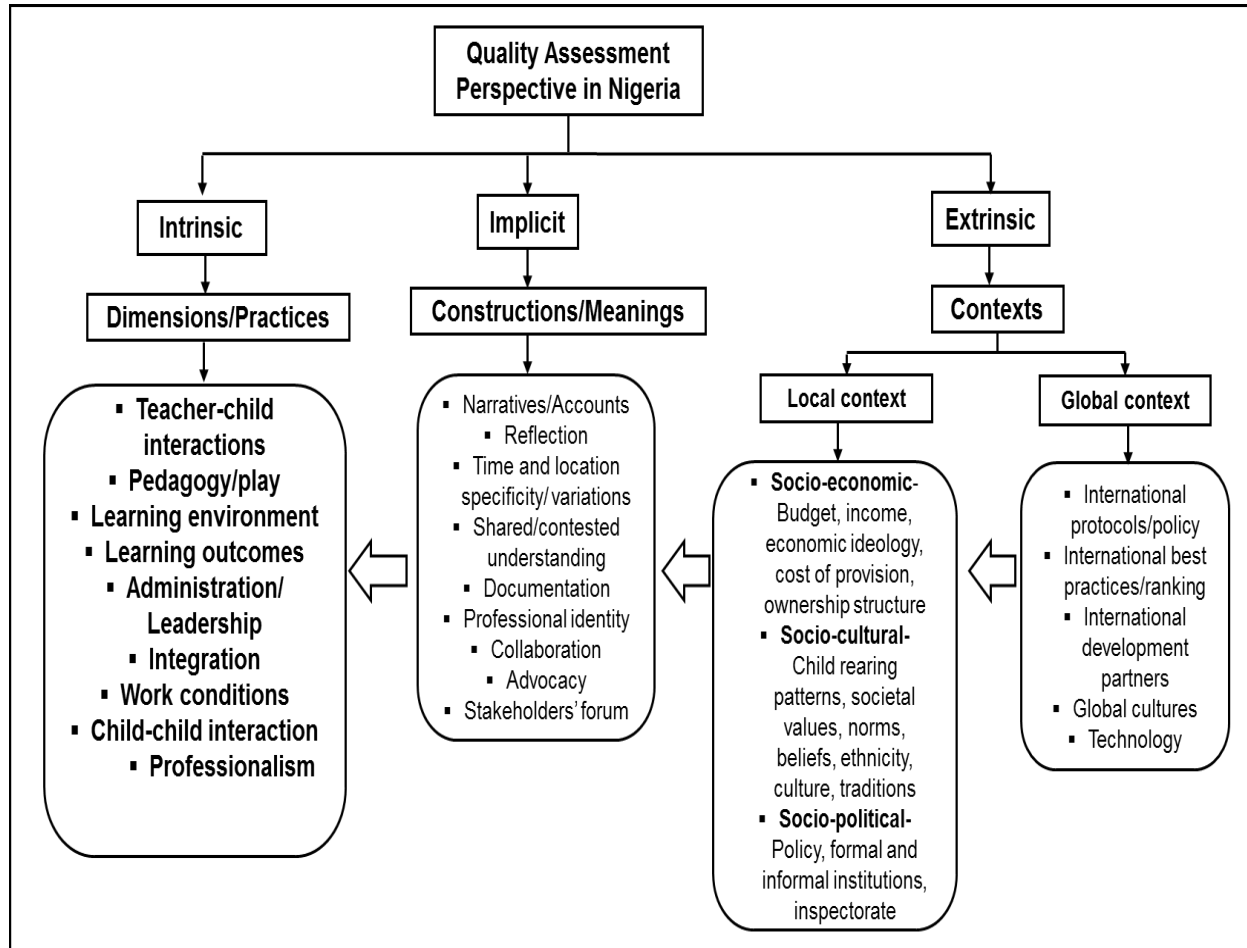
More specifically, my position on quality assessment has been greatly influenced by sociological perspectives on contemporary issues surrounding quality discourses in early childhood institutions. I do not seem to be a lone advocate of sociocultural contexts in understanding quality education. The new wave of discourse on African developmental education has in recent times

been centred on how African authors can explore their socio-cultural contexts in the best interest of providing quality and functional education for the younger generation of learners. For instance, Fafunwa's (1968; 1974; 1982; 1986) age-long, but highly relevant, advocacy on "new perspectives" to African education, highlights Nigerian societal norms and values for functional education; Jegede (1995) wrote extensively on the exploration of the eco-cultural paradigm in science and mathematics learning in Africa classrooms; Nsamenang (2011) of Cameroon advocates culturally sensitive and generative approaches to the knowledge and practice of early childhood care and education; and Akinsola (2011) argues for the adoption of an "omoluabi" approach to educating the African child. Thus, my study produces what I have termed a "provisional prototype of quality assessment models" (see Figures 4 and 5) derived from the findings discussed in the earlier chapters based on a qualitative inquiry approach.

Having presented the findings in Chapter Four to Chapter Seven, the emergent conceptual model in Figure 4 depicts a three-dimensional approach to understanding quality assessment in Nigeria. The extrinsic factors include the influences of contextual characteristics, both local and global, that both exert influence on ECCE provisions and organisation. The global context level is characterised by assemblages of "international" culture and ideologies about childhood, early childhood practices, and policy measures, which impact every aspect of the local contexts that relate to children's care and education. These include international protocols, technology, technical assistance and funding. The local context level involves the configurations of the economic, socio-cultural and political environments that assessment is being undertaken within.

These influences include the economic ideologies, prevailing socio-economic conditions, ethnicity, and childrearing patterns and belief system.

**Figure 4: Conceptual model of quality assessment in Nigeria**



Source: Gbadegesin, 2016

The intrinsic aspect relates to quality dimensions that happen within the school system such as how teachers relate to children, the way the children are taught and the professionalism of teachers. I use the term “intrinsic” because these comprise practices that occur in ECCE settings, and are essential for the smooth running of daily activities. I also use the term “extrinsic” for the internal and external contexts that constitute the local and global contexts. The interactive workings of the local and global contexts produce an implicit view of

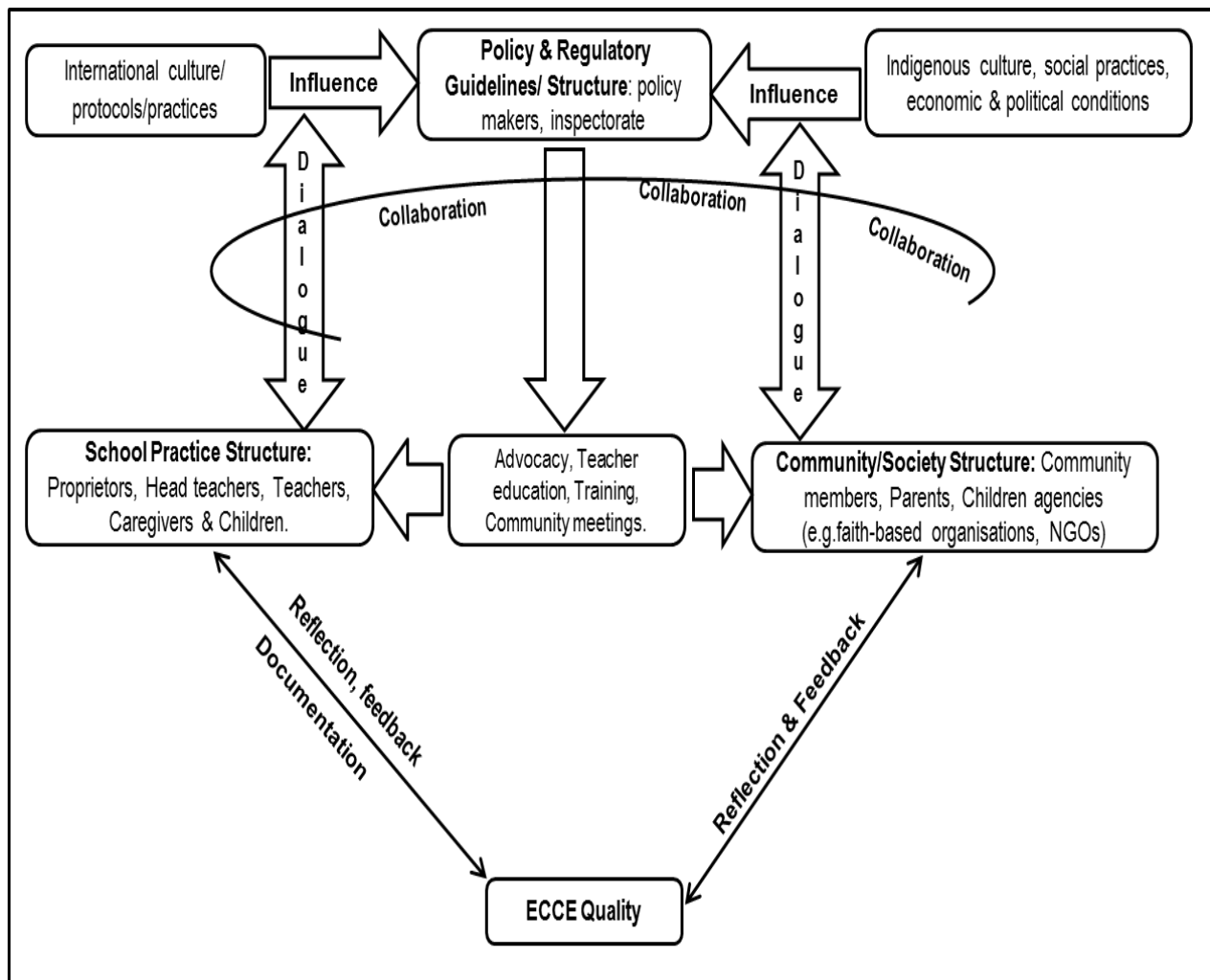
complex interplay of the intrinsic and extrinsic quality dimensions. It is implicit because it indirectly influences practices in the early childhood settings. These implicit views are the constructions and meanings that inform and shape people's action and attitude towards early childhood care and education services. They are contained in the daily reflections, narratives and history that guide understanding of "what works" within a particular reality. These constructions and meanings mediate between the contextual features and quality dimensions and practices. Quality dimensions and practices are the observable and intrinsic factors of quality assessment. They include teacher-child relationships, pedagogical practices, learning environments, and learning outcomes. These seemingly technical features have been extensively explored in the field of ECCE through various approaches (Mashburn et al., 2008; Burchinal et al., 2015). Notwithstanding, these are "surface manifestations" (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2007) of the constructions and meanings generated from contextual understanding. Quality, as Moss (2005) argues, is what is under the surface, the persistent daily work done by the staff, which can be hard fully to recognize without being together with a group of children for a long time. For instance, the teacher-child relationship is influenced by the understanding of how adults are supposed to relate with children in a given context, which however can be modified by global culture. Likewise, the learning environment might be a product of economic ideologies about the organisation of children's services and international pressure.

The exploration of these three dimensions to quality is likely to produce multiple perspectives to understanding quality in ECCE. These perspectives are provisional and can change with time and locations. For instance, childrearing

beliefs that were once cherished some decades ago are no longer encouraged. Examples are the culture of force feeding, girls' circumcision, and the assumed superiority of male over female.

I have further developed a provisional model to understand a democratic approach to quality assessment and policy formulation in ECCE. This is premised on the fact that to understand quality education for children from stakeholders' narratives creates a tension between societal choices and values, and it might be necessary to go "beyond quality in early childhood education and care" (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999; 2007: 2) and explore a democratic practice (Moss, 2007) (see Figure 5) utilising dialogue, relational culture, reflection, documentation and meaning making.

**Figure 5: Democratic approach to quality assessment**



Two democratic concepts as depicted in Figure 5 above include collaborations and dialogue. First, dialogue between actors in the practice and regulatory levels on the influence and integration of international culture and practices in the Nigerian ECCE settings. Second, collaborations between school practice structure and community structure on the negotiated influence of indigenous cultural practices. I hope these democratic activities will provoke reflections and feedback at the practice and community levels. Moreover, these two democratic outcomes are likely to inform the regulatory structure through mediational means such as advocacy, community meetings, teacher education



and training. When I return to Nigeria, I plan to undertake one of such mediation process through advocacy and training. This is just one of the possibilities of thinking about a model for quality assessment in ECCE in Nigeria.

I suggest that Figure 5 does not denote a cyclical or linear process of understanding the democratic approach to quality assessment. Realistically, it is more complex than it appears to be on the diagram. This approach will however produce a possibility that weighs societal values with external influences as well as formal versus informal approaches through a process of dialogue, contestation, collaboration and consistent feedback. In view of this, material will be generated from the research and presented to ECCE policy networks at state level. I will also engage in a training and advocacy programme that will accommodate dialogue and reflection. This I hope will produce feedback about possible ways in which quality can be understood. This will further project the voices of ECCE stakeholders (teachers, parents and children) with the aim of involving them actively in the future planning of young children's care and education services through the creation of a digital platform for continuing dialogue and a training manual for use in schools and wider services for young children.

I also plan to organise mediation activities that provide opportunity for youth to volunteer for pre-school teaching experiences in public schools. I believe volunteering is a way to get the community members involved in practical care and education of children. In that way, advocacy is easily achieved through trained youth. I hope to start with the schools where I conducted the fieldwork

project for this study because a relationship has been established and maintained throughout the study.

### **8.5. Implications for policy and practice in ECCE**

This section presents the implications of the study for policy and practice in ECCE. It highlights the ways in which findings of this study might impact the school and policy formulation structure.

One of the major implications of this study for policy is that since policy directives, emanating from a few powerful and influential individuals, shaped and informed by international pressures, are likely to continue to guide the organisation of early childhood care and education, there will always be a disparity between policy and actual practices. There is an apparent need constantly to subject international policies to critique and piloting.

Findings from my study suggest four plausible implications for ECCE policy formulation and implementation in Nigeria as follows:

1. There is a need for a tailored policy measures that accommodate the socio-cultural and economic contexts in which children live. For instance, there is a need to engage in a community-led child poverty eradication programme through early childhood development services. This does not in any way undermine the importance of maintaining global relevance in fulfilling international mandates. However, it might be a possible way of ensuring that policy directives address the subjectivity involved in child care and learning; while also considering the feasibility and plausibility of achieving such policy directives.

2. There is a need for a wider consultation at the institutional and community levels on how quality education can be achieved in ECCE. This might involve deliberations on how key informal approaches can be incorporated into formal school settings in order to achieve optimum care and education for children
3. Public awareness through the advocacy of a democratic approach to the provision and monitoring of children's care and education should be pursued.
4. Policy guidelines shaping quality assessment should be left open-ended allowing implementers to reflect on and critique them. Policy implementation processes should not be an opportunity to put teachers "in a box", rather an opportunity for them to think "outside the box".

Likewise, five plausible implications on the practice of ECCE are suggested.

They include:

1. Since my findings revealed that the understanding of quality and its assessment is indeed context-specific and embedded in the history, culture and social practices of people, it would be necessary to embark on training that encourages a documentation of practitioners' daily interaction with children. This will help to produce an archive of informal approaches to children's care and education.
2. The guiding principles of classroom practices in ECCE settings in Lagos are the intersection of formal and informal approaches to child care and education. The prominent informal approach is a communal approach to child training in which the crucial position of adult figures is

recognised. Classroom practices need to maximise human resources to provide desired relationships in the best interests of children. For instance, relationships between adults and children should be improved through training to maximise the cultural heritage of “motherly care” in a female-dominated profession such as ECCE.

3. While this study might not be able to authoritatively suggest a public-private partnership in the provision of child care and education because of its financial complications, it may be desirable for practitioners in public and private pre-schools to collaborate and improve existing knowledge, which only emphasizes strict adherence to the principle of objectivity in assessing children. These collective voices of teachers can provide a platform for informing parents about the quality assessments that work best in a particular context.
4. ECCE teachers’ professionalism which is at present open to different interpretations should utilise critiques of the present classroom practices and policy directives to negotiate a teacher education curriculum for an ECCE pre-service and in-service training programme. It might be necessary to include the major concerns of the older teachers, which is the provision of care for children in the pre-service curriculum.
5. The integration of care and education seems to be the most important dimension of quality in ECCE provision. It might be necessary for teachers to produce the “Nigerian child care plan/strategies” in collaboration with parents and government Ministries and agencies for daily use in pre-schools.

### **8.5.1. Implications for future research and study**

This study provides a knowledge base for a qualitative approach to childhood studies in Nigeria by exploring the interpretive paradigm to the study of quality education and care in a socially and culturally diverse society of Lagos state. Specifically, it embraces diversity, pluralism, subjective views and meaning making (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999) of quality assessment from ECCE stakeholders across school, political and home contexts, thereby expanding the horizons of sociological thinking in early childhood policy and practice. It might be necessary to explore further this kind of study in other regions of Nigeria, as the findings from this study of Lagos may not be transferable to other regions. Similarly, an in-depth study of the workings of each institutional level may be required. For instance, there may be a need to investigate the political settings with their various influences on ECCE provision, and a more expansive study would examine the comparative study of this subject matter across contexts and, if possible, a meta-analysis of studies in this field. More importantly, this study recommends an in-depth analysis of international agencies' success rates and intentions in relation to quality assessment in ECCE in Nigeria. Moreover, studies of this nature might want to explore the possibilities of narratives and critical discourse on power relations (Foucault, 1974). It would be desirable to explore parents' levels of involvement and advocacy in ECCE. I have a personal plan to conduct training for parents on the need to get informed about policy directives analysis and open-minded discussion on child care and education.

Each of these can be considered as an avenue to enhance an interdisciplinary approach to studying childhood through collaborations with other disciplines.

This is predicated on the teachers' concerns about meeting children's need for care and wellbeing in the school settings. One way of doing this is to explore the use of qualitative enquiry in the study of "what works" in early childhood settings in Nigeria. The theoretical model that is produced from the findings of this study can provide a base for the development of a practical instrument for the assessment of quality of ECCE in Nigeria that combines global and local approaches.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. National Policy on Education, 4th edition (FRN, 2004)

Extract from the National Policy on Education, Section 2, sub-sections 11-14, pages 5-6,

#### **SECTION 2: EARLY CHILDHOOD/ PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION**

11. Early childhood/ Pre-primary education as referred to in this documents is the education given in an educational institution to children prior to their entering the primary school. It includes the crèche, the nursery and the kindergarten.

12. The responsibilities of government for pre-primary education shall be to promote the training of qualified pre-primary school teachers in adequate number, contribute to the development of suitable curriculum, supervise and control the quality of such institutions, and establish pre-primary sections in existing public schools.

13. The purpose of pre-primary education shall be to:-

- a) effect a smooth transition from the home to the school;
- b) prepare the child for the primary level of education;
- c) provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work (on the farms, in the markets, offices, etc.);
- d) inculcate social norms;
- e) inculcate in the child the spirit of inquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys, etc.;
- f) develop a sense of co-operation and team-spirit;
- g) learn good habits, especially good health habits; and
- h) teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms, etc., through play.

14. **Government shall:-**

- a) establish pre-primary sections in existing public school and encourage both community/private efforts in the provision of pre-primary education;
- b) make provision in teacher education programmes for specialization in early childhood education;
- c) ensure that the medium of instruction is principally the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community; and to this end will:
  - i. develop the orthography of many more Nigerian language, and
  - ii. produce textbooks in Nigerian languages;
- d) ensure that the main method of teaching at this level shall be through play and that curriculum of teacher education is oriented to achieve this;



regulate and control the operation of pre-primary education. To this end the teacher- pupil ratio shall be 1:25;

e) set and monitor minimum standard for early childcare centres in the country; and

f) ensure full participation of government, communities and teachers associations in the running and maintenance of Early childhood education facilities.

**Appendix 2. The semi-structured /interview questions (guide) (Modified for each stakeholder)**

1. Please can you tell me about yourself and what you do (expected responses or follow up questions include age, educational qualifications, years of experience, ethnic background, language(s) spoken, job role and title).
2. Please can you briefly describe how the school operates and the nature of the children you work with (Expected responses include school's daily activities, children age group, gender, family background of the children).
3. What will you say that you look forward to achieve in your work with young children?
4. How do you wish to achieve these in your daily tasks with children?
5. How do you incorporate these learning activities into your daily tasks with children? follow up questions include; what has happened to folklores, storytelling, songs, enforcement of discipline, language usage- mother-tongue and English language, courtesy training, rhymes, respect for elders, parables, good health habits etc.
6. Can you describe how you go about inculcating in the children the skills in your daily interactions with them? Expected responses include; Play-way, child-centred or teacher-centred, rote learning, child initiated, group work. Are there rules you must follow?
7. How do you as a teacher assess what children have learnt? Expected responses include; assessment strategies for cognitive, socio-emotional/language development skills?
8. What are your motives for employing a particular teaching strategy in the classroom? Follow-up responses include; underlying socio cultural meanings, assumptions and priorities that shape teacher-pupils' interactions in the classroom
9. What are the desirable characters you wish to see in the children you are teaching?
10. What do you consider as quality training and education and how do you evaluate that you have achieved this?
11. Do you think any changes should occur to how and what children are learning today? If yes, what and how?

12. How would you describe the present learning environment for children and do you think it is appropriate for them? If no, then how do you think an appropriate learning environment for children should look like? Follow-up questions include safety, healthy environment, use of space, class size, teacher-pupil ratio, playground space.

13. What do you think is expected of you (your responsibility or do you expect children to appear at school ready to learn), as a teacher (and the school) in terms of caring for children, as an educator of children, and in relation to children who are in particular difficult circumstances such as children without food, orphans, abused and neglected children?

*Thank you very much for your time.*