Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Nigeria: A system Analysis of Policy in National and Local Contexts

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Abstract

Across the world, countries consider early childhood education (ECE) beneficial for young children's lifelong educational development and nations' socioeconomic growth. The national government of Nigeria has officially given this type of education recognition in the 2013 National Policy on Education, which alongside stating ECE policy's objectives, described implementation measures to achieve its goals. The national government's introduction of universal early education into the public education system was underpinned by the 2004 Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act. However, the implementation of ECE policy faces several challenges, affecting the achievement of its goals.

This thesis examines the 'fit' between ECE policy at the national level and its implementation at the state and local levels within the ECE system in three states in western Nigeria. My empirical research focused on ECE policy implementation and provision available to children aged 3–5 years since the 2004 UBE Act's introduction. This study employed a qualitative interpretive approach using semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and fieldnotes. It explored perceptions of policymakers at the national, state, and local levels of government and of implementers involved at the state and local levels, including policymakers, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) officer, ECE providers, and practitioners in both public and private-for-profit settings. A combination of systems and postcolonial theories informed the theoretical stance in this thesis.

Findings revealed significant gaps between the national government's policy aims and actual ECE implementation in the three states. All aspects of the ECE system needed to support successful policy implementation were problematic. The funding allocation model for ECE policy implementation is seriously deficient. Nigeria will likely need to develop targeted strategies for change to achieve its universal ECE policy goals. This thesis adds to the body of studies suggesting how Nigerian ECE policy implementation can be improved to achieve its stated goals.

Keywords: *Early childhood education (ECE), ECE policy implementation, ECE system, Nigeria.*

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Acronyms

CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CRF	Consolidated Revenue Fund
ECCDE	Early Childhood Care Development and Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
EFA	Education for All
FCT	Federal Capital Territory
FME	Federal ministry of education
IDPs	International Development Partners
IECD	Integrated Early Childhood Development
LEMIS	Local Education Management Information system
LGEA	Local Government Education Authority
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NCE	Nigerian Certificate in Education
NEMIS	National Education Management Information System
NEQAB	National Education Quality Assurance Body
NERDC	Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NPE	National Policy on Education
OSA	Old Students Association
PRSD	Planning Research and Statistics Department
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
SBMC	School Board Management Board
SDGS	Sustainable Development Goals
SEMIS	State Education Management Information System
SEQAB	State Education Quality Assurance Body
SUBEB	State Universal Basic Education Board
UBE	Universal Basic Education
UBEC	Universal Basic Education Commission
UN	United Nations

UNCRC   United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

UNESCO   United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

UNICEF   United Nations Children's Fund

Appendices

Acknowledgements

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter presents the research background and the concept of Early Childhood Education (ECE). It describes the Nigerian ECE system and presents the rationale for this research and research questions. My positionality and its influence on my research follow this and the structure of this research.

1.1 Research Background

This thesis explores the 'fit' between ECE policy at the national level and its implementation at the state and local levels within the ECE system in three western states in Nigeria. In my interviews, some views were expressed on the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the delivery of ECE. My study should be viewed within the context of recent policy changes, directives, and reforms, aimed at providing access to equitable and quality education for all children from 3 to 5 years.

There has been ECE provision in Nigeria for four decades, since the introduction of the National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1977, but primarily provided by the private sector (Tor-Anyiin, 2008). In 2004, there was a commitment for the first time to introduce universal early education into the public education system in Nigeria, backed by the 2004 Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act. Nigeria also signed up to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including target 4.2 to ensure equity and quality of ECE services (UN, 2015). The Nigerian national government has embraced this international agreement to align ECE with the SDG 4.2 aspirational goal and target. Pearson (2011) describes this as making European–American ideals a reality to enhance quality ECE programmes and practices across diverse contexts.

This study explores developments from an important point in the history of Nigeria's ECE when the national government laid down an entitlement to free and universal early education in the 2004 UBE Act. It examines the implementation of ECE over time and what has happened over the intervening period, illustrating how ECE policy implementation and provision for children aged 3 to 5 years have changed and developed since the introduction of the UBE Act in 2004.

These issues are explored by drawing on the views and experiences of various stakeholders in three western states in Nigeria using qualitative research design and methods. The aim is to understand how different stakeholders, including policymakers, an NGO official, ECE headteachers, and practitioners, experience the system and how

it works. A combination of systems theory and postcolonial theory is used as the conceptual approach to critically analyse the ECE system, unfolding its operation, history, and problems. This approach is an extension of how both theories have been applied to early childhood studies in Africa and other former colonies, particularly in ECE policy. Chapter 4 discusses the theoretical approach in detail.

My focus is on ECE policy implementation for children aged 3–5, privately and publicly funded in three western states of Nigeria. This involves the government's participation and allows for a public policy implementation study. Moreover, as already mentioned, the Nigerian government is a signatory to UN SDG target 4.2, promoting the global principle to be met by 2030. Recognising that global interests significantly impact ECE policy (Miller and Cameron, 2014), this study considers how the Nigerian ECE system may be working towards this goal.

The Concept of Early Childhood Education (ECE)

Before defining what ECE means, we first need to consider Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). ECEC refers to programmes and experiences designed to cater for young children's care and education needs from birth until the start of compulsory schooling (Kagan and Kauerz, 2015; OECD, 2001; OLRS, 2012; UNESCO, 2019). According to UNESCO and UNICEF (2012) and UNESCO (2019), ECEC goes beyond preparation for primary school; it consists of processes and programmes to sustain and support holistic development in the early years for lifelong education and wellbeing. It could also foster caring, competent, and responsible citizens. ECEC is an essential part of the child's education and the foundation for other education levels. ECEC is a broad area, and this study focuses on ECE, particularly the policy implementation. This thesis uses the terms 'ECE' and 'pre-primary education' interchangeably to mean early childhood education.

Although not part of the compulsory education system, ECE is recognised as a significant foundation for a child's early learning and development (Goffin, 2013). It provides a strong foundation for children's future lifelong learning and holistic development, and is the base upon which all other educational levels build (Clipa, 2017; UNICEF, 2018). UNESCO (2010, 2012) refers to ECE as 'the greatest of equalizers' and the best tool to combat inequality and poverty by reducing social and economic disadvantage and ensuring equal opportunity for all children. UNESCO

(2017) states that ECE is designed to provide equitable access for all children to quality. Hence, an effective policy implementation at this level of education is crucial.

Involvement in high-quality ECE delivery impacts children's positive outcomes and life chances (Melhuish, 2004; Sylva et al., 2008). A large and growing body of literature has emphasised the significant long-term benefits of ECE for children's holistic development and countries' socio-economic growth (Bartik, 2014; OECD, 2006; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2003; Sylva et al., 2010; UNICEF, 2020). It is one of the best investments for a country seeking to develop human resources, combat inequality, and reduce costs for later remedial programmes (UNESCO, 2019). Research (Georgeson et al., 2013; Heckman, 2017; Melhuish and Petrogiannis, 2006) has concluded that quality ECE is a higher investment return or more significant factor in countries' economic development than any other education level. It is also a priority for sustainable development investment and poverty intervention (UNICEF, 2016). Therefore, most countries have been increasing their investment in quality ECE provision for their young children. The Federal Republic of Nigeria officially recognises the importance of this type of education in the National Policy on Education (*NPE 2013*).

ECE has a long history of sharing ideas, approaches, and practices internationally (Campbell-Barr and Bogatić, 2017). Several researchers have noted that international organisations have influential voices in early childhood development, and formulate and implement policies on quality system operation and development through international agreements, policy review, and stipulations (Ball, 2009a, 2009b; Ball and Exley, 2010; Penn, 2011). Stakeholders such as UNICEF have supported the development of national ECE financially and technically in Nigeria (Aligbe, 2017). This support aimed to address the needs of children and the gaps in existing policies, laws, and programmes (Neuman and Devercelli, 2012). These stakeholders have also produced quality system operation and development guidelines through country comparisons and ratings to improve ECE services. Economic analysis has become independent of individual states and moved on to the international stage (Penn, 2011). It follows that international agencies play a significant role in transforming the approach to ECE policy and services for children.

The adoption of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.2, launched in September 2015 (Sachs, 2012; UN, 2015), is highly relevant to Nigerian ECE policy formulation

and implementation. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) recognises children's right to education, and the Nigerian government is a signatory. Education is considered to contribute to the development of sustainable societies globally (Kjørholt, 2018), and ECE is the core foundation of any educational system. Thus, SDG 4.2 has been accorded global significance by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly as a successor to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (AbouZahr and Boerma, 2010; MDG, 2017; Penn, 2018). It sets global aspirational targets for ECE programmes, policies, and practices. SDG target 4.2 urges governments to ensure that 'all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education, so they are ready for primary education' by 2030 (UN, 2015). Clearly, then, the implementation and maintenance of a high-quality pre-primary education system for all children across the globe are highly recommended. However, this may be understood and implemented differently in each context.

Although ensuring universal access to quality ECE for all children has become a global aim, its definition, emphasis, and governance vary across nations (Akbari and McCuaig, 2014). It is also largely dependent on the objectives and priorities of different bodies or actors providing support and funding for the programme. The *2013 NPE* in Nigeria refers to ECE as Early Childhood Care, Development, and Education (ECCDE), which also signifies 'pre-primary education'. Such care and education are given in creches or nurseries for children aged 0–4 years and in kindergartens for 5-year-olds before they enter primary school (*NPE 2013*). The early care and education provisions are designed to prepare young children for primary education. However, ECE in this study refers to the two-year pre-primary education provision for children aged 3–5 years before primary school education.

1.2 The Development of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Nigeria

Missionaries first established ECE in Nigeria during the colonial era (Sooter, 2013), and Nigeria's education system was influenced by British culture after independence was gained in 1960. Historically, there was no government policy on ECE. In the colonial era, in the last century, the forms of ECE were kindergartens and infant classes, introduced by missionaries into western and eastern Nigeria. Infant classes were designed for children not yet ready for elementary education. ECE in Nigeria is mainly a postcolonial development (Sooter, 2013). With the phasing-out of infant

classes, some parents began to clamour for nursery schools due to the increased number of working mothers and growing parental awareness about education (Olubor and Inua, 2015). Before independence in 1960, ECE provision had been mainly located in the voluntary sector's hands without the government's support (Tor-Anyiin, 2008).

The Nigerian educational policy's foundation was modelled after the British education system (Irigoyen, 2017). Until 1977, Nigeria went on following the inherited British education policy and did not incorporate ECE into the public education system (Irigoyen, 2017; Tor-Anyiin, 2008). ECE gained recognition in 1977 by being introduced in the Nigerian NPE. At that time, provision was mainly located in the private sector (Sooter, 2013), and the government's responsibilities were limited to regulatory roles. Although government support for private participation may have led to an increased number of ECE services, it failed to guarantee access and affordable ECE.

The *1977 NPE* was revised in 1981, 1988, 2004, 2007, and 2013 to guide the Nigerian education system (*NPE 2013*). This study focuses on the latest edition of the *2013 NPE* that guides ECE implementation up to this research period. The latest revised *2013 NPE* describes ECE as the education provided for children before they start formal schooling (at 6 years). The latest ECE policy objectives and measures to enhance implementation are derived from the *2013 NPE*. These goals and measures are highlighted in Chapter 3, which describes the system and provides a policy analysis with the help of official documents. According to the *2013 NPE*, only one year's pre-primary education for 5-year-olds is provided free by the government in public schools. Since this document formed the basis for the official recognition of ECE in Nigeria, it is the legally binding policy instrument to achieve ECE goals.

In response to the international protocols and as a reaffirmation of the country's commitment to the global Education for All (EFA) report and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Nigeria initiated reforms and implemented changes in the framework of and approach to education (*NPE 2013*), including ECE. In 1999, the national government introduced the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme. This was reformed with the signing of the UBE Act in 2004 to include the ECE programme in every public primary school in Nigeria (Irigoyen, 2017; *NPE 2013*; *UBE Act 2004*; UBEC, 2018; UNESCO, 2006). This reform was designed to ensure unfettered access

and equity to quality education for all children, irrespective of their background. Chapter 3 discusses this in detail.

Thus, the *2004 UBE* and the reviewed *2004 NPE* recognised ECE as a part of the Nigerian education system and it was brought under Basic Education in the latest *2013 NPE* alongside primary and junior secondary schools. The UBE programme provided for every public primary school to include an ECE section catering for children aged 3–5 years, to ensure successful implementation of the scheme (Irigoyen, 2017; *NPE 2013*; *UBE Act 2004*; UNESCO, 2006).

A key aspect of the Nigerian ECE system is that it comprises a mixed economy of providers: private organisations (i.e., individuals, local communities, and religious organisations) and the government (UNESCO, 2006). Most ECE services in Nigeria are provided by the private sector and operate on a commercial fee basis without government subsidy (Aligbe, 2017), while public provision is expected to be free (UNESCO, 2006). Lloyd (2012) refers to this type of ECE provision as the childcare market; this is an ECE system that runs private and public-funded provision. Penn (2012) describes this market system as 'a situation where there is minimal or no government intervention in early years education'. She notes that these forms of childcare markets are found in low-income countries where there is 'no control on childcare entrepreneurial activities; no routine information collected; no regulation, and no subsidies' (Penn, 2012, p. 173). She further asserts that this type of market exacerbates inequality. This market system could have significant implications for cost, quality, and access for children and families in Nigeria as the government intended to provide 'unfettered access and equity in education'. Against this backdrop, this study explores the impact of ECE policy implementation on the development of public and private ECE services.

1.3 Rationale and Research Questions

There has been progress in the development of the policy, with government becoming involved in ECE to offer more children the opportunity to access pre-primary education under the *2004 UBE Act*. Nevertheless, Nakpodia (2011, p. 161) argued that government proposals and measures put in place to achieve ECE goals 'are still mere paper formalities' without proper implementation. Several authors have highlighted challenges in policy implementation (Akindele, 2011; Alabi and Ijaiya, 2014; EFA,

2015; Eze, 2016; Obiweluozor, 2015; Osho et al., 2014; Salami, 2016; Sooter, 2013; Steer, 2014; Vande-Acka, 2020). They argue that ECE provision falls short with respect to funding, provision of essential facilities, regulatory system, workforce development, accountability mechanisms, and access to quality ECE. Furthermore, the challenges faced by Nigerian ECE policy implementation over the past decade tend to remain persistent, suggesting the system's inherent instability.

Several reports noted disparities in the enrolment of children in Nigerian ECE; for example, a 2017 report by UNICEF showed that about one in every ten children are enrolled in ECE programmes. Other reports (Omeje, 2017; UNICEF, 2019a; UNICEF Nigeria, 2018) indicated that the overall enrolment rate for children aged 3–5 was between 35% to 35.6%. Likewise, between 2010 and 2018, approximately 36% of children aged 3 to 5 attended an ECE programme (Varrella, 2021).

The data outlined above suggests that the percentage of children enlisted in ECE centres remains relatively low, and many children miss out. This situation could significantly impact children's wellbeing due to national policies' failure to provide a reasonable basis for their learning and development (UNICEF, 2017). The validity of the data sets presented here appears questionable, bearing in mind that Nigeria has no accurate birth registration data, according to Obokoh (2019) and UNICEF (2019b). The factors behind this low enrolment rate in ECE include the lack of public infrastructure, insufficient resources, and the use of unqualified teachers (Nwuche, 2018).

Existing literature shows that a low birth registration level is a significant factor in children's exclusion from Nigerian ECE (Obokoh, 2019; UNICEF, 2019b). The absence of birth registrations hampers the monitoring of ECE uptake, as children without a birth certificate cannot access provision. However, it is also strategic planning at all levels in the system that is seen as deficient. A recent UNICEF report (2019b) shows that only about 30% of children under 5 are registered at birth in Nigeria. Despite the increase in birth registration rates, about 17 million Nigerian children are still without birth certificates (Obokoh, 2019; UNICEF, 2019b). This implies that unregistered children do not officially exist.

According to Obokoh (2019), this situation is due to corruption at different government regulatory agencies, and lack of public awareness of the importance of birth

registration, stemming partly from socio-cultural beliefs. Education actors do not see birth registration as a prerequisite for monitoring enrolment. On this evidence, the level of birth registration in Nigeria violates the legal identity provision of Article 7 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989). The Education for All report (EFA, 2015) also emphasised that Nigerian ECE's inadequate enrolment data is a problem. Low birth registration or proof of identity levels affects efficient planning and access to services, such as education (Obokoh, 2019; UNICEF, 2019b).

Regional disparities, rural–urban dichotomy, families' economic status, and disparities in mothers' education are significant factors behind huge inequalities across the country, resulting in children's exclusion from Nigerian ECE (Obokoh, 2019; UNICEF, 2019a, 2019b). UNICEF's 2016 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) showed that 81% of children in urban areas and 5% in rural areas attend ECE (UNICEF, 2019a). Education International (2010) claimed that due to better infrastructure and more qualified teachers, the quality of ECE in urban areas is higher than in rural areas. UNICEF MICS data shows that, on average, 80% of children in the southernmost region are likely to attend ECE, compared with 40% in the middle belt region and 20% in the northern region (UNICEF, 2019a). Figure 1.1 shows the percentage breakdown of children aged 3–5 years attending the ECE programme in Nigeria by region, based on UNICEF's 2016 MICS data (UNICEF, 2019a).

Figure 1.1 Percentage of children aged 3–5 years attending early childhood education programmes in Nigeria, by region
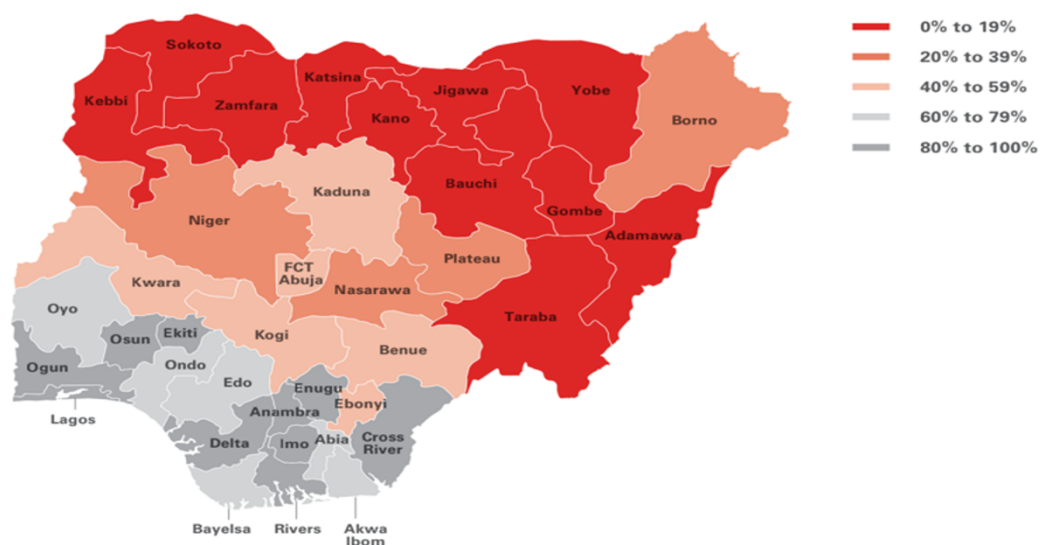
Source: UNICEF (2019a), p. 46

As shown in Figure 1.1, far more children access ECE services in the southernmost part than in the northern part of the country. According to Salami (2016, p. 75), this may be due to the importance attached to education in the southwest. Various economic, environmental, and sociocultural barriers have been identified as factors in the low attendance rate in northern Nigeria (UNICEF Nigeria, 2018). The central focus of this research is the implementation of ECE policy in three western states, which are part of the states in the southern region depicted in Figure 1.1.

NGO reports (Education International, 2010; EFA, 2015; UNESCO, 2006; UNICEF, 2019a) also noted the vast disparities in quality access to ECE across the country due to the private sector's dominance among providers in the ECE market, differences in families' economic status, and varying levels of maternal education. The economic situation and the high cost of private provision have led to a low access rate in ECE (EFA, 2015). It is expected that with the inclusion of ECE in the UBE scheme, there will be an increase in ECE facilities at every public primary school. However, most ECE facilities are privately owned (Education International, 2010; UNESCO, 2006, 2020a).

Although private-for-profit provision dominates Nigeria's ECE system, not all parents can afford it, suggesting a measure of income inequality. UNICEF's (2019a) report found that access to ECE ranges from 78% of children from wealthy families to 8% of low-income children, because well-to-do parents can access and pay for higher-quality private provision. In addition, (UNICEF, 2019a, p. 47), 81% of children whose mothers have received secondary school education and above compared to 6% of those whose mothers have primary education and below are likely to attend ECE. These circumstances raise questions about whether there is equal access to ECE and whether the quality of provision is the same for all children, especially those from low-income families.

Oketch (2017) and Udeogu (2018) note that Nigeria's education has not yet liberated many citizens from poverty or achieved rapid economic improvement. Oketch (2017) maintains that weak implementation in UBE, of which ECE is a component, means unequal access opportunities, leading to poor learning outcomes. Considering all the above, one may suppose that inequitable access promotes segregation and huge inequality in the Nigerian ECE system rather than reducing it. Access to quality ECE

tends to be far from universal and equitable, particularly for low-income families, suggesting an ineffective ECE system and policy implementation.

Building an effective ECE system would mean promoting universal, equitable, and high-quality ECE provision for all children and families irrespective of their background as stipulated in the policy and legislation (*NPE 2013*; *UBE Act 2004*). This would require an increased government investment of 10% of their education budgets in ECE to improve delivery quality, including investments in ECE teachers, quality standards, and equitable expansion (UNICEF, 2019a). This suggests that funding is a crucial element in facilitating the fulfilment of ECE goals and progress towards SDG 4.2.

A recent UNICEF report (2020) proposes a systemic approach that could support national and global efforts to achieve SDG 4.2. Five fundamental principles guide this approach: equity, efficiency, responsiveness, coordination, and flexibility. The success of these principles depends on five key elements: planning and budgeting, curriculum development and implementation, family and community engagement, quality assurance, and workforce development (UNICEF, 2020, p. 8). Strengthening the key elements requires consistency, collaboration between different system levels, and a strong and supportive enabling environment (i.e., ministerial leadership, public policies and legislation, financing, and public demand) (UNICEF, 2020). All these elements are essential to enhance ECE delivery.

UNICEF's proposed interrelated prerequisites aim to improve planning and address systemic problems that could impede effective ECE implementation to achieve SDGs 4.2. It is crucial to analyse the relevance of this framework to the Nigerian policy implementation. However, before a public sector or system could apply the highlighted systems thinking tools to policy challenges, it must adapt to change to achieve the desired change for long-term success (Lau et al., 2019, p. 129). This must be a continuous and inclusive process (Lau et al., 2019; OECD, 2017).

While acknowledging the relevance of UNICEF's systemic approach in the Nigerian ECE system, existing literature on Nigerian ECE suggests that these elements are almost non-existent in the system and ECE provision for children (Ajayi, 2008; Akindele, 2011; Alabi and Ijaiya, 2014; Aligbe, 2017; Nakpodia, 2011; Obiweluozor, 2015; Rotshak, Muktar and Podos, 2020; Salami, 2016; Sooter, 2013). Eliciting

stakeholders' perceptions will help better understand how ECE policy implementation has or has not been achieved.

This study explores the perspectives of stakeholders tasked with ECE policy implementation, including policymakers and implementers in three western states in Nigeria. The findings from these two groups of interviewees are reported in Chapters 6 and 7. Previous studies have contributed towards identifying challenges in the Nigerian ECE system. Some (Aligbe, 2017; Gbadegesin, 2018) have applied qualitative methods to investigate specific aspects of the system, such as equal access and quality in ECE, or included various stakeholders' perspectives. My study seeks to complement those studies and fill any empirical and theoretical gaps through in-depth analysis of the ECE system employing qualitative data. This can explain how the Nigerian ECE system works, its history, and its problems as perceived by policymakers and implementers. An effective ECE system and quality outcomes for all children depend on how various system elements work together (Kagan et al., 2016; OECD, 2018; UNICEF, 2020).

In summary, the purpose of this study is first to explore ECE as a system, specifically, the impact of ECE policy at different levels (national, state, and local) in Nigeria. The second aim is to examine the multiple influences (national, state, local, and global) on Nigeria's ECE policy. The third is to identify any enabling and inhibiting factors influencing Nigerian ECE policy implementation.

1.4 Research Questions

To achieve the objectives of this study, answers to the following research questions are explored:

1. How do stakeholders interpret and mediate ECE policy at national, state, and local levels?
2. How has ECE developed as a system?
3. What are the inhibiting or facilitating factors that may impact Nigerian ECE policy implementation?

These questions are meant to give visibility to the stakeholders' views and constructions of the ECE system's operation as experienced directly by them.

A qualitative approach, an interpretivist paradigm, and multiple data collection methods – documentary analysis, semi-structured interviews, and fieldnotes – are

employed in this study. I also combine systems theory and selected postcolonial theory ideas as the conceptual approach to provide an analysis and understanding of the ECE system. As my primary theoretical lens, systems theory supports a critical analysis and understanding of the Nigerian ECE system through the way participants have addressed the interaction of different elements (Kagan et al., 2016) within it. Considering Nigeria's former colonial status, postcolonial theory as a secondary theory provides a critical lens to view the Nigerian context, specifically, any influence of the legacy of colonisation on the ECE system. It also supports me in developing a critical perspective on my positionality and applying it as my 'critical friend' in subsequent chapters of this thesis.

Findings from this small-scale study are not intended to be generalised to the entire population of ECE provisions in Nigeria, including the three states in this study; rather they should provide a better understanding of the system's complexities. The Knowledge and understanding of the ECE system could help us examine how ECE implementation improvements might be made. By considering stakeholders' views and experiences, this research will help give 'visibility' to their voices to uncover the reality of the ECE implementation through how they address different elements of the system.

1.5 My Positionality and Its Influence on Research

My positionality influences my approach to the topic, setting, and research process. The term positionality refers to the researcher's worldview and the stance chosen in a research study (Foote and Bartell, 2011; Holmes, 2014; Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013). Sikes (2004) points out that these individual worldviews or how we see and understand the world emerge from our ontological assumptions (i.e., the nature of social reality), epistemological assumptions (i.e., the nature of knowledge), and assumptions about human nature and agency. Hence, the researcher's positionality is usually influenced by beliefs and values, for example, ethnicity, origin, history, personal experiences, race, gender, social class, and status (Sikes, 2004; Wellington et al., 2005). As Foote and Bartell (2011, p. 46) point out:

> *'The positionality that researchers bring to their work, and the personal experiences through which positionality is shaped, may influence what*

researchers may bring to research encounters, their choice of processes, and their interpretation of outcomes.'

Therefore, my background, values, and experiences in my professional and academic work influenced my positionality and have driven this research. Acknowledging and reflecting on my positionality in the research process is fundamental to identifying and minimising potential biases. The position I adopt affects or supports every stage of the research process. Merleau-Ponty (2007) posits that all our actions, beliefs, values, ideas, viewpoints, assumptions, and understandings as researchers are positioned within our identity structure, which affects the research process.

According to Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013), the researcher's position is usually identified in relation to the subject, the participants, and the research context and process. Sultana (2007) concludes that paying critical attention to the researcher's positionality is vital for ethical research, as it influences the research process. It is important to describe my position because my background and experience could affect my decision regarding the research process and outcomes. This approach is also crucial for my readers to better understand my research outcomes and to reinforce their credibility. On my part, it requires reflexivity on my identity as an early childhood academic and how it affects my approach to this study.

Reflexivity is a process of self-reflection necessary for researchers to identify, critique, construct and articulate their position to understand their influence on research (Chiseri-Strater, 1996; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011; Greenbank, 2003). These processes are lenses through which researchers explain the interpreted world of participants (Preissle, 2006, p. 691). Throughout this study, consistent reflection on my biography, experiences, and theoretical framework is essential to identify and understand how they influence my positionality and process.

My choice of this study is informed by my background, values, and personal experiences as an early years practitioner and a researcher. These have shaped my entire research outcomes and my positioning as a researcher in distinctive ways. Regarding my background, my dual citizenship as both Nigerian and British may lead to a conflict of identity in how I view the ECE systems in both countries. Such difference needs to be balanced in such a way as not to favour one over the other. I also have educational and professional experiences in ECE in both countries. These

experiences gave me an in-depth understanding of the differences between the two systems. I constantly revisited my positionality throughout the themes to manage my position.

The principles and values of early childhood, including children's rights in England, are different from the ideas that were prevalent during my education and work experience in Nigeria. For example, based on my experience in the Nigerian education system, schoolteachers were allowed to smack children when they misbehaved. In England, the child's right to participate is one of the most critical principles in the educational system compared to the Nigerian educational system. This difference is supported by the ideas of Wellington et al. (2005) when they claim that the researcher's understanding of an issue affects their assumptions about the nature of social reality since it is centred on beliefs and values such as historical and geographical location, status, and educational background.

However, things would no doubt have changed compared to when I worked in Nigeria, which was before the introduction of the legislation underpinning the *UBE Act 2004*. For example, improvements had taken place in the enrolment rate and the establishment of many pre-primary settings, especially in public schools. Hence, I decided to research the Nigerian ECE system hoping that the research outcomes might contribute to existing knowledge in early childhood studies and may benefit the Nigerian ECE system in the future.

My experiences as an early years professional, a student, and a researcher seeking to contribute to knowledge in the field of ECE prompted my interest in this research. Working as an early years practitioner for about eighteen years and my educational background in England broadened my understanding and knowledge in early years in terms of policy, programme, and practices. It also presented me with the opportunity of experiencing early education implementation that could foster a healthy learning environment for young children.

In my academic pursuit, I discovered that studies within the Nigerian context have explored ECE policy implementation by highlighting challenges in the system (e.g., Akindele, 2015; Akinrotimi and Olowe, 2016; Aligbe, 2017; Eze, 2016; Hamza, 2006; Nakpodia, 2011; Obiweluozor, 2015; Osho et al., 2014; Salami, 2016). Many of these were non-empirical analytical studies, while some emphasised specific aspects of the

Nigerian ECE system, such as funding, teacher education, and quality assessment. This study explores the fit between policy and practice to understand the operation, development, and contextual issues within the ECE system through a qualitative inquiry. The stakeholders' perspectives represent the views of actors tasked with, and whose role I consider important in ECE policy implementation in Nigeria. Reflecting critically on my identity and biography and how they have influenced my positionality in this study is a drive to examine why Nigerian ECE, as highlighted in previous studies, does not seem to be progressing like that of the United Kingdom.

1.6 Organisation of the Study

This thesis consists of nine chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study, presents the research background, and highlights the concept and importance of ECE. It describes the Nigerian ECE system and presents the rationale for this research and research questions. This chapter also considers my positionality and its influence on my research and the structure of this research.

Chapter 2 presents the literature review for the study. It provides a critical overview of previous studies on Nigerian ECE related to implementing the *2004 UBE Act* and the revised *2013 NPE.* The critical analysis of the literature informs an understanding of academic perspectives on the Nigerian ECE system and the status of this current research.

Chapter 3 describes the system and provides a policy analysis with the help of official documents. This chapter provides an understanding of the policy context, an aspect of the system, and constitutes one of the data chapters.

Chapter 4 lays out the theoretical framework which informed the approach to the study and analysis of data and critically justifies how systems and postcolonial theories support this study in analysing and understanding the Nigerian ECE system in three western states in Nigeria.

Chapter 5 is concerned with the research methodology, methods, and ethics that inform this study and the data analysis. In this chapter, I discuss my research questions and research design. I present and explain the research methodology, data collection methods, and data analysis measures. I also analyse my approach to ethics underpinned by decolonial ethical principles and address the validity and reliability of the study.

Chapters 6 and 7 analyse the findings of the research. These are reported in two separate chapters to reveal the different aspects of the Nigerian ECE system: Chapter 6 clarifies the policymakers' views, while Chapter 7 clarifies the implementers' (ECE headteachers' and practitioners') perspectives. These findings were based on key themes and issues identified in the analysis of the information gathered through transcribed interview scripts, document analysis, and the fieldnotes organised as settings vignettes.

Chapter 8 discusses the significant findings. It explains the complexities of the ECE system by highlighting the key issues that emerged about the system in the three states in this study.

Finally, Chapter 9 includes the conclusion, and discussion of the implication of the findings, the originality of my thesis, and its contribution to knowledge. I also discuss the study's limitations, recommendations, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: A Literature Review of Research on Nigerian Early Childhood Education Policy

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature on Nigerian early childhood education (ECE) related to the implementation of the *2004 Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act* and the revised *2013 National Policy on Education (NPE).* The Act represents the umbrella legislation underpinning any ECE policy. As mentioned in Chapter 1, NPE was introduced in 1977 and last revised in 2013.[1] The latest edition of the *2013 NPE* forms a key document and focus for this study because it is a statement of intentions that guides the current Nigerian education system up to the period this research was conducted. The national government initiated the *UBE Act* in 2004 to reinforce the revised *2004 NPE* for policy coordination and monitoring of Nigerian basic education. ECE is a fundamental aspect of the Act and policy, according to sections IV(15) of the *2004 UBE Act* and 2(10)(11) of the *2013 NPE.* The Act and policy constitute national government regulations and guidance, and will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

This chapter begins by clarifying the concept of public policy adopted in this study. It then reports on the strategy for searching the literature. The literature review provides a critical overview of the ECE implementation prescriptions embedded in NPE by evaluating the different methodological orientations and analysing their findings. Next, it focuses on the Nigerian UBE Act implementation literature to provide further insight into the ECE system. The critical analysis of the literature informs an understanding of academic perspectives on the Nigerian ECE system and the status of this current research.

2.2 The Concept of Public Policy

Although this literature review focuses on Nigerian ECE policy implementation, clarifying the concept of public policy as applied in this study is essential in analysing Nigerian ECE policy and its implementation. A public policy is the government's programme of actions and intentions that determine intended goals about a public problem and outcomes (Birkland, 2020; Bochel and Bochel, 2018; Cairney, 2020).

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[1] The 1977 NPE was revised in 1981, 1988, 2004, 2007, and 2013 (*NPE 2013*).

Given this, public policy (e.g., education policy), according to Cairney (2020, p. 2), is 'the sum total of government action, from signals of intent to the final outcomes'.

Several writers have highlighted the different stages and complexities of the policy process, such as policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation (Cairney, 2020; Howlett and Ramesh, 2020; Wegrich and Jann, 2017). My study focuses specifically on Nigerian ECE policy implementation. According to Cairney (2020, p. 27), public policy implementation involves the execution of planned decisions by a public organisation responsible for implementation. This process requires resources (e.g., funds, staffing, physical materials, and legal authority) (Cairney, 2015, 2020; Knoepfel et al., 2011). It also involves strategies and the collaboration of various organisations to achieve policy goals (Viennet and Pont, 2017). The complexity of public policy and its implications for implementation are relevant to this study.

The literature on public policy has highlighted multiple factors that can undermine an effective policy implementation process, and which should receive proper attention from policy stakeholders. Such factors include poor policy execution, unintended effects of policy, and the influence of factors beyond policymakers' control (e.g., unforeseen natural disasters) (Hogwood and Gunn, 1984, p. 197 cited by Cairney, 2020). Policymakers' power dynamics or agenda-setting can also influence public policy. Bochel and Bochel (2018) and Cairney (2020) note that policymakers can prevent important issues from rising to the top of their policy agenda or set their own agenda to encourage policy change.

Some authors have suggested that certain conditions need to be in place for effective policy implementation. Sabatier (1986) and Viennet and Pont (2017) suggested the need for clear and consistent policy goals so that implementers form a consensus on plans for effective implementation. For Hogwood and Gunn (1984, pp. 204–6), policymakers must have a common understanding of the policy goals and ensure a coordinated and coherent implementation process without interrupting communication. This process must also be backed by government's political will and a supportive organisation (Cairney, 2020). It has been argued that conditions beyond the policymakers' control should not be allowed to undermine the implementation process. For example, Sabatier (1986) asserted that unpredictable socio-economic conditions (e.g., an increase in the birth rate's effect on education demand) could impact implementation support. Overall, the literature on public policy has informed

my critical reading of Nigerian ECE policy and the literature on this topic through its emphasis on policy constituents that could facilitate or hinder implementation of policy goals.

2.3 Literature Review Search Strategy

Three research questions noted in Chapter 1 informed my literature review. My literature search began by searching for academic journal articles related to the Nigerian ECE system via electronic databases, including Ebsco, Eric, Scopus, Taylor and Francis, Sage, Google, and Google Scholar. I used a list of keywords to set up the search process, including 'Nigerian early childhood education', 'Nigerian pre-primary education', 'universal basic education', 'early childhood policy in Nigeria', and 'early education in Nigeria'.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, there was ECE provision before the watershed year 2004 but no formal entitlement to ECE. It was not until 2004 that children got the universal two years' ECE entitlement under the UBE Act. The National Policy on Education (NPE), revised many times, contains instructions guiding the Act's implementation, including ECE. This study focuses on the latest revised *2013 NPE* that currently still guides ECE implementation. Section 2(15) of the *2013 NPE* stipulates strategies to achieve ECE goals. Chapter 3 of this thesis discusses these goals and strategies when it analyses Nigerian ECE policies and guidance documents. In the selection of articles for this review, I have included relevant literature based on the following inclusion criteria:

- Articles that focus on ECE published from 2004 following the enactment of the *2004 UBE Act*
- Articles relevant to my research questions
- Some articles related to UBE implementation; although these articles do not specifically focus on ECE, UBE includes ECE as a component
- Articles concerned with different aspects of ECE and education policy in Nigeria (directly or indirectly)

Conversely, articles were not included if they met the following exclusion criteria:

- Book reviews
- Articles that do not relate to ECE or the research questions
- Articles solely relating to children younger than 3 years

- Articles published outside of the period 2004–21
- Articles reporting ECE policy implementation in contexts other than Nigeria

The earliest publication find from the search was dated 2006; hence selected studies were within the past seventeen years (2006–21). The literature review included two relevant doctoral theses: Aligbe's of 2017 at the University of Roehampton, and Gbadegesin's of 2018 at the University of Leeds. Most of the research articles are non-empirical analytical studies that reviewed secondary and primary sources. One of these selected non-empirical analytical studies is based on the authors' opinion and knowledge about the concept of education diplomacy in ECE (i.e., negotiation, mediation, collaboration, and advocacy skills). The following section will also evaluate empirical studies grouped according to whether their approach utilised quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods (e.g., questionnaires, surveys, document analysis, observations, and interviews). In sum, fifty-one articles are included in this review. Tables 2.1 and 2.2 summarise the methodological descriptions of the selected articles evaluated.

I selected studies to include in the review by reading all articles' titles and abstracts to decide if they were relevant to the research questions or dealt with ECE policy implementation issues. I also used the articles I found through database searches for reference harvesting to locate other relevant sources from their bibliographies. After searching for articles, I decided on their relevance to my study based on their abstracts. Having included these articles, I then read and reviewed each of them before making a final decision on its inclusion in the body of literature discussed in this chapter.

Table 2.1: Outline of non-empirical analytical studies

	Study	Methodology	Focus
1	Abdulrahman, 2016	Non-empirical analytical studies (NAS)	Early childhood care, development, and education (ECCDE)
2	Ajayi, 2008	NAS	Early Childhood Education (ECE) implementation
3	Akindele, 2011	NAS	ECE implementation
4	Akindele, 2015	NAS	ECCDE
5	Akinrotimi and Olowe, 2016	NAS	ECE
6	Alabi and Ijaiya, 2014	NAS	ECE funding
7	Amadi, 2013	NAS	Early childhood care education (ECCE)
8	Anibueze and Okwo, 2013	NAS	Universal Basic Education (UBE) funding
9	Buzome and Acholem, 2016	NAS	ECCE
10	Ejieh, 2006	NAS	ECE
11	Ekine and Olaniyan, 2019	NAS	ECE
12	Gabriel, 2015	NAS	ECCDE
13	Ibhaze, 2016	NAS	ECE
14	Nakpodia, 2011	NAS	ECE
15	Obiweluozor, 2015	NAS	ECE
16	Obun, Owan, and Akan, 2018	NAS	UBE
17	Ogunode, Jegede and Ajape, 2021	NAS	ECE
18	Okeworo, 2018	NAS	ECE
19	Olorunmowaju, 2017	NAS	ECE
20	Olubor and Inua, 2015	NAS	ECE funding
21	Oyeyemi, 2014	NAS	ECE
22	Rotshak, Muktar and Podos, 2020	NAS	ECE and integrated early childhood development (IECD)
23	Sani, Ibrahim and Saidu, 2017	NAS	ECE funding
24	Sooter, 2013	NAS	ECE
25	Subuola, 2017	NAS	ECE
26	Taofik, 2020	NAS	ECE funding
27	Tsafe, 2013	NAS	UBE
28	Unuigbokhai and Jimah, 2011	NAS	ECE
29	Uyang, Ojong-Ejoh and Ejeje, 2017	NAS	UBE

Table 2.2: Empirical studies summary

	Study	Focus	Methodology	Theoretical underpinning	Sample of participants
1	Aiwuyo and Omoera, 2019	ECE learning environment	Descriptive survey research (DSR) (questionnaires)		Teachers (117) in 39 public schools
2	Aligbe, 2017	ECE	Qualitative: semi-structured interviews, questionnaire, document analysis and observation	Meaning-making approach based on the work of other researchers	Teachers (22), parents (21), and policymakers (4)
3	Amali, Bello and Okafor, 2012	ECE	DSR (questionnaires)		Teachers (265)
4	Ayoola, Ojoko, and Olowe, 2018	ECE curriculum	DSR (observational checklists)		Teachers (41) from (23) public and (18) private ECE centres
5	Bolaji, Campbell-Evans and Gray, 2016	UBE	Qualitative: document analysis and semi-structured interviews	Fenshaw's (2009) theory of organisation bureaucracy	30 government officials (national, state) of UBE
6	Bolaji, Gray and Campbell-Evans, 2015	UBE	Qualitative: document analysis of literature and academic research	Morgan Gareth's (1998) organisational theory	
7	Ekpo, Samuel and Adigun, 2016	ECE	DSR (questionnaires)		Headteachers (51) and teachers (153) in 51 public schools
8	Eze, 2016	ECE	DSR (questionnaires)		Teachers (108) in public ECE centres
9	Gbadegesin, 2018	ECCE quality assessment	Qualitative: semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and policy analysis	Post-modern perspectives to quality assessment by other writers	Teachers (20), parents (12), policymakers (2), and schools inspectors (4)
10	Hamza, 2006	ECE	Mixed methods (questionnaires, interviews, classroom observations, and documents)	Context, input, process, and product evaluation model (Stufflebeam et al., 1971); the Expertise-based model by Eisner	Policymakers (8) teachers (219), school providers (73) and parents (73) in 73 ECE centres.
11	Odinko, Williams and Donn, 2009	ECE teachers' qualification	DSR (questionnaires and classroom observation)		Teachers (93) and pupils aged 4 to 5 years (2,859) in 72 public and private centres
12	Odukoya, Bowale and Okunlola, 2018	Educational policies	Qualitative: (policy document review)		
13	Ogunyinka, 2013	ECE funding	Qualitative: (document analysis)		

Table 2.2. (Continued)

	Study	Focus	Methodology	Theoretical underpinning	Sample of participants
14	Okewole, Iluezi-Ogbedu and Osinowo, 2015	ECE curriculum	DSR (questionnaires, observations, and checklists)		Teachers (31) in 5 public schools
15	Olaleye and Omotayo, 2009	Quality assessment in ECE	DSR (questionnaires)		120 teachers and headteachers
16	Olubor, 2009	Private cost analysis of ECE	Quantitative: ex post facto research design		1000 parents in the period 2004/2005
17	Osho et al., 2014	ECE	DSR (questionnaires, interviews, and observations)		Teachers (32) from 10 public schools, headteachers (3) and a local government official
18	Owojori and Gbenga-Akanmu, 2021	Government's commitment to quality ECE	DSR (questionnaires)		Teachers (150) and ECE providers (30) in public and private primary schools
19	Rentzou and Ekine, 2017	Parental engagement in ECE	DSR (questionnaires)	Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory	30 Greek and 28 Nigerian ECE educators
20	Salami, 2016	ECE	Qualitative: documents analysis	Transactional and participative theories	
21	Ukala and Agabi, 2017	ECE curriculum	DSR (questionnaires)		Headteachers (164) in 655 public primary schools
22	Viatonu, Usman-Abdulqadri and Dagunduro, 2011	IECD	DSR (questionnaires)		Headteachers (53) and practitioners (89)

2.4 Critical Analysis of Literature on Nigerian Early Childhood Education (ECE): Related Policies and Practice

This section provides a critical analysis of literature on Nigerian ECE related only to aspects of the *2004 UBE Act* and the revised *2013 NPE*. As discussed in Section 2.3, the *UBE Act 2004* explicitly stipulated two years of ECE entitlement. On this account, my area of focus is the two years' ECE provision for children aged 3–5 years old. Some selected studies focused specifically on Nigerian ECE implementation (31), while some focused on specific aspects of the ECE system, such as finance, parental engagement, quality assessment, teachers' qualification, and curriculum (14). Others focus on the UBE implementation (6) (Tables 2.1 and 2.2). This section reviews studies on Nigerian ECE implementation related to the revised *2013 NPE* and *2004 UBE Act*. The literature on Nigerian UBE implementation is important because it relates explicitly to ECE as a component. The review of selected articles is framed around this study's three research questions in the next section.

2.4.1 Critiques of How Stakeholders Interpret and Mediate ECE Policy at National, State, and Local Levels

The studies included in this section do not necessarily focus on how stakeholders interpret ECE policy but provide information on the understanding of ECE provisions related to the *2004 UBE Act* and *2013 NPE*. This is my starting point when exploring stakeholders' understanding of the policy and regulations covering ECE policy and their roles in making ECE policy a reality.

The definition of ECE policy is embedded in the *2013 NPE* and the *2004 UBE Act* because the policy and Act include the recognition of early childhood care development and education (ECCDE), including ECE as a component of UBE (Abdulrahman, 2016; Rotshak, Muktar and Podos, 2020; Taofik, 2020). The ECE programme involves children's early educational activities and experiences before starting formal schooling (Rotshak, Muktar and Podos, 2020). As was pointed out in Chapter 1 of this thesis, the *2004 UBE Act* emphasises the need for every public primary school to include free ECE sections that cater for children aged 3–5 years. Abdulrahman (2016), Rotshak, Muktar and Podos (2020), and Taofik (2020) also pointed out a similar piece of legislation. The *2013 NPE* and the *2004 UBE Act* are the umbrella regulations and guidance backing ECE provisions in Nigeria.

It has been noted that the stated ECE goals embedded in NPE are detailed because the national government aims to align the Nigerian education system with the international protocols (e.g., to provide quality ECE for all young children (Ajayi, 2008, p. 376)). Obun, Owan and Akan's (2018) non-empirical analytical study on UBE implementation also considered that the government's statement of intentions and strategies for achieving UBE objectives was clearly defined. Rotshak, Muktar and Podos's (2020) recent non-empirical analytical study on ECE implementation argued that despite government efforts towards providing quality ECE for all children, most ECE measures stipulated in NPE are not implemented in practice.

Some barriers to successful UBE implementation have been identified in several studies (Bojali, Campbell-Evans and Gray, 2016; Bolaji, Gray and Campbell-Evans, 2015; Tsafe, 2013). These studies are important to my research since ECE is included in the *UBE Act 2004*. Tsafe's (2013) non-empirical analytical study identified the government's lack of proper planning of UBE implementation regarding the provision

of essential resources, such as funding, adequate data, and a qualified workforce. Based on an analysis of relevant academic literature, Bolaji, Gray and Campbell-Evans (2015) asserted that lack of institutional willpower, disruption of programmes by the government due to political interference, and corruption are barriers, leading to a UBE implementation gap.

The same authors (Bolaji, Campbell-Evans and Gray, 2016) conducted a subsequent qualitative study on UBE implementation. They explored thirty government officials' views at all government levels (national, state, and local) in southwest and north-central Nigeria using documentary analysis of government records and semi-structured interviews. They found that compliance with the regulations and procedures for implementing policy decisions had not been attained due to lack of supervision and monitoring of the UBE programme on the part of the government. Bolaji, Gray and Campbell-Evans (2015) suggested the need for focused, accountable, and determined political leaders at various government levels to achieve the desired educational outcomes for effective UBE policy implementation, including ECE.

The UBE aspects were also reflected in the implementation of the ECE goals embedded in NPE. According to some studies on Nigerian ECE, of all prescriptions, the only successful one is to allow private efforts to establish ECE in the country (Ejieh, 2006; Nakpodia, 2011; Sooter, 2013; Unuigbokhai and Jimah, 2011). Using a mixed-methods approach, Hamza (2006) concluded that while NPE is the guiding document to ensure the realisation of ECE goals, their implementation by private providers may vary because interpretation of the policy is left to ECE providers. Hence, implementation has been unachievable. This situation is due to the government's (particularly at the national level) lack of political will and enforcement of ECE measures to achieve its goals (Abdulrahman, 2016; Nakpodia, 2011; Subuola, 2017; Unuigbokhai and Jimah, 2011). Amadi (2013) and Amali, Bello and Okafor (2012) noted that the government did not demonstrate sufficient commitment towards ECE regarding funding, infrastructural development, adequate resourcing, monitoring, and evaluation stipulated in the policy statement. Commenting on this situation, Ogunode, Jegede and Ajape (2021, p. 5) argued: 'the lack of political will and resources have limited government's capacity and commitment to implement educational policies and measures, affecting the sustainability of inputs.' Ejieh (2006, p. 63) concluded that

Nigeria's ECE goals could only be achieved if the measures stipulated in NPE are implemented consistently and efficiently.

Consistent with the literature on UBE implementation, numerous studies on ECE implementation proposed proactive and collaborative efforts at all government levels (national, state, and local) towards enforcing and achieving ECE goals stipulated in NPE. They argued that the required collaborative efforts depend on the government's political will, commitment, transparency, and accountability. The government should also ensure ECE services are well supervised, staffed, equipped, financed, and coordinated for a close interface between the policy (NPE) and its implementation, according to Abdulrahman (2016), Amali, Bello and Okafor (2012), Eze (2016), Gabriel (2015), Nakpodia (2011), and Salami (2016).

According to Salami's (2016) document analysis, the above issues can be resolved by establishing a regulatory body under the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) to oversee, monitor, and supervise ECE centres. He further posited establishing such a body at all government levels (national, state, and local), with more power given to local government since ECE is community-based. This is consistent with another document analysis by Ogunyinka (2013), who proposed the need for local government to implement ECE prescriptions in NPE to ensure consistent and effective implementation. Akindele's (2011) non-empirical analytical study also maintained that monitoring teams should ensure strict compliance with ECE prescriptions. Ogunode, Jegede and Ajape (2021) argued that sustained efforts, including state political and financial commitment, are vital to address barriers to education delivery and achieve sustainable development goal (SDG) 4. As mentioned in Chapter 1, this goal includes ECE under SDG 4.2.

Political instability due to government system changes from one political party to another also appears to affect ECE implementation (Ogunode, Jegede and Ajape, 2021). Such instability has led to inconsistency, lack of continuity, and often contradictory educational policies and practices (Odukoya, Bowale, and Okunlola, 2018; Ogunode, Jegede and Ajape, 2021). Ogunode, Jegede and Ajape (2021) highlighted the need for the government to allow for policy and planning continuity.

In their two papers, Bolaji, Campbell-Evans and Gray (2016; Bolaji, Gray and Campbell-Evans, 2015) identified a range of barriers to successful UBE

implementation, of which ECE is a component, and suggested a variety of solutions. For example, they highlighted that the ineffectual implementation of UBE is partly due to the effect of bureaucratic structures and a weak institutional framework. They further suggested that this hindrance is due to the overlapping roles and responsibilities of multiple agencies that have not yet been reformed. It is also due to the hierarchical organisational actions and bureaucratic layering of the three government levels (national, state, and local). According to the authors, this has resulted in friction and lack of coordination between the three government levels, inhibiting policymakers' understanding of policy matters. Bolaji, Campbell-Evans and Gray (2016) further claimed that lack of understanding of the policy, unclear boundaries, and an inadequate monitoring mechanism had hindered children's opportunity to enrol, attend, and progress in the UBE programme. This barrier could impact on the implementation of ECE, which is a component part of the UBE programme.

Bolaji, Campbell-Evans and Gray suggested that a constitutional amendment is necessary to resolve bureaucratic problems, for example, by giving the national government the exclusive responsibility to manage the 2004 UBE Act's implementation (2016, p. 155). The authors further maintained that the capacity and competence of appointed state governments officials, supported by politicians managing the education administration in each state, are crucial for effective UBE goals implementation. The same authors have also adopted an alternative perspective, which proposes that reducing political influence over government institutions may provide better control over administrative procedures and help overcome bureaucratic bottlenecks affecting UBE implementation in Nigeria (Bolaji, Gray and Campbell-Evans, 2015).

Some studies pay particular attention to the lack of collaboration, capacity, and commitment among stakeholders, affecting ECE regulation and implementation stated in NPE. Hamza (2006) showed that international organisations like UNICEF and UNESCO play significant roles in ECE, for example by providing funding support. However, their ECE agenda must be driven by the country's needs and goals. Salami (2016) claimed that policymakers do not inform or consult professionals about their proposals before publication, leading to ambiguities, misleading policies, and complex implementation challenges.

Okeworo's non-empirical analytical study (2018) highlighted that the government does not give sufficient support to ECE. Private owners provide most ECE facilities without any government support (e.g., subsidies) despite the *2013 NPE*'s stipulation to encourage them to establish an ECE section based on set standards. Such a situation has led to many challenges, such as a lack of trained practitioners, funding, and resources (Okeworo, 2018). Moreover, those in charge of policymaking and curriculum development are elected regardless of their level of experience, area of specialisation, or educational background (Salami, 2016, p. 83), suggesting insufficient human capacity.

Several studies have identified the challenges to ECE implementation faced by ECE service providers (public and private). Hamza (2006) found that most private ECE providers do not understand ECE objectives and strategies stated in NPE and lack the requisite educational experience to operate ECE centres, resulting in patchy implementation; other studies have shown similar results (Olorunmowaju, 2017; Salami, 2016). Consequently, most ECE measures are not implemented in public and private ECE centres, as a result of the government's inability to enforce the strategies and infrequent evaluation of ECE implementation across the country. This situation has led to further deterioration in public (Section 2.4.2 further discusses the situation in public provision) and private centres' practices (Salami, 2016). The aforementioned studies highlight significant and systemic issues with ECE implementation as required by the provisions of the NPE.

Data from several studies suggest that the collaboration of all stakeholders (providers, practitioners, parents, communities, governments, and NGOs) is needed for effective ECE implementation (Nakpodia, 2011; Olorunmowaju, 2017; Rotshak, Muktar and Podos, 2020; Sani, Ibrahim and Saidu, 2017). Ekine and Olaniyan (2019) further suggested that such collaboration between all stakeholders (government and non-government) could help Nigeria achieve the United Nations SDG 4.2 by 2030. Hamza (2006) maintained that the efforts of international agencies should focus on training teachers and providing facilities in collaboration with private providers to ensure quality services and capacity-building. Hamza further proposed the government's participation in implementing ECE prescriptions in partnership with private providers to facilitate programme sustainability and set goals. Ekine and Olaniyan (2019) also advocated using the education diplomacy approach (i.e., negotiation, mediation,

collaboration, and advocacy skills) to advance Nigerian ECE, specifically in local communities. Although the authors do not discuss their methodology, Ekine and Olaniyan's suggestion is based on knowledge of the collaboration and capacity-building approach that they have gained while working with colleagues in southwest Nigeria. The studies reviewed here note the complexities and contradictions in Nigerian ECE implementation due to lack of compliance with NPE measures, the government's lack of political will, and lack of support and collaboration by the stakeholders.

2.4.2 Research into ECE Development as a System

The studies discussed thus far have analysed ECE development as a system. As mentioned in Chapter 1, ECE was primarily provided by the private sector before it became a universal entitlement. According to Sooter's non-empirical analytical study (2013), an inventory of the Nigerian childcare market conducted by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) and UNICEF in 2003 (FGN and UNICEF, 2003) showed that 34% of ECE facilities are government-owned, while 63% are privately owned. Of the 63%, 21% are owned by local communities. This inventory was concluded before the introduction of the *2004 UBE Act*. In the same vein, others (Amadi, 2013; Buzome and Acholem, 2016) noted that most ECE services are still privately provided mainly for profit-making. This system amounts to a mixed market of public and private providers in which the private-for-profit sector provides most ECE services (Taofik, 2020). A recent non-empirical analytical study by Taofik (2020) highlighted that the administration of public ECE is the responsibility of the national and state governments, while the private sector is responsible for the private ECE. This indicates a parallel provision within the ECE system. In fact, the private sector has contributed to a considerable extent and has been responsible for ECE development since the post-colonial period in Nigeria (Gabriel, 2015; Oyeyemi, 2014).

The Nigerian ECE system has undergone extensive revision with the introduction of public provision of this service, in line with the *UBE Act 2004* to ensure universal education for children aged 3–5 years (Akinrotimi and Olowe, 2016). In her case study of equal access and quality provision for children in ECE, Aligbe (2017, p. 243) found that since the inclusion of ECE in public schools, there has been an increase in ECE enrolment of children aged 3–5 years. However, she believed that government

provision did not go far enough and was neither free nor fair for all children, contrary to the UBE Act 2004.

Researchers attempted to evaluate the impact of the government's participation and capacity on ECE implementation. These evaluations concluded that there was a lack of participation and capacity. According to Taofik (2020), the government manages and finances ECE services in public schools. Since the enactment of the *2004 UBE* and the revised *2004 NPE*, the government has primarily played a regulatory role. Most ECE measures and proposals are just paper formalities without adequate implementation, according to Aligbe (2017) and Oyeyemi (2014). This finding has been confirmed in a recent survey by Owojori and Gebenga-Akanmu (2021). The government's efforts at establishing and sustaining the programme have been ineffective due to a lack of political will, funding, and inconsistencies in the system, claims Gabriel (2015). This circumstance has resulted in many ill-equipped and sub-standard ECE institutions scattered over urban and rural areas (Ayoola, Ojoko and Olowe, 2018; Nakpodia, 2011; Oyeyemi, 2014). Owojori and Gebenga-Akanmu (2021) concluded that the government's commitment to ensuring quality ECE outcomes is crucial. The system's operation is also expected to be governed alongside clear policy and government commitments.

The UBE implementation literature also confirms the lack of government commitment to their obligations by identifying a barrier to universal participation and recommending a strategy to resolve unequal participation. Obun, Owan and Akan (2018) reported that parents accessing public facilities pay fees, even though UBE aims to provide every Nigerian child with free, compulsory, and universal basic education (including early education). The authors suggested that all government levels must ensure that UBE is entirely free to promote universal access to education.

The low quality of physical facilities and resources in most ECE centres appears to be a problem for ECE implementation, according to several studies (Akindele, 2011; Aiwuyo and Omera, 2019; Eze, 2016; Okewole, Iluezi-Ogbedu and Osinowo, 2015; Salami, 2016). The literature on UBE implementation identified a similar problem (Obun, Owan and Akan, 2018), as we will see below. This issue is more prevalent in the public than in the private sector (Aligbe, 2017; Salami, 2016). It is recognised that the government has clear goals for ECE, and its establishment in public schools has been reasonable (Owojori and Gebenga-Akanmu, 2021). Conversely, while the public

sector provides access to low-income families, there are disparities in the quality of facilities compared to private settings (Aligbe, 2017). The state of resources in public settings was of poor quality and failed to meet the national minimum standard guidelines for ECE (Owojori and Gebenga-Akanmu, 2021). The learning environment in many public settings is generally unattractive and dilapidated, with neither indoor nor outdoor facilities. Some lack security services, such as gates and fences, making them vulnerable to intruders and vandals, resulting in the damage and loss of school property (Aligbe, 2017; Salami, 2016). Inadequate indoor and outdoor facilities in public schools have also been observed in other studies conducted in different states in Nigeria (Eze, 2016; Okewole, Iluezi-Ogbedu and Osinowo, 2015).

According to Aiwuyo and Omera's (2019) survey of practitioners in public schools, the shortage of appropriate school facilities and resources posed a barrier to adequate ECE provision. Therefore, the government's obligations to ensure access to equality and quality educational opportunities for all, prescribed in NPE, appear compromised (Aligbe, 2017), affecting ECE outcomes. These situations could be due to the absence of specific budgetary provisions for ECE (Akindele, 2011; Okewole, Iluezi-Ogbedu and Osinowo, 2015; Olorunmowaju, 2017; Osho et al., 2014; Salami, 2016) or lack of government financial input (Ajayi, 2008; Obiweluozor, 2015). This funding issue will be discussed further in this chapter.

Several studies have proposed that government and private providers must provide adequate facilities and resources for effective ECE implementation and high-quality outcomes (Aiwuyo and Omera, 2019; Akindele, 2011; Obiweluozor, 2015; Osho et al., 2014). This is also argued by Obun, Owan and Akan (2018) in their study on UBE implementation. According to these researchers, the government should provide adequate facilities and resources and have worn-out facilities repaired.

A great deal of previous research into Nigerian ECE has highlighted inequality issues in the system. Regional disparities, inequality in the distribution of ECE provision in urban versus rural areas, differences in the socio-economic status of parents, and the high cost of private provision are significant factors behind inequality and inaccessibility in ECE (Akindele, 2011; Ejieh, 2006; Unuigbokhai and Jimah, 2011). Regarding regional disparities, Ejieh's (2006) analytical study found that the expansion rate of ECE facilities varies by state; however, he does not offer pertinent evidence to support this view. ECE service development is prevalent mainly in urban and semi-

urban areas compared to rural ones (Ejieh, 2006; Gabriel, 2015). Hence, children enrolled in ECE are mostly from urban areas (Akindele, 2011), while rural areas are most often affected by limited ECE facilities (Ejieh, 2006; Unuigbokhai and Jimah, 2011). Akindele (2011, p.164) pointed out that low ECE enrolments due to limited provision in rural areas could be related to poverty. Urban–rural differences in ECE facilities' spatial distribution and quality could widen educational gaps over time (Ejieh, 2006). It has been suggested that all government levels should ensure an equitable distribution of necessary ECE facilities in rural and urban areas to narrow the gap in ECE provision (Ejieh, 2006; Obiweluozor, 2015; Oyeyemi, 2014; Unuigbokhai and Jimah, 2011). This should involve local government in ensuring more spatial distribution of ECE provision across the country (Oyeyemi, 2014). This highlights the need for local government to play a prominent role because they are closer to the grassroots.

Previous studies have identified the childcare market as another significant factor contributing to inequality in the Nigerian ECE system. The lack of government participation and direct investment in ECE is highlighted and connected to the expansion of private-for-profit and unregulated providers (Hamza, 2006, p. 7). The dominance of private ECE provision has resulted in high fees and poses a risk to affordability, accessibility, and quality, particularly for middle- and low-income parents (Akindele, 2015; Gabriel, 2015; Hamza, 2006; Olubor, 2009; Obiweluozor, 2015; Oyeyemi, 2014; Salami, 2016), affecting ECE development. Thus, access to quality ECE is mainly restricted to working and high-income families in urban areas (Akindele, 2011). This literature suggests that the effect of high-cost private provision is social stratification and serious inequality. Ejieh (2006) argued that there are bound to be shortcomings in achieving ECE goals where the private sector provision is made for commercial purposes.

The variations in private ECE provision, with varying fees and the issue of profit-making by most providers, have been identified as another problem affecting affordability and parents' choices in the childcare market. Some authors argue that the quality of most facilities and services is not guaranteed for those who attend private provision, despite the high fees (Akindele, 2015; Aligbe, 2017; Obiweluozor, 2015). The high-cost settings are usually found in major cities with high-quality facilities and qualified practitioners, and often admit few children (Gabriel, 2015; Obiweluozor,

2015). In contrast, most private ECE settings are low-cost and these tend to take the most children; their fees are relatively low due to the lower standard of services (Salami, 2016). According to Sooter (2013) and Obiweluozor (2015), most private providers are primarily concerned with profit maximisation, particularly the low- or average-cost settings. Consequently, increasing the number of children takes precedence over recruiting more teachers to sustain quality ECE provision (Sooter, 2013). Access is determined by the ability to pay fees (Salami, 2016), and varying fees provide parents with ECE options (Gabriel, 2015), raising questions about universal affordability.

An analytical study by Gabriel (2015, p.12) argued that with the high demand for ECE in the country, especially in the urban areas, increased government support and involvement in ECE provision for children is of more importance than their regulatory role. To ensure equitable access to ECE, Akindele (2011, p. 166) suggested establishing more public ECE services. It is also crucial that the national and state governments establish a few model ECE centres as a quality-enhancing guide for the private sector, according to Ejieh (2006). Supporting this view, Subuola's (2017) analytical study argued for the availability of high-standard ECE services to all children, especially the disadvantaged. She also suggested the significance of public–private partnerships for quality control in ECE. Unlike Subuola, Olubor (2009) proposed that the government allocate a percentage of the Education Tax Fund (ETF) to ECE, to make it affordable for all children. However, Gabriel (2015) is much more inclined to favour government funding of NGOs that provide free ECE services and subsidies to private ECE provisions that charge reasonable fees.

Considering the literature here, several highlighted challenges appear to suggest that little progress has been made in ECE development in Nigeria. There is also a notable variation in children's opportunities to access Nigeria's ECE. This variation appears to be influenced by the dominance of the private sector in ECE provision, governance, socio-economic status, and environmental differences, resulting in inequities and disparities within the Nigerian ECE system.

2.4.3 Other Barriers and Facilitators that Impact ECE Policy Implementation in Nigeria

Various studies identified other inhibiting factors related to funding, resources, qualified professional practitioners, inconsistent curriculum, an ineffective monitoring and evaluation system, and others as barriers to ECE implementation. They also provided pointers towards potential facilitators of implementation to overcome these challenges. Some of the barriers are itemised in the previous section, such as the government's lack of political will and inadequate funding, facilities, and resources. This section discusses those that need further elaboration and other factors.

Lack of Funding as a Barrier to Quality ECE.

Lack of funding is a major barrier to quality, and makes it harder for the policy to achieve its aims for children. According to Ajayi (2008), funding is fundamental for essential ECE components in Nigeria, such as providing facilities and resources (p.379). This indicates that funding is crucial to successful ECE implementation and cannot be overemphasised; it will increase accessibility for parents who cannot afford the cost of ECE. It will also help enhance monitoring mechanisms to ensure the quality of ECE provision and positive outcomes.

Turning now to ECE funding as allocated from UBE, academic literature on UBE implementation highlighted that UBE financing is the responsibility of the three government levels (national, state, and local) (Obun, Owan, and Akan, 2018; Uyang, Ojong-Ejoh, and Ejeje, 2017). Analytical studies by Olubor and Inua (2015) and Taofik (2020) reported that states and local governments are responsible for overseeing ECE financing. The national government is tasked with the coordination and management of funding of the programme with 2% of its Consolidated Revenue Fund (CRF) each year, which is 50% of the national matching grant. This grant is allocated to all thirty-six states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT); it is a setup model meant to be agreed to by the states. (Taofik, 2020).

Section iii (11)(2) of the *UBE Act 2004* highlights that each state must contribute counterpart funding, not less than 50% of its total project costs associated with delivering UBE programmes, to qualify for the national government's matching grant (Chapter 3 explains further). The counterpart funding is an agreed funding model between the national and state governments to implement UBE projects; ECE funding

is part of this budget. Only 5% of the national matching grant is allocated to ECE for children aged 3–5 years every quarter in thirty-six states and FCT (Alabi and Ijaiya, 2014; Olubor and Inua, 2015; Sani, Ibrahim and Saidu, 2017), supported by funds from community, individuals, and foreign sponsors (Alabi and Ijaiya, 2014). This matching grant could have changed since these studies appeared.

The authors are in broad agreement on UBE and ECE implementation regarding the various issues affecting states' access to counterpart funding. This issue has resulted in funding inadequacy and complexity impacting ECE programme delivery. Olubor and Inua (2015), for example, mentioned that all states were expected to provide their counterpart funding in order to fully benefit from the CRF. However, in their analytical studies, Alabi and Ijaiya (2014) and Olubor and Inua (2015) highlighted that many states have been unable to provide counterpart funding. Academic studies on UBE implementation further argued that billions of naira (official Nigerian currency) aimed at expanding and improving basic education, including ECE, were not accessed by some states (Anibueze and Okwo, 2013; Obun, Owan and Akan, 2018). This means that the state government did not get any of this funding, affecting the supply of essential facilities, resources, funds for teacher training (Olubor and Inua, 2015), and the operation of the system. Moreover, UBEC at the national level also relies on credit from the World Bank to fund most UBE's activities due to insufficient government funding (Anibueze and Okwo, 2013), affecting successful basic education delivery.

This funding is a significant challenge hindering *UBE 2004* implementation in many states due to state governments' lack of political will and inability to provide counterpart funding, as argued by Anibueze and Okwo (2013). Corresponding counterpart funding raises questions about where states will find the money to access the national government grant. In the absence of other forthcoming subsidies, the practicality of not accessing the national grant would be funding shortfall and other issues, such as inadequate resources and poor service conditions. Alabi and Ijaiya (2014, p. 18) concluded that there is a need for the state governments to improve their attitude toward the counterpart funding system to make it work for ECE. This view may imply that the state government's attitude towards education, including ECE, is neglectful, thereby not prioritising the national matching grant for policy implementation.

Obun, Owan and Akan (2018) have adopted a different perspective, noting that funding for UBE implementation is unevenly distributed; some states within Nigeria

are favoured over others. The authors argued that while a few states could access the UBE matching grant, most states did not, which could also significantly impact ECE because it is funded from this grant. Anibueze and Okwo (2013) proposed an alternative UBE counterpart funding mechanism in Nigeria to alleviate the state governments' inability to access the matching grants. This alternative funding mechanism would involve the national government providing physical facilities and resources, while the state and local governments provide human resources.

Previous studies have highlighted that increased national government CRF and ECE funding would be valuable for achieving its goals. Olubor and Inua (2015) proposed increasing the present 2% national government CRF for UBE to 5% to increase ECE funding. Others have identified that 5% of the UBE grant allocated to ECE is insufficient and postulated the relevance of cost-effective strategies to ensure wider access to ECE (Alabi and Ijaiya, 2014; Ogunode, Jegede and Ajape, 2021; Ogunyinka, 2013). Whilst Alabi and Ijaiya (2014) and Ogunode, Jegede and Ajape (2021) suggested increasing the 5% allocated to ECE to at least 10% for quality resources and sustainability, Ogunyinka (2013) suggested at least 15 to 20%.

Some authors observed the lack of funding and concluded that the government's financial input has been negligible because ECE services are seriously underfunded, particularly in the public sector (Ajayi, 2008; Nakpodia, 2011; Obiweluozor, 2015). Despite the different funding sources, very little of the UBE allocation is devoted to ECE, contributing to the lack of resources for its successful implementation (Salami, 2016). This could be linked to an unclear statement by the government on ECE funding (Gabriel, 2015) or the misunderstanding of the national government's UBE roles regarding financing by the state and local governments, as highlighted by an academic study on UBE (Anibueze and Okwo, 2013).

Consequently, most public ECE services are underfunded (Rotshak, Muktar and Podos, 2020). Most managers cannot run the programme effectively since they find it challenging to afford money to procure the facilities and resources essential for service delivery (Okeworo, 2018). Supporting this view, Ogunyinka (2013), in his document review, wrote that most Nigerian children could not access quality ECE due to inadequate government financial support. Although Ogunyinka's paper was an in-depth analysis of a significant 2005 government report, financial reports from 2006–2013 were not available. I did not locate a more recent document on the current reality

of ECE finance. Buzome and Acholem's (2016) analytical study confirmed that the lack of funding, resulting in inadequate resources and facilities in public settings and irregular payment of practitioners' salaries, made parents send their children to private provision.

It has been suggested that more must be done regarding ECE funding (Alabi and Ijaiya, 2014; Taofik, 2020). Given this, the management and finance of ECE should involve government at all levels (national, state, and local), according to Taofik (2020). Taofik further suggested that local government must be given an active administrative role in funding due to its closeness to the grassroots. Other studies (Alabi and Ijaiya, 2014; Obiweluozor, 2015; Ogunyinka, 2013; Olubor and Inua, 2015; Salami, 2016) emphasised the need for adequate financial support by the government for effective and consistent implementation and quality ECE provision. This could be achieved by setting a realistic budget, providing proper monitoring, and coordinating public funding for ECE (Ajayi, 2008, p. 379).

Some authors have taken a different approach by suggesting a range of interventions that must be made to generate adequate funds for ECE sustenance. These would involve increased government allocations, sustained international support, equity funding (i.e., subsidies for the disadvantaged and ECE providers, public and private), and cost-sharing among education stakeholders and beneficiaries. They also proposed funding by the government for ECE teacher training institutions (Akinrotimi and Olowe, 2016; Alabi and Ijaiya, 2014; Sani, Ibrahim and Saidu, 2017; Taofik, 2020). Although these strategies seem to relate to different aspects of the ECE system, the authors did not indicate a preference among these strategies.

Low budgetary allocation to the country's education sector also contributes to insufficient ECE funding, leading to ineffective policy implementation (Akinrotimi and Olowe, 2016; Alabi and Ijaiya, 2014; Amali, Bello and Okafor, 2012; Ogunode, Jegede and Ajape, 2021). Perhaps, this is the reason why Obun, Owan and Akan's (2018) study on UBE implementation reported that the annual budgetary allocations for education have never reached the 26% of the national annual revenue budget recommended by UNESCO as a minimum standard. The amount ringfenced for ECE is not specified, and the evidence provided by the authors to support this claim is from an online newspaper article. Using several sources could give a more detailed account of the budgetary allocations. Section 10(152a) of the *2013 NPE* and Education for All

[EFA] (2015) review report in Nigeria also highlighted a similar UNESCO recommendation for a 26% revenue budget for funding all education levels. However, a recent UNESCO report (2020b) suggested that states allocate at least 4–6% of GDP or at least 15–20% of public expenditure to education. Obun, Owan and Akan (2018) suggested the need for the government to adhere to UNESCO's recommendation of 26% budget allocation to basic education stipulated in the *2013 NPE*. This case has shown that the national government policy intentions are not realised at the state and local levels.

Institutional corruption involving the misappropriation of public funds in government education ministries and other agencies is another reported problem affecting ECE policy implementation. Public funds provided for ECE implementation are diverted or mismanaged by public officials, according to Ogunode, Jegede and Ajape (2021). This situation was also mentioned in studies on UBE implementation (Anibueze and Okwo, 2013; Bolaji, Campbell-Evans and Gray, 2016; Bolaji, Gray and Campbell-Evans, 2015; Obun, Owan and Akan, 2018; Tsafe, 2013; Uyang, Ojong-Ejoh and Ejeje, 2017). This implies that the amount spent on ECE is lower than the allocated budget. These corrupt practices result in a severe government funding shortage and a consistent scarcity of resources essential for effective UBE programme delivery (Tsafe, 2013), including ECE.

Some studies suggest the use of anti-corruption agencies by the government to monitor and prevent the misappropriation of allocated funds to public institutions for efficient ECE policy implementation (Ogunode, Jegede and Ajape, 2021; Olubor and Inua, 2015). The literature on UBE implementation contains similar suggestions (Bolaji, Gray and Campbell-Evans, 2015; Tsafe, 2013; Uyang, Ojong-Ejoh and Ejeje (2017). Obun, Owan and Akan's (2018) study on UBE implementation has taken a different approach by arguing that funds from private individuals and other donors should only be used for the intended purposes and public benefit.

Research on UBE implementation emphasised that inadequate national government monitoring and lack of credible, comprehensive, and up-to-date expenditure data are other issues affecting UBE funding and, thereby, ECE funding. According to Anibueze and Okwo (2013), such data are vital for realistic budgeting. However, Gabriel (2015) highlighted that the government's inability to develop and generate credible databases or data significantly impacts early childhood care, development, and education

(ECCDE) implementation (including ECE). Some studies on UBE implementation also argued that inadequate and unreliable data for planning are a major problem that affects the management of all resources essential for UBE implementation (Tsafe, 2013; Uyang, Ojong-Ejoh and Ejeje, 2017). Tsafe (2013, p. 8) emphasises the importance of reliable and accurate data for effective planning strategies.

All the studies reviewed here describe the disbursement of UBE funding as problematic and how this contributes significantly to Nigerian basic educational development and implementation challenges. However, most studies in this section were non-empirical and only focused on secondary sources like journal articles and books rather than primary sources. An empirical investigation into stakeholders' perspectives could provide accurate information or a better understanding of the ECE funding system, which this study hopes to do.

An Absence of Qualified ECE Practitioners.

Several studies have focused on the absence of a professionally qualified ECE workforce as a barrier to successful implementation at the local level. These studies produced evidence that most ECE practitioners are not qualified professionally in the majority of both public and private ECE centres (Ajayi, 2008; Akindele, 2011; Amadi, 2013; Odinko, Williams and Donn, 2009; Ogunode, Jegede and Ajape, 2021; Sooter, 2013). About 85% do not have basic qualifications, and more than half have no formal education at all (Abdulrahman, 2016, p.131). Abdulrahman did not provide a source for this statistic.

A fact frequently reported in these studies (Akinrotimi and Olowe, 2016; Ejieh, 2006; Ibhaze, 2016; Obiweluozor, 2015; Okeworo, 2018; Olorunmowaju, 2017; Subuola, 2017) is that most ECE centres, particularly the relatively low-cost private ones, recruit unqualified practitioners. They also pay meagre salaries within their limited financial resources. Sooter (2013, p. 178) argued that underpayment deprives such settings of qualified and committed teachers, thereby hindering children's quality education. The high-cost private ECE centres can afford to recruit qualified practitioners with the minimum teaching qualification (i.e., the Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE)) and university graduates (Ibhaze, 2016; Okeworo, 2018; Subuola, 2017). Even the NCE holders are not trained for ECE but rather for primary education (Ajayi, 2008). Other researchers have also found that unqualified practitioners are often found in private

settings, while ageing female practitioners with no qualification in ECE are often found in public settings (Akinrotimi and Olowe, 2016; Amadi, 2013; Okewole, Iluezi-Ogbedu and Osinowo, 2015; Olaleye and Omotayo, 2009; Osho et al., 2014). Owojori and Gbenga-Akanmu's (2021) survey, however, found that public centres they studied had too few ECE professionals while private centres had reasonably sufficient capacity. Considering the higher proportion of private settings than public settings, Rotshak, Muktar and Podos (2020) argued that the high rate of unqualified practitioners in the system could impair ECE quality outcomes.

Akindele (2011, p. 166) suggested that the whole private sector recruit qualified practitioners who meet the basic teaching qualification (NCE) for effective ECE implementation. He also emphasised the need to ensure that the basic teaching requirement for ECE teachers is enforced and suggested continuous professional development to enhance the teaching profession. This view suggests the importance of a well-prepared workforce for high-quality ECE, as Olorunmowaju's analytical study (2017) argued for the recruitment of qualified and committed ECE teachers by both the public and private providers.

The training of specialists in ECE appears to be a problem for ECE implementation (Amali, Bello and Okafor, 2012; Ejieh, 2006; Obiweluozor, 2015; Osho et al., 2014; Unuigbokhai and Jimah, 2011). Osho et al.'s (2014) survey on ECE implementation in Chanchaga local government area in Niger-state, Nigeria, found that one-third of public settings do not have teachers specialising in ECE. The authors ascribed this to there being little or no provision for this aspect of education in tertiary institutions (Ejieh, 2006; Owojori and Gbenga-Akanmu, 2021; Oyeyemi, 2014; Unuigbokhai and Jimah, 2011).

The few teacher training institutions that run ECE have a relatively low number of students enrolled (Ajayi, 2008), which has led to the use of secondary education teachers in ECE (Nakpodia, 2011; Oyeyemi, 2014). The training gap as regards ECE specialist training in tertiary institutions is due to the government's negligence, lack of commitment to ECE, and politics in ECE administration, according to Buzome and Acholem (2016). According to other authors, even if universities offer programmes for producing specialists in ECE, the national and state governments have only established a few ECE centres that could employ graduates of such a programme (Amali, Bello and Okafor, 2012; Ejieh, 2006; Subuola, 2017). The authors further

explained that working in private settings was unlikely to attract such specialists, because of low wages and job insecurity attributed to the profession or work in such settings.

Numerous studies have suggested that the national government take proactive measures to support ECE specialisation in tertiary institutions to improve staff quality. They also highlighted the need for incentives and adequate scholarships for teacher education candidates in ECE in order to retain staff or increase the size of the workforce (Akindele, 2011; Ejieh, 2006; Ibhaze, 2016; Obiweluozor, 2015; Owojori and Gbenga-Akanmu, 2021; Oyeyemi, 2014; Sooter, 2013; Unuigbokhai and Jimah, 2011). Each state should also ensure ECE sections in their public schools where candidates for such programmes can be employed (Oyeyemi, 2014). Osho et al. (2014) highlighted the need to recruit more ECE professionals or specialised practitioners for effective children's outcomes.

Another significant aspect of the ECE workforce is the infrequent professional development of practitioners. Since almost all practitioners are not primarily trained in ECE, regular professional development is crucial to further develop their capacity (Akinrotimi and Olowe, 2016). Unfortunately, it has been noted that most practitioners in public and private centres seldom receive professional development, affecting successful implementation in line with the quality stated in the policy aims (Akinrotimi and Olowe, 2016; Aligbe, 2017; Olaleye and Omotayo, 2009; Viatonu, Usman-Abdulqadri and Dagunduro, 2011).

Both Obiweluozor (2015) and Ibhaze (2016) postulated that continuous professional development of ECE practitioners is fundamental for quality service delivery. Therefore, the government must promote and support regular CPD of practitioners and providers to further develop the knowledge and skills required to deliver quality ECE services (Akinrotimi and Olowe, 2016; Owojori and Gbenga-Akanmu, 2021). Adopting a similar position, Ajayi (2008, p. 377) argued that available NCE teachers should undergo regular on-the-job training to keep them updated with the ECE programme and adequately support children's learning outcomes. Subuola (2017) has taken a different approach by recommending the relevance of public–private partnerships for professionalism in ECE through organised conferences and workshops.

Most studies on Nigerian ECE reviewed here pay particular attention to the relationship between remuneration and job security in the ECE profession. Some authors reported poor remuneration for practitioners in public and private settings (Owojori and Gbenga-Akanmu, 2021; Sooter, 2013). Coupled with this is irregular payment of salaries, affecting practitioners' performance in delivering quality outcomes (Owojori and Gbenga-Akanmu, 2021). Other authors (Akindele, 2011; Ejieh, 2006; Oyeyemi, 2014; Subuola, 2017) provided further evidence that many private providers recruit unqualified practitioners who are paid low salaries as a strategy to make their services affordable to parents and sustain a reasonable profit margin. Only the high-quality private ECE can recruit qualified teachers because they charge high fees. In such a situation, work in ECE, particularly in private settings, would probably not attract specialists because of the low remuneration and job insecurity associated with the profession (Ejieh, 2006; Obiweluozor, 2015; Sooter, 2013; Subuola, 2017). It has been demonstrated that low remuneration affects teachers' performance, professionalism, and commitment, thus affecting the quality of children's early education (Akindele, 2011; Olorunmowaju, 2017; Sooter, 2013).

It has been shown that addressing the issue of teachers' remuneration is crucial as their working conditions determine the quality of ECE delivery (Owojori and Gbenga-Akanmu, 2021). While Sooter (2013) suggested that the government regulate ECE teachers' salaries, Olorunmowaju (2017) proposed the regular payment of teachers' wages, a contractual obligation by the government, and improving their working conditions for retention in public and private settings.

The literature presented in this section suggests that the absence of qualified and specialist practitioners hinders successful ECE implementation as envisaged in the relevant policy. Data from these studies also suggest a relationship between low salaries and practitioner shortage, particularly in low-cost private ECE centres. Hence, fewer people are willing to choose to be in a profession that puts them at job insecurity or financial disadvantage. This affects the ECE system's goals of providing a quality education equitably to all children.

Inconsistent ECE Curriculum Implementation and Pedagogy.

The academic literature on Nigerian ECE that I reviewed revealed that inconsistent curriculum implementation and pedagogy related to NPE contribute to ECE

challenges. Regarding inconsistent curriculum implementation, the Nigerian government is committed to developing and disseminating a suitable ECE curriculum for nationwide implementation (*NPE 2013*). With the support of UNICEF, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) developed a national ECE curriculum to ensure a smooth transition to primary school (Federal Ministry of Education, 2016b). However, several studies highlighted the non-availability of a standard or coherent curriculum to guide practitioners' activities in public and private ECE settings (Akinrotimi and Olowe, 2016; Aligbe, 2017; Amali, Bello and Okafor, 2012; Obiweluozor, 2015; Ogunode, Jegede and Ajape, 2021; Okewole, Iluezi-Ogbedu and Osinowo, 2015; Rotshak, Muktar and Podos, 2020; Subuola, 2017; Viatonu, Usman-Abdulqadri and Dagunduro, 2011). This problem has also been highlighted in other studies conducted in different states in Nigeria (Ayoola, Ojoko and Olowe, 2018; Ekpo, Samuel and Adigun, 2016; Okewole, Iluezi-Ogbedu and Osinowo, 2015).

For instance, Okewole, Iluezi-Ogbedu and Osinowo's survey (2015) found that the absence of a national curriculum in all the schools they studied and teachers' lack of the necessary professional development negatively affect curriculum implementation. Although the authors (ibid.) utilised questionnaires, checklist, and observations for their survey, they did not explain the type of checklist used; they neither explained how the observations were conducted nor highlighted them in their discussion of findings. Another survey, by Ekpo, Samuel and Adigun (2016), found that the approved national ECE curriculum was underutilised in public schools. Ayoola, Ojoko and Olowe (2018) found that most public and private ECE centres in their survey had the approved ECE curriculum. However, they observed that teachers did not effectively implement it, which was linked to inadequate educational resources or the lack of a practitioners' professional training programme in ECE. The authors further stated that the approved ECE curriculum has yet to reach all schools in the local government areas they studied. The significance of this is that the curriculum is not evenly distributed. The authors whose works are mentioned above claimed they used validated scale questionnaires and an observational checklist approach.

Another reason for inefficient ECE implementation is the gaps in ECE measures stated in NPE, such as lack of proper monitoring or non-enforcement of the national curriculum. According to Salami (2016), many ECE providers exploit these gaps to

justify their ineffective practices by not adopting the national curriculum. Thus, a minority of ECE providers operate the approved national curriculum (Subuola, 2017); most ECE centres rely on the primary curriculum, while some public centres have no curriculum to guide their activities (Salami, 2016). Due to the government's unevenly distributed ECE curriculum guidelines, some ECE settings, particularly in the private sector, use alternative or foreign curricula, not the approved one (Akindele, 2011; Aligbe, 2017). Most private providers deliver their services according to parents' values and priorities in order to remain in business (Subuola, 2017, p. 68). Ejieh (2006) concluded that an incoherent curriculum to guide practitioners' activities could impact children's learning experiences and outcomes. This present study's findings may shed light on whether the problems identified here have been remedied or not.

Some studies highlighted the need for an appropriate and uniform national curriculum across Nigeria. They claimed that the government and curriculum planners should enforce this curriculum for ECE standards and quality (Akindele, 2011; Amali, Bello and Okafor, 2012; Olorunmowaju, 2017). Additionally, Okewole, Iluezi-Ogbedu and Osinowo (2015) recommended that all government levels promote the national curriculum. This requires the National Educational Research and Development Commission (NERDC) to produce more curriculum and teachers' manuals and ensure they are used in all pre-primary schools (Ekpo, Samuel and Adigun, 2016, p. 85).

Both Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016) and Ayoola, Ojoko and Olowe (2018) argued that the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) at the national level and state governments should find a practical approach to disseminating the ECE curriculum effectively. They both claimed that the curriculum should be made mandatory for public and private centres with the necessary educational resources for consistent ECE programme implementation as envisaged in NPE. Ayoola, Ojoko and Olowe (2018) further maintained that the State Universal Basic Educational Boards (SUBEBs) and private providers should organise training programmes for ECE teachers to implement the curriculum effectively.

Another prominent aspect of curriculum implementation is pedagogy. Most practitioners do not use the learning through a play-based method of teaching children in ECE specified in NPE to achieve ECE goals (Ejieh, 2006; Unuigbokhai and Jimah, 2011). Among the data on quality that Salami (2016, p. 76) reported, it transpired that those activities with children in public and private settings are mainly centred around

formal teaching methods (didactic approach). This is consistent with the data obtained by other studies (Odinko, Williams and Donn, 2009; Okeworo, 2018). A survey by Amali, Bello and Okafor (2012) has shown that practitioners did not use the play-based method effectively in most ECE centres due to a lack of formal training in this method and a lack of resources. Moreover, the major teaching method was teacher-centred (Salami, 2016), while communication between practitioners and children was infrequent and focused on children's cognitive development, according to Odinko, Williams and Donn's survey (2009). For example, strong evidence emerged that most ECE centres are dominated by practitioners using a rote learning approach (Akindele, 2011; Ejieh, 2006). This is because parents' measure for assessing quality tends to be based on children's ability to count, recognise alphabets, read, or recite facts and information (Oyeyemi, 2014; Subuola, 2017). Okeworo (2018) considered this an inappropriate practice that could impact the outcomes of children's early education, considering their cognitive abilities.

Owojori and Gebenga-Akanmu (2021) maintained that practitioners must adhere to the play-based method specified in NPE for effective teaching and learning. A different approach is described in Ukala and Agabi's survey (2017), which advocated using a gamification approach (i.e., local knowledge like storytelling, riddles, and stone counting) in curriculum delivery to promote cultural value and identity. This approach incorporates ideas from postcolonial positioning. The authors also proposed developing the curriculum based on indigenous knowledge of ECE in teacher training institutions and incorporating indigenous toys into games to encourage children to develop imaginative and exploratory skills. This strategy seems to demonstrate the link between indigenous knowledge and the play-based method in curriculum development and implementation.

In the studies reviewed here, inconsistent national curriculum implementation and pedagogy are factors affecting adherence to NPE prescriptions for ECE implementation. The studies relate these problems to practitioners' lack of training and resources.

The Use of Local Languages as the Medium of Instruction in ECE.

The use of local language also appears to be a problem for curriculum implementation, as previous studies reported the dominant use of English as the medium of instruction

in most ECE centres (Ajayi, 2008; Akindele, 2011; Ejieh, 2006; Nakpodia, 2011; Obiweluozor, 2015; Owojori and Gebenga-Akanmu, 2021; Salami, 2016; Unuigbokhai and Jimah, 2011). A significant analysis of a report by the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) and UNICEF in 1993 was presented by Rotshak, Muktar and Podos (2020, p. 278). These researchers reported that 93.2% of teaching and learning in Nigerian ECE was done in English instead of the local language. This is contrary to the *2013 NPE*'s stipulation on mother tongue as a medium of instruction. This situation is due to various factors, such as parents' beliefs (Ajayi, 2008; Amali, Bello and Okafor, 2012; Ejieh, 2006; Nakpodia, 2011; Obiweluozor, 2015; Sooter, 2013; Unuigbokhai and Jimah, 2011), practitioners' attitude towards implementing the policy, absence of monitoring and shortage of personnel in the local language (Rotshak, Muktar and Podos, 2020).

Obiweluozor (2015, p. 6) argued that parents want their children to speak English early, believing this accelerates their learning. According to some authors, children's ability to speak English is also an indicator of service quality (Ajayi, 2008; Ejieh, 2006; Unuigbokhai and Jimah, 2011). These findings support the diverse sociocultural meanings of quality from parents' perspectives in relation to pedagogical instruction and learning outcomes found by Gbadegesin's PhD thesis (2018) that explored ECCE quality assessment in Lagos state. This case has shown that parents' values seem to conflict with policy intentions regarding using the mother tongue or local language as the principal medium of instruction in ECE (Amali, Bello and Okafor, 2012). In their survey, Okewole, Iluezi-Ogbedu and Osinowo (2015) argue that this issue impedes the successful implementation of the ECE curriculum. Enforcing the mother tongue in schools would be detrimental to parents' interests (Ejieh, 2006). As such, private providers tend to provide their services in response to parents' beliefs and preferences for using English as the language of instruction. Sooter (2013) argued that parents' preference for English may be because it is Nigeria's official language.

Among the studies cited above, Salami's document analysis (2016) is the only research which notes that practitioners encourage parents to use English at home with their children as it is the principal language of instruction in most ECE institutions. Osho et al.'s survey (2014) found that both English and the local community language were used in Chanchaga local government area, Niger-state, Nigeria. They observed that this promotes learning and fosters effective communication between practitioners

and children. Other writers (Nakpodia, 2011; Oyeyemi, 2014) argued that using English instead of the mother tongue as the language of instruction separates the child from his culture. Among ECE goals stated in NPE is the goal that first languages should be preserved. In contrast, Ukala and Agabi (2017) argued that the diversity of languages in Nigeria and urbanisation make the use of the local language challenging, considering the migration of people from different ethnicities with different languages. Okewole, Iluezi-Ogbedu and Osinowo (2015) argued that 'since parents' demand for the use of English instead of the mother tongue because Nigerian societies are heterogeneous, the government needs to do something to comply with the current reality'. They suggested an urgent review of the language of instruction aspect of the national ECE prescriptions (p. 53). Akindele (2011) proposed enforcing the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in ECE.

Another question raised by some authors concerns a pedagogy reliant on textbooks, specifically books in an indigenous language in ECE (Ajayi, 2008; Akindele, 2011). According to Akindele (2011, p. 165), textbooks assist teachers in achieving teaching and learning goals; however, textbooks for children are unsuitable and vary across private and public ECE centres. The available books are mostly foreign-based, expensive, and unaffordable for parents, while the few indigenous books are of low quality and unattractive to read. This contradicts ECE prescriptions to produce books and instructional materials for ECE in Nigerian languages stipulated in NPE, according to Ajayi (2008). Given this situation, Akindele (2011) considers that the government's lack of books or instructional resources for ECE has led to authors providing different or varied books for sale. Ajayi (2008) argued that there is a need for the government and those charged with producing children's books to ensure that they tackle this problem to improve children's early education. These studies identify the dominant use of English as the language of instruction and the absence of textbooks as challenges within the Nigerian ECE system.

Insufficient Monitoring and Supervision of ECE at Different Government Levels.

The cited studies widely mentioned the insufficient monitoring and supervision of ECE implementation at different government levels. Nigerian researchers have identified monitoring, supervision, and evaluation of ECE services as crucial factors in maintaining quality and achieving its goals (Ajayi, 2008; Owojori and Gebenga-

Akanmu, 2021). The official oversight of ECE facilities is inefficient (Ajayi, 2008; Akindele, 2011; Ejieh, 2006; Nakpodia, 2011; Obiweluozor, 2015; Ogunode, Jegede and Ajape, 2021; Olorunmowaju, 2017; Sooter, 2013). For example, in Amali, Bello and Okafor's survey (2012), the government's monitoring and supervision of ECE centres has been inconsistent in ensuring standards, while several unapproved centres were unknown to inspectors. Many unapproved settings exist in urban and rural areas (Gabriel, 2015). Ejieh (2006) and Sooter (2013) also mentioned that most supervision visits, specifically in the private ECE sector, occur after certain settings have been in operation for a while and have been paying the necessary taxes, regardless of their facilities' quality. Ejieh (2006) provided further evidence that monitoring officials find it impossible not to approve such centres due to lobbying by certain ECE providers. According to Olorunmowaju (2017), this situation affects inspectors' integrity and ability to discharge their responsibilities effectively and correct anomalies in these settings.

According to section 2(16) (18) of the 2013 *NPE 2013*, all government levels (national, state, and local) are allocated the monitoring task of ECE provision. Some authors argued strongly that lack of supervision by all government levels has led to an increase in substandard ECE services across the country (Amali, Bello and Okafor, 2012; Ejieh, 2006; Obiweluozor, 2015). This view is mirrored by Nakpodia (2011), who noted that most private ECE institutions are ill-equipped, and that the few high-quality ones are primarily found in urban areas. Ajayi (2008, p. 379) concluded that the minimum standard guidelines should not just be on paper; instead, the government must ensure their effective execution.

A number of researchers agree that adequate and regular monitoring and supervision of ECE facilities in public and private sectors is essential to ensure programme standards in Nigeria (Akindele, 2011; Ekpo, Samuel and Adigun, 2016; Nakpodia, 2011; Sooter, 2013; Unuigbokhai and Jimah, 2011). As part of monitoring, tailoring supervision towards constructive criticism and guidance is crucial to improve practices and evaluate the programme (Ajayi, 2008). While Obiweluozor (2015, p. 7) proposed that the government should ensure 'effective control in the establishment and approval of ECE facilities to monitor their standards', Subuola (2017) argued for a review of the licensing and approval process to ensure quality ECE standards. Subuola (2017) further maintained that inspectors must strengthen the assessment process, establish

a national quality framework, and identify areas for improvement for all providers to achieve quality standards. Olorunmowaju (2017) is more concerned with the government inspectors' commitment to their duties by doing what is suitable to fulfil their roles effectively.

It is also suggested that the state ministries of education should frequently monitor and supervise ECE centres (Akindele, 2011; Ekpo, Samuel and Adigun, 2016). This action should also ensure that all facilities are inspected and certified adequately before admitting children or given permission to operate (Amali, Bello and Okafor, 2012, p. 81). Others have highlighted the relevance of the collaboration of all stakeholders (e.g., government, ECE providers, parents, and significant stakeholders) for repositioning ECE and ensuring that high-quality programmes become a reality (Akindele, 2011; Gabriel, 2015).

Another problem affecting the efficient monitoring of ECE settings is the shortage of inspectors (Amali, Bello and Okafor, 2012; Unuigbokhai and Jimah, 2011). Since the number of registered centres in some states is extensive, this involves a considerable amount of work (Amali, Bello and Okafor, 2012). Monitoring ECE establishments and activities is difficult due to a shortage of inspectors (Ejieh, 2006). It has also been shown that certain ECE centres' locations are unknown to inspectors, affecting efficient quality control (Ejieh, 2006; Subuola, 2017). Some authors (Ibhaze, 2016; Oyeyemi, 2014; Sooter, 2013) agreed that state education ministries should establish influential monitoring agencies with appropriate functional support to maintain minimum standards in public and private ECE centres. It is clear that the state government oversees inspections and training of inspectors.

Overall, these studies highlight insufficient monitoring and supervision of ECE facilities as barriers to successful Nigerian ECE implementation. However, these authors' findings seem to apply mainly to private ECE provision rather than distinguishing between the conditions prevailing in public as opposed to private provision.

The Effect of Teacher–Pupil Ratio on ECE Implementation.

The teacher–pupil ratio has been identified as another problem affecting ECE implementation. The required teacher–pupil ratio prescribed in NPE is 1:25 without a teaching assistant. However, this ratio is not implemented due to the low teacher–pupil ratio in most public and private ECE centres, contrary to NPE's stipulation (Ekpo,

Samuel and Adigun, 2016; Ibhaze, 2016; Ogunode, Jegede and Ajape, 2021; Osho et al., 2014; Rotshak, Muktar and Podos, 2020; Sooter, 2013).

For instance, Osho et al. (2014) found that most public ECE centres in their study were overcrowded, with over thirty children per teacher in their study. Likewise, Amali, Bello and Okafor (2012) and Sooter (2013) indicated that most private ECE providers do not adhere to the teacher–pupil ratio prescribed in NPE because they are more concerned about their profit-making. Hence, the ratio in such ECE centres depends on the number of children enrolled rather than recruiting more practitioners to maintain this ratio. According to Amali, Bello and Okafor (2012) and Rotshak, Muktar and Podos (2020), this problem is due to the national and state governments' ineffective or non-existent monitoring.

Ajayi (2008) and Ibhaze (2016) took a different view. They considered that the teacher–pupil ratio of 1:25 specified in NPE might be challenging because children's developmental characteristics and needs have not been considered. They claimed that children at this level are dependent on adults and require more attention to meet their basic needs. They further agreed in suggesting the highest ratio for ECE, namely 1:15 with one assistant or 1:25 with two assistants, to provide proper care and learning experiences for children. Subuola (2017) made a similar suggestion.

Perceptions of Parental Engagement in ECE.

Another problem highlighted in some studies reviewed here is parental engagement in ECE. Rentzou and Ekine's cross-national comparative study (2017) used a survey to explicitly investigate practitioners' views on parental engagement and strategies in Greek and Nigerian ECE settings. Parents' perspectives were absent in Rentzou and Ekine's study. However, their study provides important insights into the pertinent role of parental engagement in the Nigerian ECE programme. The authors found that parental engagement activities in both countries are not yet part of the school's programme in the public and private sectors. The same finding features in Olaleye and Omotayo's survey (2009). They argued that parents' participation in schools' management was very poor. Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) are supposed to liaise with the government in ECE funding, but only a few people are usually seen in PTA meeting attendance (Buzome and Acholem, 2016, p. 22). Factors that hinder parental engagement are associated with financial constraints, lack of government

support, and parents' lack of involvement in their children's education and reinforcement of schools' efforts at home (Rentzou and Ekine, 2017).

Based on these findings, Rentzou and Ekine (2017) identified factors contributing to adequate school family support, including information sharing, awareness discussion, improved physical facilities, parental feedback, and financial support. They stressed the need for the government to provide various forms of engagement and develop a well-planned policy that addresses families' individual needs. They also proposed the need for collaboration between parents and ECE settings. Adopting a similar position, Subuola (2017) argued for an effective partnership with parents to promote quality ECE outcomes and enhance children's early experiences.

Some studies of the *2004 UBE Act* also highlighted how the lack of parental awareness of the programme affects its implementation (Obun, Owan and Akan, 2018; Tsafe, 2013). Tsafe (2013) argued that many parents are unaware of UBE's importance, of which ECE is a component. He further argued that parents need to be more aware of the UBE programme's importance through public awareness raising, publicity, and advocacy. Obun, Owan and Akan (2018) also suggested the need for government agencies at the national and state levels – Universal Basic Education Commissions (UBECs) and the State Universal Education Boards (SUBEBs) – to put appropriate measures in place to ensure uptake of education, including ECE, by parents for their children.

The same situation is reflected in studies on ECE implementation goals as embedded in NPE (Akindele, 2011; Rotshak, Muktar and Podos, 2020), which also noted parents' lack of awareness of the value of ECE. Akindele (2011) maintained that some parents considered it a waste of money to enrol their children in ECE, thinking they were still too young. Akindele did not indicate if this view differs between well-off and poor parents. As Rotshak, Muktar and Podos (2020) argued, the government must ensure that parents are actively involved in the implementation process by raising their awareness about the importance of ECE. They also emphasised the cooperation of parents in enrolling their children in ECE, specifically in public schools. However, these recommendations for action were not informed by empirical research where parents were participants, nor are parents' perspectives reflected in these studies that provide insights into the impact of parental engagement in ECE development.

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2.5 Conclusion and Salient Points from the Analysis of Literature on Nigerian ECE related to the 2004 UBE Act and the 2013 NPE

The academic literature on Nigerian ECE related to *the 2004 UBE Act and* the revised *2013 NPE* has revealed various key learning points about my research topic. It has provided a substantial body of knowledge about the ECE system by giving insights into several aspects and identifying persistent problems over the past decade. The literature on ECE implementation identifies similar issues or themes as the literature on UBE implementation. While several issues emerged from the literature review on Nigeria's ECE, some have a greater impact than the others, such as the absence of an ECE qualified workforce and funding problems.

The literature review suggests that implementation of the *2004 UBE Act* and *NPE 2013* policy explicitly related to ECE has been inconsistent. The evidence presented suggests instability in the ECE system and notable variations in quality and accessibility due to several challenges. However, these issues still seem not to have been acknowledged or addressed, especially finance by several governments over the last few years. This means much still needs to be done to achieve ECE measures stated in the *2013 NPE*, as many elements appear to be missing. In analysing the ECE system, this study considers whether the issues identified in the literature are still visible in the parts of Nigeria where data were collected.

Critical reading of the literature revealed the range of methodologies, methods, and theoretical underpinnings applied by researchers (Tables 2.1 and 2.2), and much was learnt from their work. Most studies cited here on UBE and ECE implementation prescriptions of NPE used non-empirical analytical data, while some researchers have utilised documentary analysis of official reports. Certain researchers also applied quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods approaches (e.g., interviews, questionnaires, and observations) to examine the views of some government officials, parents, headteachers, and teachers. Only a few extensively applied qualitative methods (Aligbe, 2017; Bolaji, Campbell-Evans and Gray, 2016; Gbadegesin, 2018; Hamza, 2006) to explore and understand people's views and experiences. Using various approaches, researchers have contributed significantly to knowledge of the Nigerian ECE system.

Analysis of the methodology employed in this body of literature did not include a consideration of the challenges faced by researchers when researching in the context of Nigerian ECE policy implementation. However, their methodological choices influence my thinking in identifying gaps in knowledge and informed the methodology that would enable me to collect the data needed for my research. For instance, Gbadegesin's PhD thesis (2018) utilised multiple qualitative data collection methods (i.e., semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and policy analysis) to explore ECE quality assessment in Lagos state, Nigeria. The author's approach shows the benefit of giving visibility to participants' views and perspectives to understand a phenomenon better and has informed my study with the aim of moving knowledge forward. Hence, my research further explores the ECE system through perceptions and experiences of stakeholders responsible for policy implementation (government officials, an NGO officer, ECE providers, and practitioners) in three western states of Nigeria. This is done using multiple qualitative methods (documentary analysis, field notes, and semi-structured interviews). Children and parents are not included as direct participants in this study because the *2013 NPE* does not give children and parents a formal role in policy implementation.

Studies within Nigerian ECE by various authors concentrate on policy implementation problems relating to the management of ECE institutions, funding, quality assessment, curriculum, learning environment, teacher qualification, and parental engagement. None of these studies examine the ECE system from systems or postcolonial perspectives. These gaps provide an opportunity to explore my research interest in policy implementation in ECE, applying systems and postcolonial theories. I hope these can help provide valuable insights into the Nigerian ECE system.

Chapter 3: A Review of the Nigerian Early Childhood Education (ECE) System and Policy Analysis

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the aspects of the Nigerian Early Childhood Education (ECE) system as it is understood and supposed to be implemented at different levels of government: national, state, and local. It also provides a policy analysis with the help of official documents by highlighting the basic features of the ECE system and the various policies underpinned by the legislation (see Appendices I and J). This chapter aims to understand the system through the perspective of policy.

3.2 The History of Nigerian Educational Policy and Origin of ECE

Nigeria gained independence from Britain in 1960 and still operated a British educational policy (Reuben, Odey and Egodi, 2012). According to the study by Irigoyen (2017), the policy was unpopular due to its inability to satisfy the country's educational aspirations. In 1977 the government developed Nigeria's first educational policy, known as the National Policy on Education (NPE), which provides guidance on ensuring quality in all education delivered in Nigeria (*NPE 2013*).

As mentioned in Chapter 1, an educational scheme known as Universal Basic Education (UBE) was launched in 1999 to provide free, universal, and compulsory basic education for every child aged 6–15 years in primary and secondary education (Amuchie, Asotibe and Audu, 2015; UBEC, 2021a). During this period, ECE was mainly provided by the private sector, including individuals and churches. However, there was no legal backing for the programme to take off effectively to improve education in the country (Irigoyen, 2017). In 2004 the UBE programme was reformed with the signing of the UBE Act (Irigoyen, 2017), intended to reinforce the implementation of the NPE to provide greater access to equitable and quality basic education in Nigeria (*NPE 2013*). The component parts of the UBE programme include Early Childhood Care, Development, and Education (ECCDE) (ECE is part of ECCDE), primary and junior secondary education (*UBE Act 2004*). The Act mandates the provision of two years pre-primary education for children aged 3–5 years to increase enrolment and the quality of basic education (*UBE Act 2004*; UBEC, 2018). Like other categories of basic education, this programme is intended to be free,

compulsory, universal, and qualitative in public schools and has increased government ownership and participation in ECE provisions (*UBE Act 2004*; UNESCO, 2006).

In contrast, section 2(14) (17) of the NPE (2013) provides for compulsory ECE for children aged 5 to 6. This will be provided free by the government within the public primary schools before the start of primary school. Therefore, according to the NPE, the government only funds one year's pre-primary education for 5-year-olds as the early education entitlement. There appears to be a contradiction between what is proposed in the earlier *NPE 2013* and the later *UBE Act 2004*, with one specifying one year's and the other two years' pre-primary education.

Considering the nature of the Nigerian context as a former colony, the adoption of the British educational system owes a lot to the legacy of colonialism. The *2013 NPE* is the national statement of intention for effective management of quality education delivery at all levels in Nigeria, while the *2004 UBE Act* aims to coordinate and monitor basic education. Therefore, the contradiction between the policy and legislation, as explained above, may be a direct reflection of colonialism's legacy (i.e., struggle for supremacy between the two), resulting in anomalies or lack of clarity between the policies. This research may provide an answer to this issue by highlighting the actual ECE entitlement and exploring what is implemented in the system at the state and local levels by policymakers, ECE providers, and practitioners.

As explained in Chapter 1, Nigerian ECE refers to the education provided to children before primary school. In section 2(15) of the *2013 NPE*, the objectives of ECE include:

(a) *Provide a smooth transition from home to school.*
(b) *Prepare the child for the primary level of education.*
(c) *Provide adequate care and supervision for children while their parents are at work (on the farm, in the market, or in offices).*
(d) *Inculcate social norms.*
(e) *Instil in the child the spirit of inquiry and creativity, such as exploring nature, the environment, art, music, and playing with toys.*
(f) *Develop a sense of cooperation and team spirit.*
(g) *Earn good habits, especially good health habits; and*
(h) *Teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, and forms through play.*

Section 2(16)(17) of the *NPE (2013)* stipulated various measures to be taken by the government to achieve the pre-primary education objectives. They include:

(a) Set and monitor standards for ECE centres.

(b) Encourage private and community efforts in the provision of pre-primary education based on set standards.

(c) Make provision in teacher education programmes for specialism in ECE.

(d) Develop and disseminate curriculum materials: policy implementation guidelines and other materials that will enhance ECE implementation.

(e) Fund the one-year ECE.

(f) Make conscious efforts on capacity building development of ECE personnel.

(g) Ensure full participation of relevant ministries, departments, agencies and development partners in ECE implementation.

(h) Ensure that the teacher–pupil ratio is 1:25 for effective teaching and learning.

(i) Ensure that the primary method of teaching at the ECE level shall be through play and that the teacher education curriculum is oriented to achieve this; and

(j) Ensure that the medium of instruction is principally the mother-tongue or the language of the local community. The orthography for Nigerian languages will be developed to achieve this, and textbooks in Nigerian languages will be produced.

The ECE policy goals and measures suggest that the Nigerian government has good intentions about the ECE programme and outcomes. The measures highlighted above seem robust; they also show the government's obligations and may promote ECE goals if fully implemented.

The success of any ECE system depends on a proper planning framework, efficient management, and adequate support. Therefore, taking into consideration the complexities that may be associated with understanding the Nigerian ECE system, this study adopts Kagan's conceptualisation of an efficient and effective ECE system (Kagan, 2015) as a theoretical framework. This will be explained further in Chapter 4. Here the term production variable is introduced. Production variables are seen by Kagan et al. (2016) as elements necessary to produce an effective ECE system.

According to Kagan et al. (2016, p. 167), there are seven essential production variables:

a) Governance

b) Finance

c) Programme quality, standards, transitions

d) Assessment, data, and accountability

e) Human capacity

f) Family and community engagement

g) Linkages.

The outcomes are a system displaying quality, equity, and sustainability if the seven production variables operate successfully. According to Kagan's (2015) systems theory of early childhood education and care provision, an ECE system must be supported by these production variables to be effective. These variables, in turn, must be well-defined, consistent, and sustained appropriately. I will now use this framework to describe the ECE system as it is supposed to operate at different levels of government in Nigeria, as stated in the policy documents. According to Kagan et al. (2016, p. 167), these variables must all be present, interactive, and supportive for an effective ECE system. Adopting this approach may help with describing and understanding any ECE system. Therefore, this framework will be applied here to the description of the Nigerian ECE system.

3.3 Implementation of ECE Policy at Different Levels of Government in Nigeria

The national policy on education outlined some objectives and strategies designed to achieve the goals of pre-primary education in Nigeria, as explained in Chapter 2. The responsibility for implementing these measures is shared between the three levels of government (national, state, and local).

The NPE prescribes national guidelines for effective management and implementation of education, including ECE, at the three levels of government (*NPE 2013*). Additionally, different levels of government are required to establish and enforce the educational regulations to ensure the delivery of education at all levels, including ECE. Stakeholders, such as government officials, ECE managers, and practitioners at different levels are expected to coordinate the ECE programmes effectively and to ensure the implementation of the policy goals according to the appropriate policy guidelines, monitoring, and quality control.

According to Kagan et al. (2016), examining all the production variables, as highlighted above, is necessary to assess the effectiveness of an ECE system in the delivery of systemic outcomes for all children. If the legislative system, as described in this chapter, were to meet in principle the requirements outlined by Kagan, it is only its implementation that can show whether the system really 'works'. In the *2013 NPE*, the national government enacted a legal framework to ensure all tiers of government

(national, state, local) participate in the management and regulation of education. It also clarifies the responsibilities of the three levels of government and all other stakeholders.

Governance Responsibilities at Different Levels

The Nigerian ECE system operates multi-level governance. According to the *NPE 2013* (p. vii), '*the educational responsibilities of the national government are carried out through the federal ministry of education (FME), the 36 state ministries of education (SMEs) and the federal capital territory (FCT) education secretariat as well as the 774 local government education authorities (LGEAs) in Nigeria*'. The legislation (*UBE Act 2004*) also states that the national government shall only offer assistance to the states and local governments in Nigeria, that is, in the provision of uniform and quality basic education.

The quote above shows the administrative organisation at three levels (national, state, and local). The national government is the highest body among the three tiers of government. Each level has responsibilities based on the national law. The national educational policies are mandatory, publicly implemented, and conformed with by all states in the country. Thus, the three tiers of government share responsibilities in the management and administration of the education sector (i.e., a balanced relationship between levels). A critical reading of ECE policy provides insight into the complex relationships between the three levels of government regarding the educational responsibilities in the country. Since the UBE education reform *Act 2004*, there are three main agencies responsible for the delivery of basic education in Nigeria, as illustrated in Table 3.1:

Table 3.1: The Nigerian basic education agencies

National level	State level	Local level
Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC).	State universal basic education board (SUBEB) in each state.	Local government education authority (LGEA) in each local government.
Accountable to the national government.	Accountable to the state ministry of education at the state government.	Accountable to both the state ministry of education and local government education authority.
Plays a major role in the delivery of UBE.	Responsible for the implementation of all aspects of the provision of the UBE under the *UBE Act 2004*.	Assist SUBEB with the implementation of all aspects of the provision of the UBE under the *UBE Act 2004*.

*Source: (**UBE Act 2004**)*

According to the *2004 UBE Act*, the UBE programmes are implemented through collaborative partnerships between UBEC, SUBEB, the LGEA, and basic education stakeholders at all levels. Thus, through this partnership, the national policy is meant to be implemented in the country as a whole. The *NPE 2013* and the *UBE Act 2004* set out the governance structures at national, state, and local levels of government (relevant to both private and public institutions), and they are illustrated in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Basic education governance structures at national, state, and local levels in Nigeria

National level	State level	Local level
Federal Ministry of Education (FME) responsibilities: • National education policy formulation; coordination service implementation; service quality control with the states and relevant stakeholders. • Provision and enforcement of education laws in partnership with the state level. UBEC responsibilities: • Coordination and monitoring of UBE; advocates and sensitises the importance of ECE. • Implementation of the UBE Act in operation within the constitutional bounds of states (*UBE Act 2004*). • Policy guidelines formulation; quality control; and maintenance of uniform standards for the operation of UBE. • Coordination of educational planning and research in collaboration with SUBEB.	SUBEB responsibilities: • Policy control over ECE. • Appropriate education laws provision and enforcement. • UBE programme implementation. • Research and development of education in the states. • Coordination of SUBEBs and LGEAs' activities. • Educational services provision (e.g., infrastructure and teacher quality).	LGEAs responsibilities: • Subject to the supervision of the SUBEBs. • UBE programme implementation and delivery in local areas. • Promotion and handling of disciplinary matters, teachers' transfer, and non-teaching staff in public schools within their areas of jurisdiction.

Sources: (*NPE 2013; UBE Act 2004*; **UBEC, 2018**)

In summary, the UBE programmes are meant to be implemented through collaborative partnerships with UBEC at the national level, SUBEBs at the state level, LGEAs at the local level, and other stakeholders at all levels (e.g., private providers and non-governmental organisations (NGOs)). The mode of liaison among the stakeholders is not clear or specified in the national policy. This might come to light during the fieldwork. However, within the NPE and UBE policies or legislation, there is little stated

about the responsibilities of LGEAs at the local level concerning the coordination and enforcement of national educational policies. Also, there is nothing stated on how local government liaises with public primary schools and private providers about the provision of ECE services. This also will be further explored in the field. Funding responsibilities will be dealt with separately in the section below.

Financial Responsibilities at Different Levels

Funding is a crucial element and pivotal for a successful ECE programme implementation. According to the national policy on education (*NPE 2013*) and the national policy for integrated early childhood development in Nigeria (*IECD 2013*)*,* it is the government's responsibility (i.e., the three tiers) to provide adequate funding. They are also to meet all costs relating to the operation, standard maintenance, and supervision of ECE to ensure quality service delivery. The national policy also encourages financial assistance from the private sectors, local communities, individuals, and organisations (both local and international) (*NPE 2013*).

Regarding the funding of early childhood development (ECD) activities (ECE included), education ministries and agencies are jointly responsible for planning and budgeting for (ECD) activities. According to the guidelines for implementing integrated early childhood development (FME, 2013), the formula for budget sharing concerning planned activities will be determined by collaborating partners. It also stated that free school meals must be provided for children of low-income families by the government. In respect of the budgetary demands, the national policy states: 'A*t least 26% of the national, state, and local governments budget must be dedicated to the funding of education at all levels*'. This is in line with the UNESCO minimum standard recommendation (*NPE (Section 10(152a) 2013*).

The UBE programme is financed through UBEC by the national government with the allocation of a block grant of not less than 2% of the national government's Consolidated Revenue Fund (CRF). There are also financial contributions in the form of national guaranteed credits and local and international donor grants (*UBE Act 2004*). The states can only qualify to access the national government block grants if they can provide not less than 50% counterpart funding for UBE projects. The counterpart funding serves as the states' commitment to the execution of the project

(*UBE Act 2004*). The counterpart funding in Nigeria refers to a form of matched funding.

The breakdown of the allocation of funds to all separate components of the UBE programme is not specified in the UBE Act. This means that funds are not ring-fenced or designated for ECE by the national government. However, a UNESCO report (2006) highlighted that 5% of the matching grant is allocated to pre-primary education (for 3–5 years old) in all the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The local government is funded through state allocation (*IECD 2013*). This funding is only for public schools; the government does not provide private settings with any form of subsidy or grant. Financial responsibilities of ECE at each level of government are explained in Table 3.3:

Table 3.3: Financial responsibilities at each level of government

Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) (National level)	State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) (State level)	Local Government Education Authority (LGEA) (Local level)
Block grant disbursement to the state, local governments, and other agencies implementing UBE.	Administration of states' funds and funds disbursement to LGEAs.	Funds management for teachers/caregivers' training requirements.
Management of the national government funding and development of UBE.	Funds infrastructures, play equipment, and other essential learning packages for public pre-primary education (private settings are self-funded).	Provision of funds for the establishment and management of public ECE facilities.
Standard maintenance; organisation, and supervision of ECE facilities.	Provision of funds for the operation and maintenance of public pre-school facilities; provision of school meals in public school.	Payment of teachers' salaries and allowances.

*Sources***: (***IECD 2013; NPE 2013; UBE Act 2004***)**

The national policy commits to promoting a culture of accountability and effective management of public investment in education at all levels by strengthening governance frameworks and improving the skills of administrators. To achieve this, the three tiers of government are required to publish allocation of funds and expenditures on education by level yearly, for reasons of financial accountability (*NPE 2013*). Moreover, in section 10(152c) (152d) of the national policy (*NPE 2013*), the government committed to the establishment of sectoral bodies like the UBEC Fund. UBEC Fund is responsible for funding UBE-related programmes. The government also developed measures to strengthen the policy and capacity to draw in and effectively utilise resources from international and local development partners – for instance, the World Bank and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF).

Altogether, the policy framework sets an expectation on the collaborative work of financing basic education at the different levels of government with the support of development partners. Thus, the government and development partners are supposed to work collaboratively to ensure this is done for the effective implementation of the UBE programme.

Programme Quality and Standards

It is vital to focus on the production of quality ECE for positive outcomes for children and families. Hence, coordinated efforts at different levels towards the establishment and delivery of quality ECE services, the existence of standards, a curriculum, the provision of significant-quality professional training and development are imperative. The Nigerian basic education system and the ECE policy recognised the importance of programme quality, standards, and transitions (*IECD 2013*; *NERDC 2013*; *NPE 2013*; *UBE Act 2004*). According to Kagan et al. (2016, p. 175), some quality tools will need to be put in place to achieve this. In the national policy documents (*NERDC 2013; NPE 2013)*, it was recognised that standards are considered to be among the most effective policy tools to boost quality. Within the Nigerian ECE system, three types of standards exist to promote service quality, as I have illustrated in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1: Nigerian ECE programme quality standards

Child outcome standards
(Measured on the difference ECE services made to the child. For example, school readiness).

Programme Quality

Programme standards
(Include the nature of services essential for children, e.g., minimum standards)

Professional qualification standards
(Teachers' training and development to deliver ECE services efficiently)
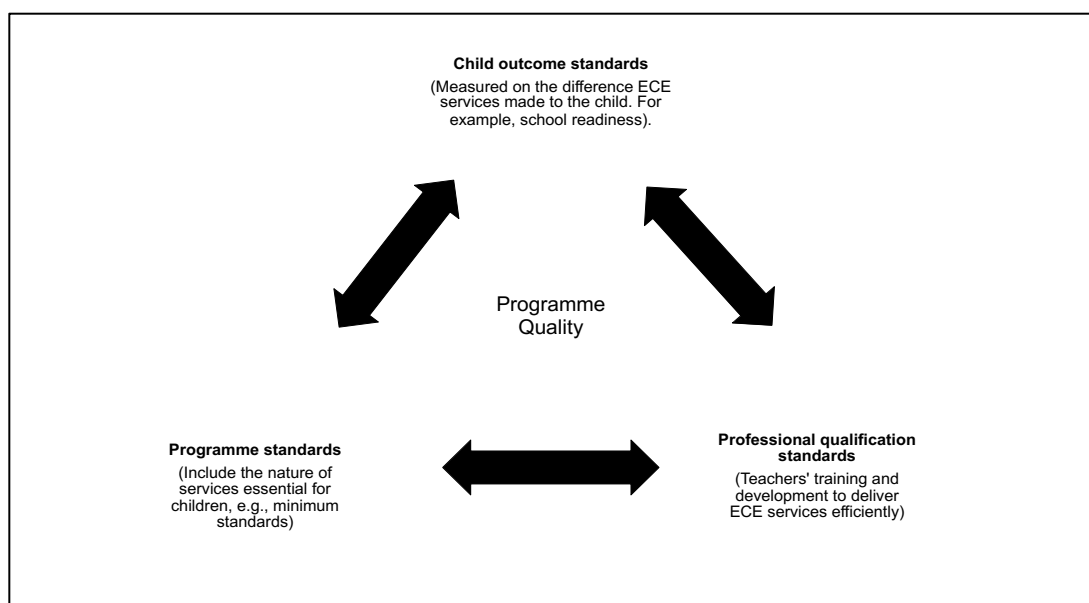
Sources: (*NERDC 2013; NPE 2013*)

Child Outcomes Standards.

One of the purposes of the national ECE policy is to ensure a smooth transition from home to school and to get children ready for school. In achieving these purposes, UBEC at the national level is responsible for the provision of adequate basic education facilities in Nigeria (*UBE Act 2004*). The Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) at the national level is mandated to develop school curricula at all educational levels in Nigeria, including ECE. UBEC disseminates a suitable early childhood care, development, and education (ECCDE) curriculum. This curriculum covers one year of pre-primary education for nationwide implementation (FME, 2016b, 2016c; *NPE 2013*).

UBEC, through the national government, ensures the dissemination of national minimum standards, curriculum implementation guidelines, and other materials that will enhance the implementation of ECE. These national policy implementation guidelines are applicable nationwide (*NPE 2013*; *UBE Act 2004*). Additionally, UBEC is tasked with the adequate provision and effective utilisation of the underlying national curricular materials. They also ensure that other necessary learning and instructional materials for basic education, including the ECCDE centres in Nigeria, are used effectively (FME, 2016b, 2016c; *IECD 2013*; *NERDC 2013*; *NPE 2013*; *UBE Act 2004*).

Critical analysis of ECE policy documents shows a significant relationship between the national and state level regarding the provision of necessary facilities and resources for the delivery of ECE services. The national level, with the assistance of the state level, develops and disseminates curriculum documents and materials, essential for the enhancement of the implementation of the ECE services (FME, 2016a; *NPE 2013*).

Since the quality of the environment is one of the significant prerequisites for effective ECE services for children, the integrated early childhood and development (IECD) policy states that the universal basic education board (SUBEB) at the state level ensures a child-friendly environment for kindergarten children (*IECD 2013*): for example, the provision of infrastructure, personnel, and instructional materials for government ECE centres (*NERDC 2013*, p. 7). SUBEB is also responsible for the provision of one school meal to children enrolled in public school facilities (*IECD 2013*; *NPE 2013*). The LGEAs at the local level under section 9 (140d) of the national policy (*NPE 2013*) are tasked with the overall management of the educational plans (including ECE) at the local level, as they are closer to the local community than the national and the state level.

ECE Programme Standards.

The programme standard is concerned with the nature, requirement and measure of services essential for children's educational outcomes. As such, the national policies contain minimum standards for monitoring and supervision systems for ECE centres (*NPE 2013*; *UBE Act 2004*). This is to ensure the practice and operation of early childcare, and pre-primary education centres become standardised by operators and stakeholders across Nigeria (*NERDC 2013*). The national policy in section 2(16) (18) (*NPE 2013*) stipulates that the government at all levels shall set and monitor minimum standards and supervise the quality of ECCDE centres. The centres include the centres delivering the one-year pre-primary education given to children aged 5, although the *UBE Act 2004* states two years of ECE provision for 3–5-year-olds. The fieldwork may shed light on what the ECE entitlement is as the policies seem to contradict each other.

The government at all levels is also responsible for licensing and quality control of ECCDE centres (*NERDC 2013*). Therefore, the quality control of the UBE programme includes monitoring, evaluation, supervision, and inspection, based on the mandatory

minimum standards (*UBEC 2010*). The institutional framework and agencies established at various levels to ensure Quality Assurance (QA) in UBE include the UBEC at the national level, SUBEBs at the state level, and LGEAs at the local level (*NERDC 2013*; *UBEC 2010*). All agencies are expected to work collaboratively together and are responsible for the organisation of supervision and inspection of all educational institutions (both public and private) under their authorities (*NPE 2013*).

At the national level, UBEC is mandated by the *UBE Act 2004* to prescribe the minimum standards for basic education throughout Nigeria in line with the national policy on education and the directive of the National Council on Education. They are to ensure the effective monitoring of the standards. UBEC supervises and monitors ECE programmes (*NERDC 2013*; *UBE Act 2004*). The minimum standard for basic education and the national policy on education state that UBEC is tasked with the coordination of the national quality assurance system for basic education services with linkages with state quality assurance agencies, local government quality assurance units, and national educational planning and research (*NPE 2013*; *UBEC 2010*). The national government also carries all appropriate costs relating to standard maintenance and supervision of ECE facilities to ensure quality service delivery according to the prescribed guidelines of the national policy for integrated early childhood development in Nigeria (*IECD 2013*, p. 21). It is also the responsibility of the National Education Quality Assurance Body (NEQAB) to advise all tiers of government and private school proprietors to use the outcome of evaluations to inform policy, planning, training, and interventions to facilitate school improvement (FME, 2016a, p. 3).

In the National Minimum Standards (*NERDC 2013, p. 7*) for early childcare centres in Nigeria, and section 9(139) of the national policy (*NPE 2013*), the state government (i.e., state ministries of education) is responsible for licensing, supervision and monitoring and improving standards of all ECE institutions, including private ECE settings. At the state level, the State Education Quality Assurance Body (SEQAB) with NEQAB advises states, local governments, private school proprietors, and other stakeholders to use the outcome of evaluations to inform policy, planning, and interventions to facilitate school improvement and to carry out any other activities to enhance educational quality assurance practices in the states (FME, 2016a, p. 4).

At the local level, the LGEAs are responsible for licensing, supervision, and quality control in all public primary schools in their local government areas in conjunction with the national and state authorities (*NERDC 2013*, p. 7; *NPE (Section 9(140) (f) 2013*). LGEAs are also responsible for the supervision and inspection of all educational institutions, including private sector settings, under their jurisdiction guided by the minimum standards for early childhood centres (*NERDC 2013*; *NPE 2013*; *UBEC 2010*). Overall, the quality assurance agencies at the three tiers of government are mandated to work collaboratively together to ensure the organisation, supervision, and inspection of all educational institutions.

Professional Qualification Standards.

The professional qualification and development of teachers of ECE services in public school is the responsibility of UBEC at the national level, SUBEB at the state level, and LGEAs at the local level (*IECD 2013*; *NERDC 2013*; *NPE 2013*). The three levels of government are to ensure the provision of suitable teacher education programmes for specialisation in ECE and retraining of teachers. The three tiers of government are also tasked to ensure that the teacher education curriculum focuses more on the play-way method of teaching and learning (*NPE (Section 2(16e) 2013*). Furthermore, the national and state levels empower IECD practitioners and managers by providing tools and training to improve their skills (*IECD (Section 10.4(ii) 2013*)). Further discussion of this topic can be found in the Human Capacity Building section below.

Overall, all three sets of standards described above could contribute to systemic quality outcomes in the delivery of ECE services, but only if policies are adequately implemented as planned. This, in turn, would help unify ECE programmes and quality improvement across the country, if standards are appropriately monitored.

Assessment, Data, and Accountability

Kagan et al. (2016) proposed that assessment, data collection, and accountability are vital to the sustainability of any ECE system, providing the evidence to monitor and evaluate the operation of the ECE system. Moreover, they are also requirements for long-term planning. For proper planning and efficiency of the ECE programme, a considerable effort would be focused on education management and information systems at all different levels to support the educational system in Nigeria (*NPE 2013*). At the national level, for example, there is an overall acknowledgement that data is

fundamental to inform policy assessment or outcomes for programme and service sustainability (*UBE Act 2004*). Thus, UBEC at the central government level is tasked with ensuring that they establish a basic education data bank and conduct research on basic education in Nigeria (*UBE Act 2004*).

For service delivery information and the enhancement of policy implementation, the Federal Ministry of Education at the national level is responsible for developing and managing an efficient National Education Management Information System (NEMIS). The state ministries of education at the state level are tasked with developing and maintaining an efficient State Education Management Information System (SEMIS), while the LGEAs at the local level are accountable for a suitable Local Education Management Information System (LEMIS) (*NPE 2013*). It appears that there is a move towards a comprehensive and collaborative approach to build data systems that could articulate information about education management from different levels of government. An active and high-quality education management information system is necessary for planning, monitoring, and accountability purposes.

The examination of policy also reveals the financial monitoring and accountability for the management of pre-primary education. As section 10(153) (154) of the national policy (*NPE 2013*) states:

> *'In line with Community Accountability Transparency Initiatives (CATI), three tiers of government, in conjunction with relevant stakeholders, also establish modalities to effectively track expenditure, monitoring, and evaluation of service delivery on education, which includes the ECE.'*

The modalities that will be used for tracking expenditure, monitoring, and evaluation are not specified in the policy.

Human Capacity Building

The quality of human resources is paramount to successful and sustainable ECE services. It is the responsibility of the three tiers of government to build appropriate human capacity. This is to ensure that the ECE workforce performs its functions competently to achieve the policy goals effectively. The national education quality assurance guidelines for basic education in Nigeria prescribe that the national level is specifically responsible for support of capacity development of states. Likewise, the state government supports the capacity development of the state and local

governments (FME, 2016a). The national government, in collaboration with state and local governments, is tasked with the training and retraining of qualified personnel for the delivery of ECE services (*NERDC 2013*; *NPE 2013*).

Additionally, there are measures for teachers' capacity building as well as the managers of ECE institutions. For example, UBEC at the national level has the responsibility to support national capacity building for teachers and managers of basic education in Nigeria (*UBE Act 2004)*. The national government is also expected to make provision in teacher education programmes for specialisation in early childhood care and education and retraining of teachers. Besides, the national government, in collaboration with state and local governments, are responsible for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) of teachers where necessary to improve professional competence in the delivery of ECE services (*NPE 2013*). UBEC, in collaboration with the state and local level, is responsible for auditing personnel (teaching and non-teaching staff) of all public basic education institutions in Nigeria at regular intervals for effectiveness (*UBE Act 2004*).

Family and Community Engagement

Another element related to the sustainability, quality, and effective management of ECE service is family and community engagement (Kagan et al., 2016). In section 9(n) of the Act (*UBE Act 2004*), at the national level, UBEC is expected to create partnerships with communities and all stakeholders in basic education to achieve the overall objectives of the compulsory free UBE in Nigeria. Given this, UBEC, in collaboration with SUBEB and LGEAs, must embark on mass mobilisation and sensitisation programmes (i.e., development of awareness) of communities and the general public regarding the one-year pre-primary education (*NPE 2013*; *UBE Act 2004*). Furthermore, section 2(16c) of the national policy (*NPE 2013*) stipulates that the national level will encourage both community and private efforts in the establishment of ECE provision based on set standards, in addition to public services. It promotes the participation of local communities, individuals, and organisations in the financing of education, as stated in section 10(151) of the *2013 NPE*.

Similarly, at the state level, the state government must engage the community. The School-Based Management Committee (SBMC) is an example of this type of community partnership at the state level. The SBMC comprises people within the

community who help voluntarily to assist in school management. They act as a bridge between schools and the communities they serve, playing both advisory and consultative roles. LGEAs, together with the SBMC, according to the national policy, are responsible for the management of public schools at the appropriate levels. This body serves as a channel for transmitting information in respect of curriculum, enrolment, quality of educational facilities, and any other matter of interest to local, state, and national authorities (*NPE (section 9(141) 2013*). The community-based efforts are expected to aid the advancement of ECE, as local involvement guarantees a better understanding of local issues and offers the best solutions to overcome these issues.

Collaboration of Various Stakeholders

According to Kagan et al. (2016), the support of various stakeholders, including the governmental and non-governmental actors, is fundamental to the sustainability of ECE programmes. Such stakeholders include NGOs, communities, academics, business, and international organisations. The national policy and the *UBE Act* set out steps to build relationships with and to ensure the active participation of governmental and non-governmental actors in the implementation of the ECE policy. These external influencers include relevant ministries, departments, agencies, NGOs, international development partners, private sectors, local communities, multilateral agencies, donor agencies, and other development partners (*NPE 2013*; *UBE Act 2004*).

According to the national policy on education (*NPE 2013*, p. vi), these external influencers are required to effectively coordinate activities and interventions, including strengthening and deepening collaboration through appropriate policy guidelines, monitoring, and quality control. Furthermore, the national policy on education emphasises the need for a better partnership between all levels of government, development partners, and all other educational stakeholders to reduce overlaps. This is to achieve effective collaboration and coordinated networking about initiatives, activities, and interventions (*NPE 2013*, p. xi).

At the national level, UBEC is mandated by the *UBE Act 2004* to facilitate and ensure smooth collaboration with International Development Partners (IDPs) (e.g., UNICEF) and NGOs to boost basic education delivery in Nigeria. Thus, UBEC is expected to coordinate the implementation of the UBE-related activities in collaboration with non-

governmental and multilateral agencies. UBEC will also liaise with donor agencies and other development partners in matters relating to basic education. Besides, according to the national policy on education (*NPE 2013*), the national government would collaborate with NGOs, international development partners, the private sector, and local communities to support and fund pre-primary education (*NPE 2013*).

The national government, also in collaboration with the state government, ensure that relevant ministries, departments, agencies, and the development partners synergise for proper implementation of the one-year kindergarten education due to its multi-sectoral nature (*NPE (Section 2(18f) 2013*). On the other hand, despite the information about the roles of the national and state government regarding partnerships with external influencers, the role of the local government concerning linkages with the international development partners, agencies, and NGOs is not stated in the national policy or the UBE Act.

Furthermore, the *UBE Act 2004* emphasised the collaborative partnership among the different levels within the education system in the development and coordination of the UBE. For example, section 9(e) of the Act (*UBE Act 2004*) proposes that the national agency (UBEC) shall consult with the states (SUBEBs), local governments (LGEAs), and other relevant stakeholders to collate and prepare periodic master plans for the active development of basic education in Nigeria. This additionally includes areas of possible intervention in the provision of adequate basic education facilities, national curriculums, syllabuses, and other necessary instructional materials. As explained above, it is clear that the three tiers of government and other stakeholders are to jointly collaborate for successful development and coordination of the UBE programme.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has described the policy aims for the Nigerian ECE system, the legislative underpinning, policies, and the pertinent regulations and guidance. Kagan's concept of the production variable was used as a framework for categorising and describing different aspects of the Nigerian ECE system. It also described the shape of the system, and responsibilities at different levels (i.e., how the system should work), as determined by national educational policies and guidelines. To ensure that the policy is efficiently implemented, all stakeholders at different levels must fully understand and be accountable for the relevant policies, guidelines, processes, and procedures.

According to Kagan et al. (2016), poor delivery of the ECE service may be traced to the implementation of the ECE policy at different levels within the ECE system (national, state, and local) and likewise, the link between the production variables.

This chapter highlights some anomalies in the policies and legislation, which seem to raise an issue about the specific early education entitlement. The requirement of state governments to match 50% of the national government funding out of the ring-fenced budgets raises questions: What happens if states are unable to provide the matching grant? How are states expected to fund basic education without adequate funds? The expectation regarding the mode of communication between the three tiers of government is not specified in the policy documents. All these anomalies might have a considerable impact on policy implementation. These will be further explored during the data collection for this doctoral research.

The process of document analysis was painstaking and time-consuming. Thus, the ECE policy is not explicit as there is no clear definition of what applies to what. For example, there is no clear differentiation of what applies to ECE, as the reference is always to basic education. It would have been easier if the individual documents had headings that pertain to each educational service to which they refer. Most of the documents have to be cross-referenced against each other to understand the meaning. Without patience and resilience, these documents could easily be misinterpreted or cast aside, with some stakeholders opting not to use them. The sets of documents used are comprehensive and are up to date (see Annex J). In the methodology chapter, I discuss how I collected the documents on which this chapter is based. The next chapter presents the theoretical framework through which to view the Nigerian ECE system.

Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will describe, critique, and justify a theoretical framework to support the analysis of early childhood education (ECE) as a system – specifically, how the elements interpret and mediate the ECE policy at different levels (national, state, and local) in Nigeria. I justify my theoretical framework by firstly critiquing systems theory and postcolonial theory as two theories that support and guide this thesis. I argue that they are complementary. Systems theory of change is my primary theoretical lens because this thesis is about understanding the ECE system. It supports a critical analysis and understanding of policy implementation within the ECE system in Nigeria. Postcolonial theory is a secondary theory that provides a critical lens to view the Nigerian context, specifically the power relations that may operate in the ECE system and the legacy of colonisation. It also supports me in developing a critical perspective on my positionality.

4.2 Systems Theory

In this section, I justify systems theory as the principal theory to support this thesis. I first provide an overview of systems theory and the concepts relevant to this study. I review and reflect on how systems theory has been adopted, developed, and applied in past research in the field of early childhood studies. I then propose a theoretical framework (systems theory of change) to apply. I also offer a rationale for using systems theory in this study, recognising its limitations.

What is 'Systems Theory'?

Systems theory was first proposed by a biologist, Bertalanffy (1969). Bertalanffy viewed a system as a complex interaction of elements that interrelate with their environments. The term systems theory is used by Bertalanffy (1969) and Laszlo (1996) to refer to a paradigmatic perspective that views all situations as a web of relationships among elements in a system, to better understand a specific phenomenon (cited in Kagan et al., 2016, p. 43). These interacting elements include people, laws, models, principles, activities, and institutions. Bertalanffy (1969) further posits that a system can only be examined as a whole by the interaction of its various elements. In other words, a system can only be fully understood by examining all the elements within it because all the elements are interdependent.

Systems theory is not a stand-alone theory; it comprises a diverse range of interrelated concepts and theoretical areas, including ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Although I am fascinated by the ecological systems theory, which is a component of systems theory, it might, as a framework for understanding childhood systems and service delivery, look at only some aspects of the system. Hence, it might not be broad enough for this research topic. Systems theory complements and expands the domains and analysis of ecological theory. It is broader and explores all phenomena through examining the relationship among elements within a system; therefore, systems theory is more relevant for this research study.

Systems theory has been widely applied in various fields and disciplines. According to Kagan et al. (2016), it is an interdisciplinary theory that has been used in a range of disciplines, including cybernetics, kinetics, ecology, sociology, and psychology. It has also appeared in and influenced other disciplines related to human learning and development, including education, and specifically early childhood education and policy (Härkönen, 2002; Kagan et al., 2016; Munro, 2011). Thus, it is not new in the field of early childhood studies, particularly ECE policy. Systems theory of change will be applied in this study as developed by Kagan (2015) as a tool to examine the operation of the Nigerian ECE system. I am not implying that Kagan's systems theory is the perfect fit for all systems. Rather, I will be testing the theory, using it as a tool and a guide for this research by considering its relevance to the Nigerian system.

New institutional and complex adaptive theories are closely associated with systems theory when discussing the ECE system. Kagan et al. (2016) highlighted these two theories as significant when discussing early childhood systems. They are different perspectives within systems theory. New institutional theory developed by Meyer and Rowan (1977), DiMaggio and Powell (1983), and Scott (2001) stresses the fundamental role of institutional forces (e.g., policy context, actors, agency, values, institutional structures, and programmes) play in shaping service delivery. It explores the normative culture in and across institutions and the impact that contextual environments have on institutional and organisational behaviour (Scott, 2001; Scott and Davies, 2007, cited in Kagan et al., 2016, p. 164). Institutional theory considers that institutions are not static but are subject to change in response to temporal (i.e., political, economic, and environmental) and socio-cultural factors (Kagan et al., 2016). Therefore, according to institutional theory, ECE services outcomes for children are

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influenced not only by the roles of multiple institutions but also by changing political, economic, environmental, and socio-cultural contexts.

Parallel to new institutional theory is complex adaptive theory, which suggests that social changes are 'now normative' and 'non-linear' (Joachim and May 2010, cited in Kagan et al., 2016, p. 164). It maintains that change must be examined systematically to discern how diverse elements relate to and impact one another (Kagan et al., 2016, p. 164). New institutional theory tends to focus on the role institutions play in the delivery of services. In contrast, complex adaptive theory offers critical insights towards analysing the interaction of different elements and how they impact one another within a system's delivery of services. Besides, complex adaptive theory suggests that studying a component from its systemic context in isolation renders the analysis incomplete (Kagan et al., 2016).

These two theories (new institutional and complex adaptive) can provide vital insights into the interaction of different elements within the system, the roles institutions (i.e., multiple influences) play, and how they interrelate in ECE service delivery. I propose that they complement each other as guides to providing critical analysis and understanding of ECE policy implementation as a system in Nigeria. They will also help to explain the operation of the system by exploring the interaction of different elements, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Systems theory goes beyond merely describing or examining programme outcomes for children; it also provides critical analysis of the elements that influence an ECE system and children's outcomes. Regarding this, Kagan et al. (2016, pp. 164–165) propose that three macro-level elements influence ECE outcomes for children: quality of services, equitable distribution, and their sustainability over time. These three elements (quality, equity, and sustainability) impact on ECE services as they are characteristics and results of an efficient ECE system. Thus, they are significant in the examination of effective outcomes of the Nigerian ECE system.

Kagan et al. (2016) use the term 'quality' to refer to characteristics of ECE programmes, practitioners, and providers that are employed to deliver the necessary ECE services as required being supportive enough to ensure that children reach their full potential. Equity refers to the provision and distribution of resources across the country and between sectors, regions, and age groups over time that ensures equality

of outcomes for everyone. Sustainability encompasses a set of financial, political, and contextual factors that seeks to determine effective operation and adaptation of the system to changing circumstances over time without affecting the provision of ECE services for children and their families.

According to Kagan et al. (2016), an ECE system will only adapt to changing circumstances of the temporal factors (i.e., political, economic environmental systems) that encase it if it is built on foundations of quality, equity, and sustainability. This may be relevant to the Nigerian ECE system as the national policy goals embrace these three systemic outcomes (*NPE 2013*). This means that it is not just outcomes of ECE services for individual children that matter. Nevertheless, the positive outcomes (quality, equity, and sustainability) of ECE services provided for all children over time are beneficial and effective. To this end, Kagan's systems theory is useful to this study. It offers a critical lens to examine and understand the Nigerian ECE system from a structural and systems perspective. Kagan's characteristics of an effective ECE system can also be profitably used. They are potent tools for exploring ECE policy implementation and the delivery of ECE provisions to ensure an effective ECE system.

Application of Systems Theory in the Field of Early Childhood Studies

In attempting to propose a theoretical framework to apply in this study, how systems theory has been adopted, developed, and used in past research in early childhood studies needs to be reviewed. Some scholars have adopted systems theory to analyse the relationship between different components in an ECE system in different ways (Härkönen, 2002; Kagan et al., 2016; Munro, 2011). Firstly, in an analysis of the ECE concept, Härkönen (2002) used concept analysis to analyse some Finnish ECE textbooks and articles that offered different interpretations of ECE based on the international theoretical cornerstones. Härkönen found a new ECE concept as a new part-system of the system entity. The part-system includes ECE as a practice, a science, a subject, and another way of ECE thinking. The use of systems theory to define ECE led to new knowledge and revealed possibilities for new ideas.

Secondly, and by contrast, Munro (2011) in her important examination of the child protection system in England was able to show the impact of previously implemented reforms. She explored the characteristics of an effective child protection system using a 7-S framework system approach (Peters, Waterman and Phillips, 1980). The seven

elements are structure, strategy, systems, skills, style, staff, and shared values. This approach provided a critical lens for understanding the underlying problems that influence a multi-agency practice/system.

Thirdly, in their comprehensive study of ECE systems in Latin America, and the Caribbean (LAC), Kagan et al. (2016) were able to show the importance of understanding the delivery of ECE services through the use of systems theory. A systems theory known as systems theory of change was adopted and applied as a conceptual framework based on Kagan's (2015) work to examine ECE outcomes in LAC, as illustrated in Figure 4.1. It is therefore necessary to describe the systems theory of change according to Kagan.

The systems theory of change aims to guide new thinking and research based on ecological, developmental, and systems theory coupled with new institutional and complex adaptive theory. For the system to work, Kagan et al. (2016) propose that elements in [A], which are programmes and boundary-spanning entities (education, health, nutrition, and social protection), must be supported robustly by seven essential production variables [B]. These seven production variables are (1) governance; (2) finance; (3) programme quality, standards, and transitions; (4) assessment, data, and accountability; (5) human capacity development; (6) family and community engagement; and (7) linkages with external influencers.

The seven elements must be coherent, connected, and considered supportive. A system is formed when all these seven production variables are joined with the programmes/services and boundary-spanning entities. Additionally, elements [A] and [B] are necessary for an efficient and effective ECE system [C]. This will, in turn, lead to systemic outcomes (high quality, equitably distributed, and sustainable) [D] and family outcomes (meaningfully involved and organisationally supported) [E]. It will then produce child and family wellbeing [F]. According to Kagan et al. (2016), socio-cultural (values, beliefs, heritages, and religions) [H] and temporal (political, economic, and environmental) [G] are variables that support and influence the context in which the programmes and policies exist.
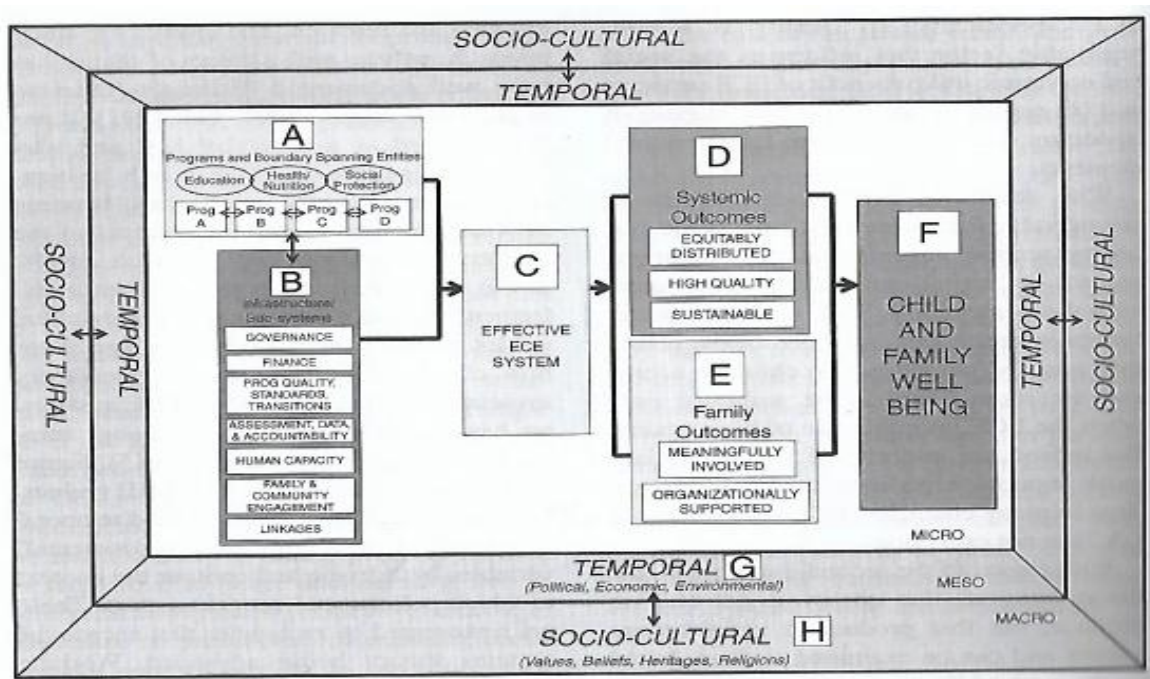
Figure 4.1   Conceptual systems theory of change. *Source: Kagan et al. (2016, p. 168).*

Kagan's systems theory of change will be applied in this study, given the importance of its holistic approach to a web of relationships of various elements within a system. Recognising the components' interrelationship patterns is crucial (Kagan et al., 2016; Senge and Lannon Kim, 1991). For example, the conceptual systems of change support critical analysis of the production variables that support ECE services. Additionally, systems theory will be used as a guide to support critical analysis of the contextual elements (temporal and socio-cultural factors) that influence Nigerian ECE policy implementation, including boundary-spanning entities (e.g., health, nutrition, and social protection).

Systems theory of change would likely also be appropriate for examining the roles of different elements within the system. The systemic elements (i.e., quality, equity, and sustainability), as argued by Kagan et al. (2016), are part of the Nigerian ECE policy goals. Therefore, applying Kagan's systems theory of change is significant to this study, as it could help with understanding the ECE system's operation. It could also offer insights into the exploration of problems, if any, within the system. This approach, in turn, could provide new possibilities for improved policy implementation through multiple perspectives.

One major drawback of Kagan's systems theory of change is that it lacks universal applicability because it was developed in a different context. It might not be ideal in specific contexts due to cultural variations. The extent to which crucial information is shared may be affected by the culture and context. Hence, it should not be seen as the perfect standard of measurement for all systems but rather a model to adopt. In other words, it is not a priori for an effective ECE system. However, I will be testing the theory to enhance the meaningfulness of this study's findings by providing rationales for discussion. This might identify gaps in knowledge and offer ideas to bridge them.

To understand how the theoretical framework of systems theory can be applied to ECE systems research, Kagan et al. (2016) propose an extensive range of prerequisites that must be met as follows:

> *First, the theory needs to be expressed through a conceptual framework that is broad enough to encase diverse programs and services for young children that pay attention to contextual and architectural variables and can be applied within and across diverse institutional settings. Second, the framework must incorporate the theoretical work upon which it is built and hopes to advance. Third, demonstrate the nature and trajectory of social change within a swirl of concurrent and rapidly changing political and economic events that characterize both the current ECE field and the social conditions of the involved countries. Fourth, the theory needs to be respectful of several guiding assumptions related to ECE, specifically: (i) quality is a non-negotiable factor that influences the social and economic utility/benefit of ECE services; and (ii) quality is contingent on a number of important yet under-studied infrastructural elements.* (pp. 166–167)

The extract above shows that the systems theory of change might apply to the Nigerian ECE system, as it is represented through a conceptual framework. I hope it would be relevant and flexible enough to adapt to changes in relation to the factors affecting the Nigerian ECE. For example, previous studies reveal that the framework's elements seem not to be consistent with the Nigerian ECE system (Ajayi, 2008; Akindele, 2015; Nakpodia, 2011).

Furthermore, the systems theory of change can incorporate related theories or guiding ideas (e.g., postcolonial theory) to address the research questions about the Nigerian ECE system. Therefore, similar to the research carried out by Kagan et al. (2016), I will be applying Kagan's conceptual systems theory of change (2015) in Figure 4.1, as a conceptual framework for this study and as a potent tool for analysing the Nigerian ECE as a system. Kagan's conceptual framework (2015) contains the prerequisites that may support and assist this study. It could provide answers to my research questions, critically analyse the Nigerian ECE system's operation, and offer possible recommendations to improve Nigerian ECE policy implementation. The application of Kagan's conceptual systems theory of change (2015) for the Nigerian ECE system will be considered in Chapter 8.

From the previous discussion, it is apparent that systems theory is potentially beneficial for analysing and understanding the interaction of elements within an ECE system; some limitations need to be acknowledged, however. A first criticism made by Kagan et al. (2016) is that applying systems theory to early childhood education and care systems requires making decisions on how deeply we need to understand each element of the system to interpret the system's operation as a whole. Kagan et al. (2016, p. 181), for example, point out that information collected may be subject to time and resource limitations, which could affect the ability to infer, in this case, the essential principles on which the Nigerian ECE system operates. Responding to, analysing, and interpreting the study data according to participants' perceptions is crucial to approach decolonising research.

Another major criticism of systems theory's application in research on early childhood systems, highlighted by Kagan et al. (2016), is that ECE systems are closely related to other areas of public policy, such as health and social welfare services. For Kagan et al. (2016), conducting systems research may require an interdisciplinary team to focus on all the system's elements. Kagan et al. (2016, p. 181) further argue that balancing attention to capture all aspects impacting children and families, including health and social protection structures, could be challenging, as analysis may favour some disciplines more than others. Acknowledging these limitations in research is crucial. In this study, I have applied systems theory in a way that only focuses on early childhood education, while my research could have encompassed broader areas of public policy or services that impact children's wellbeing.

A criticism of systems theories, in general, is the difficulty they have in conceptualising the interplay between the structure and agency of the policymakers and implementers. Therefore, they might not strike an adequate balance between these two components (Cairney, 2020). For example, Kagan's (2015) systems theory of change, and other forms of systems theory, such as the new institutional theory (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Scott, 2001; Scott and Davies, 2007), focus on multiple institutions and phenomena (e.g., policies and institutional structures) shaping ECE services (Kagan et al., 2016, p. 164). They only provide a framework for describing system elements and exclude other elements, such as policymakers, implementers, and environmental factors that limit policymakers' or implementers' ability to make decisions (e.g., changes in socioeconomic conditions). Hence, systems theories generally have been critiqued for their inability to lead us in any one direction or to a specific conclusion (Cairney, 2020; Hay, 2002). According to Hay (2002, p. 102), "systems theories describe systemic logics that operate in some sense independently of – and over the heads of – the actors." Moreover, Cairney (2020) argues that in a complex policymaking system, policies often emerge locally without central control. This implies that systems theories do not focus sufficiently on the local or include insights into loss of control, or possible deviation from central prescriptions and policy intentions, during implementation. For instance, they do not provide insights into how policymakers and implementers perceive the ECE system or challenge the structural institutional and broader systemic inadequacies they face in the policymaking process.

To overcome the limitations of systems theory requires a more sophisticated approach that provides a theoretical lens for analysing the nature of changes in complex and interactive situations rather than describing, analysing, and understanding how ECE functions and could function (Kagan, Gomez and Roth, 2018). This requires examining the broader context in which policy takes place, including the networks of elements that interact, collaborate, adapt, and share information, providing an overall explanation of policy implementation (Cairney, 2020). This perspective is highly relevant to my research context, as it focuses on a complex analysis of the various layers (national, state, and local) of the Nigerian ECE system.

In this study, systems theory and postcolonial theory are used in a complementary way to support an understanding of the structure and agency of policymakers and

implementers. Both theories give visibility to how different elements exercise power and how policymakers and implementers may exercise power in the system. Systems theory indicates how the system elements interrelate and function. Postcolonial theory explicitly privileges local voices and experiences of the system and how local stakeholders exercise power but are also subject to power. Although my application of Kagan's (2015) systems theory of change is not a perfect fit for the Nigerian context, as it does not take into account the complexity of the layers of national, state, and local governance, it still offers helpful insights for analysing and understanding the Nigerian system through the interaction of various structural elements influencing ECE services. However, I acknowledge the need to couple systems theory with postcolonial theory to provide a more nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between structure and agency and how the system operates.

Furthermore, Kagan et al. (2016) claim that systems theory may not provide sufficient information to understand each aspect of the system fully. This suggests that systems theory focuses on how systems operate and the likelihood that they might produce systemic outcomes (quality, equity, and sustainability) of ECE service provision. Systems theory might contribute, to some extent, a critical analysis of the temporal and socio-cultural factors influencing the ECE system, such as a change in government or in the economic situation. However, it might be insufficient on its own as a theory to provide in-depth explanations of how the Nigerian ECE system has developed and the problems within it, such as power relations and the legacy of colonisation that could be operating in the ECE system. Postcolonial theory will do that.

Pacini-Ketchabaw and Taylor (2015) argued that in colonised societies the social and ecological legacies of colonialism remain unintentionally closely interlinked with the unchanging state of affairs in ECE: for instance, low enrolment rate, due to low income and location (urban or rural area) (UNICEF, 2019a). An attempt to examine and describe some of these issues to expose and respond to these legacies is essential to unsettle things we take for granted. Therefore, postcolonial theory could provide a critical lens for inspecting the Nigerian context, specifically power relations that could be operating in the system and the legacy of colonisation. It could also complement systems theory.

4.3 Postcolonial Theory

In this section, I justify the use of postcolonial theory in parallel with systems theory to support this thesis. I provide an overview of postcolonial theory, the concepts and ideas relevant to this study. I reflect on how postcolonial theory has been applied in research in various disciplines and the field of ECE. I provide a rationale for applying postcolonial theory in this study, and I critique and justify how postcolonial theory and systems theory complement each other for this study. Finally, I explore how postcolonial theory has affected my positionality.

What is 'Postcolonial Theory'?

Postcolonial refers to a period coming after the end of colonialism (Childs and Williams, 1997; 2013). Young (2001) suggested that postcolonial theory evolved from the political understandings and experiences gained through the colonial resistance to dominant Western rule and culture during the development of the anti-colonial struggles. Postcolonial theory is a critical theory that focuses on critiquing and changing a system by deeply examining a specific social context to uncover the assumptions that keep us from a real understanding of how the world works: for example, challenging oppression, revealing the hidden truths, liberating, empowering people, and giving people the voice to express their narrative rather than imposing on them. Therefore, postcolonial theory is not so much the analysis of the impact of colonialism but is more the adoption of new possibilities and new critical analysis strategies. This means rejecting any forms of control and seeking social transformation (Viruru, 2005; Young, 2001).

Several attempts have been made to conceptualise the term 'postcolonial.' Hickling-Hudson, Matthews and Woods (2004, p. 2) have shown that the 'post' in postcolonialism does not imply the end of colonialism, but rather a contest of its aftermath. This means space for moving beyond the negative patterns that persist after colonialism. It is a process that reviews and explores the 'structure of inequality' (Loomba, 1998, p. 18) and addresses the impact of colonisation within a system (McLeod, 2013). McLeod (2013) argues that postcolonialism is not just a descriptive or evaluative term but rather a process that recognises the philosophical, political, economic, and socio-cultural consequences of colonialism. Also, it indicates that the continuous legacy of colonialism that exists even in the present could be explained by

pointing out the dilemmas and conflicts involved (McLeod, 2013) in a society, institutions, system, or social world. This means that postcolonial theory is a critical theory in this study. Nigeria is a formerly colonised country; therefore, it is vital to examine whether the legacy of colonialism exists within the ECE system.

In the academic literature, there are multiple perspectives of postcolonial theory. Viruru (2005) noted that the concept of postcolonial theory makes known the true nature of the will to power, which focuses on the significance of essential aspects of diverse ways of viewing and living in the world. For Young (2001), postcolonial theory is about adopting an activist position that seeks social transformation. He added that postcolonial theory examines the social and political power relations from the cultural legacy of colonisation. Postcolonial theory is characterised by the aftermath of a human experience that has not been represented at any organisational level (Young, 2001). Young (2001) added that postcolonial theory attempts to shift the dominant ways in which the relations between Western (coloniser) and non-Western people (colonised) are viewed, which means learning to challenge, and think outside, the dominant norms. This is in alignment with systems theory. As highlighted by Kagan et al. (2016), individual parts cannot be fully understood when separated from the whole when seeking to provide a real understanding of a particular system.

Young and Viruru have heavily influenced my thinking about postcolonial theory regarding my positionality as a researcher. Young's idea (activist's position) has motivated me to make a change or contribution by adopting new strategies that could provide policymakers and those implementing policies with a range of different perspectives within the Nigerian ECE system. Viruru has inspired my thought in diverse ways: for example, regarding dominant norms that exist in the field of ECE, which seem relevant to the Nigerian ECE system. Viruru also highlighted the need to unmask the power structure in order to achieve real change and representation, to move the field of early childhood in a direction that will provide positive outcomes for children (Viruru, 2005). Hopefully, this idea will provide knowledge that might help transform the Nigerian ECE system to offer better ideas for improved policy implementation practices.

As noted by Young (2009), postcolonial theory seeks to develop paradigms in which identities are no longer in conflict or resistant or entirely singular (i.e., exclusion), but instead defined by their participating and mutual relations with others (i.e., inclusion).

It seeks the knowledge and opinions of different cultures (otherness) and new epistemologies (theory of knowledge, e.g., beliefs, ideas, and experiences) from other cultures. Exploring ECE policy implementation in Nigeria offers the possibility of promoting a better understanding of the operation and situation of the ECE system from multiple perspectives.

Therefore, postcolonial theory encompasses a series of viewpoints concerned with adopting new alternatives for social change. It is a critical theory that seeks to liberate people, society, and institutions from any form of colonial control that may be operating within the system. It is concerned with critiquing and changing a system by examining a social situation in a specific context to uncover the assumptions that keep us from real understanding of the system's operation. Postcolonial theory is an interdisciplinary theory and is widely used (Loomba, 1998; Moore-Gilbert, 1997), including in ECE as a source of strategies for critical analysis and practice (Agbenyega and Klibthong, 2011; Viruru, 2001, 2005).

Postcolonial theory encompasses a wide range of complex bodies of ideas and challenging discourses put forward by academic theorists. McLeod (2013) notes that it combined the study of writers from the colonised countries, such as African, Caribbean, and South Asian nations, in an attempt to identify and evaluate these vigorous literary activities by comparing the common concerns and attributes that these literary voices might have. Postcolonial theory has various meanings, and has evolved from different origins and histories. The purpose of these writers was to address the legacy of colonialism imposed by Western ideas (i.e., the will to power) of dominating the globe or forcing diverse societies into one universal form (Viruru, 2005, p. 8). I will therefore examine and justify key concepts of postcolonial theories that apply to my study. These ideas are related to liberation (Fanon, 1986) and orientalism (Said, 1978).

Liberation.

Fanon (1986; 2008) examined colonialism to understand the complex ways in which the colonised people's identity, especially Blackness, is constructed. He focused mainly on historical critique of the consequences of racism and dehumanisation, which produce an inferiority complex in the mind of the colonised subject. McLeod (2013, p. 21) describes the effects of identity formation for the colonised subject who is forced

into the internalisation of self as an 'other'. For Fanon, the end of colonialism implies not only political and economic change but also psychological change. Colonialism can only be destroyed once we successfully challenge the way of thinking about identity. McLeod (2013, p. 20) notes that the relationship between power and language is fundamental. He added that the meaning we attach to things tell us what values we consider are essential.

Fanon's work is relevant for studying and understanding ECE policy implementation in Nigeria because his idea is explicitly about liberation, an action that uncovers any form of oppression and embraces liberty and equality, inclusion, social transformation, and justice. This involves rejecting the structures of colonial oppression and challenges the colonial world of exclusion. It means individual freedom to equality, rights, and freedom from limits on views and opinions. In short, Fanon's idea is about making voices and viewpoints heard. Every voice within the system must be listened to and considered, regardless of each individual's position. Examining the impact of implementing the Nigerian ECE policy at different levels requires this. This study highlights the importance of allowing people's views and experiences to inform the policy implementation process and the development of the ECE system.

Orientalism.

Said (1978; 2003) examined the conflicting relationship between the coloniser and the colonised but from another perspective. Unlike Fanon, whose focus was on the colonised, Said focused more on the colonisers. Said (1978) refers to 'Orientalism' as the Westerner's patronising views and representations of the East (i.e., 'the Orient'). Orientalism explored the degree to which colonialism created a way of viewing the world. Said describes how the Westerners perceived the East based on their assumptions (revealed, for example, in their art, mapping, travel stories, and museum displays). These assumptions continually justify their dominance or normative power relations between the colonialists (knowing subjects) and the colonised (known about). Instead of learning about the people and their ways of life, they assume that they know them already, and make decisions based on these assumptions – decisions they believe are right and proper (Pacini-Ketchabaw and Taylor, 2015; Said, 1978). The Orient was perceived as inferior and in a state of backwardness, thus justifying colonisation as a reliable way of spreading the benefits of Western civilisation. Said's ideas explain why, despite many people's efforts to include indigenous perspectives,

colonialism's dominant effect can be challenging to escape. They also help us to understand how indigenous ways of thinking or ways of knowing give way to 'traditional culture' which comes to provide the norms for how things are done in that particular context or part of the world.

Said's ideas of orientalism are mainly about knowledge and power. In this respect, colonial power was strengthened and supported by the production of knowledge about the colonised cultures, which produced a wrong and inappropriate image of the Orient (McLeod, 2013). Hence power is established or represented through dominant ways of knowledge or understanding, which gain their influence through their association with powerful positions within the network (Sharp, 2009, p. 110). This suggests that Said's ideas of knowledge and power are inseparable. Sharp further pointed out that for knowledge to be convincing, it must be justified, fair, equitable, recognised, and approved by both the ruled and the rulers, as everyone has power and the right to speak. Therefore, unsettling the Eurocentric ideologies of childhood is imperative. This can be achieved by drawing attention to the real, complex, inequitable, and imperfect worlds of colonial heritage operating within the field of ECE (Taylor, 2013).

Commenting on Said's idea, the change in the process of colonialism/colonial control involves decolonisation. Ngugi (1986) referred to this as 'decolonising the mind'. Thus, decolonisation is about changing the mindset with which we view the world and reality, getting everyone included in the decision-making process on issues that affect them. This implies exposing and challenging the dominant ways of perceiving the world (i.e., legacies of colonialism) that permeate the field of ECE and offering productive alternative perspectives that contribute to decolonising ideas and practice.

Said's concept of orientalism is relevant to the analysis of the Nigerian ECE policy. Potentially, orientalism provides a critical lens to deeply analyse the Nigerian ECE system and its development. It offers critical insight into the academic discourse of researchers on examining, describing, and defining the cultures being studied, with specific questions around colonial control. This means that the idea of orientalism could be used to explore the Nigerian ECE culture as it is, the people's (i.e., stakeholders') shared views and experiences of why and how they implement the policy. Said's idea also acknowledges accepting people's notion rather than thinking one knows them better than they know themselves. This might uncover the Nigerian

ECE system's real understanding through the meanings its participants ascribe to their experiences.

In the process of reading the theoretical literature on postcolonialism, I have examined and considered other concepts of postcolonial theory, including 'epistemic violence' **(**Spivak, 1988, 1999) and 'hybridity' (Bhabha, 1994). I have decided not to include these in my theoretical framework because of some limitations. Having critically analysed past literature related to the Nigerian ECE system, I set aside Spivak's and Bhabha's concepts for the following reasons. Spivak's concept of epistemic violence considered the ways an idea is brought forward, or people in power make decisions without people (whom the decisions are made for) having any form of input or control in what concerns them. In other words, Spivak's idea tends to examine a system that cannot speak for itself (Sharp, 2009). However, this study focuses on analysing the perspectives of those tasked with implementing ECE policy. Spivak's work would have been relevant if this study were about policy formulation rather than implementation.

Bhabha's concept of hybridity is about combining two different cultures to create a new or third identity that reflects a dual sense of identity (Bhabha, 1994; Huddart, 2006; McLeod, 2013; Miller and Cameron, 2014; Young, 1995). According to the national policy on education (*NPE 2013*), the Nigerian ECE system embraced the Western notion of education, including ECE. They accepted it based on the belief that there is a need to prioritise ECE for the country's future socio-economic development. Bhabha's work would have been more useful if this research were about the ECE system's identity and not policy implementation.

How Has Postcolonial Theory Been Applied in ECE?

This section will review how several scholars have adopted postcolonial theory as a tool for critical analysis of ECE practices, particularly in Asian and African contexts. It also focuses on what can be learnt from the application of this theory. Most recently, Adriany (2017) used postcolonial theories (hybridity and liberation) to analyse the changes that have taken place in ECE in Indonesia due to the change in the Indonesian socio-political situation. This revealed the legacy of colonialism (hybridity) operating within the ECE and the integration of global and local values.

Agbenyega and Klibthong (2011) critically examine and analyse how information, knowledge, belief, and value systems are structured to create dominating meaning for

everyday school practices in Cape Coast, Ghana. A component of postcolonial theory using a description of discourse was adopted for the study. This approach provides a new way of assessing professional development and pedagogy in early childhood around the concept of inclusion rather than the transmission of pedagogy through domination and fear.

Similar to Agbenyega and Klibthong (2011), Shaila (2014) examined the significant roles of pre-school teachers in Bangladesh in the promotion of quality pre-school education, as they are influential people in children's educational lives. Shaila used a postcolonial discursive framework to explore the teachers' beliefs and perceptions about quality preschool education. It was found that the teachers believe in using textbook-based techniques and rote-learning methods, where children are perceived only as recipients.

In another study, Viruru (2005) presented a comprehensive review of various scholars' work. Viruru used the postcolonial theory of unmasking power structures to analyse and reconceptualise the field of ECE. The works of postcolonial scholars were classified into two categories: (a) eclectic, i.e., those that use postcolonialism with other theoretical bases (e.g., Marxist, Foucauldian, and postmodern perspectives); and (b) studies that focus on oppressive practices. These scholars' works suggest the adoption of social transformation in the field of ECE to achieve real change and representation of all children.

Jahng (2013), in his article, used a postcolonial framework and Foucault's concepts of power and discourse to analyse the development and problems of kindergarten education in the context of the idea of 'readiness' in South Korea to reconceptualise the Korean kindergarten. This provides significant insights into reclaiming kindergarten education as a historical, cultural, and discursive product with a specific focus on different conceptions of 'readiness'.

By contrast, Viruru (2001), in an ethnographic study carried out in India, used multiple postcolonial theories such as Said's orientalism of knowledge and power and Spivak's epistemic violence to analyse the domination of Western language in the formerly colonised country, especially its impact on young children in the field of ECE. He challenged the common assumption that using language mostly means using one language, the dominant Western language. To reconceptualise ECE as a field that

creates increased opportunities for young children, Viruru proposes the importance of children exploring and employing multiple forms of communication that do not involve language (Viruru, 2001, p. 38).

These studies have applied postcolonial theory to the problems relating to changes that occur in ECE (Adriany, 2017); ECE practice (Agbenyega and Klibthong, 2011; Shaila, 2014), the language in ECE (Viruru, 2001) and reconceptualisation of ECE (Jahng, 2013; Viruru, 2005). Some of them also combined postcolonial theory with other theoretical frameworks (Jahng, 2013; Viruru, 2005). Collectively, these studies outlined a critical role for postcolonial theory in researching the contexts where there are issues about oppression and the legacy of colonialism in ECE, which could be relevant to this study. However, it seems postcolonial theory has not been applied in research involving policy implementation in early childhood studies, which this study will do by combining it with systems theory.

Postcolonial theory has some limitations, as highlighted by some writers. For example, it is often described as a historical continuity that requires a starting point or the end of history (Dabashi, 2012; Seth, 2013). Hence, postcolonial theory has been challenged for neglecting the specificity of particular historical processes of colonialism because it focuses primarily on the consequences of Western colonialism and imperialism (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1995, 2002, 2007). Others have highlighted that it neither develops a deductive understanding of human behaviour nor a specific explanation of action within a given issue area (Brennan, 2014; Moore-Gilbert, 1997; Wilkens, 2017). Another drawback is that it diverts attention from the material basis of cultural differences in favour of generalisations and theoretical abstractions (Mukherjee, 1996; San Juan, 1998).

Despite the limitations identified above, postcolonial theory is considered useful and could support this study. According to Karem (2001), it brings together local and global lenses of analysis of a system. For Teasdale and Ma Rhea (2000), postcolonial theory seeks healthier alternatives by drawing on local and global knowledge and wisdom. It also examines the embedded social, economic, political, and environmental problems (Crush, 1995; Escobar, 1995) within a system. Wilkens (2017) emphasises the multiplicity of postcolonial theories resulting from the fact that they emerged from different interpretations, especially in comparison across historical and spatial contexts.

Postcolonial theory acknowledges the interrelationship approach. This means that it provides a series of connections between two or more things (Hickling-Hudson, Matthews and Woods, 2004) or seeks a range of meanings, expressions, and understandings. For example, it provides the opportunity to place people's knowledge in their context as they experience it. Scharmer (2009) suggests that understanding the change or progress and complexity of a social system helps to see how the causes and effects of social actions and relations should be recognised. Postcolonial theory is a critical theory and a crucial tool in researching a context in which there are issues of oppression, power relations, the sustained structure of inequality, and the legacy of colonialism.

Having read and critically analysed postcolonial theory, I have decided to use the ideas of Fanon (liberation) and Said (Orientalism). The objective in applying Fanon's and Said's ideas is to give priority to people's voices at different government levels relative to Nigerian ECE policy implementation. Potentially, Said's notion of orientalism might provide a critical lens to deeply analyse Nigeria's ECE system and the history of how it has developed. The meanings people ascribe to their shared experiences will reveal the reality of the system and perhaps explain the resistance to change, power relations, and the legacy of colonialisation that could be operating within the system. Fanon's and Said's ideas are about understanding the nature of problems (i.e., in a specific context) through the people's views and experiences and finding the solutions to these problems. They explore how knowledge is communicated through knowing how things are done; hence, it is almost certain that their ideas can underpin this study.

The aim in combining Fanon's and Said's concepts is to develop a paradigm that constructs reality based on understanding the meanings people attach to their experiences. This involves the extent to which the policy is founded and implemented based on the concept of inclusion through diverse perspectives, opinions, and beliefs into one universal form (Viruru, 2005) or reform education (Carrington, Deppeler and Moss, 2010). Employing the concepts as an inclusive approach will seek to give visibility to the hidden colonial control within the system, which the stakeholders at different levels might be unaware of.

According to Macedo (1999), unless the legacies of colonialism are examined within the field of education, 'our minds, if not our hearts will remain colonized' (1999, p. xv). Finding the problems and identifying the inhibiting factors are vital before a solution

can be sought that will enhance the ECE services and policy. Therefore, in exploring new possibilities for social transformation within the Nigerian ECE system, combining a version of postcolonial theory will provide a critical lens to the influencing factors contributing to resistance towards change (i.e., the legacy of colonisation) in the system. Predicated on Fanon's and Said's concepts, postcolonial theory is proposed as complementary to systems theory of change to guide system analysis of ECE policy implementation at different levels in three states in western Nigeria.

4.4 Rationale for Combining the Theories (Systems and Postcolonial)

This section will justify the rationale for combining the theories (systems and postcolonial) as a guide for this study. Systems theory of change as the principal theory supports a critical analysis and understanding of Nigerian ECE policy implementation as a system through the exploration of the interactions of elements. It is a potent tool to understand or describe the ECE system by examining how and why things change or operate. It will provide the relationships between activities, outcomes, and the ECE programme context (Kagan et al., 2016). Such efforts aim to stimulate new thinking to improve ECE policy implementation (Kagan and Kauerz, 2015; Moloney and Pettersen, 2016). Although systems theory reveals how the Nigerian system operates, it does not provide a more in-depth exploration of the ECE system's problems and how it has developed in Nigeria as a colonised system.

As a secondary theory, postcolonial theory, based on Fanon's and Said's concepts, provides a critical lens to view Nigeria's context as a former colony, specifically power relations and the legacy of colonisation operating within the ECE system. It will provide an extra explanatory layer to help understand the system and the context. This will involve asking and finding out how and why things are done to unmask the power relations, and dominating norms, in order to provide an in-depth critical understanding of the ECE system's development. Identifying the legacy of colonialisation and power relations that might be operating within the Nigerian ECE system could open up the actual route towards achieving the ECE goals. This approach might improve the Nigerian ECE system.

Postcolonial theory has been used in ECE research in Africa (Agbenyega and Klibthong, 2011) and Asia (Shaila, 2014; Viruru, 2001), but without combining it with systems theory, even in other colonial contexts. For instance, Kagan et al. (2016) have

researched ECE as a system within the Caribbean, which used to be colonised, but did not use postcolonial theory. Therefore, compared to other studies of ECE in the African context, this study is distinctive in combining postcolonial theory and systems theory of change as complementary theories, which seems not to have been done before.

Anzaldua (1999) draws our attention to alternatives of moving away from the set of patterns and goals towards divergent thinking or whole perspective that includes rather than excludes. Combining the two theories could extend the way systems theory and postcolonial theory have been applied to early childhood studies. Therefore, the adopted conceptual systems theory of change and the combined concepts from postcolonial theory (Fanon's idea of liberation and Said's idea of orientalism) will likely work together as a suitable theoretical framework for this study. While systems theory of change will analyse the structural elements and their interaction, postcolonial theory will give visibility to the voice of those tasked with the policy implementation, in order to understand the system better.

This study employs postcolonial theory in a way that might add value to the use of systems theory of change. In this sense, I am analysing the ECE system within a specific context rather than just describing the ECE system in Nigeria. The theories might help explain the issues facing the system and its history, with possibilities for new strategies for implementing the Nigerian ECE policy. This may help my research make a distinctive contribution in the area of early childhood studies.

One of the defining features of postcolonial theory is that it adopts a historical perspective of a phenomenon in light of its process of change or development, in contrast to the cross-sectional perspective of systems theory of change (Kagan, 2015; Kagan, Gomez and Roth, 2018). According to Cannella and Viruru (2004), postcolonial theory offers knowledge from the broader construction of history, generating connections between the past and present. The postcolonial perspective is historical but also privileges the voices of the colonised people, revealing authentic narratives and experiences that are historically interrogated to understand the origins and evolution of a system that appears to reflect the impact of a colonial legacy.

My study explores the development and origins of the Nigerian ECE system. Systems theory on its own might not necessarily provide this historical context. Applying

postcolonial theory has the potential to explain the development of the ECE system in Nigeria and afford a deeper understanding of it. Postcolonial theory complements systems theory in acting as a catalyst to interrogate and explore the ECE system and its sustaining structures (Abdi, 2012) from a historical perspective and by considering the voices of local stakeholders in the Nigerian context. Postcolonial theory can also shed light on other complex and problematic contextual or structural issues in the system (Carr and Théseé, 2012). It offers insights into how people exercise power in the system based on actions taken with or against policy intentions. This could help explain the complexities of the system in a postcolonial context, encouraging new possibilities for transforming Nigerian ECE. Through this lens, we can gain a more profound understanding of the operation, development, and existing challenges of the ECE system. These characteristics set postcolonial theory apart from other theories within social science.

Questioning the existing narratives of ECE in Nigeria through the critical lens of postcolonial theory can enhance the explanatory power of other theories, including systems theory. Cannella and Viruru (2004, p. 63) argue that postcolonial theory informs new thinking for change by challenging and re-examining the basic assumptions held by researchers about ECE. This is crucial in order to move towards more thoughtful and decolonised research methodologies that generate new possibilities and innovative ideas for ECE policymaking and implementation. Cannella and Viruru's work (2004) is highly relevant to my position on the usefulness of postcolonial theory for the study of the Nigerian ECE system(s). Using a postcolonial lens to analyse the Nigerian ECE system required me to question my way of understanding it and develop my thinking beyond the findings made by past researchers on Nigerian ECE and into new policy implementation possibilities. This entailed focusing on local stakeholders' voices and experiences in the Nigerian context, creating rich possibilities for action and improved understanding within the ECE system. This approach can help establish constructed meanings from local voices and a deeper understanding of the ECE system as it has evolved and as I have encountered it. This feature makes postcolonial theory even more distinctive and valuable in complementing and extending other theories or systems theory generally, offering a broader and more nuanced perspective on ECE in Nigeria.

Postcolonial theory also offers a critical perspective to address the researcher's positionality or reflexivity concerning their influence on and place in the research process. It prompts researchers to challenge their own assumptions about the research context and participants and to focus on local stakeholders within a qualitative research approach. For instance, applying postcolonial and systems theories in this study required me to actively listen to and acknowledge participants' views and experiences of the ECE system and engage with them as a researcher. The postcolonial perspective also supports me in reflecting on how my positioning influences all aspects of the research process. For example, I am an insider in this research, as I was born, educated and worked in Nigeria; I am also conducting research within the education system as an outsider, given my professional experiences as an early childhood practitioner and academic experience in the discipline of early childhood outside a postcolonial context. Both insider and outsider perspectives are valuable in experiencing the reality of the ECE system in the postcolonial context. Using postcolonial theory as a critical lens on my positionality means I am extending beyond my chosen methodological approach (i.e., interpretivist paradigm; see Chapter 5) and research design. Thus, not only am I thinking as an interpretivist qualitative researcher, but also adding a theoretical lens to provide an in-depth explanation of the ECE system in a postcolonial context through participants' accounts of their experiences. This approach creates the potential for the researcher to report the implications (e.g., inequality) of a system in a postcolonial context as understood by its participants and to revisit their understanding of the system from a postcolonial perspective.

4.5 How the Theoretical Framework Has Changed My Positionality

It is essential to reflect on how my engagement with the theoretical framework (systems theory and postcolonial theory) has changed my positionality as a researcher. My initial engagement with the theories was in search of a relevant theoretical framework suitable for this study. However, engagement with the theories, specifically, postcolonial theory, has affected my positionality with the idea that postcolonialists hold 'activist positions that seek social transformation' (Young, 2001). This has driven my research, with the hope that the result might improve the way ECE policy is implemented in Nigeria. Postcolonial theory has also inspired me to want to make contributions or a change that might help decolonise the Nigerian ECE system

in a way that delivers meaningful outcomes for children. For example, postcolonial theory made me realise the importance of listening to people's voices and experiences to provide real understanding of policy implementation within the Nigerian ECE system. It enabled me to manage my positionality and has influenced my approach to researching in a postcolonial context.

Systems theory offers an understanding of the structural elements operating within the ECE system, which may guide me to suggest modifications for improvement. Engagement with systems and postcolonial theory has broadened my awareness (i.e., inspired new possibilities) of how a system works, its problems concerning the dominant norms, and resistance to change. This is what has motivated and influenced my ideas, rather than a representation of ideas based on assumptions or biases. Thus, reflection on the power dynamics of my research in a postcolonial context and developing a strategy for conducting research that prevents the misinterpretation and exploitation of participants is crucial. This means respecting the participants' views in order to understand the phenomena, informing the outcomes of this study while strictly adhering to the ethical principles of conducting research.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has described the theoretical framework and how it will be used to support this study. Systems theory of change and the chosen ideas from postcolonial theory (Fanon and Said) are considered suitable for this study. They can provide a lens through which to view the research problem and explain the Nigerian ECE system. Both theoretical strands are necessary for this study's data analysis, as they might enhance the meaningfulness of the results by providing the rationale for discussion.

Chapter 5: Methodology, Methods and Ethics

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology underpinning this study. After listing the research questions, it goes on to discuss the research design. The rationale for data collection methods is discussed together with the data analysis measures. The second part discusses in greater detail the ethical dimensions related to decolonial ethical principles, considering that this research was conducted in a postcolonial context. A consideration of the strategies applied to ensure validity and reliability follows.

5.2 Research Questions

This study explored the 'fit' between early childhood education (ECE) policy at the national level and its implementation at the state and local levels in three western states in Nigeria. The aim was to examine the reality of the ECE system through various stakeholders' views and experiences mandated for ECE implementation at different government levels (national, state, and local). Two categories of interviewees were involved in this study: policymakers and implementers (ECE headteachers and practitioners). The following research questions guided this study and were fundamental for explaining stakeholders' perceptions of the ECE system.

RQ1. How do stakeholders interpret and mediate ECE policy at the national, state, and local levels?

RQ2. How has ECE developed as a system?

RQ3. What are the inhibiting or facilitating factors that may impact the implementation of ECE policy in Nigeria?

This chapter discusses the methodology and data collection methods applied to address these questions. As reported in Chapter 2, past studies in the Nigerian context have contributed significantly to knowledge about the Nigerian ECE system using various approaches. In my literature review, I discovered that effective implementation rests with various interdependent stakeholders. However, previous studies appear not to have extensively applied qualitative inquiry through the meaning-making of various stakeholders' narratives at different government levels to address the Nigerian ECE system's challenges. Therefore, this study explores how ECE stakeholders

understand the system's operation through the co-construction of meanings (Creswell, 2014).

5.3 Research Design

The postcolonial context for this research had significant implications for the research design, requiring a high level of reflection in planning the methodology. According to Nsamenang (2009), Africa's early childhood research, policy, and practices reflect pre-existing assumptions, which work against understanding and improving educational practices. Bhattacharya (2018) claims that colonising assumptions (i.e., positional superiority) tend to misinterpret the researched group. She highlights the importance of a decolonising approach to research.

Adopting a decolonising approach to this research was important in understanding the Nigerian ECE system considering its colonial history. This involved recognising that my default position (i.e., English ECE experience) was to make judgements about the ECE provision. These values, beliefs, assumptions, and positionality could influence the understanding of the subject of this research because each reality is subjective, reflecting personal background or biases (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013). Applying a decolonising approach, however, offered me a position from which to be critical and reflexive throughout the research process. Okwany and Ebrahim (2016) suggested that epistemology and methodology in African early education and care research should be based on diverse perspectives within the Africentric narratives rather than assumptions. A decolonising approach offered a more collaborative way to construct knowledge by engaging with more perspectives in this research. Therefore, this decolonising approach fits with the paradigmatic perspective behind this thesis.

Various philosophical assumptions or worldviews inform the different research perspectives investigating and interpreting social reality. These worldviews relate to ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological assumptions (Guba and Lincoln, cited in Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). My ontological position (my view on the nature of reality) relates to constructing reality within specific contexts. It provides the structure to explore or construct multiple realities and interpretations through the perspectives and experiences of various stakeholders tasked with ECE

implementation to better understand this research situation or subject matter (Blaikie, 2007; Bryman, 2012).

My epistemological position (my view on the nature of knowledge) relates to the relationship between participants and me (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005) and how knowledge can be constructed and communicated to other human beings (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, p. 6). In other words, this positioning provided structure and lenses through which to understand my research process better and view my subject matter. It provided an account of the approach I adopted in this study. Based on my epistemological stance, I established a trust relationship with participants, listened to what they told me and the reality of their narratives and experiences. Knowledge was acquired between participants and me and shaped by individual experiences of the system through collaborative and respectful interaction.

Regarding my axiological position (my view on the nature of value), I made my values and biases known by positioning myself (i.e., my insider and outsider position) in this study. For example, I am part of the language and culture because of my Nigerian heritage, which helped to build trust with my participants. I also respected and embraced the research context's sociocultural values to better understand my participants' perspectives within my research context. By doing so, I developed an understanding of balancing power relations between participants and me during fieldwork, which fits with the decolonising approach. For example, I negotiated access and obtained informed consent to earn participants' trust. These assumptions helped me engage better with participants; they reinforced an understanding and interpretation of their narratives and experiences. These philosophical assumptions are embedded within the research paradigm employed in this research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

Research paradigms are worldviews or assumptions that inform the researcher's ontological and epistemological positions and guide research choices, priorities, and actions (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Flick, 2014; Mertens, 2015). I situate this research within an interpretivist paradigm of social inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln, 2013) related to my epistemological position.

The interpretivist paradigm holds that social reality is experienced subjectively by people who engage in it and involves researchers interpreting the meanings of such

experiences (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Accordingly, knowledge is socially and experientially constructed by the researcher from different individuals' perspectives and lived experiences to understand social phenomena (Creswell, 2014; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Lincoln, Lynham and Guba, 2017). Fundamentally, social reality is subjectively constructed through individuals' experiences of that reality rather than being discovered, aligning with postcolonial aspirations (Guba and Lincoln, 2005, p. 194), which recognise and incorporate others' input and knowledge. Therefore, participants' meanings and interpretations form the basis of knowledge and are central to the interpretivist paradigm (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). In other words, the focus is on the meanings generated from lived experiences to gain an understanding of social reality for participants. In this case, the researcher's active engagement with participants in the research process aims to ensure that the knowledge produced reflects their reality (Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba, 2017) through the methods they choose, such as semi-structured interviews. This contrasts with positivist research, which derives knowledge from hypotheses tested through experimentation or scientific inquiry (Guba and Lincoln, 2005). Thus, the interpretivist paradigm acknowledges the role of the researcher and emphasises the importance of reflexivity and subjectivity in the research process. By working with participants, researchers can gain a more exact understanding of the social phenomenon under investigation and explore its complexities from multiple perspectives.

The interpretivist paradigm supports an exploration of my research questions because of its flexibility in providing a means to explore individual perspectives and experiences of the research topic. This study focuses on different accounts of how reality is viewed and experienced by key stakeholders within the Nigerian ECE context. According to Crotty (1998, p. 5), an interpretivist approach seeks contextually and historically based interpretations of the real-world phenomenon. Given this, an interpretivist approach is a useful strategy for exploring, and generating in-depth knowledge and understanding of the complexities and history of the Nigerian ECE system based on local knowledge directly related to policy implementation. As a researcher, my role is to engage in overarching meaning-making of participants' perspectives to construct an understanding of the ECE system. This enabled me to look for the richness and complexity of various stakeholders' views and experiences at different levels within the Nigerian ECE system. By adopting an interpretivist paradigm, I was able to explore

multiple interpretations of reality within the Nigerian ECE context, considering the historical and cultural contexts that shape these experiences. The interpretivist approach allowed for a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the complexities of the ECE system, including local voices and perspectives that quantitative methods leave hidden.

Many scholars have highlighted the usefulness of qualitative interpretive inquiry in transforming research, institutional structures, and practice, particularly in postcolonial contexts (Ansell et al., 2022; Bunyan, 2021; Gupta, 2020; Hsiung, 2021; Lopez and Rugano, 2018; Mpu and Adu, 2021; Watermeyer and Neille, 2022). This approach may be a distinctive methodological consideration in capturing lived experience and addressing underlying colonial legacies. Therefore, applying qualitative interpretive inquiry has the potential to transform research practice concerning ECE in the Nigerian context. For example, the emphasis that qualitative inquiry places on fieldwork helped me to access individual perspectives and meanings of experiences of the policy implementation process within the local context. I have employed an interpretivist approach to engage directly in the construction of multiple realities and to understand the ECE system in the three states. The approach can also be valuable for capturing the complexities of the ECE system based on local knowledge of Nigeria's colonial heritage. Accordingly, my understanding of the ECE system was based on participants' perceptions and experiences in this research context through social interaction rather than based on my assumptions (Hughes, 2010; Ormston et al., 2014) from the interpretation of the literature review and documentary analysis data.

In the interaction process of creating knowledge between participants and me, I was cognisant of the histories, lived experiences, cultural realities, and economic plights of the research context (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011) through my reading and my experiences. Therefore, as discussed in the previous chapter, my position and theoretical framework align with the interpretivist paradigm. In other words, the knowledge gained was to be based on participants' narratives through the complex social interactions (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004) discussed above, which inform this research's methodology and methods (Flick, 2014; Myers, 2009).

5.4 Research Methods

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), the nature of the topic being studied and the research question determine the appropriate research methodology for a study. A qualitative interpretive approach was considered appropriate for this study because it provided an in-depth understanding of a system, actions, events, and processes, particularly the study of public policy implementation based on various data collection methods (Creswell, 2013).

Accordingly, this study adopted three qualitative research methods: semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and fieldnotes to explore the research questions for this study (Creswell, 2014; Silverman, 2013). These help to reinforce the understanding and interpretation of meaning and intentions underlying human interaction or relationships (Burr, 2015; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Ritchie et al., 2014a; Schwandt, 2007; Silverman, 2010) within the ECE system. Combining the methods offered an avenue to understanding the meaning attached to the system's experience, operation, development, and problems, which will either support or challenge the theoretical assumptions on which this study is based. They provided multiple forms of information for validity (Berg, 2009; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Leedy, 2001; Leedy and Ormrod, 2004).

Qualitative methods can be time-consuming (Bowen, 2009; Creswell, 2014). A significant amount of time and effort was allocated to accomplish data collection and data analysis (Creswell and Poth, 2018) due to the political instability in Nigeria when I conducted this research. Employing qualitative research methods provided in-depth answers to the research questions. The following section explains the rationale for using each data collection method used in the research for this thesis.

Semi-structured Interviews

Previous studies have used interview methods to access people's perceptions of ECE practices in the postcolonial context, particularly in Africa and Asia (Adriany, 2017; Agbenyega and Klithong, 2011; Shaila, 2014). This approach allowed me to explore participants' views and experiences of the Nigerian ECE system through open-ended questions, avoiding certain limitations of questionnaires.

This study used a face-to-face-semi-structured interview method (Bryman, 2012; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). This approach facilitated an understanding of the

complexity of the subject of my research from participants' points of view. It offered participants flexibility of response (open dialogue) and in-depth discussion (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). It allowed me to interact with relevant stakeholders involved in ECE implementation in order to understand their narratives through dialogue and the language used in constructing knowledge. The semi-structured interview allowed me to seek clarity and probe to gain a deeper understanding (Bryman, 2012; Gray, 2014; Matthews and Ross, 2010).

Participants were also able to raise talking points that resulted in unanticipated answers, which appeared to generate new lines of enquiry not thought of before (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). This process led to multiple realities and negotiated contextually based findings (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011) through active interactions between interviewees and me. The interview schedule used to guide the interview is shown in Appendix E.

According to Creswell (2014), interviews may provide inaccurate information, as interviewees may hold back specific information. In addition, the interviewer's questions may be confusing. Hence, I employed other data sources (fieldnotes and document analysis) to further understand the ECE system.

Fieldnotes and Vignettes

Fieldnotes are another valuable data collection tool employed in this study to support the semi-structured interviews as an aid in interpreting findings. Fieldnotes were taken for three reasons during the research: (1) as a backup for the audio recording in case the recording equipment failed; (2) to keep track of my thinking, feelings, experiences, and perceptions throughout the research process; and (3) to include a distinct reflection on fieldwork and research process in relation to events and people's behaviour (Arthur et al., 2014). Jotted notes were made wherever possible to remind me of the settings, events, and people. Fieldnotes were written after each interview day and were part of my data sources.

During the fieldwork, I collected fieldnotes in every single setting I visited. Fieldnotes were used to record what I heard and observed within the interview's immediate context (Berg and Lune, 2012; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). They contained my thoughts and observations about the dynamic of the encounters, ideas for inclusion in later fieldwork, and issues relevant to the data analysis (Arthur et al., 2014, p. 171).

Drawing upon fieldnote data was the incorporation of a series of vignettes. The vignettes were a specific tool to help me remember the real-life context of the interviews to provide more meaning, detailed accounts, and insights into the subject matter of this research (Arthur et al., 2014). I wrote a vignette about each ECE setting I visited (eight in total; see Appendix H). The vignettes followed a consistent structure, conveying key information about the ECE provision. They formed a detailed description of ECE settings (Copland, 2018; Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2014), and so provided a structure to organise my fieldnotes data. They were based on my observations from the fieldnotes and not my participants' accounts; therefore, my positionality may influence them. Hence, the vignettes served as a check on positionality. Applying postcolonial theory as my 'critical friend', I managed my positionality (in the fieldwork and data analysis) by recognising the struggles of the colonised instead of viewing the settings through the lens of my ECE experience in the British context.

Document Analysis

Document analysis is the systematic evaluation of a written document's content to explore meanings and relationships of texts and perceptions and interpret the meanings within the texts, authors, audience, culture, and time it was created (Robson, 2002). Like other analytical methods in a qualitative study, documents were treated like respondents that provide essential information relevant to the research, as O'Leary (2014) suggested. Documents were seen and analysed as 'systematically created communicative turns in constructing versions of events rather than as 'information containers' (Flick, 2014, p. 357). That is, documents as a data source in this study are living texts. They may be classified into primary and secondary (Coffey, 2014). In this study, primary documents (i.e., public/policy records), both public paper and electronic written documents, were collected and examined.

Most documents analysed were in the public domain; during interviews, I sought some policymakers' consent (e.g., state officials) to access some of the documents in the public domain, while some policymakers suggested some online documents considered helpful to this research. A drawback of using documents as data in this study is that some necessary documents were not available or accessible. Some government officials I interviewed declined access to some official documents (e.g., relating to funding) probably because they are not in the public domain. The difficulty

of gaining access to documents not in the public domain made me to rely mainly on public domain documents, such as the *2013 National Policy on Education (NPE)* containing ECE implementation guidelines. This difficulty limited the number of documents I accessed and the visibility of some aspects of the ECE system in my thesis, such as the budgetary allocation. However, the collection of documents selected for review (see Appendix J) provided an essential source of data and insights into the related areas of knowledge (Scott, 2006) about ECE policy implementation.

Appendix J provides a list of selected documents for analysis, such as the national government legislation. The inclusion criteria for selected documents were as follows:

- Relating to the research questions
- Relevant to the Nigerian ECE system and policy implementation
- Relevant policy regulations and guidelines for ECE implementation from 2004 in line with the *2004 UBE Act* providing for universal early education

Analysing the sample of documents allowed for an in-depth exploration and understanding (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Rapley, 2007) of the Nigerian ECE legislative system. It provided implicit and explicit information or unfiltered perspectives about the system, as opposed to relying on participants' narratives alone. Document analysis revealed the system's development, background, and historical context (Wolff, 2004). It also provided inputs for research interviews and fieldnotes, such as data that participants did not provide during the interviews or were not considered in the fieldnotes. Hence, this approach added depth and richness to the data collection to convey the situation's complexity (Bowen, 2009; Flick, 2014).

The strategy for interrogating the policy texts involved reading the complete text or selected sections and exploring the background information on documents, including their purposes. I also scrutinised their actual contents in relation to the research questions. The information was organised according to the research questions (Bowen, 2009) to analyse the different documents.

5.5. Sampling and Recruitment of Research Participants

For this study, the convenience sampling method was used to select three western states in Nigeria, local authorities (three in total), and eight ECE settings (three public and five private-for-profit). One local authority was selected in each state, and the names of the three states were not revealed, to protect the identity of participants,

particularly senior government officials. Of the eight ECE settings, six were located in urban and two in rural areas. This choice was made to analyse if a rural–urban dichotomy in ECE provision exists within the research context. The criteria for convenience sampling were based on the states' accessibility or availability to me (Bryman, 2012, p. 201; Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002), safety, and security reasons. Some states were excluded from my sample due to political instability and terrorist activities at the time the research was conducted (FCO, 2022). The Nigerian ECE policy is a national policy that is mandatory for all thirty-six states within the country. The same policy applies across all states, including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) (*NPE 2013*). Information from the sampling for the three states cannot be generalised to the entire population (Berg and Lune, 2012; Leedy and Ormrod, 2013) as implementation may differ across the country.

As stated above, the national policy and legislation relating to the provision of one-year pre-primary education apply to all thirty-six states in Nigeria. However, my study focuses on how ECE policy has been implemented in three states. The national matched funding is an issue affecting the Nigerian ECE system. In principle, the funding is only available if each state provides counterpart funding, as discussed in Chapter 2. In reality, most states cannot provide counterpart funding to invest in their early education systems, according to Alabi and Ijaiya (2014). I revisit this later in Chapters 6, 7, and 8. UNICEF's (2019a) monitoring report on the implementation of SDG 4.2 also revealed variations in ECE attendance across regions (Figure 1.1).

As this is a qualitative study, the findings only relate to the ECE system in the three states and cannot be generalised to other states in Nigeria. Hence, the findings are not representative of the entire Nigerian ECE system. Moreover, the ethical permission received from UEL for this study stipulates that I cannot give any indication of the states where I conducted my research. Due to my small sample size, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity for research participants proved very challenging.

A purposive sampling method was used to select the participants for this research. This sampling is conducted deliberately 'with some purpose or focus in mind' (Punch, 2013, p. 161). I specifically selected participants who met the inclusion criteria in this study, i.e., stakeholders mandated for Nigerian ECE policy implementation and with in-depth knowledge and experience of the research topic (Teddlie and Yu, 2007) by virtue of their job roles. The *2004 UBE Act* and *2013 NPE* also acknowledge the active

support of these stakeholders in the delivery of all education levels in Nigeria. The aim was to ensure that all key constituencies relevant to the research were covered (government officials at national, state, and local levels, one non-governmental organisation (NGO) officer, ECE headteachers, and practitioners) to explore my research topic (Ritchie et al., 2014b). There was only one NGO officer in my sample from an NGO signposted by UNICEF's branch within this research context.

It was difficult to recruit policymakers as participants; I was also constrained in how I could negotiate opportunities for data collection through interviews. A constraint on recruiting policymakers was scepticism about their anonymity being guaranteed, in view of their political appointments and ongoing elections. This led to a series of meetings, before they would participate, to reassure them that the research was not political. Since this was PhD research and not a well-funded multidisciplinary study, I was also constrained in who I could interview. Thus, I could not include extensive interviews with other stakeholders in the system, in the health services, for example. Since I was using systems theory, it would have been reasonable to have also interviewed other stakeholders who were part of the ECE 'ecosystem', including those in health or finance – particularly finance, given the importance of any ECE system's funding model. A potential limitation of the sample is my understanding the system, as reported in this thesis, through the lens of ECE rather than based on the perspectives of health and other social welfare services. Nevertheless, I was able to replicate the structure of my sample across the three states in Nigeria, including officials at different levels (national, state, and local), ECE headteachers, and practitioners in the local context, to reinforce the study's validity.

There were significant challenges in recruiting ECE settings, headteachers, and practitioners as research participants, including ensuring a sample that adequately represented the study's selection criteria of public–private and urban–rural distinctions. The selection of settings, headteachers, and practitioners involved a snowball sampling strategy (Browne, 2005; Noy, 2008). I relied on my local contacts and gatekeepers for recommendations and introductions. Decisions about recruiting ECE settings and participants were based on public–private and urban–rural distinctions-related criteria as part of an aim to offer a holistic or broader view of the ECE system and development. I also aimed to discover whether there are differences between ECE provisions within the research context. This is consistent with the

opinion of Parker, Scott and Geddes (2019) that a snowball sampling strategy offers the opportunity for referrals from a small number of initial contacts who fit the research criteria and agreed to participate. Participants who agreed were asked to recommend other potentially willing participants who met the study's criteria. The limitation of this method is the possibility that the settings sample might reflect not only the networks of my local contacts or gatekeepers but also how they understood the type of provision they felt I needed to see. Since I could only make claims based on settings in my sample, it is unknown whether the findings are representative of other pre-primary provision in the three states.

My gatekeepers were also headteachers who permitted access to practitioners I interviewed. The headteachers selected practitioners based on their experience and professional background in ECE. This could raise a potential bias issue, namely whether my sample reflects how my gatekeepers operate within a specific sociocultural context or structure and the way the headteachers may have exercised power over participants who were practitioners. In conducting the fieldwork, I checked this with practitioners who consented to participate in the research. Furthermore, the nature of the answers I received in the interviews suggests that practitioners spoke freely and were not concerned about pressure. However, my sample helped me to understand how public and private ECE settings implement the policy.

Children and parents were omitted because they are not mandated within the legislation for ECE policy implementation (*NPE 2013*). The selected participants provided rich descriptions of the ECE system based on their experiences (Baker and Edwards, 2012). In total, thirty-nine (39) participants were recruited for this study. Table 5.1 presents the participants' sampling frame (Table 1, Appendix A provides a further breakdown).

Table 5.1: Sampling Breakdown

Government officials	NGO	Headteachers	Practitioners	Total
2 national officials 3 state officials 3 local officials	1 officer	Urban ECE settings (6) Rural ECE settings (2)	18 urban ECE practitioners 4 rural ECE practitioners	39 participants
8	1	8	22	

My selected participants were directly involved in ECE policy implementation (*NPE 2013*; *UBE Act 2004*). The national officials coordinate the educational policies, including ECE, while the state and local officials implement and monitor these policies and education at the state and local levels. The ECE settings are the service providers, and the NGO has roles in delivering ECE services in Nigeria. Hence, participants represent diverse perspectives at different levels, which could provide vital insights into the Nigerian ECE system's operation.

Procedure for Gaining Access to Participants

Gaining access to participants was facilitated by the approval letter from gatekeepers who were part of my sample (see Appendix B: Gatekeepers' approval letter). The individual participants were then approached and briefed about this study so that they could give informed consent. In the subsequent fieldwork, gatekeepers served as key informants (Bryman, 2012, p. 439) and were among my participants. The gatekeepers were senior managers of government officials, ECE settings' headteachers, and an NGO director. Thus, I had three categories of gatekeepers. They were contacted by email requesting them to grant access to the fieldwork and indicate their interest in participating in this study.

The gatekeepers granted access to the fieldwork and targeted research participants (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). The sample size for this research constituted nineteen (19) gatekeepers. They included eight senior government officials, eight ECE

headteachers, and one NGO director; they were also my participants. One local government official and one headteacher were also used in the pilot study. In-principle agreements to participate in the study were obtained from all the gatekeepers before the research (see Table 2, Appendix A).

Section 5.8 fully discusses the use of personal networks to select the sample and the strategy for negotiating access to ECE settings' participants. Before arriving in Nigeria, I sent an email or letter to the gatekeepers to remind them of the interview schedule. Three months (February to April 2019) were allocated for data collection (Appendix G shows details of the interview schedule).

5.6 Research Interview Process

The fieldwork schedule did not go according to plan, due to a range of factors, including a national election, school timetables, half-term breaks, and interviewees' absence. This was anticipated, but the level of disruption to the research was not. Some interviews had to be rescheduled, which added more time and expense. McLennan, Donovan and Leslie (2014) claim that expectations and well-thought-out plans might not always be realised in development fieldwork due to some uncertainties, hence the need for flexible arrangements. I intended to start the fieldwork in one state but started in another state. As a nationwide election was in progress, constant checks were made on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO, 2021, 2022) website for any election-related alerts or warnings to ensure my participants' and my own safety and security. I had to know, for example, if the political situation had turned violent, or if schools had closed indefinitely due to industrial action, in the chosen states and, if so, be prepared to change plan accordingly.

Before undertaking the interviews, a small pilot study of the data collection tools (topic guides) was conducted. This involved two practitioners, an ECE setting's headteacher and a government official in a local authority, different from the primary sample. The goal of the pilot study was to ensure the refinement of the interview questions. It also helped develop the research process, specifically the data collection phase. For example, I practised conducting recordings without distracting participants while remaining as neutral as possible with a smooth tone and language. I succeeded in completing the interview within the agreed time while focusing on the interview questions. This was a reasonable way of conducting a preliminary analysis of how

respondents might answer questions. The experience of the pilot study had implications for the format of the interviews; it allowed me to rephrase some questions and avoid terms or acronyms that could generate misunderstanding (Bryman, 2012). Participant information sheets and consent forms were also tested for comprehension.

I interviewed in English with all participants in all three state capitals. Nigeria has diverse distinct ethnic groups and over 500 indigenous languages (*NPE 2013*); English is the official language and is widely spoken (FCO, 2021, 2022) due to the country's past colonisation by the British. Nevertheless, recognising that my participants speak another language was vital to unsettle the dominance of the English language (Bhattacharya, 2018); this aligns with postcolonial theory. From a postcolonial perspective, I honoured and respected their agency to choose the language in which the interview was to be held. All participants chose English because they understood and spoke English due to their education and professional status.

Once participants agreed to be interviewed, an appointment was made that was convenient for them and me. Participants decided on the venue for their interviews. Thus, each participant was interviewed in their vicinity (e.g., schools, government offices, and NGO offices) and at a time convenient for them. Only one government official preferred to be interviewed in a public place, for safety reasons. Participants had the opportunity to view the topic guides outlining the areas for questioning in advance (see Appendix E). The aim was to balance the researcher–participant relationships in terms of power and gain participants' trust (Bhattacharya, 2018). The interview was conducted in participants' offices or in their vicinity, with just me and the interviewees present. The research purpose was explained to all participants, together with the ethical considerations relating to participation. Approximately one hour was scheduled for interviews with the government officials and the NGO officer, and forty-five minutes with ECE settings' headteachers and practitioners. These times were subject to change depending on the interviewee's response.

Participants were treated with respect during data collection. Given my insider position as a Nigerian, it was easy for me to identify with participants' responses, but I guarded against imposing my view. My insider position also provided an opportunity to establish a relationship with my participants, which allowed them to easily share their experiences and views without feeling they were being judged. Participants raised

issues and matters that I had not thought about, resulting in unanticipated answers and generating new enquiries, highlighted in the two findings chapters.

The interviews were semi-structured, with me beginning with an open-ended question for each participant while allowing subsequent questions to be guided by the conversation between participants and me. This approach encouraged wide-ranging answers. All interviews were recorded on a digital audio recorder with the participants' permission (Gray, 2014). Only one national official declined audio recording and indicated their preference for the interview to be recorded through note-taking. This was due to the fear of identification or lack of trust in the ethical procedures. Audiotapes at interviews were beneficial for me; they provided an accurate record; I could replay when needed to cross-check the accuracy of the information provided (Arthur et al., 2014). They also allowed concentration on the interview (Robson and McCartan, 2016). During the interviews, fieldnotes were kept to help with the analysis of the gathered data.

At the end of the interviews, participants were asked if they had any questions or final comments that might contribute to the research, as Gray (2014) suggested. After the interviews, participants were given debriefing letters (Appendix F) to thank them for participating in the interview, which included my contact details if they had any questions regarding the study. The next step involved data transcription and analysis.

Taping and Transcribing of Interviews

According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), there is no need to delay data analysis until after completing the interviews. Therefore, the transcribing process was ongoing during and after each interview. In this study, recording and transcription were carried out for four reasons: (a) preservation of interview data and a necessary step to their interpretation; (b) systematic analysis of people's narratives; (c) evidence of transparency and accountability of the data; and (d) creation of options for analysing, storing and sharing data (e.g., in publications) with other researchers, such as for theoretical ideas or systematic methodological approaches (Heritage, 1984, p. 238 as cited by Bryman, 2012, p. 482).

During data collection, audio-recorded interviews were transferred directly to a laptop where they were stored. They were later transferred from my laptop to a password-protected USB stick and secure UEL server to guide against loss and damage as an

essential aspect of good research data management (Lüders, 2004). Data protection is explained further in the ethics section. I transcribed the interviews verbatim to secure the details relevant to the analysis (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015; Flick, 2014).

Although the transcription process was time-consuming, resulting in an overwhelming number of papers (Bryman, 2012), it provided the first step in systematically organising my interview data for analysis. It also helped capture the details of my interviews. The transcription process supported my engagement with the data instead of judging the ECE system from a postcolonial perspective. For example, the process initiated exploring the meaning and understanding of my participants' perspectives on the system and brought me closer to the data by identifying key themes. It also helped me to be conscious of the similarities and differences between different participants' accounts.

5.7 Data Analysis

This section introduces the process for the analysis of data collected during the interviews, fieldwork, and document analysis to address the research questions for this study. The analysis of each data source is discussed in the sections below.

The Interview Data Analysis

A coding strategy was used to analyse the interview data to produce a systematic and meaningful account of the Nigerian ECE system (e.g., ECE policy implementation) and develop themes to address my research questions. In this research, the coding strategy entailed condensing and organising a set of transcribed data (e.g., interviews) into meaningful parts to detect recurring patterns (Bryman, 2012; Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2018; Rossman and Rallis, 2012). This approach helped me not to lose the meaning of the data. For example, it provided a means to understand the phenomenon and participants' views and actions. It also helped to better analyse and summarise my findings in a structured way (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2018; Saldana, 2016).

Various authors identified different types of coding methods. However, coding for this study was done according to Saldana's (2016, p. 64) approach, which involves two significant steps: first and second cycle coding. The first cycle coding method (indexing and sorting) involves assigning codes to the data units. The second cycle coding (categorisation and classification) works with the result from the first cycle coding.

Therefore, the analysis was completed in two phases and was used to reveal and interpret participants' views (Spencer et al., 2014a) to construct the reality of the Nigerian ECE system. Saldana's approach to coding (2016) was helpful and influenced my approach to coding. It gave visibility to the way participants addressed different elements of the system. The coding process was based on the research questions and how participants experienced and understood the ECE system (i.e., inductively analysed). However, research cannot be fully inductive, as it is influenced by the researcher's past reading of studies related to the research (David and Sutton, 2004). There is a possibility that the analysis could be influenced by existing knowledge from the literature and theoretical ideas (i.e., deductive approach).

In the first coding cycle, I read through the interview transcripts several times to familiarise myself with the data and get a feel for different participants' experiences. While reading the transcripts, I reflected on and noted the ways participants constructed ideas and the meaning ascribed to their experiences being investigated (Creswell, 2013). Subsequently, initial codes were assigned to vital information received from participants by labelling relevant words or phrases, known as the coding process (Saldana, 2016), for example, 'qualifications', 'policy interpretations'. Coded data were marked up with highlighters to show potential categories within sections of the data, and analytical notes were made about my first impression alongside each coding. However, the coding approach was time-consuming, resulting in a massive number of codes (Bryman, 2012; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). Reducing data during the coding process was challenging in ensuring a connection between the data to address the research questions. I consistently reflected on the participants' responses to avoid irrelevant analysis or misinterpretation during the analysis phase. The first cycle generated codes for the second cycle.

The second cycle involved going through all the codes and analytical notes created in the previous step. Categories of codes were then created by combining several codes that led to the development of emerging themes, for example, 'the effect of social stratification on ECE', that helped address the research questions. The themes were identified using a thematic analysis approach that involved identifying, analysing, organising, and reporting patterns of shared meaning (themes) within the data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006, quoted in Flick, 2014, p. 421), which I considered essential to the description of the ECE system. The main advantage of thematic analysis is its

flexibility, allowing for themes to emerge from data (Johnny, 2009, p. 36) and for data to support the interpretation of themes (Greg, 2012). It helped review all data and make sense of them by organising them into themes that cut across the interview data (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p. 43). This process provided a well-structured approach that produced a clear and organised final report (Nowell et al., 2017).

The themes that emerged from the coding process were reviewed and refined based on participants' narratives and the phenomena studied. Additional themes emerged as subcategories as I worked through the data, in addition to the emerging themes. Categories of themes were then labelled by describing their connections with each other. In line with the research questions, these categories and the connections were the main findings of my study, which form the new knowledge (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2018; Spencer et al., 2014a) of the Nigerian ECE system. They were used as themes in this study's results chapters and subsequently analysed in light of the literature, theoretical framework, and research questions (Bryman, 2012). Throughout the analysis, themes and codes tables were monitored to ensure reliability and produce insightful and dependable findings (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Greg, 2012). The same coding cycles were also used to analyse the fieldnotes and document analysis (Spencer et al., 2014a).

Analysis of Fieldnotes Data as Vignettes

As explained earlier, the vignettes present the fieldnotes data to provide a detailed account of ECE settings studied and were analysed using similar steps to the interviews' analysis. The first coding cycle involved assigning labels to aspects of the settings' vignettes in short phrases or words to describe or capture the meaning of settings' events and participants' behaviour from the fieldnotes data (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2018; Saldana, 2016). In the second coding cycle, the list of codes was sorted and categorised to generate the emerging themes based on the connection between the codes. This process included reference to the settings' events and human actions to address the research questions (Lofland et al., 2006). The settings' vignettes were based on my observation during the research. Being aware of my influence is essential; therefore, the analysis and interpretation of the information were appropriately treated to minimise any form of potential bias that could affect the research outcomes (Spencer et al., 2014b).

Method for the Document Analysis

Within the scope of this study, I examined thirteen documents on Nigerian ECE, including extracts from the *2013 NPE* and *2004 UBE Act* (see Appendix J). In analysing the documents, I applied postcolonial theory by reflecting on my positionality to minimise any assumptions about the documents before analysing them. Next, I applied my theoretical lens of Kagan's (2015) conceptualisation of an effective ECE system (production variables; see Chapters 3 and 4) as a guide. The first coding cycle was according to the contents of the documents related to the research questions, guided by Kagan's conceptualisation of an effective ECE system (Kagan, 2015) to create relevant codes. Using Kagan's systems thinking as a strategy for document analysis offered the opportunity to analyse the current policies. This provided critical insights into understanding the connection between the structural elements operating within the ECE system. In the second coding cycle, I went through the codes and my emerging analysis to select and collate relevant codes. Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) suggest that the emerging analysis be based on jottings or analytical notes that may be taken forward into discussing findings. Categories or themes were then created to establish the connections between them. These themes were related to the research questions.

The findings from the document analysis are reported in Chapter 3, while the other two sets of findings, those from the interviews with policymakers and with implementers, are reported in Chapters 6 and 7. Hence, the analysis of my data will be reported in three chapters. I considered this structure appropriate for reporting my findings to provide insights into different parts of the ECE system in Nigeria. The document analysis chapter clarifies the policy intentions, while Chapters 6 and 7 give visibility to the policymakers' and implementers' views of the ECE system.

5.8 Ethical Framework

The expectations of the University of East London's (UEL) ethical procedures and partly other influences (including myself related to my position) informed this research's implementation of an ethical framework. Given the importance of ethics in conducting research and its challenges, procedural ethics was done through the process of ethical approval for this study from the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) to protect research participants' dignity and safety (Creswell,

2014; Silverman, 2010). The committee also ensured that ethical requirements were adhered to during the research process (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004).

UREC granted the ethical approval for this research to commence (Appendix M) after I had obtained signed approval letters from the gatekeepers to access the settings and study participants (see Appendix B). This allowed me to conduct this research in the ECE system in the three western states in Nigeria. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the gatekeepers provided access and permitted the research to be done (Fieldman, Bell and Berger, 2003; Miller and Bell, 2012; Wanat, 2008). I relied on local contacts, including my family, relatives, and friends in early education, as a strategy to gain access to the gatekeepers for this study. This is because gaining access to gatekeepers could be problematic; they have the power to permit or deny access to conduct research (Miller and Bell, 2012). These actions were done with 'humility', according to Bhattacharya (2018), instead of exercising power.

When this research was initiated and registered, the Nigerian educational ethical review board did not exist except for medical and health-related research (NHREC, 2022). Since I am working on a British PhD, I had to adhere to the British Educational Research Association (BERA), 2018, p. 14) research ethics requirements during the research process. My research complied with the ethical principles outlined by UREC. As much as the ethical approach prescribed by UREC is important, ethical dilemmas that arise in the process of doing research should not be underestimated. Reflecting on tensions that arose from this position (i.e., from applying Western ethical principles in the Nigerian context) is essential. This helped establish mutual respect with participants and construct knowledge from the research process. The following section discusses how contemporary approaches to decolonising research ethics shaped ethical practice in this study.

Decolonising Research: Ethical Research in a Postcolonial Context

Several scholars describe the decolonising of research as an ongoing process of anti-colonialism that recognises indigenous approaches to knowing the world (Battiste, 2008; Bhattacharya, 2018; Datta, 2018; Tuck and Yang, 2014; Wilson, 2008). It is a liberating process of repositioning research that respects indigenous people's interests, views, and experiences and knowing and understanding research from 'other' perspectives to protect their rights and sovereignty (Battiste, 2000; Datta, 2018;

Held, 2020; Smith, 2012). Consequently, reference is made to various decolonising ethical principles when researching in a postcolonial context.

For example, Bhattacharya (2018) highlights principles such as considering colonial historical positions, maintaining a collaborative and respectful relationship with participants, and balancing researcher–participants relationships in terms of powers (i.e., humility). Other authors (Castleden et al., 2012; Thambinathan and Kinsella, 2021) propose other fundamental decolonising principles. These involve critical reflexivity, reciprocity, respect for self-determination, embracing other ways of knowing, community-engaged research, action, relevance, responsibility, and humility.

The above principles are relevant to this research considering the postcolonial context of Nigeria as a former British colony. Hence, researching from an ethical perspective in a postcolonial context could present a range of complex ethical and practical tensions for the researcher. These tensions are due to the overlapping roles and relationships, such as my positionality, assumptions, and the power relationship between participants and me (Laine, 2000). Rather than just by the formal ethical guidelines, such tensions need to be addressed by various ethical approaches to produce the right decisions (Wiles, 2013). It is also necessary to consider the roles played by other values and interests, including theoretical and philosophical preferences and institutions (Laine, 2000, p. 145). Addressing ethical dimensions in this study from a postcolonial perspective is vital to resist potential oppression and inequality in this research context (Taylor-Henderson and Esposito, 2017).

Applying decolonising ethical principles in this research influenced my reflection and research practice in several ways; they were used to guide and shape the research process (Held, 2020). However, they were challenging (Mutua and Swadener, 2004) due to contextual differences (Beeman-Cadwallader et al., 2011; Bhattacharya, 2018; McGregor, Restoule and Johnston, 2018). Applying those principles in this research does not mean rejecting Western methods and theories. Instead, it explored a link between the Western approach and postcolonial perspectives on research, which was appropriate and valuable for the Nigerian ECE system.

Decolonising principles assisted in addressing the challenges of building a practical ethic of coexistence and collaboration in this research (Hutchings, 2019). I reflected on my assumptions, positions, and honesty with participants to bring a decolonising

perspective to bear (Taylor-Henderson and Esposito, 2017). I also challenged and reflected on my responsibilities as a researcher to cause no harm to participants, using appropriate methods and practices. For example, my decolonisation process influenced me to challenge acts of oppression (e.g., positional superiority) while advancing indigenous knowledge(s), perspectives, experiences, histories, and realities. This was done by respecting my participants, engaging in inquiries relevant to their perspectives and experience, adopting reciprocal, trust-based relationships, and allowing them to participate in research voluntarily. This approach helped me build an appropriate collaborative approach where participants benefited from the research (Bhattacharya, 2018) or might do so in future through publications based on it. From a postcolonial perspective, this seems to reveal shifts in superior and inferior positions in researcher–participant relationships.

According to Holmes (2014) and Sanghera and Thapar-Bjokert (2008), insider and outsider perspectives are critical and valid compared with one another. Applying the principles to my position in this research as both insider and outsider was beneficial relative to the ECE system studied (Weiner-Levy and Queder, 2012). An outsider to the ECE settings and ministries of education as a non-member of the contexts, I was an insider to the Nigerian culture because I am familiar with the culture; this offered easy access. As this research is policy-related, just because I know people who supported my access to gatekeepers did not guarantee easy access to fieldwork. This is because conducting sensitive educational research can be problematic (Morrison, 2006). While some participants viewed me (after the interview) as an outsider that might bring positive changes to the Nigerian ECE system, some appeared to be guarded about what they would disclose to me. Some participants were unwilling to participate due to the sensitive nature of the research, which appeared to cause misrepresentation of research intention and negotiation of the research process (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011; Morrison, 2006). I engaged with openness, humility, and shared information about the research to gain their trust (Bhattacharya, 2018; Bridges, 2017). This provided an avenue to asking or getting insightful questions and answers or producing more authentic descriptions and understanding of the ECE system.

The impact of pragmatic expectations related to Western ethical principles emanating from UREC may be another assumption representing a form of colonial belief. In other

words, applying UK ethical standards to research in Nigeria, in a completely different context, could be challenging due to the underlying philosophical and cultural differences (Datta, 2018; Wilson, 2008, p. 12). I acknowledge that Western ethical principles were helpful throughout this research process; they guided the conduct of the research and moderated the relationship between the participants and me. However, the principles could be challenging if research is not culturally appropriate, or participants do not understand the research aims (ESRC, 2020).

From a postcolonial perspective, I acknowledged and respected the research background's social, cultural, and political differences, such as power and status for consent processes, before applying Western ethical principles in this research (Datta, 2018). For example, as a prerequisite to conducting my research, the process of gaining access to public settings (e.g., the senior government officials) involved power differentials between the gatekeepers and me or gatekeepers and participants. This was due to the sensitivity around political views and cultural values. However, conflicts and tensions between ethical and cultural values were respected by gathering relevant facts about the context to ensure that I conducted the research respectfully. The local contacts proved valuable in making the first contact on my behalf and gathering facts about the research context. I also checked the FCO (2021, 2022) website to ensure that correct information was shared. Assumptions were replaced with facts by working with local informants and gatekeepers to establish adequate levels of trust with participants.

Identifying my sample as part of my application for ethical approval by UREC was quite challenging. This was because gatekeepers had different power levels, positions, and attitudes towards my research (McAreavey and Das, 2013; Wanat, 2008). The more senior the officials I sought to interview (especially at the national and state levels), the more difficult it was to see them due partly to their political appointments and the ongoing election. Consequently, they were sceptical about how I could guarantee them total anonymity.

From a postcolonial perspective, procedural ethics (i.e., the UEL ethical framework) seemed insufficient due to the absence of trust in authority. As pointed out earlier, one government official preferred to have the interview in a public place for safety reasons. However, recognising and making appropriate changes when Western methods or ideas are inappropriate are crucial for decolonising research (Datta, 2018). Hence, I

had to maintain ethical relationships with my participants, specifically power relationships. Respecting the participants' position and views regarding the research process was fundamental, as was working with them as co-collaborators (Creswell, 2014). I addressed power relation issues through respect, beneficence, i.e., minimising the potential risk of harm to participants and me, and reflection (McAreavey and Das, 2013). This was coupled with careful negotiation, adaptation, and sensitivity (BERA, 2018, p. 14). Permission was gained by explaining the nature of the research to the directors of organisations before conducting the interviews. This led to a series of meetings to reassure them that the research was not political before participating. The ethical practices for this research followed the thinking that arose from the decolonising principles I have explained.

Ethical Practices

In conducting qualitative research, ethical issues may arise in researching participants (Flick, 2014; Hammersley and Traianou, 2012; Israel, 2014; Israel and Hay, 2006; Robson and McCartan, 2016). Consequently, several ethical considerations were considered to ensure that this doctoral thesis was conducted appropriately (Bryman, 2012; Evans and Becker, 2009; Punch, 2005; Wiles et al., 2005, 2007). These conform with the principles recommended by BERA (2018), and include: (a) minimising the risk of harm to participants; (b) voluntary informed consent and the right to withdraw; (c) transparency; and (d) privacy and data storage.

A critical postcolonial perspective involved adopting reciprocal and trust-based relationships with participants, thus avoiding deceptive practices and ensuring transparency is an essential ethical issue (BERA, 2018; Sarantakos, 2005). Before participants agreed to participate in this study, the research purpose was explained to them through the information sheet, which contained the critical points of the research (see Appendix C). I informed participants that their participation was voluntary and assured them of their right to withdraw at any point of the research without explanation (BERA, 2018; Flick, 2014; Flynn and Goldsmith, 2013). I also explicitly explained to participants what their information in the research would be used for and how the research would be disseminated (e.g., thesis and other forms of academic publications) – this is essential to gain participants' trust.

To comply with the ethical considerations in conducting research, all participants gave their written consent to be interviewed and participate in this research (Creswell, 2014; Silverman, 2014; Wiles, 2013). The consent form used for this study is presented in Appendix D. Each participant and I kept signed copies of the consent forms. The signing of the consent form was an indication of agreement to participate in this study (Webster, Lewis and Brown, 2014); it also served as an agreement of trust and mutual respect between the participants and me. Therefore, participants understood the research purpose and willingly participated in this study after being approached to do so (Leedy, 2001; Sarantakos, 2005). Seeking informed consent from the practitioners involved two stages. I sought permission from ECE settings' headteachers to gain access to practitioners; I also sought approval from practitioners regarding their participation. Moreover, before the interview, consent was sought from ECE settings' headteachers to make observational notes while on walking tours.

Despite having sought the participants' consent, I could not be sure that they fully understood the research. According to Held (2020), engaging in decolonising research could be complex due to local differences. Applying decolonising ethical principles here means respecting my participants, fostering reciprocal, trust-based relationships, and empowering them to participate in my research on their terms (Kirkness and Barnhardt, 1991, as cited in Held, 2020, p. 3). This means that participants were allowed to decide whether or not to participate without any form of undue influence. For instance, I explained in detail what I would be doing and how it would be done. A copy of the topic guides outlining the areas for questioning (see Appendix E) was shared with them to provide explicit informed consent before commencing the interviews. Participants were also allowed to ask questions on any aspect of the study before I sought permission to conduct the interview. I also obtained permission from participants to record the interview (Silverman, 2014). Only one participant chose not to be recorded for the interview, and notes of that interview were used instead.

For this study, protecting the anonymity and confidentiality of participants involved treating data confidentially, including appropriate data storage, analysis, and reporting. Due to the personal and sensitive nature (policy-related) of the contents of the interviews, I informed participants of the anonymity and confidentiality of their information (see Appendix D) to establish trust with them in the early phase of the interviews (Flick, 2014; Ryen, 2011). While sharing the purpose of this study with

participants, I also shared my background as an early years professional and researcher. This helped build trust and encouraged participants to share their narratives (Bhattacharya, 2018; Creswell, 2014). From a decolonising process perspective, I am exercising 'humility in posturing', according to Bhattacharya (2018, p. 3), which means balancing power relationships between participants and me. Hence, participants appeared actively engaged as collaborators during the interview process (Patton, 2002). I explained further and assured participants that the data collected would only be shared with my supervisory team, and the team would never know the participants' personal details; only I would.

It is essential to note that it is impossible to totally eliminate risk of when it comes to protecting participants' privacy. Providing total anonymity in this research, especially for the senior government officials due to the small sample, could be challenging without giving away their identity. However, every effort was made to protect the anonymity of participants, positions, locations, and incidents (Wiles, 2013). This procedure is in line with the provisions of data protection legislation in the UK (2018). Ensuring anonymity in this research went beyond using pseudonyms for individual participants. Locations' identities and states' names were removed in the final report. This is because using pseudonyms alone could still risk the identification of senior officials. Thus, the 'fictionalising' approach was employed to write up or report the data analysis (BERA, 2018) to obscure participants' identities so that their responses remain anonymous. This approach was achieved by changing names or features that may cause risk to participants (BERA, 2018; Bryman, 2012; Flick, 2009). For example, in my analysis, I assigned specific responsibilities to my participants that do not correspond to their real job roles, especially senior officials, e.g., local officials or L1 (see Appendix L).

At the end of the interviews, participants said they enjoyed the experience, which is among the study's measurable benefits. I observed that the majority of the participants, particularly, the NGO officer, headteachers and practitioners, tended to engage freely in the discussions. This suggests that the interview process allowed participants to share their views in a comfortable and unjudgemental atmosphere.

The handling and storage of research data and records conform to UEL's research data management policy (2019). The data management plan form was completed and approved by the University's research data management office at the outset of the

research process. This research involved transferring data from outside the European Economic Area (EEA), as research was carried out in Nigeria in West Africa. The data includes interview notes, computer files with anonymised data, and audio recordings collected during fieldwork. Fieldwork data (e.g., recordings, transcriptions, and personal data) for this research were stored in a safe and fully protected container or secure holder so that no one can access such data, in the interests of confidentiality and anonymity (Allen and Wiles, 2015; Lüders, 2004). For example, data were transferred immediately on my passworded laptop and later stored securely on a USB stick and backed up regularly to the secure UEL server. Such a procedure was followed to facilitate data security, reduce the risk of data loss, and guide against calamity. It also increases research efficiency and ensures research integrity.

5.9 Data Validity and Reliability

Validity demonstrates that research accurately measures what it claims to measure and accurately captures the studied phenomenon (Winter, 2000). Reliability is the extent to which the research findings are dependable and consistent over time across different projects and circumstances with various researchers (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Reliability also measures the extent to which a study's findings are generalisable (Gibbs, 2007). This means that similar results might be produced if the research is conducted in a similar context, on a similar group of participants, and under the same methods. However, the capacity of qualitative research findings to support wider inference has been questioned (Lewis et al., 2014, p. 354). It has been argued that qualitative research findings cannot be generalised across different contexts (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). For example, this study is in three states in Nigeria; it cannot be generalised across Nigeria. Therefore, the findings are only valid for the research's context despite the multiplicity of information and results. Hence, the use of generalisation is limited to quantitative research. Since this interpretivist and qualitative research is a subjective process of multiple realities, validity and reliability are crucial to ensure this study's credibility (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011; Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2018); the following section discusses how I ensured validity within this interpretive and qualitative research.

Validity in the Research

Various strategies were used to ensure the validity of the data and findings of this study. In relation to data collection, I applied triangulation to enhance the credibility or trustworthiness of my research (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2018). This involved the use of multiple data sources (interviews, fieldnotes, literature review, and document analysis) and methods (different stakeholders and locations) to develop a broad understanding of a complex and multifaceted context (Nigerian ECE system) (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Hughes, 2010; Tisdall, Davis and Gallagher, 2009). The triangulation of multiple data methods and sources was analysed and backed up by evidence from theories and relevant literature to provide a broader understanding of the findings for this study (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

Trustworthiness of data was also used as an indication of validity and is concerned with whether this study's findings are credible, transferable, confirmable, and dependable (Johnson and Parry, 2015; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). To increase the trustworthiness of data, pilot testing of interviews beforehand contributed to validity (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). I also continuously reflected on this study's objectives to ensure that participants were guided to remain within the scope of the study (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Considering my role in data analysis, the findings responded to this study's focus and not my biases, while my judgement from the postcolonial perspective was also clarified. I reduced biases as much as possible by engaging in reflexive thinking during data interpretations. Data analysis ensured that research findings capture participants' narratives or what happened (events or human actions) to understand the Nigerian ECE system. In other words, the analysis reflected participants' perspectives for more realistic results and validity. This understanding of validity aligns with the interpretivist approach, which focuses on identifying participants' constructions of a phenomenon.

Reality could be affected by both the researcher's and the participants' positions or values (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Willis, 2007). Given this, I constantly reflected on my understanding of participants' views to confirm the meanings elicited from the conversation. Transparency of my positionality throughout the research process in a detailed manner to ensure the dependability of this research is crucial (Bourke, 2014; Silverman, 2014). To this end, information about my position on the research topic and how the research process affected me and was influenced by me (Onwuegbuzie and

Leech, 2007; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009) was included in this thesis because it forms part of the meaning of the study's interpretations.

Reliability in Qualitative Research

Reliability in qualitative research is contested (Winter, 2000) because it is concerned with the natural occurrence of situations (multiple realities) which cannot be replicated (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). This study adopted a qualitative strategy with data collection methods and a theoretical framework concerned with multiple social realities implying that people construct knowledge differently at different times. Consequently, it might not be possible for data to remain consistent across repeated studies with different participants due to fluidity within radically changed situations.

The interpretivist paradigm and qualitative research are not interested in generalised findings of the social world or human actions under study (Gibbs, 2007). These approaches mainly focus on describing and developing themes in a specific context to understand the meaning attached to a particular narrative at a certain time and site rather than generalisability. Therefore, qualitative research refers to dependability rather than reliability (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In other words, the accuracy associated with whether the data support the findings, interpretations, and conclusions determines the reliability of the data.

A detailed description of the research topic, context, methodology, procedures, and data processing were conveyed as accurately as possible to ensure that the data were dependable. Thus, other researchers could follow these procedures (Creswell, 2014). I checked the transcripts' accuracy to ensure no mistakes had been made during the transcription and the data analysis process (Gibbs, 2007). The interview responses were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and coded to preserve the continuity of the interview and reduce bias. Data were constantly compared with codes to ensure consistency in the meaning of codes during the coding process. I discussed the analysis of data sources with my supervisory team; they made their interpretations of the data gathered, and questioned some of the analysis made. The analysis relied not only on my interpretation but also on other sources, including the literature review and theoretical framework.

5.10 Conclusion

The research procedures for this thesis have been discussed in this chapter regarding the research design and rationale, data collection methods, and analysis. It explained the ethical dimensions related to decolonial ethical principles and how they influenced my thinking and ethics practices for this thesis, considering its postcolonial context. This chapter also discussed the issues of validity and reliability in this study. The selected methodology and methods will address the research questions and enable a deeper understanding of the Nigerian ECE system, which I examine critically in light of the findings.

Chapter 6: Policymakers' Views on the Nigerian ECE System

6.1 Introduction

Different perspectives on the ECE system's operation were explored by interviewing two major groups of stakeholders: policymakers, and implementers (i.e., ECE settings' headteachers and practitioners). This chapter explores the policymakers' views at different levels (national, state and local) on how the policies underpinned by the legislation should be implemented in three western states in Nigeria. The Nigerian national government is the highest tier of the government structure. It has 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), with a total number of 774 Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs) (*NPE 2013*). The states have different numbers of LGEAs, ranging from six to forty-four, respectively. The names of the states have been withheld to further anonymise participants' identities in this relatively small sample. The next chapter presents the headteachers' and practitioners' views at the local level of the system's operation.

Eight (8) government officials and one (1) non-governmental organisation (NGO) officer involved in overseeing ECE policymaking and ECE regulation were interviewed. The government officials comprise two (2) national officials, three (3) state officials, and three (3) local officials.

Several themes emerged from the inductive analysis of the interviews, and my theoretical perspectives have supported my engagement with the data. Postcolonial theory helped manage my bias and positionality in relation to the topic, providing a means of seeking to understand participants' perspectives on the ECE system and giving visibility to their voice instead of judging the system.

The interviews' findings are divided into three main sections, successively addressing the three research questions guiding this project. The first section discusses the policymakers' ECE policy interpretation and their roles in relation to making a reality of the policy. The second section describes the ECE development in greater detail. The third section discusses the factors (negative and positive) that may influence Nigeria's ECE policy implementation in my participants' views.

6.2 How Do Policymakers Interpret and Mediate ECE Policy at National, State, and Local Levels?

This section of the interview invited participants to give information on their understanding of the 2004 Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act being the umbrella legislation that covers ECE policy. Participants were also invited to indicate their roles in relation to making a reality of the ECE policy. Four themes emerged from the data analysis: "UBE programme awareness and ECE entitlement from policymakers' perspectives at different government levels," "Differences in the policymakers' support for the ECE entitlement implementation at different levels of government," "Policymakers' roles in achieving the ECE policy and the effect of bureaucratic structure on their collaboration," and "Roles of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in ECE policy implementation and their influence towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)." Each theme will now be explored.

ECE Entitlement from Policymakers' Perspectives at Different Government Levels

A range of responses was elicited from the government officials regarding their understanding of the UBE programme. All government officials indicated an understanding of the UBE programme. For example, one state official remarked:

> *"The basic education presently started from ECCDE [Early Childhood Care, Development, and Education] to JSS3 [Junior Secondary School 3]. Which means one year in ECCDE class – that is, pre-primary education; six years in basic [primary] education; then three years in junior secondary school."* (S1)

This quote corresponds to the provision identified in Chapter 3 that describes the ECE system and provides a policy analysis. From the NGO officer's perspective, the "UBE programme is designed to provide free early education for young children."

At the national level, official N1 felt that the UBE programme was established and reformed by the government in "response to global goals, such as the Education for All (EFA) goals, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)." At the state level, a state official-S2 drew attention to the fact that the "ECE programme had been part of the UBE Act since 2004" when the national government passed the Act, but since then it has received little or no attention.

At the local level, an official-(L3) explained further that the UBE programme formerly covers one year's pre-primary education for children aged 5. The official said that ECE for ages 3–4 years became part of the *UBE Act 2004* to boost enrolment. These responses seem to confirm the contradiction between the *2013 National Policy on Education (NPE)* and the *2004 UBE Act*, as identified in Chapter 3, with one specifying one year's and the other two years' pre-primary education. These documents suggest an anomaly because the NPE used for this study was reviewed in 2013 and did not include the two years suggested in the *UBE Act 2004*. Other responses from the NGO officer included: "ECE is the first elementary type of compulsory education for children 3–5 years old." He commented that ECE must be free, high-quality, and accessible for every child to develop holistically without any barrier because it is universal.

Differences in the Policymakers' Support for the ECE Entitlement Implementation at Different Government Levels

Several differences were identified in the interpretation and implementation of the national policy and the UBE Act by government officials at different levels. ECE entitlement implementation in each of the three states where I did my research appears contradictory and confusing. For example, officials at the national and state levels indicated that the ECE entitlement is one year, as stipulated in the *2013 NPE*, and not two years as specified in the *2004 UBE Act*. One national official-(N1) said, "the national government is only obliged to provide a compulsory one-year Early Childhood Care, Development, and Education [ECCDE], also known as ECE for every child." Policymakers' interpretation of the policy may have implications for its implementation in terms of funding and monitoring.

However, most national and state officials mentioned that children are admitted from 2 to 3 years old in public ECE settings. From the state level's perspective, increasing the enrolment rates and benefiting working parents were the reasons for admitting varied age groups. For example, one state official said:

> *"Ideally, the policy and the government approved one-year, but, in Nigeria, we have parents that bring children right from 2 years, so we do admit them."* (S3)

It can be seen from the extract that children are admitted as early as 2 years old in this state, which is confusing. A possible explanation for this data could be that states respond to local demands.

All officials at different government levels agreed that ECE provision is free in public schools. There was one state official-(S3) who mentioned that "ECE is not free in private settings, as they have the right to collect their fees." This finding corresponds with the *2013 NPE* stipulation that only the government's one-year ECE is free. Although the public ECE provision is free, the NGO officer held the view that the implementation of the programme does not match the implementation intentions laid out in the policy. This has led to low-quality provision, particularly in public schools. The officer further defined the purpose of ECE provision for young children as follows:

> *"The purpose of the ECE to the majority of working mothers is where the children can just be, and not looking at the things that they want to learn at that particular age. It is also to prepare the children for the primary schools."* (NO)

This quote seems to confirm the national policy goals for ECE (*NPE 2013*), as reported in Chapter 2. It stipulates there that ECE is designed to cater for children's welfare while their parents are at work and to prepare children for primary education. Overall, from the policymakers' perspectives, the government's obligation towards ECE provision is one year as stipulated in the *2013 NPE* rather than the two years stipulated in the *2004 UBE Act*. However, ECE is implemented differently across the three states.

Policymakers' Roles in Achieving the ECE Policy and the Bureaucratic Structure Effect on Their Collaboration

An important theme in the interviews was the sense among policymakers at different government levels that "they all work together" to achieve ECE under the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme. From the responses, a picture emerged of the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) as the body that liaises between the national and state levels of government. A national official-(N2) mentioned that "UBEC at the national level is responsible for coordinating the UBE programme across all states in Nigeria." He emphasised UBEC's responsibilities, including monitoring, teacher training, providing instructional resources, infrastructural facilities (e.g., classrooms), renovation, and monitoring finance released to state governments to

ensure accountability. These findings correspond with the findings in my documentary analysis in Chapter 3.

At the state level, one official-(S3) described the State Universal Basic Education Boards' (SUBEBs) roles as the "state's representatives that oversee the UBE programme's coordination and implementation in the country." Another state official-(S1) indicated that in collaboration with UBEC, SUBEB is responsible for quality control of ECE settings and funding. It also monitors the provision of facilities and resources needed to deliver basic education in public schools. The official stated that "SUBEBs work with Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs) at the local level to ensure ECE implementation at the grassroots." This view was echoed by a local government official-(L1) who mentioned that LGEAs work with the SUBEB to implement the UBE programme.

At the local level, officers serving on the LGEAs are political appointees by the state government, and their operations are under the supervision of SUBEB. One local official-(L1) further described the role of LGEAs as the "interface between the state government and the community concerning ECE policies' implementation" at grassroots level. All the state officials echoed this view. As one state official said:

> *"Any information from the federal level… and information from the SDGs on ECCDE, we disseminate to them [LGEAs] for the implementation at the grassroots."* (S1)

This quote suggests the interrelationship between the three tiers of government with respect to the ECE programme and how they impact one another. It also indicates the role of the state level as the mediator between the national and local levels. Other aspects of LGEAs' function, as highlighted by another local official-(L2), included: "supervising public primary schools in the local government areas, making recommendations to SUBEB at the state level concerning practitioners' promotions and teachers' discipline." These findings confirm what I found in the documentary analysis in Chapter 3.

The participants' experience informed their view that the structures of the implementation of the UBE appeared layered and bureaucratic. A national official-(N2) mentioned that "the state level serves as a link between the national and local levels."

In contrast, a local government official-(L1) reported that "the state only liaises with the national government about developing and implementing the UBE programme."

The two national officials in this study reported a lack of commitment by some states to ECE provision. They explained that getting some states' cooperation to comply with the UBE scheme is challenging, as some states had not implemented the ECE programme in public schools. Commenting on this issue, one national official said:

> *"They [some states] want to do it at their pace, which is somehow dragging our programme. So, we expect the states to do their own parts in enforcing those things [UBE], which is very difficult to make them understand."* (N2)

Finally, some state officials reported that they work with federal and state ministries of education. They also work with other ministries because ECE is a holistic programme that cuts across all the sectorial ministries, including health, justice, education, and women's affairs. As an official said:

> *"You know early care is not only on education. We have the general care for the children; we do work together and collaborate with the ministry of health, the ministry of information."* (S2)

This comment is important because it suggests the significance of an integrated approach with other sectors to facilitate the ECE programme's success and support children's holistic development.

This section of the data highlighted the interrelated roles of the different government levels in accomplishing ECE policy. However, some participants focused on governance structure issues within the system and some states' lack of commitment to ECE provision. This section also highlights that ECE cuts across different sectors, including health, for the programme's holistic delivery.

Roles of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in ECE Policy Implementation and Their Influence towards Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The nature of officers' interaction at different government levels with other organisations, such as NGOs and community bodies, emerges from the data. At the national and state levels, officials indicated that they collaborate with NGOs, including

international organisations like UNICEF, in ensuring appropriate ECE policy implementation. At all levels, the officials reported that UNICEF only operates at the national and state levels (i.e., UBEC and SUBEB). SUBEB at the state level passes on any necessary information gleaned from UNICEF to the local government level. One local official explained:

> "So*, they [UNICEF] interact with the national body at the level of UBEC, and those persons [UBEC] step it down to us at the state level and imbibe it with our local level. So, there is no direct link with all these NGOs. So, one might not be able to say exactly or the capacity at which all these NGOs are interacting or collaborating with the UBEC because we do not have personal contact with them."* (L1)

Opinions differed regarding how international organisations operate. One state official-(S3) alluded to the fact that "UNICEF works on their areas of interest according to the suggestion from SUBEBs at the state level." However, a local level official-(L1) argued that "there is a possibility that the NGOs may be unable to have a proper understanding of the local needs." He explained further that the local government works directly with the grassroots and is more conversant with local needs. The official suggested that the NGOs should directly link up with the local level by "financially supporting or subsidising the LGEAs offices" without passing through the national government. He further suggested it would be a good idea to have a monitoring system to ensure the NGOs' funds are used for the purposes they are assigned for.

Both national and state officials highlighted UNICEF's support in the ECE programme's implementation, including financial and technical support. One national official commented:

> *"UNICEF has funded so many capacities building training for teachers and supported in the provision of instructional materials. E.g., curriculum, educational materials, and textbooks. UNICEF contributes to some community-based ECCDE established by UNICEF in rural sectors."* (N1)

This quote highlights the participant's perspective on the significance of UNICEF's impact in developing the ECE programme.

Aside from international organisations, the participants' responses revealed that officials at the national and state levels engage with other national NGOs. The NGO officer interviewed indicated that their organisation "collaborate[s] with the national and state levels through policy advocacy, policy formulation, and curriculum design." He reported that they work in partnership with SUBEB at the state level to reach out to public primary schools. For example, they inform the community about the UBE programme, identify problems in a community, speak for people in the community, and build human capacity. Furthermore, the NGO officer reported that "their organisation offers advocacy services by raising funds, winning proposals to get education provision for children accessing public ECE and primary schools." The officer also mentioned providing support, such as social mobilisation awareness, towards achieving the SDGs.

Whilst one national official-(N1) indicated that "UBEC works in partnership with other organisations, like the private sector," all state officials reported that SUBEB works in collaboration with universities and colleges of education. A common view amongst the national and local officials was that they engage with the community bodies like the "School-Board Management Committees" (SBMCs) and the "Parents–Teachers' Association" (PTA). As one local official said:

> *"We work with the parents – PTA, then SBMC. The members are selected from the community, the old pupils."* (L3)

One national official-(N1) described the SBMC as "a voluntary community-based management committee that assists schools." All local level officials emphasised that these bodies (SBMC and PTA) consist of parents, traditional rulers, old students' associations, teachers, pupils, administrators, and the cadre of people who belong to the community. One local official asserted that the government encouraged these bodies to create partnerships with parents and the community to ensure public schools' development, as explained:

> *"If there is anything in the school, we call on them [SBMC and PTA], we hold meetings together, we deliberate on the progress of the school."* (L3)

The quote suggests that local officials acknowledge parents' and community bodies' significance as active partners in supporting schools' progress.

Another significant finding is the impact of these community bodies on public schools. At the national level, one official-(N1) commented: "the SBMC supports the public schools in funding, employing, and paying practitioners for smooth delivery of the ECE programme." One local level official-(L3) indicated that the "SBMC supports the provision of infrastructures (e.g., toilets and washing facilities) in remote areas." The official also highlighted the SBMC and PTA's support in "boosting the public schools' enrolment rates in rural areas by encouraging parents to uptake ECE provision."

From the NGO officer's perspective, their organisation collaborates with the community and some international organisations, such as the European Union and Action Aid, to support some projects in rural communities and the development of basic education, such as renovating some schools, providing sanitation, and toileting facilities. The officer mentioned that other international organisations, such as UNICEF, sometimes engage them in overseeing projects executed in some communities, including raising people's awareness about community projects. However, he commented:

> *"The relationship wasn't more of funding us directly but engaging us as partners to help them look over the projects that they are doing in those local communities. They fund mostly the government."* (NO)

This comment highlights the possibility of a partnership between the national and international organisations in executing their projects or goals.

A key point raised by participants at all government levels was how to achieve target 4.2 of the SDGs. Target 4.2 aims to ensure that all children have access to quality early childhood development, care, and education to be ready for pre-primary education by 2030 (UN, 2015). There were slight variations in the different participants' perceptions. One national official-(N2) felt that the international actors (i.e., UNICEF) are trying their best to encourage quality ECE delivery. The same official suggested further that the "SDGs' prospects depend on every state and education agency's cooperation in the country." Additionally, the ECE sector must be assessed "periodically, and feedback must be given for improvement if needed." However, he thought that the 2030 agenda of the SDGs could be achieved.

At the state level, some officials considered that the SDGs could be achievable by 2030. One state official-(S2) thought that "the enrolment rate is increasing," and another-(S1) added that some community members support the ECE programme "by

volunteering their houses, particularly in the rural areas." At the local level, one local official highlighted that most of Nigeria's policies, including education, "are subjected to a pool of bureaucracy," which is a barrier to achieving the SDGs. He further commented:

> *"There are issues which we can attack locally without having to pass through the administrative bureaucracy and get results."* (L1)

This comment suggests that the local government can do things locally within their capacity, but technically, they are not allowed to. For example, the official emphasised that many children, particularly girls, still drop out of schools before completing primary or secondary education at their local schools. However, "the government failed to take notice, and even if they did, nothing has been done to tackle the problem."

Another problem reported by a local government official was inadequate training of stakeholders by the international organisations concerning the SDGs' components and meaning to understand better and attain their goals. As he said:

> *"If you want to give anybody anything, you must train them to understand the reason why you are doing this thing. There is always a philosophy behind everything. You are giving us gold and diamond; you want us to actually make use of them, you didn't tell us the properties of gold and properties of diamond."* (L1)

A likely explanation for this response from the participant's perspective is the need for the international NGOs to provide efficient training on SDGs' components and benefits to all stakeholders. The same official suggested that the training should start at the local level before extending to state and national levels. He explained further that the transfer of knowledge from the national to local level could be mistaken for political patronage, and people might not practise it. The official suggested that the international NGOs' ideas should be expressed through partnerships with the government plans at different levels.

Concerns were expressed by the NGO officer about the governmental leadership in achieving the SDGs. The comment below illustrates this:

> *"If we have a leader who is proactive, we as civil society organisations, our job is just to complement their efforts to ensure that this is achievable."* (NO)

This section suggests the involvement and impact of NGOs and community bodies in ensuring ECE policy implementation. However, different participants reported several issues affecting ECE policy implementation. They include a lack of government leadership and direct linkages between the local government and international organisations. The results also show that different participants acknowledge the significance of stakeholders' collaboration in achieving the SDGs.

6.3 How Has ECE Developed as a System?

The second research question explored the development of ECE as a system. It examined multiple influences at different levels (global, national, state, and local) on Nigeria's ECE policy from the policymakers' perspectives and based on their experience. Three broad themes emerged from the analysis: "Parental ECE awareness needs boosting by the state and local government officials," "The impact of inaccessible funding and inefficient monitoring system on the government's support for ECE policy implementation," and "Insufficiently qualified ECE practitioners in the workforce." They are explored below.

Parental ECE Awareness Needs Boosting by the State and Local Government Officials

A common reported fact related to the enrolment monitoring system amongst participants was that it monitors ECE enrolment using strategies like "enrolment drive" or "sensitisation" and "home-grown feeding programme." Enrolment drive or sensitisation is an approach of informing parents of ECE's opportunities and encouraging them to pursue them in public settings. At the national and state levels, participants indicated that the SUBEBs are tasked with promoting ECE's uptake in collaboration with the LGEAs. There were slight variations in participants' views on the most effective approaches used for the enrolment drive. For example, all state officials reported using different approaches, including informing parents in PTAs, advertising in the media, and educational officers visiting mosques, churches, and markets. As one official put it:

> *"There is a department that deals with enrolment drive. They go round and do kind of dancing, beating drum both at the rural and urban. We go to the market to encourage. If we see any child backed up by the mother, that is of the age that can enter the pre-primary, we tell them [mothers]*

the advantages attached to it, and we really encourage them to move on in bringing their children." (S3)

The same official also mentioned that they encourage parents to take up ECE for their children "by providing attractive play equipment and resources to some schools in the community."

All local level officials reported that LGEAs ensure that headteachers and practitioners in their locality carry out the enrolment drive, particularly in rural areas, together with the community bodies (i.e., State Board Management Committee (SBMC) and the PTA). One local official-(L1) explained that the "enrolment drive approach enhances a positive relationship between parents and practitioners because of the direct contact." He also indicated that UNICEF, in collaboration with UBEC, at the national level, organises training about ECE importance for parents at the local level.

One concern expressed by a national official was that the enrolment drive is not only limited to those in rural areas but is also needed in urban areas, as indicated below:

"They are not aware even in urban areas. We carry out sensitisation everywhere. But precisely, it is more intensive in the rural areas. You know people in the urban areas are more enlightened, and we have so many private schools in the urban areas. But some people in the urban cannot take their children to private schools; they keep them [at home]. Sensitisation can also be done in the urban, not just in the rural." (N1)

This participant indicates that most parents in urban areas are educated. Perhaps, they recognise the importance of ECE for their children; however, they are mostly unable to afford private ECE settings. It seems possible that some parents, including those in urban areas, are unaware of free ECE services in public schools.

As highlighted by a state official-(S1), another enrolment strategy was the free school meal known as the "home-grown" school feeding programme. One local official-(L2) explained that "the free meal is expected to be provided for all children at ECE up to the primary level (Primary 3) in public primary schools only." However, another local official-(L3) mentioned that the free meal programme is not consistent in all states.

Some government officials expressed a variety of perspectives at different levels regarding the enrolment rate data. At the national level, participants reported that they receive enrolment data from SUBEBs annually, which is used for public-setting

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enrolment statistics. One local official-(L1) indicated that LGEAs move around the schools to monitor the "enrolment chart" or "number of pupils in schools and record data." The data is then put together for SUBEBs for review by UBEC. The same official explained that in schools where the enrolment rates are low, the LGEAs encourage the headteachers and practitioners to improve on the enrolment drive strategy. A dedicated department also move around schools, including private schools, gathering enrolment data and useful information about ECE, as mentioned by one state official-(S3) who suggests that "this data is more reliable in their state."

One local official-(L1) expressed concern about parents' educational background, which has led to their lack of understanding of the value of children's education, particularly ECE. Talking about this issue, all government officials felt that adopting the enrolment drive strategy, particularly having a direct link with uneducated parents, has improved enrolment rates. The local official thought that:

> *"If you want to take anything from anybody, that has to do with the person's understanding and education. Because once you understand the thinking of people, and then what you need to let them realise is easy."* (L1)

Most participants reported that the enrolment strategies used boost ECE uptake. One state official-(S1) felt that most parents are aware of the importance of ECE in their state; their ignorance is fading away gradually. The introduction of the "free ECE programme in public primary schools and free school meals had prompted a significant increase in the enrolment rates," as considered by another state official-(S2). Likewise, the NGO officer emphasised an improvement in girls' enrolment rates because of its introduction to public primary schools.

However, issues related to ECE provision in rural areas were prominent during the interview. Commenting on this issue, one state official-(S1) mentioned that "most children up to 5 years old, particularly in hard-to-reach communities, do not have access to ECE." One of the reasons for this inaccessibility is the lack of ECE facilities. Other reasons highlighted by the NGO officer are linked to some parents' disregard for ECE "as a waste of resources for their children." The officer further indicated the government's lack of political will, affecting the programme's sustainability.

Another reported problem was the absence of credible data and research for monitoring ECE services' uptake. Opinions differ as to whether data, such as birth registration, can be used to pursue the ECE uptake. A local official-(L3) noted that most parents do not register their children's birth despite this being free in Nigeria. And at the state level-(S3), a state official considered that most of this data from the population commission is inaccurate. He reported that birth registration had recently been introduced, and LGEAs and the headteachers in their state were trained to encourage parents to register their children. Another local official commented:

> *"There is no nexus between the birth population enrolment and the birth registration in a given environment in our enrolment. The data is not there for a level of comparison."* (L1)

The same official alluded to a "lack of modern technology" as a barrier to accessing birth registration, making it challenging to monitor children's accurate enrolment rates in ECE provision. Despite the issues identified above, most government officials believe the enrolment drive to be more efficient than unreliable data suggest. One local official-(L1) considered birth registration as a worthwhile requisite for an effective enrolment monitoring system, provided the issues mentioned above are tackled.

Turning now to research on ECE, the NGO officer indicated that their organisation has never researched the Nigerian ECE. However, the officer mentioned that, indirectly, "other networks they belong to have done some research, which has informed their work." Some of the information research outcomes were used as "an advocacy tool to engage the government to intervene in issues concerning access to education," particularly in disadvantaged areas. The information was also used to inform people about the importance of their children's education.

With respect to this topic, participants referred to the enrolment strategies used to inform parents of ECE opportunities in public settings. Some participants held perspectives on parents' educational background as a hindrance to ECE value awareness. All policymakers felt that the enrolment strategies used are efficient and have improved enrolment rates. However, issues related to ECE provision in rural areas and the absence of credible data were also evident in the interview data.

The Impact of Inaccessible Funding and Inefficient Monitoring System on the Government's Support for ECE Policy Implementation

A common view amongst the policymakers at different levels was that there is a range of support for ECE policy implementation. This includes funding, provision of facilities and resources, monitoring, and practitioners' capacity building. They are discussed under the sub-headings below.

Universal Basic Education (UBE) Funding Model and Its Accessibility Issues.

Most government officials tended not to share information about the budgetary allocation with me. Robson and McCartan (2016, p. 236) asserted, in relation to this issue, that it could be that government officials regard such documents as sensitive or that they fear exposure, or that they distrust the research and researcher. However, I found some statistical information regarding ECE funding in places suggested by some officials (Appendix K1 and K2), as discussed further in Chapter 8.

In the accounts of the processes surrounding financing ECE, one national official commented:

> *"When the government does revenue, the whole of the revenue they total it together. 2% of that revenue is coming to UBEC every year. It is out of that 2% that the ECCDE is being funded."* (N1)

This response corresponds to the block grant allocation of not less than 2% of the national government's Consolidated Revenue Fund (CRF) identified in the ECE system documentary analysis in Chapter 3. ECE is likely funded from this 2% of the national intervention fund allocated to UBEC at the national level.

Information drawn from the documentary analysis and my fieldnotes (see the ECE system vignette in Appendix I) highlighted the ECE funding model. Two officials from the national and state levels indicated that 70% of the national government's CRF is reserved as the UBE matching grant for states' UBE projects. As described in Chapter 3, a matching grant is the 50% counterpart funding states must provide to access national government block grants. 5% of the 70% is allocated for the ECE programme. In the interview data, another state official noted that this fund is then released to LGEAs at the local level. However, from the ECE system vignette (Appendix I), the same national and state officials above reported that some states could not access

the national government UBE matching grant because of "their inability to provide their 50% counterpart funding."

Most state officials mentioned that matching funding is released to SUBEBs annually to train ECE practitioners, provide instructional materials, infrastructure development, and construct ECE centres. However, all national and state officials indicated that private ECE settings are not included. As a national official said:

> *"Government don't get [financial] support for the private sectors for the establishment of ECE settings because they charge fees and make profits."* (N1)

As was stipulated in the national policy (*NPE 2013*) in Chapter 3, only the public one-year ECE provision is funded.

The comment below by a state official illustrates the financial responsibilities of the national and state governmental agencies (UBECs and SUBEBs):

> *"UBEC is the umbrella to SUBEB and LGEAs. So, funds are coming down from the federal down to state and where the state will now distribute down to all our primary schools at the local level."* (S2)

This quote suggests that money from the state level goes straight to schools, by-passing LGEAs. The state level is tasked with the management and disbursement of funds once they are disbursed to them by the national government. Additionally, one local official-(L2) indicated that states sometimes complement national government programmes regarding funding.

In contrast, one concern expressed by a state official-(S3) regarding the national level was that their support does not come up to expectations. The official said, "at least most of their written proposals for project allocation at the state level are only approved by the national government on paper without any effect in reality or commitment to implement them." Surprisingly, only one local official-(L1) reported that "local governments across states do not have direct access to funds." The official reported that local governments do not influence how funds are spent when they are released through states. He highlighted that one of the "state's requirements to access the national matching grant is the appointment of the LGEAs." He further suggested opening up a channel for local government to access minute funds so that LGEAs can

use them based on their ECE service plans. This view suggests financial autonomy for the local government so they can spend money on local ECE projects.

Provision of ECE Facilities and Resources.

The interview data collected suggests that part of the government's support for implementing the ECE programme is the provision of facilities and resources. At the national level, this included distributing the "national one-year pre-primary education curriculum" designed for the ECE programme by UBEC to all states for dissemination to all settings. One state official mentioned that originally, practitioners used to teach in the abstract because there was no curriculum designed for ECE. Accordingly, the same official commented*:*

> *"They [Nigerian Education Research and Development Council (NERDC)] supply the curriculum through the federal ministry of education. In Nigeria, we have a one-year pre-primary education curriculum, which makes it possible for the teachers to be able to know the core areas to impact the knowledge."* (S1)

This comment suggests that NERDC supplies the curriculum, which corresponds with my documentary analysis findings in Chapter 3. It also seems to provide evidence on the curriculum's significance in providing practitioners with a considerable ECE delivery plan.

At the state and local levels, some participants reported that the curriculum is disseminated to all public settings for free through the state and local governments. However, the private sector purchase the curriculum from the ministry of education with their own money. In one case, one state official-(S2) mentioned that regardless of this situation, private settings are required to adhere to the policy guidance; hence, "ECE curriculum is essential for practitioners to disseminate necessary activities needed at that level."

Other responses at the national level included the provision of resources and infrastructure by UBEC to expand the ECE programme. One national official-(N1) indicated that these resources are "procured and sent to states for onward distribution to public schools." At the local level, a local official-(L1) emphasised the LGEAs' roles, for instance, "paying teachers' salaries, constructing schools, providing instructional and playing resources."

Inefficient ECE Monitoring System.

As indicated by the policymakers, other government support includes monitoring and supervising ECE services to ensure minimum standards. One national official said:

"It is the responsibility of UBEC, SUBEBs, and local government to work together, supervise… and adequate monitoring. And three tiers work together to achieve this." (N1)

All the government officials indicated that UBEC oversees the monitoring of ECE centres, while SUBEBs and LGEAs are responsible for the supervision and quality control of public and private settings. A local official-(L3) mentioned that sometimes "some challenges beyond the LGEAs' capacity are reported to SUBEB for support," which takes charge if it is a matter of urgency.

Most government officials reported that the external monitoring bodies focus mostly on the enrolment rate, teacher or pupils' notes, diary, facilities, and staff attendance. One local official explained his inspection role as a member of an external monitoring body as follows:

"Getting there, we ask for the enrolment for that day. We move around the classes, we collect the students' notes, check the board, are they in line with the curriculum, and then the attendance of staff is important. We also look at the structural facilities there. Where we have dilapidated buildings, we can advise to move students from those classes that are not conducive to better wards [classes]." (L2)

Some participants expressed views that the monitoring system needs improvement. Commenting on service quality, one local official-(L1) reported that "a lack of funding and infrastructures (e.g., vehicle)" affects efficient monitoring of ECE services. The official expressed the view that an office's running cost is not straightforward, particularly in remote areas. The official suggested the need for "local governments' funding autonomy and sufficient machinery" to discharge their duties effectively.

Regarding facilities quality, the licensing system, according to the national minimum standard guidelines (*NERDC 2013*), requires that ECE facilities meet core standards before they are officially approved. Discussing this issue, a local official commented that some facilities' physical state, particularly in public settings, is not up to the minimum standard, as indicated:

"In the past, even lunatic will just walk into the schools, and even at night, we have the cases of burglary thefts and the guards [lack of security personnel]." (L2)

The same official said that the government was trying to solve this issue, and the state governor had just permitted them to build fences around all public settings.

The NGO officer expressed a view about the monitoring of workforce capacity. He stated that "most external monitoring teams are inefficient and are not seen in the field." He also indicated that the monitoring roles are inadequately executed, as some inspectors just come to collect money. As a result, most ECE service and facilities are of low standard, while some operate without approval in most states. For the officer, the absence of funding was why the monitoring personnel could not discharge their roles effectively.

This section suggests that all the government agencies at different levels are responsible for the supervision and quality control of public and private settings. However, concerns were expressed about the monitoring workforce capacity, and it seems there is a correlation between the absence of funding and ineffective monitoring function. This indicates that the formal monitoring of ECE provision is in development and needs improvement. There were some suggestions regarding the local governments' funding autonomy and sufficient machinery to effectively discharge their monitoring duties.

Insufficiently Qualified ECE Practitioners in the Workforce

Evidence from the interviews with all government officials shows that the minimum requirement for teaching in Nigeria, including ECE, is the Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE). All government officials indicated that only a few pursue ECE as an area of specialisation. However, one state official-(S3) commented that "most of these practitioners are specialised in other fields, particularly in primary or secondary education." Another state official-(S1) claimed, "no experts in the field yet," as only two institutions in Nigeria offer ECE studies as an area of specialisation, which recently started. Additionally, many unqualified practitioners trained in other disciplines work in most ECE settings, in the NGO officer's view, due to high unemployment levels.

At the local level, a local official commented about the skills and knowledge of most NCE graduates, as follows:

"We have discovered that some of them when they graduate from school [college], they probably may not be able to understand the practical dissemination of what is needed to be given to these children as a caregiver." (L1)

The correlation between teachers' professional development and motherhood experience is interesting. The same local official mentioned that apart from practitioners' teaching qualification, they also rely on motherhood experiences in caring for children. However, the official argued that the quality of ECE outcomes for children could improve more, "provided that practitioners are specially trained and are graduates in the field."

Regarding capacity development, the national officials indicated that UBEC ensures practitioners' training (e.g., workshops) in collaboration with the state and local governments. One national official-(N1) alluded to the fact that "UBEC provides funds for the workforce training and development." He stated that supervision and management workforces are also involved in capacity building among ECE practitioners and teachers.

Conversely, at the local level, one official-(L3) reported that "not all ECE practitioners are involved in the government's training" in their state. Likewise, another local official-(L1) agreed that only practitioners who have many years in public teaching service participate in training and seminars in their state. Only one local official-(L2) mentioned that their local government compensates practitioners that attend seminars; these trained practitioners go back to their settings to teach others. Surprisingly, all the government officials indicated that private settings are not involved in this capacity building organised by the government. Only one state official-(S3) reported that an effort was made in their state's proposal to engage private ECE settings in training organised for the public settings, provided that the private providers can sponsor themselves. However, the official said that "this has not yet become a reality."

Issues related to the payment of practitioners' salaries were also prominent in the interview data. A local official-(L2) reported an instance where practitioners "did not receive wages for over seven months." The official thought that this is important and impacts the quality of services for children. However, at the time of this research, he said the payment of wages was more regular than before.

The data in this section provides important insights into ECE development as a system. It indicates that there has been an improvement in enrolment rates because ECE was introduced in some public schools. However, there is a perception among policymakers that some significant elements for quality ECE delivery were absent. For example, the data strongly suggests inefficient monitoring and insufficiently qualified ECE practitioners in the workforce.

6.4 What Are the Inhibiting or Facilitating Factors That May Affect ECE Policy Implementation in Nigeria?

This final section of the interview examined the inhibiting or facilitating factors that may affect Nigeria's ECE policy implementation. The themes of "Problems facing ECE policy implementation at different levels" and "Factors identified for a successful ECE policy implementation" emerged from this. They are discussed below.

Problems Facing ECE Policy Implementation at Different Levels

A range of responses was elicited from participants regarding problems facing ECE policy implementation. Some of these problems have been highlighted above. This section presents further elaboration, as reported by the participants. The national officials indicated that the ECE policy's implementation relies on the state and local governments, however, getting some states' cooperation with ideas of UBEC is challenging. At the state level, a state official commented:

> *"There is a change in government every four years. So, there will be a need to really re-sensitise, to really do the advocacy for the new set of administration coming in."* (S3)

From the NGO officer's perspective, the government's leadership problem or lack of political will has led to issues with retention and ECE programme failure. A state official-(S3) commented that "there is a need for the government willpower regarding supporting and financing ECE." This determination may lead to continuity if a different government comes into power.

Individual parents' beliefs and place of residence were other factors limiting the ECE policy implementation. Some officials at the national and local levels mentioned that the ECE programme's implementation is not always easy, especially in rural areas. They explained further that most parents are not aware of the importance of the ECE programme and would rather have their children on farms than send them to ECE

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settings. The NGO officer agreed that some parents believe that their children are too young for early education, affecting the attendance rate in ECE. One national official-(N1) also alluded to the fact that "the learning environments of some ECE settings in rural areas are impoverished."

Another reported problem was inadequately qualified ECE practitioners, and supporting staff, particularly in public ECE settings. One national official commented:

> *"There are not enough teachers. In some states, teachers in the primary schools will leave their work and then come and teach in the ECCDE."* (N1)

For some state officials and the NGO officer, the emphasis was more on the absence of experts in the field. The comment below illustrates that many people with the wrong qualifications work in ECE settings, resulting in a lack of commitment to their job:

> *"You see cane; you see smacking, you see people giving children drugs to sleep because of their problems."* (NO)

The *2013 NPE* stipulates a teacher–pupil ratio of 1:25 for ECE. The NGO officer said, "some ECE settings are overcrowded." One local official-(L3) reported that the "workload is cumbersome for practitioners" and suggested the need for extra support, like helpers and non-teaching staff, to ease their job.

At all levels, most government officials reported that funding is inadequate to ensure quality ECE provision, particularly in some public ECE settings. Coupled with the problem of insufficient funding is the issue of inadequate facilities and resources in ECE settings. Some state officials argued that "adequate funding is essential to provide quality ECE services and facilities" (indoor and outdoor) needed for children's learning and wellbeing.

One concern expressed by a local official-(L1) regarding the LGEA's equipment was that most of their monitoring motor vehicles are in a poor state. He also mentioned that they live in an environment where they cannot even keep or secure data. The official commented that "LGEAs' offices in their state must be more resourceful and computerised to effectively perform their administrative role." He commented that "UBEC at the national level should have direct contact with the local level, get their views to have input in decision-making relating to their needs," rather than the state level being the mediator between the local and the national level. It could be a huge

task for the national government to deal with the 774 LGEAs compared to the 36 states.

The NGO officer pointed out the inconsistency at work within the system by highlighting an ECE policy, for which no effective system exists to monitor its implementation. He complained about the lack of meaningful and committed human capacity of the external monitoring teams, as they are not effectively trained to inspect ECE settings' adherence to the policy. The comments below illustrate possible corrupt practices among the monitoring teams:

> *"Going to the field to monitor, is it that you want to be there to collect something from the owner of the place, give you great things to eat and drink. At the end of the day, you just say, 'thank you, well done, this is a good place.' Because already by collecting anything from the owner of that place, your judgement is already impaired."* (NO)

The NGO officer further mentioned the absence of monitoring and evaluation systems in place, as ministries or agencies in charge of monitoring systems do not have office buildings to coordinate their efforts.

Other responses to these barriers included the government's lack of understanding of the SDGs. The NGO officer said the government emphasises building projects instead of putting in place systems that will help achieve the SDGs targets:

> *"It's [SDGs] not looking at 'I built schools.' It's looking at the targets, the ratios, the indicators that we are looking at to make sure that education for all, irrespective of the background, irrespective of the economic situation of the people. At least, this first level of education should be made free for people. Like I said, what you don't have, you can't give."* (NO)

Overall, this section highlights several problems facing ECE policy implementation at different levels as perceived by the nine participants. The next section discusses the facilitating factors for successful ECE policy implementation, as perceived by the participants.

Factors Identified for a Successful ECE Policy Implementation

Participants were asked to suggest enhancing factors for a successful ECE policy implementation. Most government officials at different levels suggested a greater parental awareness of the ECE programme. To reinforce the enrolment system, one national official-(N2) suggested that "the state government must ensure the ECE programme's enforcement, as directed by UBEC." Additionally, one local level official-(L3) mentioned that the government should ensure consistent "provision of the free feeding programme for all public ECE children" across states.

Most participants suggested the need for adequate funding for the quality and sustainability of the ECE programme. At the state level, a state official-(S2) emphasised adequate investment in public ECE to improve quality and equitable provision, such that "there are no differences in the quality of services provided by the public or private." In one case, a local official thought that:

> *"If there are some local funds on the part of the LGEA at local level to access. Some of these things we can respond to them without having to wait for UBEC."* (L1)

The same official highlighted an increment in the local government running grants to perform effectively in respect of the ECE programme implementation. He also stressed the need to put accountability measures in place to monitor spending. Finally, the NGO officer's view was primarily related to achievement of the SDGs, particularly target 4.2. The officer suggested the provision of adequate government funding for "better coordination of civil society organisations and stakeholders in taking actions to reach out to all communities" towards achieving the goals. From the NGO's point of view, they are closer to people in the community than the government. He further highlighted the provision of grants by international organisations (e.g., UNICEF) to support local NGOs.

There were some suggestions by participants for improving practitioners' capacity building. These included efficient training programmes at the national and state levels, including initial training of specialised ECE practitioners to effectively deliver ECE services. One local official-(L1) emphasised the need for more ECE practitioners' employment in public settings. The NGO officer emphasised practitioners' qualification

requirements and competency and suggested "a degree as the minimum qualification."

A small number of participants expressed views about ECE practitioners' retention. At the state level, one state official-(S2) thought that "regular payment of practitioners' salaries" may give them the zeal to discharge their responsibilities accordingly. And another state official-(S1) suggested "providing financial incentives for practitioners' retention in ECE." The NGO officer agreed that ECE practitioners' remunerations should be reviewed, as he commented:

> *"They [ECE providers] see people who do this as those who don't have a choice. And then they are giving ₦5,000, ₦10,000 [approximately £10 to £20], so the commitment won't be there."* (NO)

At different government levels, some participants emphasised that a better quality of services and facilities is needed for positive children's learning and development. For example, participants highlighted a need for age-appropriate facilities, resources and toys. In contrast, the NGO officer stressed the importance of thorough government inspection of ECE settings before they are approved, particularly the private settings.

Only the NGO officer suggested seamless public–private partnerships:

> *"So, there should be public–private partnership. Also, ensuring that this is seamless. I wish there will be a summit where ECE providers would come together to learn from one another. It will greatly improve these people [ECE providers]."* (NO)

He also emphasised the significance of a participatory approach in bridging the gap between the government and people. Thus, people would be willing to participate in government programmes.

This section has looked at the inhibiting and facilitating factors affecting ECE policy implementation at different levels from participants' perspectives. For the participants, these factors are vital for a high-quality, equitable, and sustainable system.

6.5 Conclusion

The results in this chapter provide an account of the ECE system as experienced by the policymakers (i.e., government officials at different levels and the NGO staff). The participants raised important issues. Convergent and divergent themes emerged from

the data provided, allowing a wide range of views. The findings discussed in this chapter suggest a contradiction between the earlier 2004 UBE Act and the later 2013 NPE. Most government officials appeared to approve the one-year pre-primary education, as stipulated in the national policy, to the two years in the UBE Act. However, ECE is implemented differently across the three states studied, reflecting the varied ways ECE entitlement is offered. I thought that this anomaly would be resolved during data collection, but the policymakers' contradictory responses have not helped in any way. These results highlighted the interrelated roles of different government levels and their linkage with other organisations regarding ECE policy implementation. However, from participants' views, issues like the bureaucratic structure of governance and some states' lack of political will were highlighted as shortcomings affecting ECE policy implementation.

One significant finding to emerge from this study is the success of policymakers' enrolment strategies in raising parental awareness. The results indicate that these strategies, as experienced by participants, have improved ECE uptake, particularly in public schools. However, participants identified the ill effects of inaccessible funding, an inefficient monitoring system and insufficiently qualified practitioners on ECE development, resulting in inadequacy in terms of a high-quality programme.

Finally, these results provide important insights into the policymakers' views on factors that inhibit the successful implementation of ECE policy and suggest factors for its successful implementation. These themes will be compared to the headteachers' and practitioners' views and experiences of ECE policy implementation at the local level in the next chapter.

Chapter 7: The ECE System: Perceptions and Experiences of ECE Settings' Headteachers and Practitioners

7.1 Introduction

This chapter explores how ECE policy is understood and implemented by ECE settings' headteachers and practitioners. The findings arise from the analysis of interview data and settings' vignettes, which provide a detailed description of each setting's ECE provision. Several themes emerged from the inductive analysis of the interviews and settings' vignettes. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, my theoretical perspectives have supported my engagement with the data. Applying postcolonial theory to my positionality supported my understanding of my participants' perspectives on the system. Twenty-two (22) practitioners and eight (8) headteachers were interviewed in public and private ECE settings in three states in the western part of Nigeria. Like the previous chapter, this chapter is divided into three main sections, presenting the emerging themes relating to the research questions.

7.2 How do Headteachers and Practitioners Interpret and Mediate ECE Policy at the Local Level?

This section explores the first research question, probing ECE settings' headteachers' and practitioners' views on the interpretation and mediation of ECE policy in their settings. The themes of "Fragmentary knowledge of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme" and "Differences in the implementation of the ECE element of the UBE programme across all settings" emerged from the interview data analysis. These themes are discussed in the following sections.

Fragmentary Knowledge of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme

Participants were invited to share their understanding of UBE. The findings show that participants have a fragmentary knowledge of the UBE programme, and UBE was understood differently in private and public settings. The headteachers (public and private) have been in their positions for a period ranging from 6 months to 13 years, and appeared to show limited awareness of the UBE programme. Only three of the headteachers in public settings shared a level of awareness of the UBE, as set out in the 2013 National Policy on Education (NPE) statement. As one headteacher said:

> *"It is about the training of the pupils, starting from kindergarten class to the junior secondary 3 class."* (Headteacher/BA-setting)

Similar to the settings' headteachers' views, the interview data suggests that most public and private settings' practitioners shared a fragmentary understanding of UBE. Of the 22 practitioners interviewed, 4 came close to defining UBE as consistent with the NPE. As one practitioner said:

> *"It is the system of education in Nigeria which covers from 2–3 years upward to the secondary level."* (T3/BA-setting)

The quote indicates that UBE components include ECE (for 2–3-year-olds), primary and secondary education. The remaining 18 practitioners appear to have a fragmentary understanding of the policy.

Most headteachers and practitioners, specifically in private settings, felt that the UBE was just a policy designated for public schools. The comments below illustrate:

> *"UBE belongs to public schools, in which people from local/community can easily take their children to relieve parents instead of private schools."* (Headteacher/RU-setting)

> *"I think UBE is just for the public sector, not for the private."* (T2/IV-setting)

From the responses, these participants believed that private settings are outside of this public policy agenda.

Interestingly, most private settings' headteachers seemed to be unaware of the ECE's introduction as an aspect of the UBE Act. One setting's headteacher (VA-setting) mentioned that he was only acquainted with the NPE and not the UBE Act. Thus, he thought that the basic education under the NPE only comprises "primary and three years of junior secondary education," excluding ECE. Likewise, most private settings' practitioners seemed unaware of ECE's introduction for children aged 3–5 years in public primary schools. Accordingly, they expressed that ECE provision for 3–5–year-olds is offered only in private settings. As one practitioner said:

> *"I think for a long time they have excluded 3–5 years old in the UBE. We deliver the ECE scheme."* (T3/IV-setting)

This response suggests a fragmentary knowledge of the policy, and confusion regarding the UBE Act's scope and aims on the part of headteachers and practitioners.

Finally, most settings' headteachers and practitioners perceived that the ECE programme aims to prepare children for primary education, as illustrated below:

> *"This kind of education has been the main foundation, and they can get the basic skills before they start school."* (T3/VA-setting)

Differences in the Implementation of the ECE Element of the UBE Programme across all Settings

The ECE settings' headteachers and practitioners narrated their experiences regarding implementing the ECE element of the UBE in their settings. From the settings' vignette analysis (see Appendix H), I observed that all ECE settings (public and private) were part of the main primary school buildings. The analysis of the interviews and the settings' vignettes shows variations in how ECE was implemented across all public and private settings visited during the fieldwork. These variations were related to the expectation of children's ECE experience before commencing primary school and the provision offer in terms of children's age group. For example, most private settings offer ECE provision for children aged 2–5 years. In contrast, all headteachers in public settings indicated that children are expected to start pre-primary education at 3 years old. As one headteacher in a public setting commented:

> *"UBE has been implemented from kindergarten 1 [i.e., 3 years]. After a year or two in kindergarten, they now start primary one. But at least, a child should be 3 years old before admitted in the school."* (Headteacher/BA-setting)

From this participant's perspective, children are expected to start ECE at 3 years old. Hence, they are expected to have at least one or two years of ECE before starting school. Other headteachers shared this view.

However, the interview data suggests significant variations in ECE provision across the public settings, contrary to the *NPE and UBE Act*. While some public settings provided ECE services for 3–5-year-olds, some offered ECE and childcare services. For instance, one headteacher (JO-setting) specified that their ECE services "catered for children aged 6 months to 5 years old." In contrast, others (BA-setting and RU-setting) reported "the admission of children aged 2 years upward" in their settings. The participants' views of the provision are similar to my observations recorded in the vignettes (Appendix H).

From the analysis of the ECE settings' vignettes, one public setting's headteacher (JO-setting) told me that ECE for these children (i.e., 6 months to 5 years) "is provided free by the state government." Similarly, the settings' vignettes show that the children access free ECE services five days a week during term time in public settings. Public settings are opened for ECE services from 7.30 am to 2 pm, while private settings open between 8 am and 2.30 pm daily. These variations may be due to public settings focusing on and responding to local needs, hence exercising autonomy within the resources available. Other possible explanations may be that they did not operate within the definition of UBE or probably disregarded the policy.

All public settings' headteachers and some practitioners indicated that ECE provision is free. However, some practitioners reported that it is not free as parents are charged for exams, uniforms, textbooks, and other needs, which appears contradictory. One practitioner commented:

> *"UBE in public schools pay. I think there is no more free education in Nigeria. Just a small amount compared to what they pay in other private schools."* (T3/JO-setting)

This is illustrated in the settings' vignettes (Appendix H); one public setting's headteacher (BA-setting) mentioned that "these charges are paid in agreement with an association known as the Parents–Teachers' Association (PTA)," and mandatory. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, this association is a community body. This is an example of how schools and communities work together to implement the UBE programme, which is within the *2013 NPE*, as mentioned in Chapter 3.

Each ECE setting (public and private) appears to have developed ECE provision quite differently, for example, kindergarten, reception, creche, and nursery. Further analysis of the interview and settings vignettes (Appendix H) showed that ECE service provision exists together in some settings but independently in others. For example, whilst some settings had a mixed age group of 2–5-year-olds in a class, others had separate classrooms for the 3–4- and 4–5-year-olds (Appendix H). The diversity of provision (i.e., creche, nursery and kindergarten) is within the definition and segmentation of ECE of the *2013 NPE*'s basic education. According to the minimum standard guidelines (*NERDC 2013),* these may exist together or independently. The

diversity of the offer could be beneficial for parents, as they could maximise the ECE entitlement for their children.

In the accounts of the criteria surrounding the admission of children in public settings, one headteacher (BA-setting) indicated that other admissions criteria than those included in the formal ECE policy and legislation are applied apart from offering provision to 2-year-olds in their setting. Such criteria include the child's physical or communication skills and some based on the parents' requests or needs. The comment below illustrates:

> *"Some of them have smallish stature [height]. So, with their stature, sometimes, we will not accept them. We don't accept those who cannot talk very well or communicate."* (Headteacher/BA-setting)

The quote suggests that age is not the only criterion for admission. Even when settings do offer the provision to 2-year-olds, the headteachers may also apply their own criteria.

There are different perspectives held by sectors of each other. Most private settings' participants indicated that private settings play a significant role in ECE delivery in terms of the quality provided compared to public settings. Thus, they held perspectives on the quality of ECE provision in public settings. One headteacher (VA-setting) reported that ECE services in public settings are not worthwhile because they are substandard, even though the government provides them. As he said:

> *"Looking at the public setting, I don't actually see any viable ECE in the public settings in a situation where the current facilities cannot actually even take care of those primary pupils."* (Headteacher/VA-setting)

However, the headteacher (VA-setting) further noted that "not all private ECE settings are of a good standard." This data was also observed and noted in the settings' vignettes, where some private settings seemed not to have adequate lighting or ventilation. I also observed that some classrooms appeared crowded, and that there was an absence of indoor or outdoor play facilities and security (see Appendix H).

Most public and private ECE settings' headteachers and practitioners interviewed had limited awareness and different interpretations of the UBE programme. It was also shown that the ECE element of the UBE was implemented differently across settings, as shown in the variations of entitlement offered (i.e., in terms of age). UBE was

implemented in ways that were not free in all locations. The following section explores the ECE system development in the three western Nigerian states.

7.3 How Has ECE Developed as a System?

In analysing the second question, "How has ECE developed as a system?", seven themes emerged. These themes were: "The effect of social stratification on ECE," "Critical perspectives on the government support for ECE provision," "Local perspectives are critical of the formal monitoring," "The level of qualified ECE practitioners in the workforce," "Inconsistency in implementing the curriculum," "Variation in practitioner–pupil ratio," and "The effect of the UBE Act on the development of ECE provision." Each theme will now be explored.

The Effect of Social Stratification on ECE

Participants identified that ECE provision is affected by a social stratification. These effects are related to disadvantaged families' inability to access quality ECE for the reasons of cost, unavailability, and location, and privileged families using private settings to boost social status. One headteacher (JO-setting) indicated that the "government's intention for public ECE settings is to build a kind of structure that caters for the disadvantaged children to bridge the gap between them and the rich." However, most participants (headteachers and practitioners) indicated that equitable access to quality ECE services seems to be compromised. Some practitioners reported that 70% to 80% of children accessing public ECE services are from low-income families, as one public setting's practitioner said:

> *"80% of children here are from the disadvantaged. Rich people feel you have to take your child to a private school based on your status or ability."* (T3/JO-setting)

This response suggests that this participant perceives inequities, arising from families' economic resources, in the participation rate in public settings. Privileged families for the most part access private settings because they can afford to pay fees.

From participants' perspectives, people's beliefs about the quality of public services were the reason for this inequality structure. As one public setting's practitioner commented:

"It's difficult to find privileged people bringing their children here because it is a public school. Because they believe that public schools don't have adequate training. So, the mentality is there. Anything public, people don't bring their children there, unless they are broke [bankrupt]." (T2/JO-setting)

The participant seems to indicate that some parents have a negative perspective of the public ECE provision. Furthermore, some practitioners raised questions about the quality of service and facilities in some public settings. One public setting's practitioner (T3/JO-setting) alluded to the absence of key facilities and human resources affecting ECE delivery, which has been an issue between the government and the school administrators. Similarly, another private setting's practitioner indicated that children in public settings are not well looked after. She said:

"Public schools are so poor, no infrastructure. They are not well taken care of. The teachers are not committed in public schools, which makes private schools more advantageous than public schools." (T2/IV-setting)

This participant suggests that the absence of infrastructural facilities, the condition of the physical environment, and an under-motivated workforce affected the public ECE services. This may have made private settings more appealing to privileged families and practitioners. The practitioners' views above (T3/JO-setting and T2/IV-setting) are in agreement with public settings' vignettes regarding the buildings' physical condition (see Appendix H). For example, I observed that some settings had windows and doors that appeared to be broken and pulling out of their hinges. The concrete flooring appeared to have cracks and holes. In some settings, some classrooms had many children with one practitioner, and there were some classrooms without practitioners.

Another reason for social stratification was based on social status, as highlighted by participants in public settings. One public headteacher (JO-setting) reported that some people put their children in private settings, not because of the value they offer "but because of the individual's perception of their relative position in the social class." One public setting's practitioner (T1/RU-setting) considered that privileged families prefer private settings because they do not want their children to mix with less privileged children. However, another public setting's practitioner commented:

> *"ECE is supposed to be for every child where they can mingle together both the privileged and the less privileged."* (T2/JO-setting)

This practitioner considered a fair, accessible and inclusive ECE provision important for every child regardless of background. This view was echoed by a private setting's headteacher (VA-setting), who said that ECE services should be accessible and affordable for all children.

From one public setting's headteacher's (BA-setting) perspective, most families prefer private settings due to "the consistent industrial actions in public settings." She further indicated that some parents enrol their children in public settings because ECE services are free. However, when it is time to start formal schooling, they take their children to private schools for reasons of social pride or status. Another reported problem relating to inequity in ECE services was the areas in which settings are located. One private setting's practitioner in the rural area (T1/JE-setting) indicated that "ECE services are limited in rural areas." Despite all the issues highlighted above, a common view among the participants was that not everyone could afford private ECE settings. One public setting's practitioner stated that:

> *"Fingers are not equal. This is a public school, and we have poor children… It's free for every one of them."* (T3/BA-setting)

This suggests that not everyone can afford private ECE settings due to different household incomes.

In addition to the inequity issue, most participants expressed concern about the high cost of private settings making them unaffordable for disadvantaged families. From a private headteacher's perspective (JC-setting), the country's economic recession has led to more advantaged children attending private settings than disadvantaged children. However, another private headteacher indicated that some disadvantaged families are not put off by the high cost of private settings. He commented:

> *"It is not actually because they have the money but because they want that sound foundation."* (Headteacher/VA-setting)

From the participant's perspective, this comment suggests that these disadvantaged parents want quality education for their children even though it might not be affordable. Some private settings accordingly show leniency to disadvantaged children in their settings. As another headteacher said:

> *"Sometimes they pay in bits, but for those rich parents, they pay at once."*
> (Headteacher/JE-setting)

The response suggests that the idea of social stratification is quite complex, and some private settings are inclusive and accommodating of families with lower income.

There were some comments about private settings' service quality levels and affordability. One private setting's practitioner (T1/VA-setting) emphasised that the variation of private settings' standards "depends on the quality of services provided and the private owners' motives." Thus, fees are based on the standard of ECE services and parents' private provision choices are based on what they can afford. In contrast, another private practitioner (T2/JC-setting) argued that "the quality of ECE environments does not matter; instead, the ECE outcomes are more crucial when it comes to parents' choices" about private ECE settings.

Overall, these results indicate issues related to social stratification as problems affecting ECE provision. From participants' perspectives, the nature of ECE facilities and resources available for children, especially in public settings, was of concern. The data suggests that an equitable and accessible provision is essential for all children, regardless of their background, to eradicate social stratification.

Critical Perspective on Government Support for ECE Provision

There were slight variations in the different participants' perceptions regarding government support for ECE provision. One public setting's headteacher (JO-setting) indicated that the government supported with "educational resources (e.g., textbooks) and the payment of teachers' salaries." However, she commented that this support is not enough, while other public headteachers reported the absence of necessary resources and facilities. One public setting headteacher stated that:

> *"They [government] promise us that they will do the fence, they promise us that they will erect another office, some of the classrooms, they will help us to renovate. We shall be reminding them that they should not forget their promise."* (Headteacher/RU-setting)

The response suggests the need for new infrastructures in this setting, a development which the headteacher claims is waiting on government action. This response is similar to my observation in the settings' vignettes. The school premises seemed to have no perimeter fencing, and I observed goats roaming around the school compound. The

physical condition of the building appeared dilapidated (see Appendix H). From the interview data, most public settings' headteachers and practitioners reported that the facilities might not cater for the diverse age groups in their settings. One headteacher (BA-setting) reported that they "improvise for some instructional materials." Likewise, one practitioner (T1/RU-setting) said that "parents and practitioners also provide some essential resources, like toiletries and gloves, which the government is meant to provide." It is possible that the policymakers' interpretation of the policy, as highlighted in the previous chapter, has implications for implementation in terms of funding for essential components.

The interview data reveals that there is support within the communities for the public ECE provision within the ECE system that is local and independent of government initiatives. The public settings' headteachers indicated that they receive help from community bodies, such as the Parents–Teachers' Association (PTA) and the Old Students Association (OSA). An RU-setting's headteacher mentioned that these bodies "support areas like the renovation of dilapidated buildings," whilst a BA-setting's headteacher said that they "provide materials and teaching aids for ECE operation." This data corresponds to the policymakers' perception of the parent and community bodies they collaborate with, as highlighted in the previous chapter.

A common view amongst private settings' headteachers was that they do not get support from the government despite the government taxes and levies placed on their businesses. One headteacher (VA-setting) reported no effective collaboration between private settings and the government; "the only support they get from the government is the monitoring aspect." One headteacher commented:

> *"What the government do is collect more than half of our profit or what we earn. They call them tax, land use, signage, local government. We have more than ten bodies that come around to get money from us. They call it the renewal of your registration."* (Headteacher/IV-setting)

The comments above suggest that private settings are subject to government levies and taxation, and headteachers question these. The same headteacher argued that registration should not be renewed yearly once it is done.

Together, the participants seem to focus on various aspects of relationships with the government. The public settings reported that government support for ECE services

seems not to go far. They seem to focus on the absence of facilities and resources, which affects the quality of provision of ECE facilities. These results suggest the absence of government support for private settings and underdeveloped partnerships between the government and private settings.

Local Perspectives Are Critical of the Formal Monitoring

In response to the monitoring of ECE provision, all the settings' headteachers and practitioners (public and private) indicated that internal and external measures are taken to monitor their settings. Commenting on the internal monitoring, one public practitioner said:

> *"Internal, we have our mummy [headteacher] in the office and the two assistants [headteachers]."* (T2/RU-setting)

Another private practitioner commented:

> *"We have hierarchies. We have the directors. We have the HOS [Head of Staff], we have the HODs [Head of Departments], then we have the teachers."* (T2/IV-setting)

These quotes suggest that the headteacher or assistant headteacher conducts the internal monitoring arrangement in public settings. In contrast, private settings involve the proprietor, the director, the head of department, and religious board members for private religious settings. The participants in both public and private settings perceived the internal monitoring of their practices to be effective.

The external monitoring arrangement involves government departments, such as the ministry of education, Universal Basic Education Commissions (UBECs), State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs), and Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs). From the headteachers' perspectives, these government departments are responsible for approving, regulating, and inspecting ECE provision. One headteacher (BA-setting) emphasised how the government monitoring teams interrelate together. She mentioned that "the local government report to the SUBEBs at the state level when there are any lapses in the setting, and SUBEB comes to inspect them."

Most participants indicated that each setting had different experiences of external monitoring. Some settings' external monitoring happens one to three times termly, or it may occur twice fortnightly or monthly. As one headteacher said:

> *"Sometimes three times in a term or monthly basis not fixed depending on whatever happens."* (Headteacher/JO-setting)

This response suggests that formal monitoring of settings varies and is inconsistent. None of the participants could provide any explanation for this monitoring variation.

Participants indicated that formal monitoring focuses on the quantifiable aspects of ECE provision, such as the register, lesson notes, and the number of children more than the practice. One headteacher commented:

> *"They move around, go inside the classroom, check our notes, see our records, see the numbers of the pupils, and some other things. They advise us wherever we are lacking behind to gear up."* (Headteacher/RU-setting)

Here the suggestions seem to be that the formal monitoring is carried out but on measurable aspects of the facilities. This data is in line with the policymakers' perception of monitoring and quality control systems in the previous chapter. This appears to contrast with the basic education minimum standard guideline that monitoring must focus on three aspects of standards (resources, process, and performance) (*UBEC 2010*).

Participants expressed varied perspectives regarding the effectiveness of the formal monitoring of ECE provision. Some felt that formal monitoring is regular and helpful because it gives them a view of what is expected of them, while others considered it ineffective. Participants highlighted issues related to the procedural and logistical aspects of monitoring. For example, one private headteacher (VA-setting) reported that "the government monitoring function is not executed appropriately because most private ECE settings operate with their licence renewed annually." Talking about the logistical aspects of monitoring, the VA-setting's headteacher said that the external monitoring teams lack the perception of what needs to be done. He added that most of their monitoring ends in the office without any further evaluation or feedback and commented:

> *"They [ECE settings] may be quick with the documents and files. But we [i.e., external inspectors] need to actually get to the field, see how they actually practice the ECE and actually see if it is what it should be and if there are corrections to be made."* (Headteacher/VA-setting)

Here the headteacher seems to be indicating that ECE settings may keep up with their documents for inspection purposes. However, the external monitoring goes beyond merely assessing ECE provision's measurable aspects to cover all aspects of the provision.

There were some perceptions of lack of competency and dedication on the part of the government monitoring bodies, as one private headteacher commented:

> *"They [government] don't really do it. All they do is come around; they tell you, 'your school is very fine, it's very neat, we like this place.' And they just eat in the offices; we entertain them, and off they go. When you tell them 'would go around the toilet to check the kitchen and all that,' they will tell you, 'no, your environment is fine.' These bodies come from the ministry of education."* (Headteacher/IV-setting)

The comments recall the non-governmental organisation (NGO) officer's view in the previous chapter regarding the shortcomings of monitoring agencies. Similarly, another public setting's practitioner (T3/JO-setting) indicated that the government's monitoring teams only monitor the number of children enrolled to determine the money that can be claimed per child rather than the quality of services. Furthermore, there were suggestions from participants' perspectives about the issue of corruption within the monitoring system. One headteacher (VA-setting) reported that some ECE settings are "automatically given a renewal certificate for approval once they pay the government," which he felt is illegal and inappropriate.

This section's data suggests that the formal monitoring of ECE provision focuses on quantifiable aspects of the provision. Participants' views seem to show the incompetence and irregular monitoring system of the government monitoring body.

The Level of Qualified ECE Practitioners in the Workforce

There was a perception of the level of practitioners' qualification amongst participants. Most participants indicated that the basic qualification for teaching in Nigerian schools is the "Nigerian Certificate of Education" (NCE). As one public headteacher said:

> *"The major requirement is normally you have your NCE, national certificate in education before you can work in pre-primary."* (Headteacher/JO-setting)

This response indicates that NCE is the mandatory requirement to teach in ECE. One public setting's headteacher (JO-setting) stated that practitioners with NCE certificate are "trained specifically to work only in primary and junior secondary schools." However, practitioners are allowed to work in primary education and ECE regardless of their subject areas.

Most practitioners interviewed had the NCE qualification, but they did not have specialist knowledge of ECE. All practitioners interviewed were females and had worked in their settings for a period of between 4 months and 20 years. Of the 22 practitioners interviewed, 11 attested that they were NCE qualified. Of the 11 practitioners who were NCE holders, only one (1) private setting's practitioner (IV-setting) indicated that she had specialised knowledge in ECE. Some had bachelor's degree or postgraduate qualifications in education, such as business education or French education. However, they were not trained explicitly for ECE. As one public setting's practitioner said:

> *"I have little experience working with primary school. I have been teaching in secondary schools."* (T3/JO-setting)

From the practitioner's perspective, this situation might be due to the unemployment situation, as she alluded to the notion of being one of the "N-Power teach volunteers." N-Power teach is a government programme to support unemployed graduates. Volunteers are deployed in primary schools across the country to support basic education delivery in public schools.

Interestingly, there were also practitioners without the NCE certificate or teaching qualification, who therefore did not have skills, knowledge, and experience in ECE. They had qualifications in non-education disciplines, such as social work and administration, accounting and electrical engineering. As one practitioner said:

> *"Although I'm not in teaching line, but it's because of this Nigeria employment issues, but have HND [Higher National Diploma] in accounting."* (T3/JC-setting)

From the response, it can be seen that some practitioners have no teaching qualifications. However, because of the country's high unemployment level, they opted to work in ECE. The variations in qualification could affect ECE policies implementation, and practice in the classroom.

Participants explained why specialism in ECE is not necessarily perceived as a positive option. The comment below illustrates:

> *"There are different courses. But if you study early childhood, there's a course you automatically work in pre-primary. You won't be taken to senior classes [primary education]."* (Headteacher/JO-setting)

This comment might indicate that studying ECE as an independent course will limit practitioners' teaching outside the ECE context. Thus, some settings' headteachers reported that only a few practitioners pursue ECE as the main course.

There was a perception that most practitioners may not have the skills or knowledge required to work as ECE practitioners. One private setting's headteacher (VA-setting) seems to suggest that most practitioners in their setting were not competent "because they do not have the basis of what it entails." Talking about this issue, he said:

> *"We feel embarrassed by the time they apply, and then we give them written test, and we see very poor performance."* (Headteacher/VA-setting)

This comment shows a critical perspective on the headteacher's part of practitioners' inability to carry out their roles effectively despite their educational qualifications. This response is similar to the local level official's view in the previous chapter that most practitioners lack the practical skills necessary to cater for ECE children. The same headteacher further expressed the belief that "the education system in Nigeria should be blamed for this lapse," as poorly qualified practitioners in the field of education generally are to the product of "a lack of strict entry systems in universities and colleges." He stated that

> *"I'm looking for a situation where we have a kind of very strict entry point where those who are actually coming to study education are actually people who have very high IQ [Intelligence Quotient]."* (Headteacher/VA-setting)

This comment suggests that education, including ECE as a course, should be studied through a comprehensive entry system to have highly qualified practitioners in ECE.

Some private settings' headteachers expressed perspectives regarding the significance of specialism in ECE in policies' implementation and practice. One headteacher (JC-setting) thought it would be better to have "practitioners trained explicitly in ECE to acquire appropriate knowledge and skills to handle ECE children," which may positively impact children's outcomes. Another headteacher (VA-setting) considered that having "ECE as a substantive department in some universities would have been desirable to produce specialists in the field."

There was an awareness of the shortage of practitioners in public settings amongst some public settings' practitioners. For example, one practitioner (T3/JO-setting) reported that "cleaners and administrative staff are sometimes used as practitioners in the nursery and kindergarten," which seems to be affecting their roles and practice. This view was also echoed by another practitioner (T1/BA-setting). This data agrees with policymakers' perceptions of primary education teachers as a substitute for teaching ECE children presented in the previous chapter.

Another reported problem amongst public settings' participants was inconsistency in practitioners' training and development opportunities organised by the government. Participants reported that seminars and in-service training were organised for ECE practitioners to keep them professionally up to date. Further analysis revealed that the government's training is only for public settings' practitioners to improve their practices. Some participants felt that the in-service training is consistent in some settings, while others considered that they are not or are inadequate. One public setting's practitioner (T3/BA-setting) reported that "she had never received any training in the past six years." Another practitioner (T3/JO-setting) mentioned that "she had never been for any training since she started, despite her inexperience in the field of ECE." One headteacher said:

> *"But it is not regular. Maybe once in a year."* (Headteacher/BA-setting)

This response suggests inconsistency in opportunities for ongoing training and development in public provision.

A distinctive feature of private settings is that practitioners' training and development programmes are organised frequently by headteachers. The training frequency varies

from setting to setting. Some settings have training termly or once in a session, while some have it weekly. One headteacher (IV-setting) alluded to the notion of "paying and inviting some instructors to train them." Another headteacher (VA-setting) indicated that "they have lead practitioners in their setting who give feedback on the areas of weakness that needs reinforcement after going for training." All private ECE practitioners felt that internal training and seminars are valuable and useful for their professional development. One practitioner highlighted:

> *"I won't lie. I've really gained a lot. And I have learnt a lot of things: to handle the children, the communication, to teach them; different things."* (T2/IV-setting)

Overall, most settings' headteachers and practitioners reported that most practitioners did not have the necessary skills, experience, and knowledge in ECE. It was also shown that there is a shortage of ECE practitioners, especially in public settings. This study found that the training programmes are consistent in private settings, with many government inconsistencies in public settings.

Inconsistency in Implementing the Curriculum

During the interview, participants were invited to share their perceptions and experiences regarding the curriculum implementation to deliver the ECE programme. The interview analysis revealed that there is inconsistency in curriculum implementation between public and private settings. Most public ECE settings' headteachers and practitioners indicated that they used the approved national one-year pre-primary education curriculum designed for 5-year-olds. They noted that this national curriculum is used across ECE age groups within their settings (2–5 years). The national government stipulates that all settings must use the national curriculum for successful ECE operation in Nigeria (*NERDC 2013*; *NPE 2013*). Of five private settings interviewed, only one (JE-setting) indicated they use the recommended national curriculum. Some private religious ECE settings reported that they produce their curriculum as directed by their missionary commission. Other private settings indicated that they use alternative curriculums, sometimes combined with the national curriculum to a small extent. As one practitioner commented:

> *"We run a Montessori curriculum and an integrated curriculum. But for our British curriculum too, which is more of 'Jolly phonics' and*

> *Montessori. So, we have a curriculum for that, which we follow to the latter." (T3/VA-setting).*

The quote suggests that this setting uses alternative curriculums, such as Montessori or the British early years curriculum, to teach the children instead of the established national curriculum. This might be as a result of resistance to the national curriculum, or the settings or parents valuing the alternative curriculum more than the indigenous one.

Whilst most public settings' headteachers reported that the national curriculum is provided free to all public settings by the government, it is not free in private settings. One private setting's headteacher (VA-setting) said that "private settings pay for the curriculum." Despite the free curriculum distribution in public settings, one public setting's headteacher (RU-setting) reported that "only the Nigerian primary education curriculum is disseminated to them." Hence, they do not have a one-year national pre-primary education curriculum. She indicated further that practitioners in their setting use their initiatives or motherhood experience to teach children at the ECE level.

There was a perception of inconsistency in training regarding the curriculum implementation amongst participants. Some public settings' headteachers and practitioners indicated that the government organises seminars to ensure its implementation, while some practitioners reported that there was no training. One public practitioner reported that she had only just become acquainted with the national curriculum, as indicated:

> *"I just found the curriculum somewhere; it was last week. So, I discovered that a whole lot has changed."* (T3/JO-setting)

A likely implication of this response is that these practitioners are unaware of the curriculum, which could have impacted their abilities to deliver ECE.

Other issues regarding curriculum implementation were identified. These related to the absence of resources and the different perspectives that participants held on the ECE curriculum. Commenting about the absence of resources, one of the public settings' headteachers (BA-setting) expressed concerns about the absence of teaching, learning and play resources to support the curriculum's implementation. Likewise, one public setting's practitioner said:

> *"And to make matters worse is that we don't even have textbooks to work with."* (T3/JO-setting)

Here this practitioner seems to question how the absence of resources affected their role to implement the curriculum effectively. The same practitioner further indicated that the resources provided (e.g., textbooks) appear inadequate to cater for every child in their setting.

Participants held a variety of experiences and perspectives regarding the ECE curriculum. Some headteachers and practitioners perceived the national ECE curriculum, particularly in public settings, to be useful in planning their teaching and learning activities and preparing children for primary education. One private practitioner explained:

"Without a curriculum, we will not know what we are going to teach. It serves as guidance to the teacher in order to know what they are going to teach." (T2/JE-setting)

This suggests that the curriculum provides practitioners with a considerable structure and plan for delivering teaching effectively.

In contrast, some participants, particularly in private settings, were highly critical of the national curriculum. One public setting's practitioner (T3/JO-setting) reported that there are "lots of discrepancies in the curriculum, and it is too ambiguous to understand, affecting its implementation." This inconsistency seems to have led to some private settings using an alternative curriculum, probably believing that it is more explicit than the national one. Additionally, some private headteachers and practitioners indicated that they use the Nigerian primary education curriculum to raise the standard of education for ECE children in their settings.

Some participants held critical perceptions of the curriculum structure. One private setting's headteacher was particularly keen on the importance of practicability in the national curriculum; she commented:

> *"Learning should be more of practical. When they [children] are introduced to practical, they understand better."* (Headteacher/IV-setting)

Here, the participant emphasised the importance of engagement in practical activities in children's learning and experiences, which seems to be absent in the national

curriculum. Thus, one public practitioner (T3/JO-setting) felt that "the national curriculum contents are out-dated" and suggested regulating it for clarity and practicability. She also urged the provision of adequate resources as back-up for the curriculum to enrich their activities.

Opinions differed as to whether national and alternative curricula can be combined or not. Some participants argued that the mixture of national and alternative curricula is more beneficial in helping children to fit into local and global contexts comfortably. One private headteacher (VA-setting) pointed out that not all parents could afford to send their children out of the country. However, one private practitioner emphasised that the local curriculum is more valuable, as illustrated:

> *"In a situation where the British curriculum will be used to teach the weather… There are things that we have in common. But there are some things we don't have in common; then you try to bring in the Nigerian curriculum into what you are teaching for better explanation."* (T2/IV-setting)

The comments highlight the importance of inclusion of indigenous knowledge to facilitate children's early learning educational outcomes. In contrast, some practitioners emphasised that using just the alternative curriculum will better prepare children for the global society.

Another critical point raised by some practitioners was using the English language as the medium of teaching. Practitioners in one public setting (RU-setting) said that in a seminar they went to, "emphasis was laid on the importance of mother tongue in teaching ECE children." Some practitioners agreed that children tend to understand their learning better in their mother tongue, especially those who cannot express themselves in English. However, some thought that the English language is better as a medium of instruction because it helps children learn the official language (English) early. One private setting's practitioner commented:

> *"I think the use of English language is better; the age we are, most Nigerian parents don't want the situation whereby their child won't be able to speak English. Everybody wants their child to speak English as early as possible."* (T3/VA-setting)

The quote suggests that most parents are keen on their children's ability to speak English early, which could be a measure of standard in ECE settings. Only a small number of practitioners preferred the integration of English and the indigenous languages as a medium of teaching, as shown:

> *"Children should be sound in both languages; that is what makes them a Nigerian."* (T2/IV-setting)

This might be because Nigeria is a multilingual society with several languages and dialects, with the English language having been adopted as the official language by dint of colonisation.

An interesting point raised by a private setting's headteacher is the polarising of Nigerian and Western teaching methods. The comment below illustrates:

> *"Children of that age [ECE] in the Western world have their own way of teaching them. I believe at that age they should be involved in something that will really help their experience. But with the national curriculum, all they do is cramming."* (Headteacher/IV-setting)

The response highlights the importance of play in children's learning and ECE experiences, as opposed to the rote learning method. Interestingly, in most of the ECE settings I visited (see Appendix H), I observed numbers and letters written on cardboards, which were referred to as "instructional materials" by practitioners. In some settings, practitioners seemed to be using the rote learning method at the time of my observations. Children were pointing to chalkboards with rods or sticks to recite written activities, while other children were repeating after them. In some settings, children were busy with workbooks, with chairs and desks arranged in rows. Of eight ECE settings visited during the fieldwork, just four had an outdoor area with play equipment. Furthermore, I observed that most ECE practitioners were sitting at their desks in a corner of the classroom, waiting for the children to finish their classwork activities. This approach seems to contrast with the play-way method highlighted in the national policy measures and the one-year national curriculum (FME, 2016b; *NPE 2013*).

The data so far suggests that the national government prescribes the national one-year ECE curriculum for delivering the ECE programme. The national curriculum is implemented across the ECE age group (3–5). The results indicate that curriculum implementation is inconsistent across ECE settings, particularly private settings.

Participants were highly critical of the ECE curriculum and most support the use of English language as a medium of teaching.

Variation in Practitioner–Pupil Ratio

Another important theme in the interviews was a sense amongst participants that the practitioner–pupil ratio varies across settings. Most headteachers and practitioners (public and private) considered that the ratio stipulated in the national policy (1:25) is probably low for the targeted ECE children (3–5). From the interview data, the ratio in each ECE setting visited varies. Whilst most public settings had a practitioner–pupil ratio ranging between 1:12 and 1:30, most private settings are on average between 1:10 and 1:15. However, my observation of the settings visited (Appendix H) seems to reveal a ratio between 1:15 and 1:36 in some private settings.

Public settings' practitioners expressed concerns about the low practitioner–pupil ratio. One practitioner (T3/JO-setting) reported that "due to low practitioner–pupil ratio (i.e., 1:30), it was difficult to give the children the needed attention." She indicated that this had "led to most children being placed into classes not meant for their age because of overcrowding." For her, this may impact negatively on children's learning and development. She further suggested a significant increase in the supply of practitioners, as follows:

> *"But if we have enough teachers. Maybe the ratio of teachers to pupils may be 1:20 or 15; it will be easy. You will be able to spot a child that has challenges."* (T3/JO-setting)

A possible indication of this response is that participants believe that an increase in the practitioner–pupil ratio could help practitioners accomplish the universal ECE obligation by giving children the full attention they need. Similarly, some private settings' headteachers commented about the benefits of a high practitioner–pupil ratio. As one headteacher said:

> *"We have different types of temperament when it comes to pupils' assimilation levels and learning abilities for pupils. So, the teachers will be able to manage them well."* (Headteacher/IV-setting)

This quote suggests that a high practitioner–pupil ratio enables practitioners to manage the class, resulting in better outcomes for children in the long run. Overall, participants' views indicate that the practitioner–pupil ratio varies in public and private settings.

From the participants' perspectives, a high practitioner–pupil ratio may facilitate children's learning and development.

The Effect of the UBE Act on the Development of ECE Provision

A range of views was elicited from participants about the UBE's effect on ECE provision development. Most settings' headteachers and practitioners indicated that ECE provision is developing well due to its introduction in public schools through the UBE Act. One public setting's headteacher (JE-setting) thought that "it had developed more than before, due to its accessibility in public schools, particularly for the working parents and disadvantaged families." Moreover, more children have access because it is free, and this has increased the enrolment rate. Most settings' headteachers and practitioners, particularly in private settings, believed that the private sector had played a significant role in sustaining ECE development. As one headteacher explained:

> *"The only development we're having now is still being managed by the private sectors."* (Headteacher/VA-setting)

This response appears to reflect some private headteachers' perspectives on the private sector's critical role in ECE development in the country.

However, some participants thought that ECE had only developed to an extent. One private headteacher (IV-setting) said, "it has only improved on the scale of 50%." She expressed further that the ECE programme has not been adequately implemented in public settings compared to private settings. This view was echoed by another private headteacher (VA-setting) who commented on "the general decline in ECE services quality in some states, particularly in public settings." He also mentioned settings' physical condition and the absence of facilities in most public settings. One public headteacher (BA-setting) indicated that this is because the government failed to provide the ECE programme's necessary resources. A VA-setting's headteacher estimated that "70% of parents access public settings because they could not afford private settings." He further questioned the quality of provision available to that 70% of children in public settings.

Another reported issue was that some rural areas are neglected for ECE provision. One rural private setting's practitioner (T1/JE-setting) emphasised the non-availability of public ECE services in their area. Another public setting's practitioner (T2/JO-setting) argued that "this situation seems to impact children's learning and

development negatively." She suggested a need to build new schools with ECE services in rural areas, so the disadvantaged can also benefit. A rural private setting's practitioner commented:

"But due to the environment alone [rural area], the government doesn't want to support. Some people now they want to come to school, but due to the condition of this area, there is no money." (T1/JE-setting)

This suggests a lack of government support despite the willingness of some parents to get an education for their children. Other responses on the issues that could be inhibiting ECE's development included parents' lack of awareness of their children's education, inadequate funding, and the government's lack of political will. They will be discussed further in the following section.

Only two practitioners indicated awareness of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They expressed views that achieving SDGs in Nigeria regarding quality ECE by 2030 depends on good leadership, the government's political will, consistency, and adequate funding. As one practitioner said:

"11 years, not too far, but if we have leaders who have values and are passionate about building the nation and putting so much in the children, it will work. It all comes down to money, willpower, and embrace it in totality." (T1/VA-setting)

The results in this section show the participants' perspectives on the development of ECE provision. Participants held perceptions of very little development of ECE provision and absence of services and facilities quality, particularly in public settings.

7.4 What Are the Factors Influencing ECE Policy Implementation in Nigeria?

This section addresses the third question: "What factors influence ECE policy implementation in Nigeria?" Two themes emerged from this, "Barriers to ECE implementation at the local level" and "Participants' ideas for enhancing ECE policy implementation" and are presented below.

Barriers to ECE Implementation at the Local Level

The participants highlighted several barriers to ECE policy implementation in their settings. One of the most cited challenges is inadequate funding by the government. Funding issues are experienced differently in public and private settings. Some private

settings' practitioners indicated that ECE's financing is the responsibility of both the government and the parents. As one practitioner commented:

> *"If there has been enough funding; not even only from the government now, from the parents; things would have been better. Because everybody knows nowadays that everything is about money."* (T1/IV-setting)

This suggests the importance of funding for the ECE system's essential mechanisms, such as providing infrastructure and practitioners' training. Likewise, most public headteachers and practitioners suggested the importance of the provision of funds by the government for adequate facilities and resources.

A common reported fact amongst private settings' headteachers and practitioners was that the government does not provide any financial or material support for their provision. They also mentioned that some parents delay paying fees, affecting the programme's smooth delivery. Two practitioners (T1 and T2/IV-setting) claimed "the issue of corruption and the government's lack of accountability," whereby the UBE programme's funding is diverted for other use. A VA-setting's headteacher suggested that "consistency is vital on the government's part regarding funding" to provide the necessities for delivering effective and quality ECE services.

Another critical challenge cited by most participants was the absence of infrastructural facilities and resources in public ECE settings. As one public headteacher said:

> *"They [government] promise us that they will do so many things. Even in this school, as big as it is, we don't have any guard. You know how risky it is for not having a guard. Even we need fence as you can see some animals roaming about the compound now."* (Headteacher/RU-setting)

This comment shows that some public settings lack safety facilities, which is similar to the local official's view in the previous chapter, who commented on the absence of safety provision in public settings.

Issues related to the insufficient quality of the workforce were particularly prominent in the interview data. One private headteacher (JE-setting) commented on insufficiently qualified practitioners in the field, which appears to affect ECE service outcome. One public practitioner (T3/JO-setting) reported the absence of ongoing training opportunities for practitioners without knowledge, skills, or ECE experiences. She said:

> *"Most schools don't really train. They say that as long as you are in the process or system, you blend along and ask questions."* (T3/JO-setting)

This probably means that the absence of in-service training and development affects practitioners' roles in the ECE programme delivery.

Some practitioners in public and private settings reported delays in payment of salaries and low payment for ECE practitioners, affecting ECE service delivery. One public setting's practitioner illustrates:

> *"Government should pay our salary on time; our arrears, everything they should pay it in time."* (T1/BA-setting)

This response suggests that the government has not been paying practitioners' salaries regularly in public settings. This view is similar to the state official's view in the previous chapter regarding the regular payment of practitioners' salaries. One private setting's practitioner (T3/VA-setting) felt that the delay in salary payment "affected some practitioners' commitment in their jobs, especially in public settings." Similarly, a public setting's practitioner (T1/JO-setting) and another private setting's practitioner (T3/JC-setting) observed that some private settings pay their practitioners a 'meagre' salary, which seems not to be encouraging. This view might be linked to the NGO's perspective, presented in the previous chapter, on the local stigma that attaches to early years teaching as an "undervalued career".

There were interesting perspectives that practitioners hold of parents. Some practitioners perceived that parents lacked appreciation of practitioners' work, often making their work difficult. Most headteachers and practitioners were critical of parents not supporting their children's education at home, for example, parents not helping their children with their homework. Whilst one public practitioner (T3/JO-setting) thought that education should extend from school to home for the advancement of ECE policy implementation, one private headteacher expressed concerns about parents' educational background, as shown:

> *"The majority of parents are typical illiterates. From 100% of our parents, 30% are literates, while 70% are illiterates, that is constituting to the problem of education."* (Headteacher/JC-setting)

From this participant's perspective, parents' difficulty in supporting their children's learning at home might be due to their educational background. The same headteacher

further said that most parents prioritise social activities over the value of their children's education. Another public headteacher (JO-setting) reported that some parents are still not aware of ECE, and suggested more "educational campaign for effective public awareness."

Similar to the policymakers' perspectives, there was a sense of the government's lack of political will, inconsistency, and political discontinuity amongst participants. One private setting's headteacher commented:

> *"Government will say they're going to do this tomorrow; the parents will be relaxed that the governments are going to do it. Later, they will change their minds that they are not going to do it."* (Headteacher/JC-setting)

Furthermore, one private practitioner (T1/IV-setting) mentioned that "political discontinuity affects ECE policy implementation, where different governments have different priorities." This response confirms the state official's view in the previous chapter. Another public practitioner (T3/JO-setting) reported that "the government is only involved in ECE's provision for its benefits but not for its sustainability." This affects the quality, sustainability, and success of the ECE programme's implementation. Overall, participants referred to several barriers to ECE policy implementation. The next section discusses participants' views on enhancing factors for effective ECE policy implementation.

Participants' Ideas for Enhancing ECE Policy Implementation

Participants' ideas for enhancing ECE policy implementation were principally about specific aspects of the ECE system. Participants expressed a variety of perspectives. It was suggested that increased levels of funding are vital for ECE policy goals. For example, one private setting's practitioner said:

> *"When there is no money, there is little the organisation can do."* (T3/IV-setting)

This suggests that funding was perceived as a crucial factor for an ECE system's essential elements. Another private practitioner (T1/VA-setting) insisted that the adequate government funding is fundamental and suggested "providing funds in subsidies for private ECE settings." Similarly, a private setting's headteacher (VA-setting) suggested that the "government needs to increase funding to boost public settings' quality" to ensure that most disadvantaged children benefit. One private

practitioner (T1/IV-setting) stressed the importance of government transparency and accountability regarding allocating and managing funds.

There were suggestions from all participants about the quality of the services and facilities for ECE programme delivery. One private setting's practitioner (T1/IV-setting) felt that "a well-equipped and stimulating environment, mainly through the play-way method," as stipulated in national policy and guidelines (FME, 2016b; *NERDC 2013*; *NPE 2013*), will be beneficial and allow children to thrive. Another public practitioner (T1/JO-setting) mentioned that "adequate resources and facilities enhance teaching and learning."

These views surfaced mainly around the ECE workforce's role in ECE services delivery. Some participants suggested the recruitment of specialised ECE practitioners. Most practitioners suggested regular continuing professional development (CPD) for practitioners, so they are well versed in the area. To promote workforce improvement, a private setting's headteacher (W-setting) advocated for "the government's financial support for people willing to study ECE as a course but cannot, due to financial constraints." Another private setting's headteacher (JE-setting) proposed that the government should "make ECE a substantive course for specialisation in Nigerian universities" rather than a subject in other courses. Only one private practitioner (VA-setting) emphasised the significance of practitioners' qualities and passion for delivering positive ECE child's outcomes.

There were some suggestions for improving practitioners' salary payment in order to improve staff retention and professionalism. From a private headteacher's perspective (VA-setting), "the regular payment of practitioners' wages will help practitioners become committed to their job" and, in turn, facilitate ECE services delivery. Another public headteacher (BA-setting) also mentioned that "practitioners' motivation through incentives could encourage them to be diligent."

Another highlighted enhancing factor was to ensure a coherent monitoring system to improve policy implementation. One private setting's headteacher suggested close monitoring of the practices of existing private ECE settings before the renewal of their licences. He also emphasised that the monitoring bodies should be regularly appraised to provide monitoring accountability by "training them to develop further their

capacity." This result is similar to the NGO officer's view regarding the monitoring bodies' inefficacy in the previous chapter.

There was a range of suggestions that collaboration of all stakeholders (e.g., parents, communities, NGOs, providers, practitioners, and the government) is an important aspect in advancing ECE's sustainability. One public headteacher (RU-setting) said, "building partnerships with parents through regular meetings and adequate communication" helps solve issues facing the school before the need for government intervention. Most practitioners highlighted the importance of a strong relationship between parents and practitioners in supporting positive home-learning environments. For one public practitioner (T2/RU-setting), "government's engagement with the community," such as through the Old Students Association (OSA), creates better ECE services. Some settings' headteachers and practitioners recommended NGO support in establishing affordable ECE settings for all children. Only through such collaboration can ECE policy goals be accomplished.

This section has highlighted the factors affecting ECE policy implementation at the local level. It also provides important insights into various enhancing ideas that could facilitate policy implementation and effective provision delivery.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter provides valuable insights into the perspectives of key implementers (i.e., settings' headteachers and practitioners) on ECE policy implementation in their settings. The data indicates a fragmentary knowledge of the UBE programme amongst most participants. This chapter's findings suggest that there are variations in ECE policy implementation across ECE settings. Most public settings' participants held critical perceptions of the level of government support with infrastructural facilities and resources, while private settings were critical of the lack of government collaboration. It was shown that the workforce was perceived as inadequate, as most practitioners did not have the necessary skills, experience, and knowledge for ECE provision. The results also indicate that the monitoring system experienced by participants was incoherent and ineffective. The research also identified inconsistency in curriculum implementation and the teacher–pupil ratio variation across ECE settings.

Finally, participants highlighted various barriers to ECE policy implementation in their settings and suggested various ideas to facilitate it. Comparing and analysing the

results from the policymakers in the previous chapter, the implementers in this present chapter, and the document analysis in Chapter 3 could enhance the reliability of findings and the following interpretations. The next chapter discusses the analysis of my findings with reference to the document analysis, literature review, and theoretical framework, which could provide an in-depth explanation of the history and operation of and factors affecting the Nigerian ECE system.

Chapter 8: Discussion of Findings

8.1. Introduction

This chapter presents an integrative analysis of all the data collected (interviews, official document analysis, and fieldnotes) to answer the research questions. It relates the data analysis to the theoretical framework adopted in this thesis and the review of literature pertaining to Nigerian early childhood education (ECE). It aims to provide an in-depth explanation of how the ECE system in three western Nigerian states has been implemented and continues to operate, as viewed by policymakers and ECE settings' headteachers and practitioners. The former can be considered the articulators of how the ECE policies ought to be implemented, whereas the latter are the actual implementers in the field.

Chapter 4 introduced two theoretical strands underpinning my analysis. These are Kagan's (2015) application of systems theory to an ECE system, illustrated in Figure 4.1 in Chapter 4, and two aspects of postcolonial theory (Fanon's idea of liberation and Said's idea of orientalism). Elements of both theories were used as a lens to critically interrogate the inductive analysis of the findings as laid out in Chapters 6 and 7 and analysed documents in policy Chapter 3. These theories could also help identify areas for improvement in the ECE systems and provide insights to inform future ECE implementation.

Kagan (2015) describes the system elements that need to be in place, and that must function well in relation to each other, if the ECE system is to achieve the system outcomes of quality, equity, and sustainability. These are preconditions for a successful ECE system that meets the needs of children and families. According to Kagan (2015), the context in which policies and these system elements exist is supported and influenced by temporal and socio-cultural factors.

Recognising my positioning as a postcolonial researcher, Kagan's description of an ideal ECE system might be helpful as the primary theoretical lens for analysis. However, applying a theory developed in a different context might not be ideal in other contexts due to barriers like cultural differences. Therefore, I cannot assume a priori that the ECE system is at fault if it fails to correspond to Kagan's theory. Hence, I am only testing the theory as part of my research, particularly its relevance to understanding the Nigerian ECE system.

The central focus of this study is to explore the 'fit' between the system envisaged by ECE policy at the national level and its implementation at the state and local levels in three western states in Nigeria. This discussion is framed by the eight overarching issues arising from the ECE systems I studied, based on a synthesis of all my findings. The key issues identified here cut across the three research questions that guided my research, highlighting the system's complexity. These key issues are discussed below.

8.2 Issue one: Inadequate Funding

One of the key findings of this study is the inadequacy of the funding available to implement the policy provisions on the ground, primarily because of the three states' inability to locate the matching funding needed to qualify for the national government subsidies. This is evident in data on the matching grants, also known as counterpart funding, obtained for all Nigerian states (see Appendix K2). This issue is crucial because everything else concerning other aspects of the system follows from that. It is likely that no specific funding at all is going to the system to implement the policy or do everything the policy prescribes. According to Kagan's (2015) systems framework, applied by UNICEF in a 2020 paper (UNICEF, 2020), adequate funding is a fundamental part of any ECE system that facilitates sustainable development, including adequate facilities and resources for programme quality and standards.

ECE's essential components hinge on adequate and sustainable funding; it is impossible to successfully implement ECE policy in these three states without funding. The inability of the state governments to provide the matching grant could have affected the supply of vital elements for effective implementation, such as facilities, resources, a trained and adequately remunerated workforce, monitoring, and inspection. This, in turn, could affect the achievement of ECE goals and positive outcomes. Other studies have also highlighted this situation around the lack of matching funding (Alabi and Ijaiya, 2014; Anibueze and Okwo, 2013; Obun, Owan and Akan, 2018; Olubor and Inua, 2015). This means the funding aspect of the system is a persistent and widespread issue that had not been resolved at the time my research was conducted.

This study's findings did not show any reason for the states' inability to access the grants, as all policymakers interviewed were reluctant to discuss the funding issue. However, it may have something to do with the state governments' lack of political will,

as highlighted by my policymaker interviewees. This would confirm Alabi and Ijaiya's (2014) findings, which emphasised the need for the state governments to improve their attitude toward the counterpart funding system for effective ECE implementation. Furthermore, employing Fanon's (1986) postcolonial concept of liberation, the policymakers' reluctance to discuss this issue may be related to how the structures exercise power over officials; hence they might feel too vulnerable to criticise the system.

While the policymakers were reluctant to talk about funding, this study revealed the challenges headteachers and practitioners in public settings faced regarding the condition and quality of facilities. Most headteachers found it challenging to run the programme effectively due to a lack of the facilities and resources essential for service delivery. Some policymakers and headteachers in public settings expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of security, such as fences and gates, at their schools, which has led to burglary and made the premises easily accessible to criminals and other miscreants. This was also evident in the settings' vignettes (Appendix H) and was described by one policymaker interviewee. This supports evidence from other studies (Aiwuyo and Omera, 2019; Aligbe, 2017; Eze, 2016; Okewole, Iluezi-Ogbedu and Osinowo, 2015; Okeworo, 2018; Owojori and Gebenga-Akanmu, 2021; Salami, 2016) that inadequate facilities and resources affect ECE implementation, implying the limits that lack of funding places on quality.

The settings' vignettes also describe the poor conditions in all the public settings studied, which failed to meet the standards set in the national policy and minimum guidelines (Federal Ministry of Education [FME], 2016a; *NERDC 2013*; *NPE 2013)*. For instance, their learning environment appeared very unattractive. This was also the view of most headteachers and practitioners in public and private settings, who noted the absence of appropriate facilities and resources. Some headteachers in public settings reported that these shortcomings were due to the government's negligence: children attending public settings could not access quality ECE due to inadequate government financial support, making many parents, particularly high-income ones, send their children to private provision instead.

It has been argued that parents' participation in schools' management has been of a very poor standard (Olaleye and Omotayo, 2009). This does not appear to be the case in this study. Since no subsidy was forthcoming from the government, all headteachers

in public settings in all three states showed resilience to keep the programme running by raising more funds from parents. Parents pay levies in an effort to bridge the funding gap and make ends meet.

Some policymakers and practitioners in public settings reported irregular payment of practitioners' salaries, attributable to funding gaps. Practitioners in public settings also indicated that many children did not benefit from the free universal basic education available in public provision. This finding contradicts the ECE prescriptions in section 2(12) of the *2013 NPE* providing free one-year pre-primary education in public schools to all children, and entitling children to free and quality universal basic education stipulated in *UBE Act 2004*. Aligbe (2017) and Obun, Owan and Akan (2018) have also raised this issue.

These findings reveal a dreadful situation, probably influenced by state governments' inability to access their matching funding. They suggest that inadequate funding has made it almost impossible to deliver any meaningful and high-quality ECE provision. They indicate inadequate government financial input and illustrate gaps in the state government's commitment to ECE implementation, particularly for disadvantaged children. This has implications for providing the support required to turn desired practices into reality within the ECE system in the three states. One question that needs to be asked is whether the matching funds requirement should be abolished. The circumstances identified in this study are also highlighted in other studies, indicating that ECE services in the public sector are seriously underfunded due to inadequate government financial support (Ajayi, 2008; Buzome and Acholem, 2016; Nakpodia, 2011; Obiweluozor, 2015; Ogunyinka, 2013; Rotshak, Muktar and Podos, 2020).

Inequitable Distribution of Funds

Another problem affecting the funding allocation system is the equal distribution of funds among states, which poses inequality issues. Nigeria's philosophy of education is based on the belief that education must be functional, qualitative, comprehensive, and relevant to society's needs (section 1(3e) *NPE 2013)*. Collaborative partners or ministerial agencies are expected to jointly determine the budget-sharing formula and plan for Early Childhood Care Development and Education (ECCDE) activities, including ECE, based on agreed priorities or needs (FME, 2013). This approach is

supposed to ensure an equitable distribution of funding. However, a breakdown of the matching funding released to all 36 states from 2005 to 2019 (Appendix K1) shows that each state had equal funding allocations, including the three states studied. As illustrated in Chapter 1 (Figure 1.1), some states have a greater percentage of children attending ECE services than others. Given the different numbers of children in each state, an implication of equal funding allocation is the differential development of ECE services across different states or unsustainable resourcing of ECE service delivery.

Kagan's (2015) systems framework, applied by a UNICEF report in 2020, noted that the allocation of resources, including funding, must be fair and sustainable across and between states and populations for high-quality and equitable services over time. Equitable funding suggests the distribution of 'fair' funds in relation to each state's needs. This finding is contrary to that of Obun, Owan and Akan (2018), who reported an uneven distribution of funds for UBE implementation, including ECE, as only a few states accessed their matching funds, while most did not. Thus, they felt the few states that accessed their matching funds were favoured over others, even though matching funding was the precondition for national government subsidies. One could not really say these states were favoured. Nevertheless, this combination of findings suggests that the funding allocation system is a drawback to ECE implementation; it enhances our understanding of the importance of a sustainable and transparent financing system for a functional ECE system. The present study makes a contribution to the current literature claiming that equitable and viable financial support is crucial for promoting quality ECE service delivery.

Misappropriation of Funds

One surprising issue that most headteachers and practitioners in this study highlighted was that the government's inadequate funding is significantly associated with a claimed institutional corruption. They expressed the opinion that public funds intended for ECE implementation were diverted or mismanaged by public officials or government agencies. They attributed this situation to a lack of accountability and transparency around expenditures that hinders progress in ECE delivery, particularly in public schools. No policymaker interviewees mentioned the possibility of corruption affecting the system. If it exists, this has implications for securing the level of funds and resources needed for ECE delivery and implementation. Funding and accountability mechanisms are significant for ECE development and systemic

outcomes (quality, equity, and sustainability) (Kagan, 2015; Kagan et al., 2016). These findings mirror those from previous research into Nigerian ECE (Ogunode, Jegede and Ajape, 2021). They also corroborate the work of other studies on UBE implementation (Anibueze and Okwo, 2013; Bolaji, Campbell-Evans and Gray, 2016; Bolaji, Gray and Campbell-Evans, 2015; Obun, Owan and Akan, 2018; Tsafe, 2013; Uyang, Ojong-Ejoh and Ejeje, 2017).

Local Governments Funding Autonomy

One policymaker interviewee made a call for funding autonomy for the local government within their domain. Previous studies have described both the state and local governments as being responsible for overseeing ECE financing (Olubor and Inua, 2015; Taofik, 2020). However, this study found that the bureaucratic layer in the system denies local government education authorities (LGEAs) direct access to funding and necessary mechanisms for ECE implementation. This has resulted in insufficient logistic support to discharge their duties effectively. Hence, they demanded funding autonomy to deal with the situation affecting them directly and provide better control over administrative procedures regarding local projects free from political influence.

Previous studies have not reported the absence of such local government funding autonomy. However, Taofik (2020) suggested that local government be given an active administrative role in funding given its closeness to the grassroots. This does not appear to happen in the local government areas in this study. One of the issues that emerged from this study is the lack of monitoring data at the disposal of local government, as discussed in the following sections. This limitation means that this finding needs to be interpreted with caution. One wonders how this funding will be allocated or monitored without reliable data to ensure that it is used for what it is meant for.

My findings discussed in this section suggest that the funding allocation system and state governments' inability to access national government funding are among the major barriers affecting ECE service implementation. They further suggest that insufficient financing, lack of accountability mechanisms, and possible misappropriation of funds undermine the implementation process.

8.3 Issue two: Ineffective Monitoring and Inspection, Their Impact on ECE Services

It is worthy of note that in all three states in this study, ineffective monitoring and inspection mechanisms affect the quality of ECE services, according to my interviewees. The minimum standards for basic education (UBEC, 2010) stipulate that UBE resources, process, and performance standards must be monitored; they are meant to coexist. The national minimum standards guideline for ECE also aims to ensure consistent standard practice in ECE centres across Nigeria. This standard practice aims to produce an equivalent enabling environment for better learning outcomes for all children (FME, 2016a; *IECD 2013*; *NERDC 2013*; *NPE 2013*; UBEC 2010). Hence, officials at national, state, and local government levels are tasked with licensing, monitoring, and maintaining ECE institutional standards (*NERDC 2013*). Moreover, the dissemination of monitoring reports to all stakeholders, including the private sector, is essential for evaluation purposes and for informing policy, planning, training, and interventions for school improvement (FME, 2016a; *IECD 2013*).

Although all the policymakers interviewed maintained that they frequently monitor public and private settings for quality control, many headteachers and practitioners, particularly in private settings, stated, on the contrary, that the national government regulatory system for overseeing quality in public and private ECE settings is ineffective. As was pointed out in Chapter 3, the regulations are issued at the national level of government; the state and local governments carry out monitoring and inspection.

One NGO officer taking part in this study further noted that even in urban areas where ECE provisions are plentiful, the service quality in both public and private provision is often compromised. It would appear that inadequate monitoring and supervision had led to an increasing number of ill-equipped, unregulated, and unapproved public and private ECE settings across the country. A few policymakers also noted that several unapproved settings were unknown to inspectors. This finding is supported by my observations from the settings' vignettes (Appendix H), which revealed that most ECE settings in my sample did not meet the minimum standards for approval. For example, some settings lacked indoor and outdoor play and teaching resources, while some buildings were dilapidated. Some settings had large group sizes ranging from 30 to 36, contrary to the teacher–pupil ratio (1:25) for ECE stated in the *2013 NPE*.

Ineffectiveness of ECE quality and lax standards in ECE settings indicate an inadequate regulatory system. Proper formal monitoring and inspection of the provision appear to be lacking. Minimum standards appear not to be enforced by the national government. These findings match those highlighted in previous studies (Ajayi, 2008; Akindele, 2011; Amali, Bello and Okafor, 2012; Ejieh, 2006; Gabriel, 2015; Nakpodia, 2011; Obiweluozor, 2015; Ogunode, Jegede and Ajape, 2021; Olorunmowaju, 2017; Sooter, 2013).

It is somewhat surprising that some headteachers in private settings and the NGO officer in this study claimed that government inspectors may collect money from private providers without carrying out their duties. This corruption, if this claim is accurate, could be attributed to oppressive structures in the system, which contradicts Fanon's (1986) postcolonial concept of liberation. This finding was also reported by Ejieh (2006). This study suggests that such practices could affect other inspectors' integrity and ability to discharge their responsibilities effectively (Olorunmowaju, 2017).

Consistent with the literature (Amali, Bello and Okafor, 2012; Unuigbokhai and Jimah, 2011), this study found that a few policymakers reported a shortage of inspectors to regulate ECE provisions and activities. A possible explanation for this finding may be the lack of adequate funding. A small number of participants, headteachers, and the NGO officer interviewed further indicated that most inspectors lacked understanding of their roles. Moreover, most of their monitoring ends in the office without further evaluation or feedback.

These situations could be attributed to inadequate funding and inadequate training for monitoring personnel to develop their capacity effectively, which is probably why the regulatory system is inefficient. In the absence of feedback, settings could not be aware of inadequacies. The inspectors also might not have a baseline for their subsequent inspections. These findings have not previously been described in the studies I analysed. They have important implications for improving the regulatory system.

An adequate regulatory and inspection system is one of Kagan's (2015) preconditions for a well-functioning ECE system. The quality and standards of ECE are of great importance as they can significantly impact children's experiences, learning, and well-

being. Thus, functional regular monitoring and inspection are fundamental to enhance programme quality and standards. Equally essential is functional support, such as sufficient funding, accountability, and adequate human capacity (Kagan, 2015) to discharge monitoring duties effectively. These findings were unexpected; they suggest the monitoring institutions' lack of capacity, competence, and commitment to their roles, resulting in questionable practices. They may further explain why there is an increasing number of unregulated settings. The problems my study identified may impact significantly on provision quality outcomes for children and ECE service development.

The Quality Control System in ECE

My study found that formal government monitoring focuses only on the quantifiable aspects of ECE provision, such as the number of enrolled children, ignoring other vital areas. Most policymakers' and implementers' views revealed that this finding was present in all three states studied. A possible explanation might be that the policymakers find it easier to measure quality in terms of quantifiable aspects of ECE provisions rather than ECE quality outputs. This finding reveals important aspects of the nature of the quality assurance system in ECE settings, with potential consequences for other aspects of ECE services, such as following the recognised curriculum, staff qualifications, and children's experiences related to activities and resources. This hinders continuous improvement in ECE standards and quality outcomes if all aspects of provision quality, such as children's experiences, staff qualifications, and group size, are not inspected.

This finding has not been reported in the literature, however. It sheds light on the ineffectiveness of government in monitoring various aspects of ECE provision in the three different states. It also enhances our understanding of the need for comprehensive and efficient monitoring to strengthen ECE programme implementation.

8.4 Issue three: Multiple Interpretations of the Policy Guidance and Governance Structure for ECE Services Affect Implementation

As mentioned in Chapters 1 and 3 of this thesis, the 2013 National Policy on Education (NPE) is the mandatory national policy guidance for effective administration and implementation of quality education delivery in Nigeria, including ECE. This policy

guidance is underpinned by the 2004 Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act for policy coordination and monitoring (*NPE 2013*). The component parts of the *2004 UBE Act* comprise Early Childhood Care, Development, and Education (ECCDE), of which ECE is a component in Nigeria, primary and junior secondary education (*NPE 2013*; *UBE Act 2004*; UBEC, 2018, 2021a).

This research shows multiple interpretations of the policy guidance underpinned by this legislation among the policymakers I interviewed and the policy implementers, i.e., the headteachers and ECE practitioners. Most of the policymakers gave similar policy interpretations to those found in the Act and policy guidance. However, many of the headteachers and practitioners in both public and private settings interviewed for this study had a fragmentary understanding of government policy and legislation relating to ECE. This has resulted in the finding that the policy is not effectively implemented as intended in the states in which the research took place. My research revealed that the implementation process faces huge challenges that resulted in the near non-implementation of the programme in most ECE settings in this study.

Consistent with previous studies (Hamza, 2006; Olorunmowaju, 2017; Salami, 2016), this research found that most of the private settings studied felt that the policy prescriptions were only designed for public settings and did not apply to them. Most headteachers in private settings were unaware of the introduction of ECE as an aspect of the *2004 UBE Act*. This resulted in the varied interpretation of the policy and ECE implementation compared to the three public sector settings I studied. According to Kagan's (2015) systems theory, proper monitoring and human capacity are essential to achieving an equitable, high-quality, and sustainable ECE system. A possible explanation for these findings may be the absence of adequate monitoring and inspection of ECE provision and the government's lack of enforcement of the policy prescriptions. They could also be attributed to inadequate human capacity related to stakeholders' training on the policy content and implementation process.

The literature on public policy suggests that effective policy implementation requires that policymakers focus on a shared understanding of the policy goals to ensure coherent coordination of the implementation process (Hogwood and Gunn, 1984). However, the evidence presented here suggests otherwise. An implication of this is that all government levels (national, state, and local) must make efforts to evaluate all stakeholders' policy understandings for effective policy implementation and outcomes.

Roles of International Agencies in Nigerian ECE Implementation

Some participants expressed views on the role of the international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Nigerian ECE policy implementation; they are active stakeholders in the Nigerian education sector (*NPE 2013*). This linkage is one of Kagan's (2015) prescriptions for a well-functioning ECE system. Both national and state officials and the NGO officer in my sample noted that international agencies, such as UNICEF, impact tremendously on the development of the ECE programme by providing financial, resourcing, and technical support. The literature also reflects such assistance or linkages (Hamza, 2006). I only had the opportunity to interview one local NGO signposted by the branch of UNICEF in this research context. Further research into NGOs' roles in Nigerian ECE policy implementation might need to be undertaken with a larger sample to understand them fully.

Some policymakers highlighted that most stakeholders, including policymakers and implementers in this study, lack awareness and understanding of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.2, even though it is embedded in the national policy. The NGO officer in this study also highlighted this finding. As a result, the SDG agenda and ECE policy were not implemented properly. This agenda, particularly target 4.2, is important in the development of ECE. As explained in Chapter 1, SDG 4.2 promotes the principle that by 2030 all boys and girls should have access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education, so they are ready for primary education (UN, 2015). This issue has not been identified in previous studies I reviewed and may help us better understand the factors influencing the ECE implementation process to find strategic ways of dealing with them.

The Interpretations of ECE Entitlements

My research uncovered a significant gap between government policy statements and the actual implementation of ECE entitlements and good practice in the three states studied. Policy intentions need to be clear and consistent to increase effectiveness and prevent multiple interpretations by implementers for effective policy implementation (Sabatier, 1986; Viennet and Pont, 2017).

The latest revised *2013 NPE* was meant to address noticeable gaps in the content and provisions that emerged in the course of implementing previous ECE policies (*NPE 2013*, p. ix). This intention was not realised, as this study identified contradictions

and failures on the part of the government in fulfilling its obligation and commitment to the ECE programme. As highlighted in Chapter 3, while the *2004 UBE Act* specifies two years of free ECE provision (UBEC, 2010, 2018, 2021a) for children aged 3–5 years, the *2013 NPE* stipulates one free year of pre-primary education for 5-year-olds in public settings. This is contradictory, suggesting inconsistencies between the law and the policy text, and may significantly impact the implementation process and hence potential ECE outcomes.

A note of caution is due here, since none of the policymakers interviewed pointed me in the direction of any amendments to the *2004 UBE Act*. The national curriculum (FME, 2016b) is the latest guideline after the *2004 UBE Act* that stipulates one year's pre-primary education for 5-year-olds. Since the pre-primary curriculum document was issued under the *2013 NPE*, it may well be that the policy document is key to what providers are supposed to do. It may also be that the government had, in the meantime, decided that the one year envisaged in the policy guidance was enough, indicating their intention.

Another possible explanation for this is the earlier *1977 NPE*, the umbrella for all Nigerian education systems, which was last revised in 2013. Seen through the lens of Fanon's (1986) postcolonial idea of liberation, these policy anomalies could be traced to the legacy of colonialism, where a policy, NPE, modelled on the British educational system was superimposed on the legislation, the *2004 UBE Act*. Drawing on Said's (1978, 2003) postcolonial idea of orientalism, it may be that all stakeholders are expected to take the 2013 policy guidance, NPE, as a mandatory or legally binding document or probably misinformation. A clear and consistent policy content may help implementers agree on effective implementation plans.

Another issue is the discrepancies in ECE entitlement interpretation across the three states studied and the private–public dichotomy in ECE settings. This is more complicated than the discrepancies between the legislation and the policy text. Unfortunately, I could not get any clarification from policymakers regarding the ECE entitlement. Most of them that I interviewed at different government levels tended to confirm that the one free year of ECE in public settings stipulated in the *2013 NPE* was the correct interpretation of the entitlement. However, most children stay more than the allocated one-year entitlement, which would have cost a lot more to implement. Following the interviews and my observations from the setting vignettes

(see Appendix H), all public settings in this study offered varied ECE entitlements different from the confirmed one year to children ranging from birth to five years. Amongst policymakers, the funding allocated for one-year entitlement covers this ECE provision without extra funding.

In the view of many policymakers and headteachers in my study, these differences are also based on the headteachers' criteria or parents' demands. As interpreted by both policymakers and implementers, these findings bore more similarity to the British system. In other words, they tried to build a system that is different from the one that the government imposes on them, which is more of a combination of care and education services for a greater number of children. Seeing these findings from the standpoint of postcolonial ideas of liberation (Fanon, 1986) and orientalism (Said, 1978, 2003), the headteachers in the public provisions are not constrained by the system, i.e., the top-down approach to policy. They deviated from the policy guidance because it did not fit their community's situation and they appeared to integrate improvements into policy and practice to make things work for children and their families. This act of resistance or liberation represents a positive endeavour where the local is exercising agency or autonomy to do what they can; probably, they need more family-oriented services that are more suited to family needs.

These findings give visibility to the knowledge that emerged from people without policy-related power but who made the system work by meeting the local community's needs within the available resources. According to Kagan's (2015) systems framework, funding is crucial for quality and sustainable ECE services with a monitoring and regulatory framework. In practice, these variations in how the ECE entitlement is implemented would lead to a funding shortfall unless extra funding was allocated. Therefore, the possibility of added pressure on the funding allocated for one-year provision could impact provision quality and sustainability.

Moreover, the differences in the numbers of children admitted in all the public settings studied could be attributed to the government's lack of supervision and monitoring of the ECE programme. Proper monitoring should be able to correct this variation in children's intake as it could be having a significant impact on ECE development in Nigeria. These differences may also be due to the anomalies in policy texts, as highlighted above. The lack of clarity in the policy and legislation could have resulted in ambiguities and complex implementation challenges. These findings corroborate

those of other studies that most ECE measures to achieve the goals stipulated in NPE are not implemented in practice due to the government's lack of enforcement (Abdulrahman, 2016; Nakpodia, 2011; Rotshak, Muktar and Podos, 2020; Subuola, 2017; Unuigbokhai and Jimah, 2011). However, no data was found in the literature on the interpretation and implementation of the ECE entitlement; these findings add to a growing body of literature on the Nigerian ECE system which identified the same shortcomings.

Governance Structure Issues

With respect to the approach to policy implementation across the three states studied, there are governance structure issues related to the states' bureaucratic layers, the government's political will, and political instability. These issues influence the multiple interpretations of ECE policy. As explained in Chapter 3, the Nigerian ECE system hinges on governmental and non-governmental actors' inputs. These actors include other line ministries, local and international NGOs, the private sector, and local communities. They are all expected to work together to enhance the ECE programme's sustainability, quality, and uniformity (*IECD 2013*; *NERDC 2013*; *NPE 2013*; *UBE Act 2004*). Most policymakers also mentioned such linkages.

Consistent with the literature (Bolaji, Campbell-Evans and Gray, 2016; Bolaji, Gray and Campbell-Evans, 2015), my research found that the top-down hierarchical organisational actions and bureaucratic layers between the three government levels, national, state, and local, were significant hindrances to ECE policy implementation. Amongst the policymakers, international NGOs, like UNICEF, operate only at the national and state levels. According to Kagan's (2015) systems theory, having an effective governance structure and stakeholders' involvement is vital to successful ECE services delivery. However, according to the policymaker interviewees, in conjunction with the international NGOs, the national and state governments centrally influence and make decisions about implementing ECE policies and programmes without consulting the local government about their needs. It was clear from some policymakers' views that this situation had prevented local government input in decision-making, inhibiting the effectiveness of ECE implementation at the local level. It had also impeded LGEAs' performance in implementing the whole programme for all basic education levels.

Seen through the lens of postcolonial concepts of liberation (Fanon, 1986) and orientalism (Said, 1978, 2003), the findings indicate the importance of listening to local voices regarding situations concerning them to understand their local communities' needs. The bureaucratic system described by policymakers reflects a colonial legacy of power relations, where local needs are based on the state's assumptions, aligning with Said's (1978, 2003) idea of orientalism. Indeed, Fanon's (1986) concept of liberation contests exclusion where larger bodies impose what is considered appropriate on the local level. The implication is that local governments were unable to present their issues directly to the national government; consequently, each local government's needs were ignored. This situation may have resulted in implementing educational policies, including ECE, that do not benefit the local levels since state agencies make most decisions regarding their needs at the national level.

Among my interviewees, though, only a minority of the policymakers at the local level demanded greater administrative autonomy in decision-making to deal with the situation affecting them and perform their assigned roles without political interference or bureaucratic limitations. This demand reflects Fanon's (1986) liberation concept. As regards Kagan's (2015) application of systems theory to these ECE systems, local autonomy may further enhance effective governance for ECE services. It could be vital for transforming the policy implementation process, as LGEAs could use discretion to fulfil their obligations. Previous studies on Nigerian ECE did not identify local government autonomy as a key issue related to policy implementation success. This finding draws attention to the importance of understanding how policies at national and state levels affect local events and conditions, and local level input can strengthen partnership and governance for an effective ECE system.

Most participants in private settings in my sample indicated that there is no collaboration between them and the government regarding the policy process. This could be due to the bureaucratic layers. This contradicts the policy stipulation about all stakeholders' involvement in ECE implementation and suggests a lack of input from the various actors, including the private sector. It is noteworthy that private ECE settings have been providing services since before public settings were established (Gabriel, 2015; Oyeyemi, 2014). Given that the private sector is the largest provider of ECE provision in the country, as mentioned in the literature (Amadi, 2013; Buzome and Acholem, 2016; Sooter, 2013), one would expect their input in the policy

implementation process. This issue may have contributed to how the policy is interpreted. It can be argued that failure to effectively engage with the private sector, in part, is responsible for the lack of proper implementation.

Seen through the system theoretical lens, public and private support is crucial for ECE sustainability (Kagan, 2015; Kagan et al., 2016). This means that the coordination of different actors is an essential element of an effective governance mechanism. Most private settings in this study felt isolated from the system and considered they were positioned outside the policy agenda, which could impede policy implementation. This finding highlights the need for the active involvement of partnership with various actors, especially implementers at the grassroots level, in the policy process for achieving positive outcomes. This collaborative process ensures that different interests are revealed, reflected on, and negotiated to achieve common goals. These findings have important implications for advancing an effective stakeholder engagement strategy for effective ECE implementation.

Other issues mentioned by my policymaker interviewees and in the literature are a lack of political will on the government's part and political instability, which appear to undermine effective ECE implementation. For instance, officials at the national level perceived that the state government (including the three states studied) did not demonstrate enough commitment to enforcing the UBE programme, including ECE provision. Officials at the state level indicated that most of their proposals are approved on paper but never executed by the national level. Hence, it could be suggested that the national and state governments' lack of political will to enforce measures to achieve ECE goals hindered policy implementation. These findings corroborate previous studies (Abdulrahman, 2016; Amadi, 2013; Amali, Bello and Okafor, 2012; Nakpodia, 2011; Subuola, 2017; Unuigbokhai and Jimah, 2011).

Some policymakers pointed to political instability due to government system changes from one political party to another. Such instability has led to inconsistency and lack of continuity, as other studies have reported (Odukoya, Bowale and Okunlola, 2018; Ogunode, Jegede and Ajape, 2021). Such political instability could also have contributed to the multiple interpretations of the policy and ECE entitlement.

From a systems theoretical perspective, the issues just mentioned are specifically temporal issues, particularly political factors influencing the context of policies and

system elements. Factors such as a government's political will are pathways for system strengthening. Political issues may significantly impact the government's involvement in and support for ECE provision in respect of funding, adequate resourcing, workforce, monitoring, and evaluation as stipulated in the 2013 policy statement. This, in turn, could affect the sustainability of inputs. This situation is consistent with the views of authors in the literature review, who noted that policymakers' power dynamics or agenda-setting could influence public policy (Bochel and Bochel, 2018; Cairney, 2020).

The political party in power at the national level may differ from that in the states, hence the difference in the manifestoes, affecting ECE implementation. Bolaji, Gray and Campbell-Evans (2015) found that political influence affects UBE implementation outcomes, including ECE. A growing body of evidence suggests the need for the government to ensure a system that allows for policy and planning continuity (Ogunode, Jegede and Ajape, 2021). These findings have implications for developing the government's political will and commitment to support policy implementation and improve ECE sustainability for desired outcomes.

This section has analysed a lack of awareness of government policies by certain stakeholders, particularly ECE headteachers and practitioners. This issue illustrates the different ways in which stakeholders interpret the policy and ECE entitlement across the three states studied. To ensure effective ECE policy implementation, there is a need to raise awareness and effectively engage with all stakeholders, especially at the local level, by considering different interests and values. This will require increased government leadership capacity, support for, and involvement in ECE provision implementation.

8.5 Issue four: The Gap between Private and Public ECE Provision

Another important finding is the gap between the conditions under which private and public ECE provision operate. One of the issues that emerge about the ECE system, which has built on the knowledge of other studies, is the way the private provision is positioned within the system. Though private settings are not dominant in my sample, they form the majority of the settings in the three states where I conducted my research: five private and three public settings were studied. My sample is very limited; therefore, the findings cannot be generalised or claimed to be representative of private

provision overall in the three states in this study. However, this may be an area for future research.

One of the issues most headteachers and practitioners in my sample highlighted, especially in private settings, is the dominance of private ECE provision across the three states studied. They further noted that the private sector had contributed immensely to ECE development by increasing the number of services. The literature also reflects that they provide most of the ECE services in Nigeria. For example, an inventory of the Nigerian childcare market conducted by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) and UNICEF in 2003 showed that 34% of ECE facilities are government-owned, while 63% are privately owned. Of the 63%, 21% are owned by local communities (Sooter, 2013). Other studies have shown that most ECE services are still privately owned (Amadi, 2013; Buzome and Acholem, 2016).

The system just mentioned suggests a mixed market of public and private ECE providers in which the private-for-profit sector is the major player, as Lloyd (2012) and Penn (2012) described. This was also reported by Taofik (2020). The *2004 UBE Act* officially encourages ECE provision in public primary schools, but at the same time it is still very dependent on the private-for-profit sector. The dominance of private-for-profit-provision poses the risk of inequitable access and unaffordability, especially for disadvantaged children and families.

As highlighted in Chapter 3, the government is obliged to encourage private efforts to establish ECE based on set standards (*NPE 2013*). This means private provisions are all part of this ECE system. However, the private sector does not seem to be fully included in the system's mechanisms, such as financial support. From most private settings' headteachers' perspectives in my sample, the only support provided by the government is the regulatory aspect. The findings reported here suggest that the private sector is recognised as a partner or provider within the ECE system because they must be registered and inspected, which is mandatory. The state's registration and inspection requirements are a kind of support. However, there is no financial support from the government.

There is a perception among the policymakers about the extent of their responsibilities to the private providers. They expressed the view that private providers do not qualify

for government subsidies. According to most policymakers, the reason is that they are profit-making entities. Public ECE provision is limited, yet the government does not support the private provision financially. The Nigerian ECE system appears to be a market where only public providers qualify for subsidies. However, as mentioned earlier, public provision in these three states does not receive these subsidies either. At the same time, public provision's ability to garner parental funding is limited by the demographic they cater for.

Some headteachers and practitioners in private settings thought that appropriate subsidies could go a long way to help them provide better services. These findings support Subuola's (2017) contention that public–private partnerships might be a way forward. They also support the work of Gabriel (2015), recommending subsidising private ECE provisions that charge a reasonable fee. Government subsidies for public and private provision may be a way to bring such partnerships into the system but must build in safeguards to prevent private-for-profit providers from taking advantage of them.

Inequality Access and Quality in ECE

Another key feature of the positioning of the private sector in the ECE system is the high level of inequality; access to quality ECE is far from being universal as most children, particularly the disadvantaged, appear to be deprived of equal access and quality in ECE. This has led to a distinction between private and public ECE provision or the private and public ECE sector. Government intervention in ECE in Nigeria is based on the need for unrestricted access to quality, equitable, and inclusive Universal Basic Education (UBE) for all Nigerian children, irrespective of their background (*NPE 2013*; *UBE Act 2004*). A shared view among the policymakers, headteachers, and practitioners I interviewed was that ECE development has advanced because of its inclusion in public schools through the *2004 UBE Act*. Many participants acknowledged significant improvements, in the form of the enrolment of more children in public provisions, especially the disadvantaged, and an increase in girls' enrolment rates due to this inclusion. Figure 1.1 in Chapter 1 indicates that southern Nigeria, which includes the three states studied, has the highest regional percentage of children attending ECE. However, my findings suggest that much more needs to be done to achieve equitable and quality services.

While existing public provision may have created access for disadvantaged families, most headteachers and practitioners in public and private settings I studied felt that government provision did not go far. It was neither free nor fair in its quality for all children. These participants noted that disadvantaged children most often access low-quality provision in public settings due to the absence of quality public services and facilities and to constant teachers' strikes related to delays in salary payments, which mean schools often have to close. Consequently, most high-income families prefer to access private provision, whereas inconsistencies in public provisions deprive many disadvantaged children and families of quality ECE.

According to systems theory, quality and equity are characteristics of an effective ECE system (Kagan, 2015; Kagan et al., 2016). The difference in the quality of the provisions in public settings compared to private settings that I studied shows how quality is available but not accessible and affordable for low-income families. The exclusion of disadvantaged children from quality ECE contradicts the policy stipulation to provide unfettered access to quality and equity in education for all children. These findings have implications for disadvantaged children as they are at heightened risk for several poor educational outcomes and reduced life chances.

The Distinction between Public and Private ECE Provision

This study found a wide distinction between public and private ECE provision across the three states studied. The Nigerian government set out the national minimum standards for ECE centres to provide standards and quality ECE for all children (*NERDC 2013*). Kagan's (2015) systems theoretical framework also indicates the importance of programme quality and standards for a well-functioning ECE system. Several headteachers and practitioners, particularly in private settings, considered that public provision is insufficient compared to private provisions as far as the educational quality offered to children is concerned. These participants expressed dissatisfaction over the state of resources and facilities in public settings. One headteacher in a public setting even highlighted that some practitioners in their settings send their children to private settings, implying that public provision is of a low standard.

The findings just mentioned were supported by my observations reflected in the settings' vignettes (Appendix H); there were distinct patterns of difference, in terms of

the settings' physical structure, between the public and private provision. Most facilities and resources in the public settings studied were inadequate, uniformly poorly equipped, and failed to meet the minimum standards required in the national ECE prescriptions. These facilities and resources are considered an essential element of quality in ECE (Kagan, 2015); their absence appears to pose a barrier to adequate ECE provision. It is also likely to affect children's ECE outcomes.

In contrast, most private settings I visited had much better provision than those in the public sector, such as superior facilities, well-arranged shelves, pleasant classrooms, and designated play areas. This was in sharp contrast to the dissatisfaction expressed by most headteachers and practitioners in public ECE provision that I observed. However, being a private setting is no guarantee of quality services. One of the private settings I visited (Appendix H) lacked adequate resources, had dilapidated buildings, and operated with large group sizes.

The disparities between the public and private provisions raise intriguing questions about the initial nature and quality of facilities and services and suggest that only a little progress has been made in public provision in the three states studied. Since the introduction of the *2004 UBE Act*, therefore, ECE provision has only developed to an extent. This study's findings strongly suggest that these situations are associated with the lack of public financial input, as do other studies (Ajayi, 2008; Obiweluozor, 2015); or the absence of specific budgetary provisions for ECE, also noted in other studies (Akindele, 2011; Okewole, Iluezi-Ogbedu and Osinowo, 2015; Olorunmowaju, 2017; Osho et al., 2014; Salami, 2016). This means that the present level of ECE financing cannot narrow the gap between high- and low-income families. Therefore, the government's obligations to ensure equal access to quality educational opportunities for all children as stipulated in the national policy appear compromised.

These conditions also suggest negligence on the part of different levels of government related to a lack of political will and ineffective monitoring. These are significant building blocks that need to be in place, particularly funding for a functional ECE system (Kagan, 2015; UNICEF, 2020). Employing Said's (1978, 2003) postcolonial concept of orientalism, the service delivery and the participants' experiences voiced during this research suggest that the ECE system is ineffective. These participants all had a common desire for change or improvement in public ECE provision. The distinction between the private and public settings observed as part of this study

corroborates the findings of previous studies (Aligbe, 2017; Eze, 2016; Okewole, Iluezi-Ogbedu and Osinowo, 2015; Owojori and Gebenga-Akanmu, 2021; Salami, 2016). This indicates that the problems highlighted in the previous studies still persist in the system. My study shows that much needs to be done, specifically as regards public support systems, to further service quality and ECE development.

The Variations in Quality in Private ECE Settings

The variations in the quality of private provision were also found to be a problem for effective ECE implementation in this study. The government was determined to encourage private efforts in the establishment of ECE services based on set standards (*NPE 2013*). Given that private ECE provisions are widespread across the country and have been providing services for a long time, one may suppose there will be an expectation regarding regulation. However, this study found that quality differs from setting to setting. For example, the settings' vignettes (Appendix H) show that the private settings I visited were quite distinct from each other in quality terms; I saw some impoverished private settings and some better-equipped ones.

Some participants, such as the NGO officer, headteachers, and practitioners, particularly in private settings, also highlighted that the quality of most private provisions is not guaranteed and varies depending on their standards and providers' motives. An effective monitoring and regulation system is fundamental for strengthening programme quality and standards (Kagan, 2015; UNICEF, 2020). These variations in quality may be due to the absence of effective regulation, as highlighted by some headteachers and the NGO officer I interviewed. Even if there are such regulations, they are probably not enforced. This contradicts the government's obligations regarding private provision based on set standards. These findings match other research indicating that the quality of most private facilities and services is not guaranteed despite their high cost (Akindele, 2015; Aligbe, 2017; Gabriel, 2015; Obiweluozor, 2015).

Parents' socio-economic status was a significant determinant of the settings they chose for their children. This is in line with the shortcoming noted in a report by UNICEF (2019a). Some headteachers and practitioners in private settings expressed the view that only high-income parents could afford and access the few quality services, which charged very high fees. Most low- or average-cost settings are poorly

resourced, and tend to be over-subscribed, despite their lower provision standards. Given this situation, the lack of choice for many low-income parents was evident. Many parents wanted their children to attend private settings with better-quality provisions, but they could not afford the fees. In contrast, some parents sought out low-quality services for their children, perhaps understanding that they could not afford the best. The evidence from this study suggests that lack of access to high-quality provision, or attendance in settings of inferior quality, could affect outcomes for children and their families.

These findings are suggestive of a link between social and economic factors which significantly influence ECE policy, programmes, and systemic outcomes for children and families, according to Kagan's (2015) systems framework. Cost and parents' income status are significant factors affecting parents' access to quality and equitable ECE provision for their children. This has resulted in the social stratification of provision, and serious inequality in the system, as not all children can access quality ECE.

Employing Fanon's (1986) postcolonial idea of liberation, such inequalities mirror persistent educational inequalities within the coloniser's education system, widening the gap between the rich and the disadvantaged. The implication is that only high- or middle-income families that could afford the high-cost private ECE provisions were guaranteed access to quality ECE provisions, corroborating Akindele's (2011) findings. My findings are consistent with those of various authors which showed that high-cost private provision poses a risk to accessibility, affordability, and quality for low-income parents (Akindele, 2015; Gabriel, 2015; Hamza, 2006; Olubor, 2009; Obiweluozor, 2015; Oyeyemi, 2014; Salami, 2016). In other words, most disadvantaged children are less likely to access quality ECE, raising questions about universal affordability.

Urban–Rural Dichotomy in ECE

Residential disparity related to the distribution of ECE provision in urban and rural areas is another significant factor affecting equal access and quality in ECE. Of the eight ECE settings in this study, two were rural (one public and one private setting); others were urban. Some policymakers and practitioners indicated the inadequacy of both public and private ECE facilities in rural areas compared to urban areas,

suggesting inequality within the ECE system. As far as the public sector is concerned, most headteachers and practitioners in rural and urban public and private settings indicated that public ECE provision is prevalent in urban areas, whereas rural areas are more affected by limited ECE facilities.

The reason for this is unclear, but it may be related to the lack of financial or logistical support or the non-involvement of local government in decision-making highlighted earlier. All these issues together present barriers to monitoring, adequate facilities, and sufficient human resources. It has been demonstrated that equitable distribution of services is fundamental to achieving macro-outcomes of quality, equitable and sustainable provision that reach all children (Kagan, 2015; Kagan et al., 2016; UNICEF, 2020). These findings further suggest that differences between urban and rural areas in ECE facilities' spatial distribution and quality could widen educational gaps, as Ejieh (2006) noted. This study supports evidence from previous research (Akindele, 2011; Ejieh, 2006; Gabriel, 2015; Unuigbokhai and Jimah, 2011) regarding the prevalence of ECE services in urban rather than rural areas. A UNICEF report (2019a) also highlighted this situation.

A theme that arises from the interviews is the shared view between policymakers, headteachers, and practitioners that all children, including the disadvantaged, should have access to high-quality and equitable ECE to achieve positive developmental and educational outcomes. This has important implications for delivering equalising effects for all children and their families, as suggested in the policy documents. Some state-level policymakers suggested that bridging the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children requires adequate investment in providing quality ECE services in public settings and rural areas. This is yet another finding that suggests that public investment is insufficient; funding issues must be sorted for quality, equitable, and efficient ECE services. Seen through postcolonial concepts of liberation (Fanon, 1986) and Said's orientalism (1978, 2003), it is evident that all participants had a common desire to see improvement in government provision to ensure equality of access to quality ECE opportunities for all children. This also reflects previous studies' findings (Ejieh, 2006; Obiweluozor, 2015; Oyeyemi, 2014; Unuigbokhai and Jimah, 2011).

This section has enhanced our understanding of the significant gap in accessibility, quality, and affordability between private and public ECE provision. This gap is

primarily related to the positioning of private provisions in the system. Thus, it significantly affects ECE system development in the domains of accessibility, affordability, and quality.

8.6 Issue five: Absence of Reliable Data Affects ECE Implementation

Another significant though less visible aspect of the system is the absence of credible, comprehensive, and current data affecting ECE implementation, particularly the monitoring of enrolment and ECE uptake. The policy guidance document acknowledges the significance of information technology systems for educational management (*NPE 2013*) and the importance of birth registration (*IECD 2013*). Surprisingly, for most policymakers in all three states studied, the government's ability to develop and generate accurate data was not a prominent feature in planning and monitoring ECE enrolment. Several policymakers at national, state, and local government levels indicated that this issue is due to the absence of modern technology and the lack of accurate data on children's birth registration.

As pointed out in Chapter 1, this finding chimes with reports that many Nigerian children under five have no birth certificate (Obokoh, 2019; UNICEF, 2019b). Undoubtedly, the policymakers in this study implement the policy without knowing exactly how many children they cater for. This situation suggests a lack of technical capacity, with significant impacts on ECE implementation and planning. Conversely, few policymakers valued the importance of datasets as prerequisites for an effective enrolment monitoring system, corroborating Young's (2001) postcolonial activist position that rejects administrative complexity while seeking new possibilities for change. My finding adds to the growing body of evidence that suggests the importance of reliable and accurate data for appropriate planning (Tsafe, 2013).

Systems theory highlights the importance of such data for a functioning ECE system and for informing policy. Reliable administrative datasets are also important for several other aspects of the ECE system, such as enrolment rates, staff numbers, setting numbers, and allocation of funds (Kagan, 2015; Kagan et al., 2016). Proper strategic planning cannot be done without data. Although all policymakers considered the local strategies (e.g., enrolment drives) for monitoring ECE enrolment as efficient, the non-availability of reliable administrative data may have consequences for accountability. It could also lead to mismanagement of the resources essential for ECE

implementation, including funding. These findings echo studies asserting that inadequate data affects UBE implementation and planning (Tsafe, 2013; Uyang, Ojong-Ejoh and Ejeje, 2017), including ECE (Gabriel, 2015). This issue clearly persisted at the point this research was conducted.

8.7 Issue six: Inappropriately Qualified Workforce Affects ECE Implementation

An inappropriately qualified workforce appears to hinder effective ECE implementation in all three states. According to Kagan's system theory, an appropriately or well-qualified workforce is key to achieving sustainability, quality, and equity in the system.

The *2013 NPE* emphasises the importance of teachers' quality for positive education outcomes, including ECE. It also states that the government would be responsible for providing education programmes for specialisation in ECE and ensuring the retraining of teachers. This strategy aims to produce highly motivated, reliable, and efficient teachers with adequate professional qualifications to enhance their commitment to their roles. Thus, the government made the Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) the mandatory basic qualification for teaching, including ECE (*NERDC 2013*; *NPE 2013*). These findings clearly show that the government at the time recognised how important qualified practitioners were for ECE implementation.

However, policymakers – the officials and policy implementers – the headteachers, and practitioners, participating in my research regarded this as a very unsatisfactory situation in all ECE settings. During my visits to ECE settings, I discovered by asking my interviewees that most practitioners' qualifications and experience in public and private settings did not match the requirements of a quality ECE setting. Most practitioners had the basic teaching qualification (NCE) without specialising in ECE. Statistical data from the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC, 2021b) shows each state's ECE practitioners' qualifications in 2012/2013 and 2013/2014. This data also showed such findings to be prevalent in all three states. My observations from the vignettes supported these findings (Appendix H).

Among some policymakers, headteachers, and practitioners, the lack of specialisation was ascribed to the lack of provision for this aspect in most higher education institutions and the absence of experts. This had led to the use of primary and secondary education teachers in ECE. These findings undercut the government's commitment to providing education programmes for specialisation in ECE. This issue

suggests inadequate workforce development, as most practitioners were not professionally qualified in ECE. It may further indicate practitioners' lack of skill, proficiency, and knowledge, impacting efficient ECE delivery.

A headteacher in a private setting suggested studying ECE as a course in higher education institutions through a comprehensive entry system to have highly qualified practitioners in ECE. This view reflects the significance of workforce development that ensures the overall ECE competencies, skills, and training required for roles promoting children's positive development and early education. This aligns with the framework described in the UNICEF report (2020) whereby a well-prepared workforce is crucial to delivering high-quality ECE services.

Interviews with practitioners in public and private settings revealed that practitioners with completely different qualifications appeared to be employed in the ECE system. Having a job appeared to be their priority, not teaching young children. The recruitment of unqualified practitioners in these settings could well impede performance. Additionally, the shortage of practitioners had led to the use of primary education teachers, cleaners, and administrative staff in these roles, according to certain policymakers and public settings practitioners. These findings contradict previous studies (Ejieh, 2006; Okeworo, 2018; Olorunmowaju, 2017; Subuola, 2017) which found that it was mostly the relatively low-cost private ECE settings that recruited unqualified practitioners. A comparison of my findings in this area with those in several other studies confirms that the recruitment of unqualified practitioners in the system is a barrier to successful ECE implementation (Abdulrahman, 2016; Ajayi, 2008; Akindele, 2011; Amadi, 2013; Odinko, Williams and Donn, 2009; Ogunode, Jegede and Ajape, 2021; Owojori and Gbenga-Akanmu, 2021; Rotshak, Muktar and Podos, 2020; Sooter, 2013). The absence of ECE specialists in this study corroborates previous findings in a wide range of studies by Amali, Bello and Okafor (2012), Ejieh (2006), Nakpodia (2011), Obiweluozor (2015), Osho et al. (2014), Owojori and Gbenga-Akanmu (2021), Oyeyemi (2014), and Unuigbokhai and Jimah (2011).

Inconsistent Professional Development

On top of the problem of an insufficiently qualified workforce, the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) of practitioners is inconsistent, especially in the public settings across the three states. The national government, in collaboration with

state and local governments, is responsible for the CPD of teachers where necessary to improve professional competence in the delivery of ECE services (*NPE 2013*; *UBE 2004*). The local governments are responsible for training ECE managers and practitioners. It is also obligatory that all school administrators offer in-service or on-the-job training for teachers (*IECD 2013*; *NERDC 2013*; *NPE 2013*). The training must be regular, at least once a year (FME, 2013).

Since hardly any practitioners are primarily trained in ECE, it would be expected that regular in-service professional development would further develop their ECE knowledge and skills. Unfortunately, most practitioners in public settings in this study noted that they seldom receive professional development training, perhaps due to a lack of funding. In contrast, most private settings practitioners mentioned that in-service training organised by headteachers was consistent and beneficial for their professional development. This indicates another disparity between public and private settings.

According to certain policymaker respondents, professional workforce development by the government is for public settings only. It is meant to keep them updated with ECE programme developments and build their capacity. Employing Fanon's (1986) postcolonial idea of liberation, this finding indicates that private settings were not included in such training programmes. This situation suggests a lack of professional development for the ECE workforce. It also explains why most practitioners had fragmentary knowledge of the policy guidance, *2013 NPE*, and legislation, *2004 UBE* Act discussed earlier. It may reflect differences in quality service delivery. They may not be aware of having to keep updated with the changes or the essential skills agenda for the ECE programme to support children's learning outcomes adequately.

The sample of ECE professionals interviewed for this study in public and private centres had seldom received professional development. This is in line with the situation described in studies by Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016), Aligbe (2017), Olaleye and Omotayo (2009), and Viatonu, Usman-Abdulqadri and Dagunduro (2011). The lack of CPD may hinder the implementation of ECE policy prescriptions, such as the curriculum. Consistent with Subuola (2017), the NGO participant in this study highlighted the relevance of public–private partnerships to achieve professionalisation in ECE to improve quality, sustainability, and successful implementation in Nigeria.

Inadequately Remunerated Workforce

Workforce conditions are certainly dire. As far as the public sector is concerned, some practitioners in public settings highlighted the irregular payment of salaries. One local official confirmed this finding. This is likely related to the problem of the funding allocation system explained earlier or inadequate funding. Likewise, some headteachers and many public and private practitioners highlighted the profession's low remunerations in most private settings. The NGO officer noted a similar issue. This issue has led to job insecurity, a shortage of practitioners, and a lack of specialisation in the ECE workforce. Hence, only a few people pursue ECE as the main course in their university-based teacher training.

These findings suggest that professionalism in ECE remains a problem due to low remuneration and irregular payment of salaries, resulting in less attractive career prospects. These issues may impact on practitioners' zeal and competencies to discharge their responsibilities, with negative effects on children's developmental and educational outcomes. Previous studies also reported these findings (Akindele, 2011; Ejieh, 2006; Owojori and Gbenga-Akanmu, 2021; Oyeyemi, 2014; Sooter, 2013; Subuola, 2017).

Consistent with the literature (Olorunmowaju, 2017; Sooter, 2013), a shared view among some policymakers and most implementers, headteachers, and practitioners in public and private settings is the need for regulation of ECE practitioners' salaries and the regular payment of wages to encourage staff retention. They also suggested harmonising ECE practitioners' wages to promote ECE professionalism. A few practitioners suggested governmental scholarships for students interested in ECE but who cannot afford the fees. Applying Said's (1978, 2003) postcolonial idea of orientalism, these views reflect the research participants' assumption of a link between practitioners' pay, staff retention, and high-quality ECE delivery outcomes. It has been suggested that staff working conditions significantly promote continuous workforce improvement and retention (UNICEF, 2020, p. 15).

In line with Kagan's (2015) systems theory, all the highlighted issues related to the ECE workforce require enhanced human capacity, appropriate funding, and regular monitoring to build a well-prepared workforce and high-quality services. These are all the building blocks that need to be in place for adequate workforce development. In

other words, quality ECE is built on support systems for practitioners. Nigeria may have attempted in its policy to create a system that would meet those requirements that Kagan described. Nevertheless, crucial elements are missing, like funding, to make a reality of this aspect of the system.

8.8 Issue seven: Inconsistent Curriculum and Pedagogy Impact ECE Implementation

Another issue that emerged from my findings relates to the ECE curriculum and pedagogy employed in delivering ECE; this cuts across the different parts of the system. Significant issues arise from my findings about the national curriculum implementation, a play-based learning method, and regulations and policy guidance regarding the status of the language of instruction. They are all contentious issues, and their implementation varies widely, affecting the quality of provision.

Inconsistent Curriculum Implementation

Curriculum and pedagogy are crucial if the implementers are to follow the policy regulations and guidelines to achieve programme quality and standards for an effective ECE system, as Kagan (2015) highlighted. The government committed to developing and disseminating a suitable ECE curriculum for nationwide implementation and other relevant materials for the effective delivery of quality ECE programmes (*NPE 2013*). Practitioners are tasked with its implementation (FME, 2016b, 2016c; *NERDC 2013*; *NPE 2013*). The specified ECE curriculum is the national one-year pre-primary education curriculum to cater for 5-year-old children (*NPE 2013*). The national policy did not specify an appropriate curriculum for ages 3–4. This is a significant gap and suggests inadequate guidelines or standards. This ambiguity may be attributable to the discrepancy in ECE entitlement in the relevant policy documents.

In terms of this statutory guidance, NPE, for ECE provision, it is expected that both public and private providers follow the curriculum, according to a certain policymaker interviewee at the state level. However, this was not otherwise evident in my study. All the other policymakers I interviewed indicated that they only disseminate the curriculum to public settings. One of the public settings in this study confirmed the absence of the national curriculum, however. Their practitioners used their initiatives or motherhood experiences to teach children in the absence of a curriculum. This could mean that no meaningful teaching took place in such a setting in practical terms.

It also suggests that the approved ECE curriculum, which is distributed for free, has yet to reach all public settings. All private settings claimed they are expected to purchase necessary policy documents and guidelines, including curriculum, because they are for-profit organisations. Policymakers' perceptions revealed a similar condition. This has implications for programme quality outcomes for children.

The curriculum in public and private settings I visited varied. While most headteachers and practitioners in public settings reported using the one-year national curriculum, most private settings use alternative or foreign curricula, such as primary education, Montessori, or a programme based on the English Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). This suggests varied curricular experiences for children, leading to a lack of uniformity. It was found that these private settings use the primary education curriculum or foreign curricula, believing that these might help promote children's continuous cognitive development, support their learning, and prepare them for global competencies. They also felt that the national-approved curriculum was unclear or impracticable, rendering it underutilised. This study's findings suggest that the government is unable to regulate or harmonise practice and fails to provide a consistent national curriculum for ECE. Lack of enforcement of regulations and the absence of regular policy impact evaluations may be explanatory factors.

Analysis of this finding through the lens of the postcolonial concepts of orientalism (Said, 1978) and liberation (Fanon, 1986) suggests private settings' possible act of resistance relating to the marketing strategy they use to enhance their profits. It also shows how social values and expectations emanating from stakeholders, such as private providers, can affect curriculum implementation. Kagan's (2015) systems theory incorporates such socio-cultural factors as an influence on ECE policy and practice. Thus, the imported curricula could be based on the notion that they are better than the locally approved curriculum. Ekpo, Samuel and Adigun (2016) showed that the approved national ECE curriculum was underutilised in public settings they studied. This finding differs from the findings presented here. However, the inconsistent curriculum implementation in this study corroborates previous findings by Aligbe (2017), Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016), Amali, Bello and Okafor (2012), Obiweluozor (2015), Ogunode, Jegede and Ajape (2021), Okewole, Iluezi-Ogbedu and Osinowo (2013), Rotshak, Muktar and Podos (2020), Subuola (2017), and Viatonu, Usman-Abdulqadri and Dagunduro (2011). Their studies all identified the

non-availability of a standard or coherent curriculum in public and private ECE settings.

A few headteachers and practitioners in private settings considered that integrating national and alternative curricula is more beneficial in helping children to fit into local and global contexts comfortably. They also highlighted that using the local curriculum makes for better learning experiences for children in Nigeria. This is because some content in the foreign curricula does not fit within the Nigerian context due to cultural differences. Applying Said's (1978) postcolonial idea of orientalism, these views reflect the importance of utilising indigenous knowledge to facilitate children's early learning educational outcomes. These findings corroborate the ideas of Ukala and Agabi (2017), who advocated the incorporation of indigenous knowledge in ECE curriculum delivery to promote cultural values and identity.

It was common to find that practitioners, particularly in private settings, were not conversant with and could not effectively discuss the content of the nationally approved curriculum guidelines. According to some headteachers and practitioners in public settings, insufficient educational resources, such as textbooks, and inadequate practitioners' training appeared to affect curriculum implementation. Lack of capacity and educational resources led to a failure to meet the needs of children or to a lack of equivalent experiences. It also has implications for the efficiency and quality of the ECE programme, considering that practitioners are tasked with the national curriculum implementation as the curriculum guideline stated (FME, 2016b). These findings correspond to Ayoola, Ojoko and Olowe's (2018) findings that practitioners did not effectively implement the curriculum due to insufficient educational resources and training.

Pedagogy of a Play-Based Method and Language of Instruction

Although the policymakers tried to make the system work, in reality the curriculum, pedagogy of instruction, and the play-based method specified in the policy were not being implemented. The *2013 NPE* explicitly prescribed a play-based method for teaching ECE children, and the practitioners' initial teacher training curriculum must also be oriented towards this. The national minimum standards for ECE (*NERDC 2013*) also stipulated age-appropriate activities and flexible child-friendly schedules

that promote the holistic development of ECE children. However, this was not evidenced in all ECE settings in this study.

From the settings vignettes (Appendix H), I observed a preference for rote learning methods in most ECE settings (public and private). Children's sitting arrangements appeared structured, and the teaching and learning approaches were primarily teacher-centred. Activities focused on a typical formal curriculum, such as identifying and memorising letters, numbers, and other facts. This pedagogical practice seems embedded in the culture or traditional knowledge system that informs teaching and learning approaches, that is, a system where teachers have the authority to dominate the course of instruction and learning without recognising children's voices. This contrasts with Fanon's (1986) postcolonial concept of liberation, which advocates for inclusivity in the teacher–child relationship. The teaching styles I encountered may have implications for quality learning and useful and enjoyable experiences for children.

There are several possible explanations for this finding. It may be due to an ineffective regulatory system. It may also be that these practitioners' training did not equip them with specialised knowledge of the "play-based learning" method, as the policy stipulated. Hence, most settings are absorbed in formal education. Adequate regulatory systems and workforce development are crucial factors that contribute to quality provision (Kagan, 2015). My findings illustrated gaps in the government's obligations and implementation of ECE. These could be due to inadequate provision of required logistical support, such as funding. This situation is consistent with those reported in other studies, which have highlighted that practitioners in most settings do not use the play-based method specified in NPE to teach children (Akindele, 2011; Amali, Bello and Okafor, 2012; Ejieh, 2006; Odinko, Williams and Donn, 2009; Okeworo, 2018; Salami, 2016; Unuigbokhai and Jimah, 2011). My research provides evidence that training and retraining practitioners in the play-based approach specified in the policy are essential aspects of high-quality ECE delivery and curriculum implementation.

Regarding the language of instruction, English has become dominant compared to using the mother tongue or one of the community languages in all the ECE settings I studied. The *2013 NPE* prescribes the mother tongue or local community language as the language of instruction in ECE. This strategy aimed to instil social and cultural

values in children while making teaching and learning easier. However, all the headteachers and practitioners I interviewed noted the dominance of English as the language of instruction in their settings, contradicting the policy stipulation about using the mother tongue. This outcome contrasts with findings by Osho et al. (2014), who found that both English and the local community language were used in their study conducted in a different state in Nigeria (Niger-state).

Many practitioners highlighted two reasons why the English language has become so dominant. Firstly, practitioners believe that it helps children learn the official language, accelerates their learning, and prepares them for the global society. Secondly, parents believe that their children's ability to speak English indicates service quality. The preference for English shows the language complexities or barriers related to the pedagogy of instruction. It also shows how practitioners and parental values appear to shape the notion of what they consider the best language of instruction and service quality. This study's findings align with the influences of socio-cultural factors, like values and heritage on policy and practices, as highlighted in Kagan's (2015) systems theory. It could be argued that these complexities are due to English being the official language in Nigeria as a former colony.

Through Fanon's (1986) postcolonial idea of liberation, we can infer that the legacy of colonialism, the English language, has led to the redundancy of the indigenous languages in Nigeria. This legacy may impact the social and cultural values the policy aimed to protect. It is also worth noting that Nigeria has three major languages and over 500 indigenous ones (*NPE 2013*). Its linguistic diversity could also be a barrier for the indigenous language as a medium of instruction. These findings echo studies highlighting English as the major language of instruction in Nigerian ECE centres (Ajayi, 2008; Amali, Bello and Okafor, 2012; Ejieh, 2006; 2011; Obiweluozor, 2015; Rotshak, Muktar and Podos, 2020; Sooter, 2013; Unuigbokhai and Jimah).

A minority of headteachers and practitioners in public and private settings I interviewed felt that using or learning in the mother tongue makes learning easier, particularly for children who cannot express themselves in English, and facilitates their understanding of the curriculum. Hence, they suggested combining both languages to understand the curriculum better. This challenges the dominance of English as a language of instruction and adds to a growing body of evidence that suggests that English could be taught alongside the indigenous language to promote learning, foster effective

communication between practitioners and children (Osho et al., 2014), and preserve Nigeria's societal values (Gbadegesin, 2018). Conversely, the barrier of multiple languages within Nigeria will need to be overcome.

8.9 Issue eight: Lack of Parental Involvement Affects ECE Implementation

Surprisingly, lack of parental involvement was found to affect ECE implementation across the three states and settings in this study. All stakeholders at all government levels are expected to raise public awareness, including that of parents and the community, to enhance access to quality and equitable ECE in Nigeria (*NPE 2013*; *UBE Act 2004*). All policymakers noted that they used enrolment strategies, such as enrolment drives to enhance parents' awareness about free ECE uptake in public schools. These strategies are prevalent in the three states studied. According to my informants, this strategy was efficient as it had improved enrolment rates in public settings, parents' awareness of public provision and had impacted direct relationships with parents. Most headteachers and practitioners in my sample also confirmed the increased pupil enrolment in public settings since the introduction of ECE provision in public primary schools because of the *2004 UBE Act*.

Despite the enrolment strategy, most policymakers reported that the increase in ECE uptake has only been achieved to a certain extent. My research reports that many parents in urban and rural areas lack awareness of ECE due to some parents' opinions that ECE lacks value and educational background. Some policymakers expressed the view that some parents considered ECE a waste of money because they felt their children were still too young. Hence, these parents preferred to take their children to the farm or market. A few headteachers confirmed such a lack of awareness of the importance of ECE due to some parents' educational backgrounds and social priorities. These findings correspond with UNICEF's report (2019a) highlighting mothers' education as a significant factor behind children's exclusion from Nigerian ECE. All policymakers felt that raising parental awareness about ECE values and putting in place appropriate measures, such as enforcement legislation for parents in all states, would facilitate ECE demand.

Seen through a systems theoretical lens, the above findings suggest that active parental engagement ensures systemic and positive ECE outcomes (Kagan, 2015). It can be argued that parents' lack of awareness impacts the demand for ECE services,

implying that governments need to do more to promote understanding of the benefits of ECE to parents. This may ensure that parents are actively involved in the implementation process to achieve effective public demand and increased enrolment. These findings are reflected in previous studies on UBE implementation, of which ECE is an element (Obun, Owan and Akan, 2018; Tsafe, 2013). They also corroborate other studies on ECE implementation (Akindele, 2011; Rotshak, Muktar and Podos, 2020). They suggest that these issues persisted at the time this research was conducted.

Another key issue is parental involvement in ECE activities related to their children's learning and development. Most practitioners I interviewed across the three states reported that the majority of parents do not support their children's learning at home to reinforce settings' efforts. These parents did not value practitioners' efforts and often blamed them for children's poor performance, making their work difficult. This finding suggests a lack of parents–practitioner partnership despite the importance of parental engagement in the ECE programme emphasised by practitioners.

Although this study did not include parents' views, this may be an area for further research. The literature also suggests that parental engagement activities in Nigeria are not yet part of the school programme in the public and private sectors (Rentzou and Ekine, 2017). Several factors may have influenced this unexpected finding, such as parents' beliefs, experiences, and the method of sharing information with parents in ECE settings about their active participation in their children's education. It may also be due to parents' socio-economic status, which is a determinant of knowledge, skills, and available time. My findings related to this issue highlight the need to encourage parental involvement for effective partnership with practitioners and ECE settings. This requires creating a wealth of information for parents about the importance of home learning support through regular discussion about their children's progress. This may lead to them being actively involved in their children's early experiences and enhancing ECE programme implementation. My findings in this respect echo those by Rentzou and Ekine (2017), who also found a lack of home parental support for children's learning to reinforce settings' efforts.

8.10 Conclusion

This chapter presented the analysis of all data sources (interviews, documentary analysis, and fieldnotes) on ECE implementation in three western Nigerian states. It

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highlights the themes arising from these data sources by examining how the ECE policies are implemented in the three states to address the research questions.

At the chapter's beginning, I questioned if Kagan's 'ideal' ECE systems framework is appropriate for the Nigerian situation. The discussion of findings identifies that, in principle, the provisions of the *2004 UBE Act* and the *2013 NPE* governing ECE reflect reasonably well Kagan's prescription for a quality, equitable and sustainable system that is good for children, families, practitioners, and government. The problem may be an implementation gap due to funding shortfalls and other factors, such as workforce qualifications, monitoring, parent–teachers partnership, and coordination of stakeholders. These elements need to be in place for an effective ECE system.

Seeing these highlighted conditions, also described in the pertinent literature, and other contextual factors, such as workforce conditions and the regulatory system, through a postcolonial lens raises questions as to whether the ECE system as described in the 2004 Act and the 2013 policy is ultimately fit for purpose in the Nigerian context. It also raises intriguing questions as to whether it is just a blurred reflection of a system that includes a clear combination of ECE and childcare.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

This chapter summarises this thesis and its significant findings as they address my research aims and research questions. It reflects on the themes emerging from the multiple data sources (interviews, fieldnotes, document analysis) and my review of literature on ECE implementation in Nigeria's three western states. It considers the originality of my thesis and the contribution of my research findings to the field of Nigerian ECE studies from the perspectives of methodological and theoretical significance. It presents recommendations for improving policy and practice. It further discusses the limitations of my research. The recommendations for future research on Nigerian ECE implementation are also addressed.

9.1 Summary of the Major Findings

As stated in Chapter 1, the central focus of this study is to explore the ECE system as a system, specifically the 'fit' between early childhood education (ECE) policy at the national level and its implementation at the state and local levels in three western states in Nigeria.

Through the application of two theoretical lenses (systems and postcolonial theories), this study provides insights into the operation, various aspects, problems, and history of the ECE system in three states in Nigeria. The study of participants' perspectives within a postcolonial context could be a significant contribution to the research literature on Nigerian ECE. Their perspectives shed light on the system's tensions, underlying challenges, and complexities that are similar across the three states I studied. They also revealed several inconsistencies and tensions in the system relating to the policy text, what policymakers stated, and the implementation process. Gaps were found to exist between the policy and its implementation, as policy tends not to be implemented as intended due to problematic aspects of the core elements of the ECE system. This section summarises my findings in relation to the three research questions (RQs).

RQ1: How Do Stakeholders Interpret and Mediate ECE Policy at National, State, and Local Levels?

One of the significant findings from this study is the multiple interpretations of ECE policy amongst participants. In addition, there is a lack of clarity within the legislation and policy, specifically, the 2004 UBE Act and the 2013 NPE, and a disconnect

between the policy and the actual provision concerning ECE entitlements. Policy implementers at the local level, i.e., headteachers and practitioners in public and private ECE settings, have a fragmentary knowledge of the legislation and policy. This implies a lack of understanding of policy, which impacts on the actual implementation of ECE entitlements in the three states studied. This was reflected in the different interpretations of ECE entitlements in each public ECE setting, although the policymakers at the state level confirmed the actual entitlement as one free year of pre-primary education. Additional entitlement beyond that stated in the policy will require more funding for public provision. If there is an enrolment of diverse age groups beyond those for whom the funding is meant, the resources will be inadequate.

Nevertheless, the evidence from this study suggests that the integration of care and education is a possible new way of thinking about universal access in ECE for children and their families. This is because public settings in this study provided services for children from birth to 5 years old, possibly with the intention of meeting local needs within their available resources. This supports the implementation of integrated services as universal services.

This problematic issue with the policy and legislation and different understandings of the policy requirement may lead to poor policy execution or the policy having unintended effects. In agreement with the view of public policy scholars in the reviewed literature, such as Hogwood and Gunn (1984, p. 197 cited by Cairney, 2020), such issues undermine effective policy implementation. This could explain why the implementation process faced challenges that have resulted in partial and, in some cases, non-implementation of the two years' pre-primary entitlement at the local level. It is imperative that all stakeholders have a common understanding of all educational policy goals, guidelines, and targets for a coordinated, coherent, and effective implementation process (Hogwood and Gunn, 1984).

With respect to stakeholders' roles, several structural issues emerged as barriers to their involvement in policy implementation in the three states studied. These include bureaucratic layers, lack of political will on the part of national and state governments, political instability, and lack of government collaboration with the private sector. Government at the national, state, and local levels and all stakeholders, such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), ministries departments, communities, and the private sector, are expected to work together towards achieving ECE goals (*NPE*

2013). The aforementioned issues have led to complex implementation challenges and to a significant gap between government policy intentions and programme implementation.

This study showed that the governance structure at the national, state, and local government levels was influenced by bureaucratic layers that tended to ignore local perspectives on ECE. It also found that international NGOs, such as UNICEF, operate only at the national and state levels. Thus, the evidence from this study suggests that the national and state governments, in conjunction with NGOs, influence and make decisions on ECE policy and programme implementation for children. The determination of local needs was often based on state governments' decisions without local government officials necessarily being consulted. This study has identified the relevance of local and direct partnership between the NGOs and local governments for effective ECE policy implementation, rather than the state and national levels making decisions on their behalf.

It was also shown that the absence of collaboration between state and local governments and the private sector meant that the private sector was not involved in decision-making on ECE policy implementation. Thus, the private sector, who are the majority providers in the three states, were denied a vital platform for making their voices heard in relation to the development of the ECE system. This suggests the need for the active involvement of various actors and implementers at the local level in the policy implementation process.

As highlighted in Chapter 1, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.2 sets the target that all boys and girls must have access to quality ECE so they are ready for primary education by 2030. This is an aspirational goal and target for the Nigerian government. However, participants' perceptions suggest that many stakeholders, including state and local governments, had no knowledge of the SDG 4.2 agenda. This could explain why ECE is not being adequately implemented, as stakeholders might lack the knowledge to improve planning and address systemic barriers that affect ECE implementation.

For clarity, the first research question addressed two elements: first, the interpretation of policy by stakeholders, and second, how stakeholders mediate ECE policy, i.e., how they collaborate in making the policy a reality. By stakeholders, I mean my

participants–policymakers and implementers. Regarding the former, this study found that a lack of clarity in the policy and legislation regarding the ECE entitlement, and different understandings of policy by local implementers, impedes effective policy implementation. To effectively implement ECE policy in the three states studied, particular emphasis needs to be placed on building and strengthening organisational and human capacities, especially at the local level, as regards the knowledge and skills required for implementation. This is only possible with adequate and sustainable funding.

Concerning how stakeholders mediate ECE policy (i.e., policymakers' and implementers' roles and collaboration in making ECE policy a reality), achieving the policy goals requires partnerships between governmental and non-governmental agencies. However, this study identified institutional and structural elements that negatively influence effective collaboration, communication, decision-making, implementation, and ECE service delivery. Institutional elements, such as bureaucratic governance structures, lack of political will, political discontinuity, incompetence, and ineffective stakeholder engagement, were identified by participants. Structural elements include too little information and insufficient technical and public support related to funding and logistics. These elements limit the participation of local stakeholders, especially in policy integration, consultation, coordination, and decision-making. In turn, they impede stakeholders' performance in implementing policy and delivering ECE services as intended. Policymakers at the national and state levels must engage in active dialogue to tackle the situation on the ground with stakeholders at the local level, in particular the lack of funding, in order to implement the policy effectively. In doing so, they can develop targeted interventions to address these limitations, such as capacity-building programmes, improved communication channels, and support for stakeholder engagement. However, without adequate funding, these suggestions are unlikely to have the intended impact.

RQ2: How Has ECE Developed as a System?

There have been various local and international initiatives that have influenced Nigerian ECE provision and practice. The official policy document, NPE, last revised in 2013, provides the frame of reference for providing universal access to equitable and quality education to all children regardless of their background. With the enactment of the *2004 UBE Act* came the introduction of ECE provision in public

primary schools. Additionally, Nigeria is a signatory to the SDG 4.2 target, confirming a joint aspiration to provide quality basic education for all Nigerian children. These initiatives called for a sustainable and sufficient funding allocation for ECE, as proposed by UNICEF (2020).

The most significant finding to emerge from this study is that the funding allocation within the ECE system is a barrier to effective ECE implementation in all three states. According to Kagan's (2015) systems theory of change and UNICEF's (2020) systems framework, funding is a core element in any ECE system. My findings indicate that there is no targeted or specific funding scheme for ECE services in the three states because they could not find the matching funding required to access the national government funding for ECE, making it difficult for any meaningful provision to be made in ECE. The present allocation method where each state receives the same amount from the national government is problematic. Not every state can afford the match funding, and the numbers of children and their needs differ from state to state. As well as these problems with funding allocation system, there is a perception amongst participants of misappropriation of the funds devoted to ECE and weak accountability mechanisms on the part of the government. These factors explain the lack of ECE funding and why there are so many other problematic issues in the system that are dependent upon funding.

The *2013 NPE,* which is the statutory policy guidance, prescribes measures that must be in place to achieve effective ECE goals. It also stipulates the requirements for both public and private settings regarding the minimum standards for the establishment of ECE centres, such as workforce qualifications, quality control measures, and distribution of a suitable ECE curriculum for nationwide use. However, my findings suggest that the policy requirements are not implemented in practice. There are significant structural or systemic aspects of the ECE system in the three states I studied that are very problematic. These include an inefficient monitoring system, inadequate workforce qualifications and remuneration, and varied curriculum implementation.

This study also revealed variations in ECE curriculum implementation in the settings I studied, particularly private ones, instead of the statutory nationally approved one-year pre-primary education curriculum. Even in public settings that used the nationally approved curriculum, some practitioners were not well versed in it and were unable to

effectively implement the curriculum content due to a lack of training. The study also showed the absence of the free approved curriculum in one public setting, suggesting that the curriculum may not be widely in operation. This has implications for the quality of provision and learning outcomes for children.

My study found no evidence that the play-based method pedagogy specified in the policy guidance was being implemented. The use of English as the language of instruction in all the ECE settings I studied, had led to language barriers due to the heterogeneous nature of Nigeria and practitioners' and parents' preferences as quality indicators. Within a postcolonial context, in other words, there was a privileging of English. However, the range of indigenous languages spoken in each setting could be problematic. This study shows the government's inability to harmonise practice. These barriers contradict the government's stipulated measures and obligations to achieve ECE goals. My research strongly suggested that the core measures or elements included in the policy, as highlighted above, are not feasible in practice.

Although increased national government involvement in ECE was aimed at harmonising practice, promoting equitable, affordable, and quality education for children regardless of their background in Nigeria (*NPE 2013*), participants' perspectives suggest otherwise. Most participants' perspectives in the public and private provision in the three states that I studied suggest that despite the introduction of ECE provision in public primary schools, the private-for-profit providers are the major players in ECE provision. This seems to have led to a high level of inequality in ECE. It also poses a risk of unaffordability in the system, particularly for disadvantaged children and their families. This study's findings also showed that the national government recognised the private sector as providers in the system because they must be regulated. However, they do not receive any financial support from national, state, or local government.

Most participants expressed satisfaction with the growth in ECE provision for 3–5-year-olds in public primary schools. This has been an advance in ECE development because it offered more access for children in ECE. However, participants perceived that the quality of provision was much higher in the private sector than in the public sector. My findings showed that the state of physical facilities and resources in public settings were of poor quality and did not meet the standard prescribed in the national minimum guidelines. While existing public provision may have created access for

some disadvantaged families, participants' perspectives were that families access public provision not for its quality but because they cannot afford private provision. This potentially contributes to social stratification.

In the three states studied, public ECE provision is not free, contrary to the stipulations of the *2004 UBE Act* and the *2013 NPE*; some participants revealed that parents were charged independently across public settings. Thus, the system is not straightforward: participants' experiences of the ECE system in the three states do not align with the government's policy intentions. These findings suggest that funding, accountability mechanisms, and monitoring and inspection are problematic elements of the ECE system in Nigeria.

Although this study found a difference between the quality of provision for children in private settings and those in public settings, being a private-for-profit setting did not guarantee the quality of services. Participants highlighted the ill-equipped state of private settings due to inconsistencies in regulation. It was perceived that high- and middle-income families tend to access better-quality services in most high- or middle-cost settings, leaving many low-income families with a lack of choice due to the high fees charged by the private sector. The growing numbers of private settings and unregulated providers mean that accessibility, affordability, and quality remain problematic, particularly for low-income families. Despite the national government's commitment to high-quality and equitable access for all, there are disparities between urban and rural areas. Participants noted that there are more ECE facilities in urban than in rural areas, suggesting that access is far from being universal in the three states I studied. Given the evidence in this section, it is unlikely that the three states will achieve SDG 4.2 by 2030.

RQ3: What Are the Inhibiting or Facilitating Factors That May Impact on ECE Policy Implementation in Nigeria?

The policymakers have tried to put in place a policy framework for ECE that reflects a system as might be understood by Kagan's (2015) systems theory of change and UNICEF's (2020) systems framework. My data showed that the policymakers understood some of the challenges within the Nigerian ECE system. However, there are multiple issues in the system in which the policy is being implemented. This study

identified challenges for both policymakers and implementers; there were also problematic issues with the policy and the framework for accountability.

While the participants (i.e., policymakers and implementers in my sample) at local, state, and national levels tried to make the system work with the available resources, some components essential for the system, such as funding, qualified staff, and monitoring, were not there. Hence, these aspects of the system are not working. The absence of these components seems to have hindered quality, equitable and sustainable ECE provision, particularly in public settings. These missing elements highlight the importance of the crucial components to advancing ECE implementation and strengthening the system. A system cannot function efficiently without these crucial elements, according to Kagan (2015). This means that multiple elements need to be aligned or developed within the Nigerian ECE system.

Viewing some of these issues through the postcolonial lens indicates that the policy as designed is not a strong fit with the local context. For example, the language barriers, disparities in ECE entitlements, inconsistencies in curriculum implementation, and bureaucratic layers are hindrances that are part of the multiple interpretations of the policy. This study's findings suggest that the national government's efforts and commitments towards implementing these measures suffered setbacks, which hindered successful implementation. Given the persistence of many complexities, much work is still needed if the ECE policy goals and SDG 4.2 are to be successfully implemented in the three states.

To gain more significant insights into successful ECE policy implementation, it is crucial to understand the factors influencing it to find strategic ways to deal with them. As discussed above, this research has identified various barriers to implementation. Participants also identified facilitating factors that could aid in the improvement of ECE quality and implementation across the three states. These include strong leadership, sustained political will, adequate funding, suitable financial management mechanisms, adequate monitoring systems, public–private partnerships, and stakeholder involvement. The principal theoretical implication is that these facilitators were essential components lacking in the ECE system but desired by participants in this study. Seen through a postcolonial lens, the system as it stands does not give visibility to the voices of people who may potentially have ideas as to how to move it forward. As mentioned in Chapters 1 and 4, the facilitating factors are vital components for an

efficient ECE system, according to Kagan's systems theory (2015) and UNICEF's (2020) systems framework. This indicates that systems theory, as set out by Kagan, is helpful in analysing the Nigerian ECE system as it enabled me to explore the component parts of the system. This theory could be helpful to the policymakers and implementers in this study in addressing systemic barriers to successful ECE policy implementation.

Overall, as explained in Chapter 1, the ECE system, including all stakeholders, must constantly adapt to change by applying systemic tools to achieve the desired change for long-term success (Lau et al., 2019; OECD, 2017). This study's findings suggest that the issue is not with the policy but with the development of all aspects of the system, primarily the matched funding to support the implementation of the policy. The implementation outcomes seem not to match the intentions laid out in the legislation and policy. The policy measures have not been fully implemented; there are gaps in some areas, while nothing has been implemented in others. Building a strong ECE system will require focusing on key missing elements to ensure systemic outcomes. Attention to the identified barriers may start with developing targeted strategies or systemic tools for change. The objective should be to address what needs improving and what works for children and their families. This involves the review of policies, effective implementation, and functional monitoring systems.

The third research question presented here addresses two key elements: inhibiting and facilitating factors influencing ECE policy implementation in Nigeria. My research identified several inhibiting factors that might be areas of focus for future policy implementation. My research has found that funding is one of the key factors inhibiting implementation. There is potential for a change in the system if there is an increased focus on funding. A key enabling factor has been the introduction of the national policy specifying a universal one-year programme of pre-primary education. Another enabling factor is the enrolment drive, or sensitisation, and home-grown feeding programme, indicating strategies from the national policy (*NPE 2013*) and from participants used by regional policymakers to engage parents or raise parents' awareness. Other enablers identified by policymakers and implementers include strong leadership, sustained political will, adequate funding and monitoring systems, appropriate accountability mechanisms, and stakeholder engagement. Participants found that the absence of these enablers functions as a real inhibitor in the system.

They are necessary elements for supporting an ECE system, and participants in this study valued them. This study suggests that successful policy implementation may require attention to missing key elements to ensure an effective ECE system in Nigeria. Therefore, the national and state governments should prioritise and act on funding in collaboration with the local level and ensure that strong leadership and accountability mechanisms are in place. In this way, the Nigerian ECE system can move towards more effective policy implementation and improved ECE service delivery.

9.2 Significance of the Study and Contribution of New Knowledge to the Field

While there have been previous studies on Nigerian ECE, only a few of these applied qualitative methods to explore and understand the various stakeholders' perspectives and experiences. As a result, there is a gap in knowledge and understanding of their views and experiences of policy implementation. My thesis addresses, in part, this gap in knowledge through its emphasis on the experiences and knowledge of both policymakers and policy implementers.

The various stakeholders' experiences and perspectives have shed a contemporary light on the broad issues affecting ECE provision, specifically for children aged 3–5 years in the three states. This work contributes to existing knowledge and current literature in Nigerian ECE studies by providing a deeper insight into the ECE system's operation, development, problems, and facilitating factors that impact on policy implementation.

The knowledge gained from this study could offer critical insights into strategies that may improve Nigeria's ECE policy implementation. These insights could support policymakers in tailoring ECE programmes towards the fulfilment of the policy goals. For example, based on the findings of this study, I would suggest that government allow all stakeholders to participate at local level through the coordination of different actors and training for effective ECE implementation. This involvement tends to be lacking but is desired by participants in this study. It is an approach that would be sensitive to the lived experiences of the people who participate in ECE at the local level.

The combination of systems theory and postcolonial theory ideas as the conceptual approach within this thesis contributes to understanding ECE implementation in the

Nigerian context. Systems theory, as my primary theoretical lens, supports a critical analysis and understanding of the ECE system in three western states in Nigeria through the ways participants addressed the interaction of various elements. As my secondary theory, postcolonial theory provides a critical lens to view the Nigerian context as a former colony, specifically the influence of the legacy of colonialisation on the ECE system and provision. This study's approach extends the way systems theory and postcolonial theory have been applied to early childhood studies in Africa and other former colonies, particularly in ECE policy implementation, which seems not to have been explored in previous studies by Nigerian authors, though postcolonial theory has been applied in research on the rest of the educational system (e.g., Olayele, 2021; Oviawe, 2013).

In addition, my study used postcolonial theory to contextualise the ECE system in Nigeria as a former colony. This perspective highlights how the findings relate to the lived experiences of the policymakers, the NGO officer, ECE providers, and practitioners who live and work in the three states studied. It also strengthens the relevance of the findings for these participants and future researchers. There were aspects of the system that had greater visibility when seen through the postcolonial lens. For example, my study revealed the integration of the care and education services as a possible emerging local strategy for a greater number of children and meeting community needs. This practice was already visible within the local context. Other broad issues that influence ECE implementation were analysed, including bureaucratic layers, local government autonomy, and language barriers in the ECE system. Accordingly, I am contextualising the ECE system as well as analysing the system.

As highlighted in Chapter 4, postcolonial theory contributes to my thesis and the literature on ECE in Nigeria by complementing and extending other theories. The postcolonial perspective, with its historical focus and consideration of local stakeholders' relative voices and knowledge, effectively complements systems theory to provide insights into the complexities of the Nigerian ECE system. Without postcolonial theory's inclusion in the conceptual and methodological framework, it would have been challenging to achieve an in-depth explanation or understanding of the ECE system in a postcolonial context. Previous studies have demonstrated knowledge of different aspects of the ECE system, revealing problematic issues and

attempting to share local voices (Abdulrahman, 2016; Aiwuyo and Omoera, 2019; Ajayi, 2008; Akindele, 2011, 2015; Akinrotimi and Olowe, 2016; Alabi and Ijaiya, 2014; Aligbe, 2017; Amadi, 2013; Amali, Bello and Okafor, 2012; Ayoola, Ojoko, and Olowe, 2018; Buzome and Acholem, 2016; Ejieh, 2006; Ekine and Olaniyan, 2019; Ekpo, Samuel and Adigun, 2016; Eze, 2016; Gabriel, 2015; Gbadegesin, 2018; Hamza, 2006; Ibhaze, 2016; Nakpodia, 2011; Obiweluozor, 2015; Odinko, Williams and Donn, 2009; Odukoya, Bowale and Okunlola, 2018; Ogunode, Jegede and Ajape, 2021; Ogunyinka, 2013; Okewole, Iluezi-Ogbedu and Osinowo, 2015; Okeworo, 2018; Olaleye and Omotayo, 2009; Olorunmowaju, 2017; Olubor, 2009; Olubor and Inua, 2015; Osho et al., 2014; Owojori and Gbenga-Akanmu, 2021; Oyeyemi, 2014; Rentzou and Ekine, 2017; Rotshak, Muktar and Podos, 2020; Salami, 2016; Sani, Ibrahim and Saidu, 2017; Sooter, 2013; Subuola, 2017; Taofik, 2020; Ukala and Agabi, 2017; Unuigbokhai and Jimah, 2011; Viatonu, Usman-Abdulqadri and Dagunduro, 2011). However, my study's findings extend knowledge of the ECE system, the split between early childhood education and care, the ways in which policymakers may attempt to communicate the role of ECE to communities, and the problematic implications arising from the marketisation of the childcare system. My findings complement the existing literature on Nigerian ECE and augment understanding of the system's operation by providing new knowledge on these issues, creating new possibilities for improving Nigerian ECE policy implementation and practice.

A key finding that emerged from my study is the surprising legacy of the split between education and childcare in Nigeria. The national policy mandates one year of pre-primary education but with limited hours of provision (approximately 30 hours a week term time), which most policymakers and headteachers perceived does not fit the needs of working parents. ECE headteachers and practitioners recognised this and attempted to extend ECE's purpose to meet local demands beyond the early education mandate. Postcolonial theory helped explain why I encountered implementers who were trying to offer integrated early care and education services for a wide age range, not just ECE, to meet working parents' needs. Although the UBE Act in 2004 was a step forward, it did not address the split between early education and care which may need reconfiguration for Nigeria. Cairney (2020) suggests that in public policy implementation, people exercise agency and move from the position in prescriptive policy. I build on existing knowledge in the field by explaining how the ECE system

operates through the problems encountered by implementers. Postcolonial theory enabled me to develop a critical awareness of the legacy issues by highlighting local contextual voices, their experiences and concerns. While systems theory might consider the split in policy design between education and childcare as a legacy of colonisation, other colonial legacies, such as discrepancies in ECE entitlement, possible resistance to policy intentions, bureaucratic structures, and language barriers, might have remained invisible using systems theory alone.

This qualitative study makes an original and significant contribution to the literature on early childhood education and care in Nigeria through its analytical and theoretical framework. The postcolonial perspective has been fundamental in shaping my view of my positionality, my thinking and research approach by challenging my assumptions about the research context and participants. By focusing on local stakeholders' understanding of the system and applying systems theory alongside a postcolonial lens, this study has enabled a better and more realistic understanding of the ECE system in the three states in Nigeria. Indeed, postcolonial theory's value extends beyond this study, as it has the potential to challenge assumptions and address existing biases concerning early childhood education in general. It could also complement and challenge other theories and approaches by emphasising the importance of acknowledging local stakeholders' voices, in order to develop more thoughtful research methodologies that generate innovative ideas and shed light on a particular social situation in ECE. This approach could move the ECE literature forward and significantly contribute to the field.

My study extends the body of empirical knowledge about the ECE system in the Nigerian context and contributes to the emerging and wider literature on ECE in Africa. The need for a well-functioning early childhood system is growing as the economies of countries like Nigeria expand, and the issue of the organisation of early education and childcare is challenging, taking account of the needs of families. My thesis distinctly contributes to the broader literature by applying a postcolonial perspective, adding to knowledge of early childhood systems in Africa, and providing valuable information for the global picture of early childhood systems. For example, in Sub-Saharan Africa, public funding for implementing quality ECE remains limited in the system (Agbenyega, 2017).

9.3 Limitations of the Study

Several limitations of this study need to be noted. One is the relatively small sample size of the settings and human participants. This study was conducted in three states in western Nigeria; examining ECE implementation in other states could provide further insight into the Nigerian ECE system. However, due to time and practical constraints, it is beyond this study's scope to examine the ECE system in all the states in Nigeria. The study only included 39 participants; this was considered reasonable to gain insight into participants' perspectives and was ameliorated by including various stakeholders at different levels. It cannot be assumed that the situation is similar in other Nigerian states. The findings may not be applicable to the wider ECE system as this small sample size is not representative of the population of stakeholders in the ECE system in the three states studied or of the Nigerian ECE system as a whole. Notwithstanding the relatively limited sample, though, I consider that this thesis offers valuable insights into the ECE system's operation and the complexities of policy implementation at different government levels in the three states studied.

Another limitation of the study is that it did not include parents' and children's perspectives. Although children are given entitlement in the legislation, parents and children are not mandated to implement Nigeria's ECE policy; yet their voices, perceptions, and experiences of the system are important. They could provide further valuable insights into the services' delivery. While this group of stakeholders was beyond the scope of this study, the data generated met my research objectives; omitting them means their views may remain an area for future research.

The status of some of the proposed participants and their attitude towards the data collection process, particularly providing verbal information to an outsider, constitute limitations. Some participants, especially government officials, were reluctant to discuss or provide detailed information on some aspects of the ECE system, notably funding, due to the sensitive nature of the research (i.e., policy-related). This might have been due to fear of jeopardising their status because they are political appointees. Therefore, some of their answers might be biased. Despite its limitations, this study adds to the understanding of the ECE system in the contexts studied.

The theoretical perspectives, i.e., systems theory and postcolonial theory, selected for this study, have proven useful. They have helped me, as a conceptual and critical lens,

to shape this research and interpret the ECE system. Kagan's systems theory of change served to provide insights into and helped me to analyse the core elements of the ECE system. While helping to analyse Nigerian ECE as a system, it does not go so far as to provide a critical in-depth understanding of the system's development and why some core elements are very problematic. Postcolonial theory did this, for example with regard to the funding issues and the gap, or the fit, between the policy and its implementation in the Nigerian context, which are complex. Hence, the two theories complement each other. This shows that Kagan's systems theory is easily transferrable and adaptable depending on the context within which it is being used.

Postcolonial theory has supported me in developing a critical perspective on my positionality. It helped me to manage my position by looking at the Nigerian ECE system not through the lens of the British system that I am familiar with, but through the struggles of the colonised. It proved useful as my critical friend in the course of writing this thesis. Both theories gave visibility to the operation, history, and some of the tensions within the ECE system. They assisted in the understanding of the 'fit' between the ECE policy designed at the national level and the reality of its implementation at the state and local levels from participants' experiences and perceptions.

9.4 Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Some participants recognised a significant improvement in the enrolment rate for ECE due to its inclusion in public settings for 3–5-year-olds. However, this study's findings call for prompt action to bridge the gaps between policy and practice.

Alignment of the Policy and Legislative Framework

This study revealed problematic issues or lack of clarity with the policy and the legislative framework regarding the ECE entitlement. Therefore, a key policy priority should be to evaluate the *2004 UBE Act* and *2013 NPE* in relation to the local needs. This can be done by bringing the *2004 UBE Act* in line with the policy guidance, NPE. In areas where there are discrepancies, there needs to be an alignment. Once that is achieved, it would be beneficial if the policy was vigorously implemented by those responsible for implementation. Since the state governments are tasked with implementing UBE programmes, they must ensure accountability for and monitoring of ECE policy implementation. This is very important so that implementers have a

consensus on plans for effective implementation, as noted by Sabatier (1986) and Viennet and Pont (2017).

Involvement of Stakeholders in Policy Planning and Implementation

This study revealed stakeholders' understanding of ECE policy and the SDG 4.2 agenda to be fragmentary. Therefore, in line with the view of Hogwood and Gunn (1984) on public policy, this study recommends that the national, state, and local governments make greater efforts to determine and ensure a shared understanding of the ECE policy goals, guidelines, and targets among all stakeholders to prevent multiple interpretations and ensure a coordinated and coherent implementation process. This requires creating knowledge of the policy content through adequate training to actively participate in the implementation process and support quality service delivery. These approaches could help to unify effective policy implementation. To achieve the SDG 4.2 agenda, the national government, in collaboration with international organisations, must ensure that all stakeholders at the state and local levels are adequately informed and trained on the aspirational goals.

This study also showed the non-involvement of stakeholders at the local level, particularly in local government and the private sector, in planning ECE programmes. The top-down approach to policy employed by the national government in delivering ECE is challenging. It fails to recognise and accommodate the perspectives of the various stakeholders involved, particularly at the local level, in the ECE policy implementation process. Consistent with the literature (Bolaji, Campbell-Evans and Gray, 2016; Bolaji, Gray and Campbell-Evans, 2015), amending the constitution and reducing political influence over government institutions could be a reasonable approach to tackle this issue. This could shift control of administrative procedures to the local government. Hence, this study recommends that greater local government autonomy might be necessary to handle local community needs. This would benefit local ECE services rather than interventions being based on the states' agenda.

It might also be necessary for the government to adopt an inclusive approach that directly engages all stakeholders' participation, particularly at the local level, in planning and programme delivery through coordination of different actors in the public and private sectors. In line with Ekine and Olaniyan's views (2019), a wider

consultation at governmental and non-governmental levels is vital to achieving quality ECE outcomes.

Improve Quality through an Alternative Funding Allocation System

Although progress has been made with introducing ECE provision in public schools, the poor state of ECE physical facilities and resources, particularly in all three public settings studied, requires urgent attention. This poor condition suggests that the nature of the funding allocation system and the absence of accountability mechanisms are obstacles to achieving the desired outcomes for children in the three states studied. Consistent with the literature (Anibueze and Okwo, 2013) on UBE policy implementation, this study recommends that the national government consider alternative means for allocating ECE funds instead of the matching funding mechanisms with no conditions attached to ensure sustainability. The funding allocation should also consider each state's needs and the number of children to ensure an equitable distribution. Therefore, there is a definite need for national, state, and local governments' inputs into ECE management and finance. The local governments must be given an active administrative role in funding because they are closer to the grassroots, as Taofik (2020) highlighted. This calls for implementing strict monitoring and accountability measures alongside eradicating any alleged corruption to ensure that funds are channelled where required for improved service delivery. Again, this will require programme evaluation and the participation of various stakeholders.

Consistent with the literature (Alabi and Ijaiya, 2014; Ogunode, Jegede, and Ajape, 2021; Ogunyinka, 2013; Olubor and Inua, 2015), an increased budgetary allocation should also be made available to improve the quality of ECE services. This could help achieve the desired outcomes for all children, including the disadvantaged, in the three states studied. Moreover, the dominance of the private sector should be recognised: government subsidies for the private sector could provide more funds, possibly reducing their fees and making their provision more accessible to children of low-income families. A public–private partnership might be a way of bringing this into the system without allowing government subsidies to be exploited.

Workforce Development

The *2013 NPE* acknowledged the importance of qualified teachers to education policy implementation. This agrees with a UNICEF report (2020) highlighting the importance of a qualified workforce and professional development in delivering high-quality ECE. Yet, only one out of twenty-two practitioners in my study was qualified in ECE. My study also showed inconsistencies in practitioners' professional development and working conditions, including remuneration. There is an apparent need for the government and private providers to improve practitioners' welfare and boost the status and professionalisation of the ECE workforce to ensure their competence and commitment to their roles. It is recommended that the state and local governments address the provision of in-service training for practitioners in public and private settings.

Public–private partnerships in ECE provision may be valuable to improve practices. The state and local governments should ensure these partnerships open doors for collaborative training among providers and practitioners to provide a unified professional development. This collaboration could provide the platform for informing practices that work best in a particular context. Moreover, the national government should ensure that ECE teacher education is directed towards the play-based approach stated in the policy for appropriate pedagogy in ECE.

Consistent with the literature (Akinrotimi and Olowe, 2016; Alabi and Ijaiya, 2014; Sani, Ibrahim and Saidu, 2017; Taofik, 2020), this study recommends a government financial allocation to ECE teacher training institutions. This research finding also points to the need for prioritising initial teacher training programmes in ECE, with increased entry requirements in tertiary institutions to encourage professionalisation and promote quality service delivery. All these measures will be necessary for strengthening the Nigerian ECE system if the hope of achieving its goals and positive systemic outcomes is to become a reality.

9.5 Suggestions for Further Research

While my study may have illuminated the complexities involved in implementing ECE provision for 3–5-year-old children, further studies incorporating parents' and children's views concerning the programme implementation will extend knowledge of

the ECE system in Nigeria. This could help provide visibility to all voices, the policymakers', implementers', and service-users'.

It would be interesting to compare ECE policy implementation in the three states studied with that in other states in Nigeria, for example, the northern region, to see if the issues encountered there are similar or not. Although the current study included only a small sample of private-for-profit ECE provision, my findings suggest that private provision is dominant across the three states studied. The literature review also reflects such dominance in the ECE system. Further research will also need to examine more closely the relationship between private and public ECE provision to better understand how the private sector is positioned and its roles within the system.

The main concern in this study is inadequacies in the funding allocation system. More data on this aspect would help establish a more comprehensive understanding of the matter. This could also be relevant for helping to raise awareness of the need for more funding for ECE services in the three states studied. Another possible area for future research might be to further explore workforce development in relation to the qualifications, professional development, and conditions of service of practitioners. Further research in these areas might help improve future funding and development of the ECE workforce. Given the limited sample size of the NGO, my study did not have a range of views from different international organisations on their roles in ECE implementation and the achievement of SDG 4.2 in Nigeria. This could be a potential area for future research.

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Appendix A: Sampling Breakdown

Table 1: Sampling Frame Breakdown

States	Government officials (national level)	Government officials (state level)	Government officials (local level)	NGO	Heads of Urban ECE Settings (local level)	Heads of Rural ECE Settings (local level)	ECE Practitioners (urban) (local level)	ECE Practitioners (rural) (local level)
State 1	1	1	One in each state		2	1 each in any of 2 of the 3 states	6	2 each in any of 2 of the 3 states (Same state where the Head of ECE is Interviewed
Sate 2	1	1			2		6	
State 3		1			2		6	
Total	2	3	3	1	6	2	18	4

Table 2 (In-principle agreement to participate in research and pilot study)

	National officials	State officials	Local officials	Urban ECE settings	Rural ECE settings
State 1	1	1	1	2	1
State 2	1	1	1	2	1
State 3	NA	1	1	2	NA
NGO	1				
Pilot Study			1	1	

Total gatekeepers -- 19

Total approval -- 19

Approval Letter for ECE Heads

University of East London

Cass School of Education and Communities

Water Lane

Stratford

London E15 4LZ, England, United Kingdom.

10 April 2018

Address of setting

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am a doctoral student at the University of East London in the field of Early Childhood Studies and I am in the process of writing my doctoral thesis. I would like to ask your permission to allow me to conduct research in your school in February/March 2019. This is in view of my thesis, entitled, "**Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Nigeria: A system analysis of policy in national and local contexts".** If granted**,** I will be conducting a semi-structured face-to-face-one-to-one interview. This will be with the head of school and practitioners (teachers) working in pre-primary education section for 3-5 years old (Kindergarten).

The interview will last for about 45 mins to one hour approximately and would be arranged at a time convenient for the school in your vicinity. Participation in the interview is entirely voluntary and there are no known or anticipated risks to participation in this study. All information provided will be kept in utmost confidentiality and would be used only for academic purposes. The names of the participants and name of school will not appear in any of the thesis or publications resulting from this

study unless agreed to. After the data have been analysed, you will receive a copy of the executive summary/report.

If you agree, please kindly sign below acknowledging your consent and permission for me to conduct this study at your school. Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. Details about the research and consent forms for volunteered participants will be provided to you prior to the start of the research. Thank you in advance for your interest and assistance with this research. If you have any queries or concerns regarding the conduct of this research/researcher and the nature of the research in which you are being asked to provide access of approval for, please contact:

The Researcher

Mrs Adejoke Ogunkoya Email: u1438876@uel.ac.uk

The Research Supervisors:

Prof. Eva Lloyd **e.lloyd@uel.ac.uk**

Dr. Jennifer Robson J.Robson@uel.ac.uk

Director of Studies:

Prof. Gerry Czerniawski g.czerniawski@uel.ac.uk

Research Integrity and Ethics Manager:

Catherine Fieulleteau, The Graduate School, Docklands Campus, University of East London, London, E16 2RD (Telephone 0208 223 6683 researchethics@uel.ac.uk)

Sincerely,

Adejoke Ogunkoya

Approved by:

_____

_____

Printed name and title

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Approval Letter for Government Officials

University of East London

Cass School of Education and Communities

Water Lane

Stratford

London E15 4LZ, England, United Kingdom.

10 April 2018

Address of setting

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am a doctoral student at the University of East London in the field of Early Childhood Studies and I am in the process of writing my doctoral thesis. I would like to ask your permission to allow me to conduct research in your department in February/March 2019. This is in view of my thesis, entitled, "**Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Nigeria: A system analysis of policy in national and local contexts".** If granted**,** I will be conducting a semi-structured face-to-face-one-to-one interview. This will be with the national/state/local officials, and the interview will be about 3-5 years old pre-primary education.

The interview will last for about 45mins to one hour approximately and would be arranged at a time convenient for the director in your vicinity. Participation in the interview is entirely voluntary and there are no known or anticipated risks to participation in this study. All information provided will be kept in utmost confidentiality and would be used only for academic purposes. The name of the participant and the department will not appear in any of the thesis or publications resulting from this study unless agreed to. After the data have been analysed, you will receive a copy of the

executive summary/report. In connection with this, we would like to ask your office to allow us to use some documents as one of the references.

If you agree, please kindly sign below acknowledging your consent and permission for me to conduct this study at your premises. Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. Details about the research consent forms for volunteered participants will be provided to you prior to the start of the research. Thank you in advance for your interest and assistance with this research. If you have any queries or concerns regarding the conduct of this research/researcher and the nature of the research in which you are being asked to provide access of approval for, please contact:

The Researcher

Mrs Adejoke Ogunkoya Email: u1438876@uel.ac.uk

The Research Supervisors:

Prof. Eva Lloyd **e.lloyd@uel.ac.uk**

Dr. Jennifer Robson J.Robson@uel.ac.uk

Director of Studies:

Prof. Gerry Czerniawski g.czerniawski@uel.ac.uk

Research Integrity and Ethics Manager:

Catherine Fieulleteau, The Graduate School, Docklands Campus, University of East London, London, E16 2RD (Telephone 0208 223 6683 researchethics@uel.ac.uk)

Sincerely,

Adejoke

Approved by:

_____

_____

Printed name and title

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Approval Letter for NGO Staff

University of East London

Cass School of Education and Communities

Water Lane

Stratford

London E15 4LZ, England, United Kingdom.

10 April 2018

Address of setting

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am a doctoral student at the University of East London in the field of Early Childhood Studies and I am in the process of writing my doctoral thesis. I would like to ask your permission to allow me to conduct research in your organization February/March 2019. This is in view of my thesis, entitled, "**Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Nigeria: A system analysis of policy in national and local contexts".** If granted**,** I will be conducting a semi-structured face-to-face-one-to-one interview with any nominated staff working in Early Childhood Education with regards to the role of UNICEF in Universal Basic Education for 3-5 years old.

The interview will last for about 45mins to one hour approximately and would be arranged at a time convenient for the participant in your vicinity. Participation in the interview is entirely voluntary and there are no known or anticipated risks to participation in this study. All information provided will be kept in utmost confidentiality and would be used only for academic purposes. The name of the participant and name of the organisation will not appear in any of the thesis or publications resulting from this study unless agreed to. After the data have been analysed, you will receive a copy

of the executive summary/report. In connection with this, we would like to ask your office to allow us to use some documents as one of the references.

If you agree, please kindly sign below acknowledging your consent and permission for me to conduct this study at your school. Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. Details about the research consent forms for volunteered participants will be provided to you prior to the start of the research. Thank you in advance for your interest and assistance with this research. If you have any queries or concerns regarding the conduct of this research/researcher and the nature of the research in which you are being asked to provide access of approval for, please contact:

The Researcher

Mrs Adejoke Ogunkoya Email: u1438876@uel.ac.uk

The Research Supervisors:

Prof. Eva Lloyd **e.lloyd@uel.ac.uk**

Dr. Jennifer Robson J.Robson@uel.ac.uk

Director of Studies:

Prof. Gerry Czerniawski g.czerniawski@uel.ac.uk

Research Integrity and Ethics Manager:

Catherine Fieulleteau, The Graduate School, Docklands Campus, University of East London, London, E16 2RD (Telephone 0208 223 6683 researchethics@uel.ac.uk)

Sincerely,

Adejoke

Approved by:

_____

_____

Printed name and title

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Permission to Conduct Research Study with ECE Practitioners

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

Head of School

Address

Date

RE: Permission to Conduct PhD Research Study with Early Education Practitioners

Dear Ma/Sir,

I am writing to request permission to conduct a PhD research study with the early education teachers at your setting. I am a PhD student in Early Childhood Studies at the University of East London and am in the process of writing my Doctoral Thesis. The study is entitled **Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Nigeria: A system analysis of policy in national and local contexts.**

I hope that the school administration will allow me to recruit two (2) early childhood education teachers/practitioners from the school to anonymously participate in interviews involving different stakeholders in the early childhood education system in Nigeria. Interested practitioners, who volunteer to participate, will be given a consent form to sign (copy enclosed) and returned to the primary researcher at the beginning of the interview process.

If approval is granted, practitioners participants will be interviewed by the researcher involve in the Study from the University of East London. The interview will be conducted in _____ 2019 on the school site. Participants will get to look at the topic guides in advance of the interview. The interview will last approximately 45 minutes to one-hour semi-structured-one-to-one-face-to-face-interview with the inclusion of open-ended questions at your premises at your convenient time. The interview will be audio recorded and will later be transcribed. If you prefer not to be audio recorded, notes can also be taken. The results of the study will be pooled for the thesis project and will remain absolutely confidential and anonymous and participants'

identity and privacy will be respected. Participants and the school in which the interview will take place will be allocated a pseudonym. Should this study be published, only pooled results will be documented. No costs will be incurred by either your school or the individual participants.

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. I will follow up with a telephone call next week and would be happy to answer any questions or concerns that you may have at that time. You may contact me at my email address: u1438876@uel.ac.uk Or please contact:

Research Integrity and Ethics Manager:

Catherine Fieulleteau, The Graduate School, Docklands Campus, University of East London, London, E16 2RD (Telephone 0208 223 6683 researchethics@uel.ac.uk)

 The Director of Studies:

Prof. Gerry Czerniawski

Email: g.czerniawski@uel.ac.uk

Project Supervisors:

Prof. Eva Lloyd **e.lloyd@uel.ac.uk**

Dr. Jennifer Robson J.Robson@uel.ac.uk

 If you agree, kindly sign below and return the signed form in the enclosed self-addressed envelope. Alternatively, kindly submit a signed letter of permission on your school's letterhead acknowledging your consent and permission for me to conduct this study/interview at your setting.

Sincerely,

Adejoke Ogunkoya (Mrs)

Approval Letter for Pilot Study with Local Government Official

University of East London

Cass School of Education and Communities

Water Lane

Stratford

London E15 4LZ, England, United Kingdom.

10 April 2018

Address of setting

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am a doctoral student at the University of East London in the field of Early Childhood Studies and I am in the process of writing my doctoral thesis. I would like to ask your permission to allow me to conduct a pilot study for my research in your Local Government Education Authority (LGEA) in February 2019. This is in view of my thesis, entitled, "**Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Nigeria: A system analysis of policy in national and local contexts".** If granted**,** I will be conducting a semi-structured face-to-face-one-to-one interview. This will be with the head of the LGEA and the interview will be about pre-primary education for 3-5 years olds.

The interview will last for about 45mins to one hour approximately and would be arranged at a time convenient for the head of LGEA in your vicinity. Participation in the interview is entirely voluntary and there are no known or anticipated risks to participation in this study. All information provided will be kept in utmost confidentiality and would be used only for academic purposes. The name of the participant and the department will not appear in any of the thesis or publications resulting from this study unless agreed to.

If you agree, please kindly sign below acknowledging your consent and permission for me to conduct this pilot study at your premises. Your approval to conduct this pilot study will be greatly appreciated. Details about the research consent forms for volunteered participants will be provided to you prior to the start of the pilot study. Thank you in advance for your interest and assistance with this research. If you have any queries or concerns regarding the conduct of this pilot study/researcher and the nature of the research in which you are being asked to provide access of approval for, please contact:

The Researcher

Mrs Adejoke Ogunkoya Email: u1438876@uel.ac.uk

The Research Supervisors:

Prof. Eva Lloyd **e.lloyd@uel.ac.uk**

Dr. Jennifer Robson J.Robson@uel.ac.uk

Director of Studies:

Prof. Gerry Czerniawski g.czerniawski@uel.ac.uk

Research Integrity and Ethics Manager:

Catherine Fieulleteau, The Graduate School, Docklands Campus, University of East London, London, E16 2RD (Telephone 0208 223 6683 researchethics@uel.ac.uk)

Sincerely,

Adejoke

Approved by:

_____

_____

Printed name and title

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Approval Letter for Pilot Study with ECE Headteacher and Practitioners

University of East London

Cass School of Education and Communities

Water Lane

Stratford

London E15 4LZ, England, United Kingdom.

10 April 2018

Address of setting

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am a doctoral student at the University of East London in the field of Early Childhood Studies and I am in the process of writing my doctoral thesis. I would like to ask your permission to allow me to conduct a pilot study for my research in your school in February 2019. This is in view of my thesis, entitled, "**Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Nigeria: A system analysis of policy in national and local contexts".** If granted**,** I will be conducting a semi-structured face-to-face-one-to-one interview. This will be with the head of school and practitioners (teachers) working in pre-primary education section for 3-5 years old (Kindergarten).

The interview will last for about 45mins to one hour approximately and would be arranged at a time convenient for the school in your vicinity. Participation in the interview is entirely voluntary and there are no known or anticipated risks to participation in this study. All information provided will be kept in utmost confidentiality and would be used only for academic purposes. The names of the participants and name of school will not appear in any of the thesis or publications resulting from this study unless agreed to.

If you agree, please kindly sign below acknowledging your consent and permission for me to conduct this pilot study at your school. Your approval to conduct this pilot study

will be greatly appreciated. Details about the research and consent forms for volunteered participants will be provided to you prior to the start of the pilot study. Thank you in advance for your interest and assistance with this research. If you have any queries or concerns regarding the conduct of this pilot study/researcher and the nature of the research in which you are being asked to provide access of approval for, please contact:

The Researcher

Mrs Adejoke Ogunkoya Email: u1438876@uel.ac.uk

The Research Supervisors:

Prof. Eva Lloyd **e.lloyd@uel.ac.uk**

Dr. Jennifer Robson J.Robson@uel.ac.uk

Director of Studies:

Prof. Gerry Czerniawski g.czerniawski@uel.ac.uk

Research Integrity and Ethics Manager:

Catherine Fieulleteau, The Graduate School, Docklands Campus, University of East London, London, E16 2RD (Telephone 0208 223 6683 researchethics@uel.ac.uk)

Sincerely,

Adejoke Ogunkoya

Approved by:

_____

_____

Printed name and title

Signature: _____

Date: _____

University of East London

Cass School of Education and Communities

Water Lane, Stratford

London E15 4LZ, England, United Kingdom

Participant Information Sheet

Research integrity

The University adheres to its responsibility to promote and support the highest standard of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research; observing the appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks.

The university is committed to preserving your dignity, rights, safety and wellbeing and as such it is a requirement of the University that formal ethical approval, from the appropriate Research Ethics Committee, is granted before research with human participants or human data commences.

Principal Investigator

Adejoke Ogunkoya   u1438876@uel.ac.uk

Director of Studies

Prof. Gerry Czerniawski g.czerniawski@uel.ac.uk

Research Supervisors

Prof. Eva Lloyd **e.lloyd@uel.ac.uk**

Dr. Jennifer Robson J.Robson@uel.ac.uk

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the information that you need to consider in deciding whether to participate in this study.

Project Title

Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Nigeria: A system analysis of policy in national and local contexts.

Project Description

The propose PhD research seeks to explore the early childhood education (ECE) as a system and specifically the impact of early childhood education policy at different levels within this system in Nigeria by focusing mainly on the Universal Basic Education (UBE) for 3-5 years old.

Aims of the Research

The propose study poses three research questions:

1. How do stakeholders interpret and mediate ECE policy at national, state and local level?
2. How has ECE developed as a system?
3. What are the inhibiting/facilitating factors that may facilitate the provision of early childhood education in Nigeria?

Methodology and Methods

Subject to your agreement to take part in this PhD research an interview schedule will be administered to you in your setting/ premises. The interview will present questions relating to your views and experiences of early childhood education policy and its implementation within the system in Nigeria. The interview will last approximately 45 minutes to one-hour and participants will get to look at the topic guides in advance of the interview. These interviews will be audio-recorded, however, if you prefer not to be audio recorded, notes can also be taken. I should like to interview you in _____ 2019 and your consent will be required in order for you to be able to participate.

Confidentiality and Anonymity of the Data

Names of participants and setting/institution in which the interviews will take place will be kept confidential and anonymous and participants' privacy will be respected. Hence, I will ensure that participants and institution/ setting in which interview will take place will be allocated a pseudonym. However, because of the small size of the sample this may have implications for confidentiality/anonymity in this study.

Data Protection

All data will be treated in a confidential manner and will ensure anonymity of individual participants. Although, the confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations. All data generated in the course of the research will be retained in accordance with the University's Data Protection Policy. Data will be stored electronically, and password protected with access only to the researcher. Once the programme has been completed, in accordance with the University's Records Retention Schedule, the minimum retention period for research data and record is three years after publication of the work of the research. After the agreed period of retention, research data and records are to be destroyed in accordance with all legal, ethical, research funder and collaborator requirements with regards to confidentiality and security.

Ethics

This PhD project has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee of the University of East London.

Limits to Confidentiality:

Limitations to confidentiality may apply where disclosure is made that indicates that the participant or someone else is at serious risk of harm. Such disclosures may be reported to relevant authority.

Disclaimer

Your participation is entirely voluntary and are free to withdraw at any time during the research. Should you choose to withdraw from the programme you may do so without disadvantage to yourself and without an obligation to give a reason. Please note that your data can be withdrawn up to the point of data analysis-after this point it may not be possible.

Dissemination

The research findings will be published in the form of a doctoral thesis. It is also intended to provide a brief report of findings to participants.

University Research Ethics Committee

If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of the research in which you are being asked to participate, please contact:

Catherine Fieulleteau, Research Integrity and Ethics Manager, Graduate School, EB 1.43 University of East London, Docklands Campus, London, E16 2RD (Telephone 0208 223 6683, Email: researchethics@uel.ac.uk**)**

For general enquiries about the research please contact the Principal Investigator on the contact details at the top of this sheet.

Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

Consent to Participate in a Programme Involving the Use of Human Participants.

Title of PhD project: Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Nigeria: A system analysis of policy in national and local contexts.

Doctoral Researcher: Adejoke Adewale Ogunkoya

Please tick as appropriate:

	YES	NO
I have read the information leaflet relating to the above programme of research in which I have been asked to participate and have been given a copy to keep. The nature and purposes of the research have been explained to me and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what is being proposed and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me.		
I give permission for interview to be audio recorded and anonymised quotes will be used in PhD thesis. (Please confirm by consent)		
I understand that my involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential as far as possible. Only the researchers involved in the study will have access to the data. (Please see below)		
I understand that maintaining strict confidentiality is subject to the following limitations: If sample size is small, this may have implications for confidentiality/anonymity; Where possible, participants' confidentiality will be maintained unless a disclosure is made that indicates that the participant or someone else is at serious risk of harm. Such disclosures may be reported to the relevant authority.		
I understand that anonymised quotes will be used in publications.		

I understand that I have the option to be named in publications		
I understand that data gathered in this project may form the basis of a thesis/report or other form of academic publications or presentation.		
It has been explained to me what will happen once the programme has been completed.		
I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and I am free to withdraw at any time during the research without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason. I understand that my data can be withdrawn up to the point of data analysis and that after this point it may not be possible.		
I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in this study which has been fully explained to me and for the information obtained to be used in relevant research publications.		

Participant's   Name   (BLOCK   CAPITALS)
………………………………………………………….

Participant's   Signature
…………………………………………………………………………..

Investigator's   Name   (BLOCK   CAPITALS)
………………………………………………………..

Investigator's   Signature
……………………………………………………………………………

Date: …………………….

Appendix E: Interview Guide

Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Nigeria: A system analysis of policy in national and local contexts.

Contact Details: Adejoke Ogunkoya at <u>u1438876@uel.ac.uk</u>

<u>**Interview Guide for National and State Government officials**</u>

Interview schedule (approximately one hour)

1. **Background information on the interviewee.**
   - Can you please introduce yourself, your roles/responsibilities and how long you have been in post?

2. **Explore how stakeholders interpret and mediate the ECE policy.**
   - From your perspective what is Universal Basic Education and how is it implemented?

3. **Explore/identify multiple influences on ECE policy in Nigeria or how ECE has developed as a system.**
   - Can you please tell me which different levels of government you work with as part of the process of UBE to ensure the implementation of the UBE scheme? (as well as organisations/agencies). How do you work together?
   - How do you monitor enrolment in pre-primary education?
   - Could you share detailed examples of what type of supports are in place for the implementation of the ECE policy and the establishment of ECE services? (funding, teacher training programmes, curriculum and resources)
   - From your perspectives what are the roles of the international agencies/NGOs, e.g. UNICEF in the provision/implementation of pre-primary education in Nigeria?

4. **Identify enabling and inhibiting factors that may affect the provision of ECE in Nigeria.**
   - What do you consider to be the challenges in implementing the UBE policy and the provision of ECE at the level you operate?
   - In your opinion what do you think might facilitate/enhance the provision of ECE at your level?

5. **Anything else that the interviewee feels has been missed and anything that they did not get the chance to discuss fully.**

End of interview- thank you.

Interview Guide for Local Government officials

Interview schedule (approximately one hour)

1. **Background information on the interviewee.**
   - Can you please tell me about your roles/responsibilities and how long you have been in post?

2. **Explore how stakeholders interpret and mediate the ECE policy.**
   - From your perspective what is Universal Basic Education and how is it implemented?

3. **Explore/identify multiple influences on ECE policy at the local level or how ECE has developed as a system.**
   - Can you please tell me which different levels of government you work with as part of the process of UBE to ensure the implementation of the UBE scheme? (as well as organisations/agencies). How do you work together?
   - How do you monitor enrolment in pre-primary education?
   - Given that you are closer to the ECE settings, how would you describe your relationship with the ECE settings?
   - Could you share detailed examples of what type of supports are in place for the implementation of the ECE policy and the establishment of ECE services? (funding, teacher training programmes, curriculum and resources)
   - Can you please tell me about the roles of the international agencies/NGOs, e.g. UNICEF in the provision/implementation of pre-primary education at the local level?

4. **Identify enabling and inhibiting factors that may affect the provision of ECE in Nigeria.**
   - What do you consider to be the challenges in implementing the UBE policy and the provision of ECE at the local level?

- In your opinion what do you think might facilitate/enhance the provision of ECE at the local level?

5. **Anything else that the interviewee feels has been missed and anything that they did not get the chance to discuss fully.**

End of interview- thank you.

<u>Interview Guide for NGO official/staff</u>

Interview schedule (approximately one hour)

1. **Background information on the interviewee.**
   - Can you please tell me a bit about yourself, your roles/responsibilities and how long you have been in this post?

2. **Explore how stakeholders interpret and mediate the ECE policy**
   - From your perspective what is Universal Basic Education and how is it implemented?

3. **Explore/identify multiple influences on ECE policy in Nigeria or how ECE has developed as a system.**
   - Please tell me more about your scale of operation within the Nigeria education system? Who do you work with and please tell me how this works?
   - Have you undertaken analysis or research on ECE in Nigeria? What data has informed your work?
   - From your perspective what progress is being made in the implementation of the UN 2030 Sustainable?
   - Could you please tell me the kind of support your organisation is providing towards the achievement of these goals?
   - From your perspective, what do you think about the local attitudes towards the uptake of global ideas about early childhood education among parents, policymakers and practitioners?

4. **Identify enabling and inhibiting factors that may affect the provision of ECE in Nigeria.**
   - In your opinion what do you think might facilitate/enhance the provision of ECE at the local and state levels?

5. **Anything else that the interviewee feels has been missed and anything that they did not get the chance to discuss fully.**

End of interview- thank you.

Interview Guide for ECE Heads

Interview schedule (approximately 45mins to one hour)

1. **Background information on the interviewee.**
   - Can you please briefly tell me about yourself, your roles/responsibilities and how long you have been in this post?
2. **Explore how stakeholders interpret and mediate the ECE policy**
   - What is UBE? How is this implemented in your setting?
   - How are the curriculum guidelines and materials disseminated to your setting? How do you implement them? Do you think this has helped in the delivery of the ECE services in your setting?
   - Could you share with me the practice of enrolment?
3. **Explore/identify multiple influences on ECE policy in local context or how ECE has developed as a system.**
   - Could you share examples of supports that are available for the establishment within the educational departments in the delivery of early education in your setting?
   - Please tell me about how your setting is monitored and when does this happen?
   - Could you share your views about the teacher education programmes, training and development opportunities for teachers in your setting?
   - Could you please share your experiences and views with regards to the development of ECE?
4. **Identify enabling and inhibiting factors that may affect the provision of ECE at the local level.**
   - What do you consider to be the challenges facing settings in implementing the UBE policy and the provision of ECE at the local level?
   - In your opinion what do you think might facilitate/enhance the provision of ECE at the local level?

5. **Anything else that the interviewee feels has been missed and anything that they did not get the chance to discuss fully.**

End of interview- thank you.

<u>Interview Guide for ECE Practitioners</u>

Interview schedule (approximately 45mins to one hour)

1. **Background information on the interviewee.**
   - Can you please tell me a little bit about yourself, roles/responsibilities and how long you have been in this post?
   - Could you tell me your initial training received for this role? E.g. teacher training and where?

2. **Explore how stakeholders interpret the ECE policy.**
   - From your perspective what does Universal Basic Education mean? How does it work for this setting especially for the practitioner's group?
   - Can you share the proportion of children in the area/community that can and do access this provision?
   - Do you have a curriculum? If yes, could you share examples of how it has helped in the delivery of the ECE services in your setting?

3. **Explore/identify multiple influences on ECE policy in the local context or how ECE has developed as a system.**
   - How is your setting monitored? When does it happen?
   - Please tell me about the kind of support you get with regards to education training programmes opportunities as an individual?
   - Could you please share your experiences and views with regards to the development of ECE?

4. **Identify enabling and inhibiting factors that may affect the provision of ECE at the local level.**
   - What challenges do you face as practitioner in implementing the UBE policy and the provision of ECE at the local level?
   - In your opinion what do you think might facilitate/enhance the provision of ECE at the local level?

5. **Anything else that the interviewee feels has been missed and anything that they did not get the chance to discuss fully.**

Appendix F: Debriefing Letter

Debriefing Letter

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

Thank you for participating as a research participant in the present PhD study concerning your views and perspectives/ experiences in the early childhood education policy implementation in early childhood education system in Nigeria.

If you have any questions regarding this study or you feel the need to discuss thoughts or feelings brought about following your participation in the research, please feel free to ask the researcher at any time. Or please contact:

Research Integrity and Ethics Manager:

Catherine Fieulleteau, The Graduate School, Docklands Campus, University of East London, London, E16 2RD (Telephone 0208 223 6683 researchethics@uel.ac.uk)

The Director of Studies:

Prof. Gerry Czerniawski

Email: g.czerniawski@uel.ac.uk

Project Supervisors:

Prof. Eva Lloyd **e.lloyd@uel.ac.uk**

Dr. Jennifer Robson J.Robson@uel.ac.uk

Feedbacks on the research will be presented to participants via a report.

Thanks again for your participation.

Sincerely,

Adejoke Ogunkoya

Appendix G: Interview Schedule

University of East London

Cass School of Education and Communities

Water Lane

Stratford

London E15 4LZ, England, United Kingdom.

January 2018

Address of setting

Interview Schedule

Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you for accepting to participate in this research. Follow on from the acceptance to conduct my PhD study in your setting/institution, the interview is scheduled to take place between February and April 2019. If you can please let me know when it is convenient for you, so I can allocate a slot for you within the period as specified above. Closer to the time for interview, information sheet will be given regarding the details of the study to participants. For general enquiries about the research please contact the Principal Investigator on the contact details below. Thank you once again for your approval to participate in my research.

Yours sincerely,

Adejoke Ogunkoya.

Principal Investigator

Adejoke Ogunkoya u1438876@uel.ac.uk

Appendix H: ECE settings Vignettes

Vignette 1 (JO-setting)

<u>Type of setting</u>

JO-school is a public primary school in an urban area of state 1 which is provided and funded by the state government. It delivers the provision of ECE year as well as childcare for working parents from ages 6-months to 5 years old. This setting refers to the provision of ECE as kindergarten.

<u>The provision of UBE pre-primary year</u>

JO-setting offers provision that caters for the delivery of pre-primary education for the 3–5 years old before the start of primary school. The head-teacher told me that the pre-primary education for this age group in the setting is free. The head-teacher also said that generally the age for pre-primary education is 3–5 years. However, they admit some 2 years old into the ECE classes. I was shown around the ECE setting by one of the practitioners. The practitioner and head-teacher of the setting said the families pay minute money that covers some miscellaneous. These include, uniforms, exam, some instructional and learning materials (e.g., number and letter books). This payment is from an association known as the parents, teachers' association (PTA). The practitioner told me that the PTA money is mandatory, and money raised is used to fund the provision of instructional materials and toiletry the setting.

The practitioner mentioned that the challenges facing the setting are between the government and the school administrators. These issues, according to the practitioner, are mainly about funding constraints and release of allocation of resources to the school. She added that sometimes, resources/materials necessary for the effective delivery of ECE services provided by the state government are inadequate, therefore money raised from the PTA is used to cover these inadequacies. Furthermore, the headteacher mentioned that although the state government funds the ECE for free because it is a state school. The setting does not get any direct fund (money) from the state government for projects rather they carry out the projects themselves (i.e., the state government). She stated that the state and local government only pay teacher salaries. The practitioner and the headteacher told me that the state government also provide homegrown food for free for the pre-primary year. Homegrown food is a feeding programme for pre-primary education children. The practitioner said when

there is a change in the present government administration, then another government that takes over may not have the vision of doing the free food.

Attendance pattern of children

All children enrolled in pre-primary education in JO-setting (i.e., the 3–5 years old) qualify for free ECE services for five days a week during term time. The setting is opened for ECE services from 7.30 am to 2 pm.

Descriptions of the environment

Classrooms

JO-setting has three classes in total for the pre-primary education section. These include two classrooms for the mixed age group for 2–5 years old and one classroom for the 4–5 years old. In the 2–5 years old classes, the pre-primary year (3–5-years) is not distinct or separated from the provision for the younger children (2 years old). The children were all together in the same classes. The practitioner told me that due to staff shortage and overcrowding in the 4–5 years old classroom, some 4–5 years are made to stay with the younger children (i.e., 2–5 years classes).

During lunchtime, when a practitioner showed me around, I observed some children wandering around in classrooms for 2–5 and 4–5 years old, while some were having their lunch unsupervised. Some children had their lunch on their laps due to non-availability of spaces for their lunch on the table. Each classroom had approximately 30 children with one teacher. Bags were scattered on the floor, and the floor was littered with rubbish from the children's meals.

Indoor environment

The indoor spaces for 2–5 and the 4–5 years old classes had children-sized plastic chairs, tables. The 2–5 years class also had two mats on the floor. The furniture (chairs and tables) in the classes were all cramped. The classrooms' walls were blank with just only the white-boards in each class without play activities. On the white-boards in each of these classrooms were written classwork/activities, such as counting of numbers (1-20), reading of letters (upper cases A–Z), health habits (materials for cleaning) and uses of water.

The practitioner showed me the teaching materials which were hand-drawn. These teaching materials were hung on the wall in the corner of one of the classes. According

to her, these teaching materials are resources used as instructional materials to teach the children.

Outdoor environment

The outward appearance of the school building looked structurally nice. It is fenced with a gate and a security man at the entrance. The outdoor environment has a mini playground with a slide, a seesaw, and a swing made of metal. This area was fenced with steel barb wires and covered with a canopy.

Staffing

Three practitioners work with kindergarten children (i.e., the 2–5 and 4–5 classes). The teacher–pupil ratio in each class was one teacher to approximately 25–30 children. One practitioner has a degree in French language education. One has a master's qualification in business education trained to teach in secondary school. Another practitioner qualifies in another discipline, which is not in education. Overall, none of the practitioners are specialised in ECE. The state government employed two of these teachers as N-power volunteers due to the high level of unemployment in the country. The N-power, according to the practitioners, is linked to the Federal government's policies in economic, employment, and social development. N-power is a national programme/scheme set out to engage unemployed Nigerian graduates.

The head of the setting mentioned that sometimes some of the pre-primary education teachers go for training or seminars relating to class management but not actual training on ECE. The headteacher told me that one of the practitioners went for a workshop organised by the state government on Jolly phonics early this year. According to the two practitioners employed as N-power volunteer, they have never been on any training, not even on the job training.

Curriculum

JO-setting uses the one-year pre-primary school education curriculum, which is the approved national curriculum. The curriculum is designed to prepare 5-year-olds and get them ready for schooling. The practitioner that showed me around said that this curriculum is used for all the children aged 2–5 years old.

Other ECE or ECEC services that the setting provides

JO-setting also provides ECEC or childcare services for children aged six months to 2 years old in crèche. The setting head told me that the provision for 6mths to 5 years is provided free by the state government because government school should be free. But the head-teacher and practitioners said provision for UBE pre-primary education is actually for 3–5 years old.

Vignette 2 (IV-setting)

Type of setting

IV-setting is a private nursery and primary school in an urban area of state-1 which is privately provided and funded (i.e., a sole proprietor). It delivers ECE and childcare services for the children of employed parents from birth to 5 years old. The provision of early childcare and education include crèche (0–2yrs), nursery(2–3yrs), and kindergarten(3–5yrs) before the start of primary school. The setting refers to the ECE provision as the kindergarten.

The provision of UBE pre-primary year

IV-setting offers provision that caters for the delivery of ECE for the 3–5 years old. The families in this setting pay fees to access the ECE services. The director and head-teacher of the setting showed me around, and the director said that the government does not provide support regarding the provision of pre-primary education in their setting. Instead, they pay varied taxes to the state government yearly, which she felt it is huge.

Attendance pattern of children

The children enrolled in the pre-primary education in IV-setting (i.e., 3–5 years old) do not qualify for free ECE because it is a private setting. Therefore, all families pay fees to access ECE services as the government does not provide any form of incentive to the setting. All the children attend the setting five days a week during term-time only. The daily ECE programme opens between the hour of 8 am and 2.30 pm daily.

Descriptions of the environment

Classroom

IV-setting has two pre-primary education classes. One for the 3–4 (Kindergarten1), another for the 4–5 years old (Kindergarten 2). The classrooms were separated with one teacher in each class.

Indoor Environment

The indoor spaces of each kindergarten class looked clean and neat. The classrooms spaces seem small, with approximately 13–15 children in each class. The classrooms had no play resources; just colourful plastic children-sized desks and chairs arranged in rows.

In the Kindergarten-1 class (i.e., 3–4 years), class activities were written on the white-board, such as positional language words, multiplication, and other learning words. The children were sitting in front of their desks busy completing the class task in their workbooks. The class teacher was seated at her table in the corner of the classroom. She was reading a book while waiting for the children to complete their lesson tasks.

Similarly, in KG2 (i.e., 4–5 years), all the children were sitting down with their heads down busy writing their lesson notes at their desks from the white-board. The class teacher was also sitting down in the corner, waiting for children to finish their class works. On the walls were picture posters, such as multiplication table, states and capitals in Nigeria, human body, colours, and classroom rules.

Outdoor Environment

The school was fenced with a gate and a security man at the entrance. The playground was at the entrance of the school. The playground has a playhouse with a slide, a seesaw, and a merry-go-round.

Staffing

Three practitioners work in the pre-primary year class (i.e., 3–5 years old). One of the practitioners has a Nigerian certificate in education (NCE) in early childhood studies and works with the 3–4 years old. Another practitioner is a graduate of Agric economics who claimed she had no experience/training in education. She mentioned that her job in the setting was her first teaching profession due to the problem of unemployment in the country. She works with the 4–5 years old. And another practitioner is a graduate of business administration, and she is the head of the department (HOD) for the nursery and kindergarten sections. She oversees the welfare of the children and reports to the director or the head of the school. In each classroom, the pupil to teacher ratio is 15:1.

Curriculum

The setting offers the Early years foundation stage (EYFS) curriculum, which is the UK set standards curriculum guidelines for children from birth to 5 years old. They also have the national one-year pre-primary school education designed for the 5 years old. According to the director of the setting, they rarely use the national pre-primary education curriculum. This is because they believe the curriculum is not practicable, but they have it for inspection purpose. From the practitioners' point of view, they combine both curriculums but use more of EYFS.

Other ECE or ECEC services that the setting provides

The setting also makes provision for childcare (i.e., from birth to 2 years old) which is the crèche. This childcare service is privately funded because families pay for the provision.

Vignette 3 (JE-setting)

Type of setting

JE-setting is a nursery and primary school in a rural area in state-1 which is privately provided and funded by an individual. The nursery section of the setting caters for ECE provision for working parents with children between the ages of 2 years and 5 years old. This setting refers to the provision of ECE as the nursery.

The provision of UBE pre-primary year

JE-setting offers ECE services that caters for children ages 3–5 years old before the start of primary education. Families pay fees to access the ECE services. According to the head-teacher, the setting does not get any support from the government because it is a private setting. Instead, they get taxed by the state government yearly. He added that it would be nice if the government can give them support with regards to the provision of facilities and resources because they are costly.

Attendance pattern of children

The children that are enrolled in the pre-primary education section of JE-setting from 3–5 years old attend the setting five days a week during term-time only. The ECE setting opens between the hours of 8 am and 2 pm daily.

Descriptions of the environment

Classrooms

The JE-setting has two ECE classes- nursery 1 (3–4) and nursery 2 (4–5) years old. Each class has one teacher.

Indoor Space

I was shown around the setting by the head-teacher and one of the practitioners. I observed that the nursery classes were demarcated by wood. The classes were not well lit except for the natural light coming from the doorway due to limited windows in the classes. As such, it was too dark to the extent that one of the teachers was using torchlight to read the children's work at her table.

The middle of the classrooms had an obstruction, such as poles. The classes appeared congested with approximately 36 children sitting on their benches and desks. Two children were sitting on each bench and desk arranged in rows, and one teacher was sitting in the corner end of each classroom. Some of the desks being used by the children were broken. Some children were sleeping with their heads on the desks. The classrooms' walls had no display (it was blank), no play activities/resources except for chalk and white-boards. Children were sitting in rows facing the white/chalk-board with letters and numbers written on the boards.

In the 3–4 years old class, I observed some children rote learning about "sources of water." In the corner was a shelve with children's packed lunches. Some of the ceilings were broken with exposed electric wires.

Outdoor Environment

The JE-setting is a two-storey building with a gatehouse and a security man at the entrance of the school premises. The outdoor space/playground is just an open space with no play equipment or facilities.

Staffing

Two teachers work in the nursery session. One teacher in each class with approximately 36 children in each classroom. The two teachers both have NCE qualifications. One practitioner has NCE in primary education while the other in accounting education. The two practitioners claimed that they are not specialised in early childhood education/studies.

Curriculum

JE-setting uses the national one-year pre-primary education curriculum in the delivery of ECE services for 3–5 years old. The practitioner that showed me around said the curriculum has helped in the preparation of teaching/learning plans for the children. The head-teacher mentioned that the curriculum is not free as they buy the curriculum from either the state government or the national headquarters in Abuja.

Other ECE or ECEC services that the setting provides

Other ECE services that the JE-setting provides includes ECE provision for the 2 years old, which is referred to as the pre-nursery. Families also pay fees for this ECE service.

Vignette 4 (BA-setting)

Type of setting

BA-school is a state funded public primary school in an urban area of state-3 which provides pre-primary education for children aged 2–5 years old in the kindergarten. BA-setting refers to the ECE provision as the kindergarten.

The provision of UBE pre-primary year

BA-setting offers the provision of ECE for children ages 3–5 years old, which the state government funds and provides for free. However, the head-teacher mentioned that parents pay PTA fees to cater for the needs of the children and teaching aids. The head-teacher said that PTA fees are agreed between the state government and parents. The PTA fees are fixed and mandatory. According to the head-teacher, the actual pre-primary age that the government singles out for free ECE is the 3–5 years old. However, the two years old children also get admitted in the kindergarten based on their stature and communication skills. The ECE provision is also provided free for the 2 years old. The headteacher said generally, the children are supposed to be 3 years old before they are admitted in the kindergarten.

Attendance pattern of children

BA-setting provides free ECE services for five days a week during term time only to all the 3–5 years old. The daily programme of the ECE operates from 7.30 am to 2 pm.

Descriptions of the environment

Classrooms

The pre-primary education section in BA-setting has only one class. Both the pre-primary year and the younger children of 2 years old were all together in a classroom. There were approximately 12 children altogether in the classroom (i.e., 2–5 years old). According to the head-teacher, the low number of children is due to incessant strike by public school teachers. As a result, most parents prefer to take their children to private schools.

Indoor environment

The indoor space of the kindergarten class had wooden child-sized tables and chairs with one child sitting at each table and chair. Some children had benches and desks which sit two children. Children were sitting in rows facing a black chalk-board. There was a teacher's desk at the back of the class and another on the side of the classroom. Children's bags and lunch boxes or bags were under the children's desks. Some children were wandering around the classroom, while some were playing near the stacked chairs stored at the back of the class. On the black chalkboard were written letters and numbers with chalk which teachers referred to as instructional materials. An example of such letters includes "Aa for apple", "Bb for ball", "Cc for cup", etc. I observed the children rote learning as a child was touching the chalkboard with a stick reciting letters on the chalkboard while others were repeating after her. The classroom had no play activities, and the wall was blank with no display. The back of the classroom had stacked tables, boxes, and stacked chairs.

Outdoor environment

The school compound had no fence and no reception; the school buildings looked old and dilapidated. Majority of the classrooms were empty and locked. According to the head-teacher, this is so because the buildings were old and needed renovation. The head-teacher said they were still waiting on the state government to revamp the school and to provide more resources and facilities necessary for the operation of the school including the ECE. She said the state-government are supposed to be providing the materials required for the delivery of the ECE services, but sometimes they do not. The compound and the ground of BA-setting had rocks outside the school. The playground is just an open space with no play equipment/tools or facilities.

Curriculum

It offers the approved national one-year pre-primary education curriculum designed to prepare 5-year-olds and get them ready for schooling. The same curriculum is used for all the children in the kindergarten (i.e., 2–5 years old).

Staffing

Three practitioners work in the pre-primary education section of BA-setting. However, during staff shortage one of the practitioners is used to cover administrative duties. The practitioners hold NCE in primary education studies, which is the minimum qualification for teachers, while one is currently studying for her bachelor's degree in primary education.

Other ECE or ECEC services that the setting provides

BA-setting caters for the two years old as well apart from ages singled out for the offer of free pre-primary education by the government, and the provision is free for them as well.

Vignette 5 (VA-setting)

Type of setting

VA-setting is an independent nursery and primary school in an urban area of state-3 which delivers childcare and ECE. It is privately funded by a sole proprietor. Early childhood education and care (ECEC) include provision for children from birth to 5-years-old. That is creche (0–2), reception (2–4), kindergarten (4–6), and the primary level. The VA-setting refers to the ECE provision as the reception and kindergarten.

The provision of UBE pre-primary year

VA-setting offers the provision of pre-primary education for the 3–5 years old. The ECE provision is not free as parents/families pay fees to be able to access the ECE services. The head-teacher told me that they do not get any support from the government for the provision of ECE services except for monitoring only.

Attendance pattern of children

The children enrolled in the pre-primary education in VA-setting access the ECE services in the setting five days a week during term-time only. The setting opens between the hours of 8 am and 2.30pm daily.

Descriptions of the environment

Classroom

VA-setting has six classes for the pre-primary education age groups, which they classify as reception 2 (3–4), Kindergarten 1 (4–5) and kindergarten 2 (5–6). Each class/group has separate classrooms and two arms each.

Indoor Environment

The kindergarten classes (4–6) had display board on the wall with some educational posters. The windows were covered with curtains and well lit. The classes had about 15 children-sized tables and chairs arranged in rows. The classes had pegs attached to the wall at children's level with children's bags hanging on. The classes had white-boards and projectors. In the corner of the classrooms were the teachers' desks. The classrooms had no play resources. It has a large Montessori room with Montessori apparatus. The 3–4 years old were in the Montessori room, with approximately 13 children sitting in a circle on the red carpet. A practitioner was with these children sitting in the circle while participating in Montessori activities together. The rest of the Montessori apparatus was set up on the tables around the classroom area.

Outdoor Environment

The school was fenced; it had school gate and security guards before entry into the school. The setting has a receptionist at the reception area. The outdoor space had a children's basketball court, an enclosed area with a playhouse, a slide, and swings. The enclosed area was covered with a canopy for shelter. The reception wall had the ground rules and children's work display, the school's vision, mission, and core values of the school.

Staffing

Six practitioners work in the reception and kindergarten classes. The following is the breakdown of their qualifications: B.Ed. in history; B.SC in social work and administration; a degree in accounting; and a NCE in economics. A practitioner had a BA in English language and a postgraduate diploma in education. Another practitioner had NCE qualification in English language/Christian religious studies and a degree in English.

Each classroom had a teacher with approximately 13–15 children. One of the teachers told me that the school had a system where teachers work in different classes every session. As such, they get used to teaching or handling a diverse age group of children.

Curriculum

The setting offers the Montessori and the national one-year pre-primary school education curriculum. According to the head-teacher, the setting has a problem in implementing the approved national curriculum because they felt it is limiting. From one of the practitioners' perceptions, the national curriculum is too simple to the extent that sometimes they had to use the curriculum intended for primary 1 and 2 for the kindergarten, particularly the 4–5 years. The practitioner said they only abide with the approved national curriculum so that when the inspectors come to monitor the school, they will have something to present. The head-teacher told me they buy the national curriculum; it is not free from the government.

Other ECE or ECEC services that the setting provides

Apart from the ECE services, the setting also delivers care services for children from birth to 2 years old. Fees are applicable for childcare services.

Vignette 6 (RU-setting)

Type of setting

RU-setting is a public primary school in the rural area of state-2 that provides pre-primary education for children aged 2–5 years old and primary education. The state government funds these educational services. RU-setting refers to the ECE provision as kindergarten and nursery.

The provision of UBE pre-primary year

RU-setting offers the provision of ECE for children ages 3–5 years old, which the state government funds and provides for free. The head-teacher said the two years old also get admitted into pre-primary education. The 2 years old benefit from the free pre-primary education funded by the state government. In the setting, the younger children (i.e., the 2 years old) are separated from the 3–5 years old classes. One of the practitioners that showed me around said that even though it is a government funded

school; at times, the school provide some materials with money from the PTA fund. These materials include toiletries and gloves necessary for the care of the children.

Attendance pattern of children

All the children enrolled in pre-primary education (i.e., 3–5 years old) in the setting qualify for free ECE services for five days a week during term time. The daily programme for ECE operates between the hours of 7.30 am and 2 pm daily.

Descriptions of the environment

Classrooms

The pre-primary education section is divided into three groups. The classes include kindergarten 2 (3–4 years), nursery 1 (4–5 years), and nursery 2 (5–6 years). Children in the setting start primary education between 5 years plus and 6 years old depending on their abilities.

Indoor Environment

Two practitioners showed me around after the interviews. The 3–4 years old class had approximately 19 children. Two teachers' tables and chairs were in the classroom, but no teacher. More than half of the children in the 3–4 years old class were sleeping with their heads on the desks. Some were lying on desks while some were sitting. The children's lunch boxes/baskets were left on the floor in the corner of the room. The classroom had no play activities and facilities; just the black chalkboard with numbers (1–20) and lower-case letters activities (a-m). The classroom's wall had no display; it was blank.

The 4–5 years old classroom seemed overcrowded with approximately 34 children. In the corner of the class, a teacher was sitting by her desk. The children were seated in rows by their wooden benches and desks. Four children were sitting on each bench facing the black chalkboard. There seems to be too many children sitting at some desk/bench which resulted in some having their legs out on the side. I observed children doing rote learning with letters and numbers activities written on the chalkboard. Two children were holding sticks/rods in their hands, pointing to and reciting the letters on the black chalkboard. While the rest of the children in the classroom were repeating after them. The classroom had no displays or play facilities/toys. All the classes looked dilapidated. For example, some of the

classrooms' walls had cracks and holes on them. Some had wooden windows and doors pulling out of hinges, and the concrete flooring had cracks and holes. The practitioners that showed me around mentioned that the state and local governments are not doing anything with regards to the provision of resources, instructional, educational aids, and play facilities. He said that the government has the money but wonders how the money is being spent.

Outdoor environment

The school premises had no fencing; goats were roaming around the school compound. The school building appeared dilapidated and old. Some classrooms were empty. The pre-primary education classrooms' windows were made of wood. The majority of the classrooms' doors and windows were broken. Some of the metal burglary gates were pulled out of the wall and ready to fall out. The setting had no playground, no outdoor play equipment; it is just an open space.

<u>**Curriculum**</u>

The practitioners did not specify the curriculum they use for these children. But, according to the head-teacher, there is no curriculum provided for pre-primary education in the setting. She said the curriculum offered by the government for their school starts from primary 1. As a result, the teachers use their initiatives to teach pre-primary education children based on children's abilities and through singing, dancing and rhymes.

<u>**Staffing**</u>

The head-teacher told me that the pre-primary education section is staffed by teachers with minimum qualification of NCE in other subjects' combination, but not specifically in early childhood studies. With regards to the two teachers that I interviewed; one had B.Ed. in education, and another practitioner had NCE in Agric science. A practitioner was in each of the 4–5 and 5–6-years old class. The other 3–4 years old class had no teacher. One of the practitioners mentioned the issue of inadequate staffing in the pre-primary section as they will need more helping hands with these children to give the children the attention required. The headteacher said the state or local governments sometimes organise seminars for the teachers, which has helped to improve their practices, such as the use of mother tongue in teaching children. The headteacher and one of the practitioners mentioned that sometimes the teachers use

their experience of motherhood to take care of the children as there are no specialised teachers in the area of ECE.

Other ECE or ECEC services that the setting provides

RU-setting also provides free ECE services or early learning for two years old. The state government funds this provision.

Vignette 7 (JC-setting)

Type of setting

JC-setting is a private missionary school provided by the Anglican Diocese in the urban area of state-2. The school offers provision for childcare, pre-primary education, and primary education. It delivers the provision of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) for children between the ages of 18months to 5years old. The Anglican diocese funds the ECCE provision in the setting.

The provision of UBE pre-primary year

JC-setting offers ECE service for children ages 3–5 years old before the start of primary education. This ECE service is not provided free. According to the head-teacher, the school is not a private nor public school, but rather it is a private religious school funded by the Anglican diocese. Thus, the children pay fees for the ECE services. JC-setting only gets support from the church (Anglican diocese) for the ECE provision and not from the government.

Attendance pattern of children

All the children enrolled in pre-primary education (i.e., 3–5 years old) in JC-setting attend five days a week during term time. The ECE programme operates between the hours of 8 am and 2 pm daily.

Descriptions of the environment

Classrooms

The ECE has three classes, which include the kindergarten (3-4), nursery 1 (4–5) and nursery 2 (4–5) years old. One of the practitioners said that the 4-5 years old class also had 6 years old children. Because they think they are not ready for primary education due to their low abilities.

Indoor Space

The windows and doors of the classrooms were made of wood. The classes had wooden benches and desks. In nursery one and nursery two classrooms, some of the children's chairs were upside down. These classrooms were littered with buckets and overcrowded with approximately 30 children. In nursery 1 class, some children were sleeping on the mat on the floor. A practitioner was in each of the classes. Ripped cardboard posters were displayed on the classrooms' walls.

The pre-primary education classrooms had no play facilities. Some of the classrooms' doors were broken hanging by the hinges. All ECE classes had just black chalkboards with written activities, such as numbers, letters, and writing activities. Teachers' tables were located in the corner of each class. The children were eating their lunches unsupervised in all the classes. I was told it was the school's cultural day, so teachers were going in and out of the classrooms. Some children were having their lunches while some were playing around in and out of the classes.

Outdoor Environment

The school was fenced with metal barbed wires. The school buildings looked dilapidated and old. The school's playground had rocks and the ground appeared eroded with deep gullies everywhere. The outdoor area/space of the school had no playground and play equipment.

Staffing

Three teachers with varied qualifications staff the pre-primary year section in the setting. One practitioner had a minimum requirement of NCE in social studies. The second practitioner had HND (higher national diploma) in agriculture, while the third practitioner had HND in accounting. The two practitioners with HND qualifications said that they are in the teaching profession due to the issue of high-level unemployment in the country. The teacher–pupil ratio is approximately 1:25-30.

Curriculum

According to practitioners and the head-teacher in the setting, they have their school curriculum provided by the missionary which they use alongside the national curriculum for the pre-primary education. One of the practitioners said she does not know what the approved national curriculum is called. The head-teacher called it the

UBE curriculum but was trying to look for it in her office but could not find it. The headteacher specified that they buy the curriculum from the UBEC headquarters in Abuja.

Other ECE or ECEC services that the setting provides

JC-setting provides ECEC services for children between the ages of 18 months and 3 years old, and families pay for these services.

Vignette 8 (W-setting)

Type of setting

W-setting is a private and missionary nursery and primary school in the urban area of state-2. It offers ECE service to children between ages of 2 to 5years old. It also offers primary education. The setting is funded and supported by the education commission of the missionary.

The provision of UBE pre-primary year

W-setting offers the provision of ECE for the 3–5 years old before the start of primary education. The ECE provision is not free because it is a private missionary school, so parents pay for ECE services. This setting refers to the ECE provision as the nursery.

Attendance pattern of children

All the pre-primary education children (3–5 years old) attend the setting five days a week during term-time only. The daily ECE programme runs between hours of 8 am and 2 pm daily.

Descriptions of the environment

Classrooms

The pre-primary education classes have four sections. This includes two classrooms for 3–5 years old (nursery 1) and two classrooms for and 4–5 years old (nursery 2).

Indoor Environment

The indoor environment of classrooms is well lit and ventilated with large windows. In the 3–5 years old and 4–5 classrooms, the chairs and desks were arranged in rows. All children were sitting, busy writing the numbers/letters activities written on the white-board. The teachers' tables and chairs were located in the corner of the classes.

The classrooms' furniture was child-sized (e.g., shelves, chairs, and tables). The shelves and the teacher's desk had lots of workbooks. The classes looked clean and tidy with shelves to keep children's belongings; but had no indoor play activities. Classrooms' walls had few posters, such as the multiplication table and colour posters; some posters were ripped.

Outdoor Environment

W-setting is a storey building fenced with a gate. The entrance of the school had a security house and a security man. The school's compound looked neat and clean. The playground had some outdoor play equipment, such as a swing, a slide, and a seesaw.

Staffing

The pre-primary education section is staffed by three practitioners with minimum qualifications of NCE of various combined subjects, such as mathematics and computer, secretarial study, and primary education in the Yoruba language. None of the practitioners were trained or had a specialty in early childhood education/studies. Each class had a practitioner with approximately 21–25 children.

Curriculum

W-setting has a curriculum designed by the missionary education commission which the practitioners and the head-teacher claimed they use most. They also adopt some of the national one-year pre-primary education curriculum as a guideline. According to one of the practitioners, they use more of the missionary education curriculum designed for their pre-primary section than the national pre-primary education curriculum. The setting offers some of the national curriculum for inspection reason and the national assessment.

Other ECE or ECEC services that the setting provides

W-setting provides early learning service (i.e., other ECE services) for the 2 years old. This provision is not free as the families also pay to access the services.

Appendix I: Vignette Diagram of Nigerian ECE System

Policy at national level

Infrastructure variables	National level	Notes
Governance	-The national level provides the National Policy on Education (NPE) in collaboration with states and relevant stakeholders (*Section 9(138)(a) NPE 2013*). -Formulates the policy guidelines for successful operation of the universal basic education [UBE] (including ECE) programmes in the federation (*UBE Act 2004*). -Coordinates and monitors the implementation of ECE policy (*NPE 2013*; *UBE Act 2004*). -Coordinates educational practices and services (including the ECE) in Nigeria (*Section 9(138)(c) NPE 2013*). -Responsible for the national educational planning and research (*Section 9(138)(e) NPE 2013*); and -Responsible for the provision of appropriate education laws (including the ECE) and ensures their enforcement (*Section 9(138)(n) NPE 2013*).	The NPE in Nigeria comprises the basic education given to children aged 0-15 years. It encompasses one-year pre-primary education given to children aged 5 prior to the start of primary school. and provided free by the government in public schools (*NPE 2013*). In 2004, the early childhood care, development, and education [ECCDE] became an aspect of the of the UBE Act 2004. Children aged 3-5 years old are beneficiaries of the UBE programme (*UBE Act 2004*; UBEC, 2018).
Funding	-Universal basic education committee (UBEC) at national level receives a block grant from the national government and allocates to the states and local governments and other agencies implementing UBE (*UBE Act 2004*). -The national government intervenes in the provision of basic education, with 2% of its Consolidated Revenue Fund (CRF) (*UBE Act*	-The financing of ECE is a joint responsibility of national, state, and local governments (Section 10(151) *NPE 2013*). -According to one national official, 70% of this fund (i.e., CRF) is reserved as a

	2004). States can only access this fund only if they can provide their 50% counterpart fund. - Provides adequate funding for basic infrastructures necessary to support ECE activities nationwide (*IECD 2013*, p. 21)	matching grant for state projects while 5% of the 70% is allocated to ECE. However, some states have not been able to access the CRF from the national government because they have not been able to provide their 50% counterpart fund.
Programme quality, standards, transitions	-National government prescribes and maintains the minimum standards for ECE centres in line with the NPE (*NPE 2013*; *UBE Act 2004*). - Coordinate the regulation of (quality control) ECE programmes (*NERDC 2013*, p. 7; *UBE Act 2004*). -Coordinates the national quality assurance system for basic education services with linkages with state quality assurance agencies, local government quality assurance units and national educational planning and research (UBEC, 2010; *NPE 2013*). -Meets all costs relating to standard maintenance and supervision of ECE facilities to ensure quality service delivery (IECD, 2013, p. 21). -Develops suitable ECE curriculum for nationwide implementation (*NPE 2013*). -Ensures the dissemination of national curriculum materials, national minimum standards, curriculum implementation guidelines and other materials that will enhance the implementation of ECE (this is applicable nationwide) (*NPE 2013*; *UBE Act 2004*); and	Monitoring and supervision of quality ECE services are at all levels. (national, state and local).

	-Makes provision for the production and effective utilisation of learning and instructional materials for basic education (including ECE) in adequate numbers (*NPE 2013*; *UBE Act 2004*).	
Human capacity	-The national level is responsible for training of suitably qualified personnel for the delivery of ECE services (NERDC, 2013, p. 7). -Ensures capacity building and building of teachers (*UBE Act 2004*), and organises meetings, workshops for teachers to improve professional competence (*Section 9(149)(e) NPE 2013*). -Ensures to make provision in teacher education programmes for specialisation in early childhood care and education and retraining of teachers (*Section 2(16)(d) NPE 2013*). -Supports capacity development of states (FME, 2016a)	
Family and community engagement	- The national government encourages the participation of local communities, individuals, and organisations (*Section 10(151) NPE 2013*). -Encourages both community and private efforts in the establishment of ECE section based on set standards (Section 2(16)(c) *NPE 2013*). -Embarks on sensitisation of communities and the nation in general on the one-year pre-primary education (*NPE 2013*).	
Linkages	-Collaborates with NGOs and international development partners, private sectors, and local communities to support and fund ECE (*Section 1(7)(e) NPE 2013*).	it is stated that the national and state government shall collaborate to ensure relationships with the relevant development partners. The local

	-Responsible for coordinating international co-operation in education (*Section 9(138)(k) NPE 2013*). -In collaboration with the state government ensures that relevant ministries, departments, agencies, and the development partners synergise for proper implementation of the one-year pre-primary education (*Section 2(18)(f) NPE 2013*).	government is not mentioned.
Assessment, data, and accountability	-National, state, and local governments are responsible for publishing allocations, releases, and expenditures on education by level and type annually to provide an overview of trends in financing education. In line with Community Accountability Transparency Initiatives (CATI), national, states, and local governments also establish in conjunction with relevant stakeholders, modalities to effectively track expenditure and the monitoring and evaluation of service delivery on education, which includes the ECE (*Section 10(154) NPE 2013*) -Develops and manages an efficient national education management information system (NEMIS) (*Section 9(138)(f) NPE 2013*).	

Policy at state level

Infrastructure variables	State level	Notes
Governance	-The state government is responsible for the policy control over ECE by the requirements of NPE (*Section 9(139)(a) NPE 2013*). -Provides appropriate education laws (including ECE) and ensures their enforcement (*NPE 2013*). -Plans research and development of education, including ECE in the states (*NPE 2013*). -Coordinates activities of State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs) and other education parastatals as well as local government education authorities (LGEAs) as prescribed by the law (*Section 9(139)(e) NPE 2013*). -Provides broad educational services (including ECE) (*Section 9(139)(d) NPE 2013*).	
Funding	-The states only qualify for the federal government block grant, if they contribute not less than 50% of the total cost of their projects as its commitment in the execution of their projects (*UBE Act 2004*). -The administration and disbursement of funds is through SUBEBs (*UBE Act 2004*). -Funds infrastructures, play equipment and other essential learning packages necessary to keep young children happy and stimulate their interest in learning in publicly owned ECE facilities. For instance, teacher/caregivers' salaries (IECD, 2013, p. 22). -Provides fund for all recurrent expenditures relating to operation and maintenance of ECE services.	- According to a state official in this study, 70% of this fund is reserved as a matching grant for state projects. 5% of 70% is allocated to ECE. 60% is for primary education and 35% is allocated to junior secondary education. These funds are for provision of instructional materials, infrastructural development and teacher professional development. However, some states have not been able to access the CRF from the national government because they have not been

		able to provide their 50% counterpart fund. Another state official mentioned there is no budgetary allocation for ECE when I tried to sought permission to access budgetary allocation documents.
Programme quality, standards, transitions	-The state-level ensures a child-friendly environment for pre-schooling children (*IECD 2013*). For example, provision of infrastructure, personnel, instructional materials for government/community-owned ECE centres (*NERDC 2013*, p. 7). -Provides one school meal to children enrolled in public school facilities (*IECD 2013*, p. 22). -Responsible for licensing, supervision/monitoring (quality control) and improving standards of all ECE institutions (*NERDC 2013*; *NPE 2013*). - Quality assurance agencies at the state level in collaboration with the national quality assurance agency and the local government education authorities are responsible for the organisation of supervision and inspection of all educational institutions including ECE programmes (*NPE 2013*; UBEC, 2010). -Develops and disseminates curriculum documents and materials/guidelines that will enhance the implementation of ECE (FME, 2016b; *NPE 2013*).	Quality of ECE is at all levels. (national, state and local).

Human capacity	-Training of suitably qualified personnel (NERDC, 2013, p. 7). Organises meetings, workshops for teachers where necessary to improve professional competence in the delivery of ECE services (*Section 9(149)(e) NPE 2013*). -Supports capacity development of the state and local governments (FME, 2016a, p. 4).	
Family and community engagement	-There is community participation in school management established at the state level known as the School-Based Management Committee (SBMC). They act as a bridge between schools and the communities they serve. SBMC is responsible for the management of public schools at the appropriate levels. This body serves as channels for transmitting information in respect of curriculum, enrolment, quality of educational facilities and other matters of interests to local, states and federal authorities and the boards (*Section 9(141) NPE 2013*).	SBMC only operates only in the Nigerian public schools (not in private settings) on the achievement of quality assurance in schools.
Linkages	-The state government in collaboration with the national government ensures that relevant ministries, departments, and agencies, as well as the development partners, synergise for proper implementation of the one-year pre-primary education (*Section 2(18)(f) NPE 2013*).	
Assessment, data, and accountability	-National, state, and local governments are responsible for publishing allocations, releases, and expenditures on education by level and type annually to provide an overview of trends in financing education. -In line with Community Accountability Transparency Initiatives (CATI), national, state	

| | and local governments establish in conjunction with relevant stakeholders, modalities to effectively track expenditure and the monitoring and evaluation of service delivery on education (*Section 9(154) NPE 2013*).
 -The state-level develops and manages an efficient state education management information system (SEMIS) (*Section 9(139)(h) NPE 2013*). | |

Policy at local level

Infrastructure variables	Local level	Notes
Governance	-LGEAs manages public primary schools within their local government areas (*Section 9(140) NPE 2013*). -Responsible for appointments, promotion, disciplines, transfer of teachers and non-teaching staff in public schools within their areas of jurisdiction (*Section 9(140)(a) NPE 2013*).	
Funding	-Funds training requirements of caregivers and teachers (*IECD 2013*, pp. 22). -Responsible for the payment of teachers' salaries and allowances (*Section 9(140)(b) NPE 2013*). -Funds, manages preschool facilities and provide fund for the establishment of ECE centres as required in the local communities (*IECD 2013*).	There is no role at the local level with regards to the allocation of matching grants.
Programme quality, standard, transitions	-LGEAs in collaboration with the national and state quality assurance agencies are responsible for the organisation of supervision and inspection of all educational institutions (including the ECE) under their jurisdiction (*NPE 2013*, p. 79; UBEC, 2010). -Responsible for quality control in all public schools in their local areas in conjunction with the national and state authorities (*NERDC 2013*; *NPE 2013*).	Quality of ECE programmes is at all government levels. (national, state and local).
Human capacity	-Training of qualified personnel (*NERDC 2013*, p. 7). -Training and retraining of teachers and caregivers (*IECD 2013*, p. 22; *NPE 2013,* p. 78). -Organises meetings, workshops for teachers to improve professional competence (*Section 9(149)(e) NPE 2013*).	

Family and community engagement	LGEAs and the SBMC are responsible for the management of schools at the appropriate levels.	
Linkages	The role of the local level concerning linkages/relationship with the international development partners is not stated in the policy.	
Assessment, data, and accountability	-National, state, and local governments are in charge of publishing allocations, releases, and expenditures on education by level. The three tiers of governments are accountable for the provision of a yearly overview of trends in financing education. -In line with Community Accountability Transparency Initiatives (CATI), national, states and local governments establish in conjunction with relevant stakeholders, modalities to effectively track expenditure and the monitoring and evaluation of service delivery on education (*Section 9(154) NPE 2013*). - Accountable for the overall management of the educational plans at the local level (*Section 9(140)(e) NPE 2013)*. -Develops and manages an efficient local education management information system (LEMIS) (*Section 9(140)(g) NPE 2013*).	

Appendix J: List of Official Documents Selected for Analysis

1. Federal Ministry of Education [FME] (2013) Guidelines for implementing national policy on integrated early childhood development in Nigeria.

2. Federal Ministry of Education (2016a) National education quality assurance handbook for basic and secondary education in Nigeria. Abuja: Federal Education Quality Assurance Service (FEQAS).

3. Federal Ministry of Education [FME] (2016b) One-year pre-primary school education curriculum. Lagos: Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC).

4. Federal Ministry of Education [FME] (2016c) Teacher's guide for the one- year pre-primary school education curriculum. Lagos: (NERDC) Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council.

5. Integrated Early Childhood Development [IECD] (2013) National policy for integrated early childhood development in Nigeria. Lagos: NERDC.

6. *National Policy on Education* [NPE] (2013) 6th edn. Lagos: NERDC.

7. Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council [NERDC] (2013) *National minimum standards for early childcare centres in Nigeria*. Lagos: NERDC.

8. Universal basic education (2004) *The compulsory, free, universal basic education Act, 2004.*

9. Universal Basic Education Commission [UBEC] (2010) *Minimum standards for basic education in Nigeria.* Abuja: UBEC.

10. Universal Basic Education Commission [UBEC] (2018) *2018 National personnel audit report*. Abuja: UBEC Available at: https://education.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2018-NATIONAL-PERSONNEL-AUDIT-REPORT-Oct.-2019.pdf (Accessed: 2 January 2019).

11. Universal Basic Education Commission [UBEC] (2021a) Available at: https://www.ubec.gov.ng/ (Accessed: 06 September 2021).

12. Universal Basic Education Commission [UBEC] (2021b) *UBE Data*. Available at: https://www.ubec.gov.ng/data/ (Accessed: 06 September 2021).

13. Universal Basic Education Commission [UBEC] (2021c) *Matching grants.* Available at: https://www.ubec.gov.ng/grant/disbursements/ (Accessed: 14 March 2019).

Appendix K1: Matching Grants Releases

MATCHING GRANT RELEASES (2005-2019)

S/N	STATE	2005-2008	2009-2010	2011-2012	2013-2014	2015-2016	2017	2018	2019	TOTAL
1	ABIA	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
2	ADAMAWA	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
3	AKWA IBOM	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
4	ANAMBRA	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
5	BAUCHI	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
6	BAYELSA	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
7	BENUE	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
8	BORNO	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
9	C/ RIVER	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
10	DELTA	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
11	EBONYI	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
12	EDO	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
13	EKITI	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
14	ENUGU	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
15	GOMBE	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
16	IMO	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
17	JIGAWA	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
18	KADUNA	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
19	KANO	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
20	KATSINA	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
21	KEBBI	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
22	KOGI	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
23	KWARA	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
24	LAGOS	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
25	NASARAWA	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
26	NIGER	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
27	OGUN	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
28	ONDO	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
29	OSUN	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
30	OYO	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
31	PLATEAU	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
32	RIVERS	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
33	SOKOTO	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
34	TARABA	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
35	YOBE	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
36	ZAMFARA	2,501,175,674.38	1,153,903,587.26	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.23
37	F.C.T. ABUJA	2,501,175,674.37	1,153,903,587.32	1,725,464,020.62	1,983,094,594.60	1,918,783,784.04	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	12,656,694,708.54
	CURRICULUM	1,312,500,000.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00				1,312,500,000.00
	GRAND TOTAL	93,855,999,952.05	42,694,432,728.68	63,842,168,762.94	73,374,500,000.20	70,995,000,000.12	47,594,697,791.35	54,531,815,272.77	22,721,589,696.71	469,610,204,204.82

Sources: UBEC, 2018a, 2019, Matching Grants

Appendix K2: Unaccessed Matching Grants

UNACCESSED MATCHING GRANT FROM (2005–2019)

S/N	STATE	2005-2008	2009-2010	2011-2012	2013-2014	2015-2016	2017	2018	2019	TOTAL
1	ABIA	1.38	0.00	26,430,893.96	0.00	0.00	874,444,853.76	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	2,988,805,613.14
2	ADAMAWA	1.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	2,087,929,865.42
3	AKWA IBOM	1.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	91,277,608.94	614,097,018.83	705,374,629.15
4	ANAMBRA	1.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	491,277,613.70	614,097,018.83	1,105,374,633.91
5	BAUCHI	4,866.38	0.00	0.70	0.00	0.00	0.00	491,272,748.00	614,097,018.83	1,105,374,633.91
6	BAYELSA	1.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	491,277,613.70	614,097,018.83	1,105,374,633.91
7	BENUE	1.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	609,368,972.54	614,097,018.83	1,223,465,992.75
8	BORNO	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	614,097,018.83	614,097,018.84
9	C/ RIVER	1.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	2,027,027.02	0.00	0.01	614,097,018.83	616,124,047.24
10	DELTA	1.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	614,097,018.83	614,097,020.22
11	EBONYI	1.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	614,097,018.83	614,097,020.22
12	EDO	1.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	491,277,613.70	614,097,018.83	1,105,374,633.91
13	EKITI	1.38	0.00	527,306.70	0.00	1,102,670,626.38	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	4,477,470,982.05
14	ENUGU	2.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	90,600,548.29	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	3,464,873,598.26
15	GOMBE	1.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	614,097,018.83	614,097,020.22
16	IMO	1.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	614,097,018.83	614,097,020.22
17	JIGAWA	1.38	0.00	-0.04	0.00	0.00	0.00	736,916,422.61	614,097,018.83	1,351,013,442.78
18	KADUNA	1.38	0.00	-0.04	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	614,097,018.83	614,097,020.18
19	KANO	1.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	614,097,018.83	614,097,020.22
20	KATSINA	1.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	614,097,018.83	614,097,020.22
21	KEBBI	1.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	614,097,018.83	614,097,020.22
22	KOGI	1.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	614,097,018.83	614,097,020.22
23	KWARA	1.38	0.00	1,000.00	952,297,297.30	1,918,783,783.78	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	6,245,355,130.05
24	LAGOS	1.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	614,097,018.83	614,097,020.22
25	NASARAWA	1.38	0.00	1,000.00	0.00	434,177,926.54	1,286,343,183.55	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	3,808,451,975.51
26	NIGER	1.38	0.00	5,000,000.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	486,277,613.70	614,097,018.83	1,105,374,633.91
27	OGUN	1.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	491,277,613.70	614,097,018.83	1,105,374,633.91
28	ONDO	1.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	614,097,018.83	614,097,020.22
29	OSUN	1.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	2,087,929,865.42
30	OYO	1.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	2,087,929,865.42
31	PLATEAU	1.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	202,948,047.47	1,473,832,845.21	614,097,018.83	2,290,877,912.89
32	RIVERS	1.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	614,097,018.83	614,097,020.22
33	SOKOTO	1.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	614,097,018.83	614,097,020.22
34	TARABA	1.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	614,097,018.83	614,097,020.22
35	YOBE	1.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	614,097,018.83	614,097,020.22
36	ZAMFARA	1.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	491,277,613.70	614,097,018.83	1,105,374,633.91
37	F.C.T. ABUJA	1.37	0.68	0.00	0.00	0.26	0.00	0.01	614,097,018.83	614,097,021.15
	CURRICULUM	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	GRAND TOTAL	4,915.67	0.68	31,960,201.28	952,297,297.30	3,548,259,912.27	6,222,765,635.43	18,135,997,041.36	22,721,589,696.71	51,612,874,700.70

Sources: UBEC, 2018a, 2019, Matching Grants

Appendix L: Codes Used for Participants in the Study

Policymakers' codes

N1	National official 1
N2	National official 2
S1	State official 1
S2	State official 2
S3	State official 3
L1	Local official 1
L2	Local official 2
L3	Local official 3
NO	NGO Officer

Headteachers' codes

Headteacher/BA-setting	Headteacher of BA setting
Headteacher/IV-setting	Headteacher of IV setting
Headteacher/JE-setting	Headteacher of JE setting
Headteacher/JC-setting	Headteacher of JC setting
Headteacher/JO-setting	Headteacher of JO setting
Headteacher/RU-setting	Headteacher of RU setting
Headteacher/VA-setting	Headteacher of VA setting
Headteacher/W-setting	Headteacher of W setting

Practitioners' codes

T1/BA-setting	Practitioner 1 of the BA setting
T2/BA-setting	Practitioner 2 of the BA setting
T3/BA-setting	Practitioner 3 of the BA setting
T1/IV-setting	Practitioner 1 of the IV setting
T2/IV-setting	Practitioner 2 of the IV setting
T3/IV-setting	Practitioner 3 of the IV setting
T1/JE-setting	Practitioner 1 of the JE setting
T2/JE-setting	Practitioner 2 of the JE setting
T1/JC-setting	Practitioner 1 of the JC setting

T2/JC-setting	Practitioner 2 of the JC setting
T3/JC-setting	Practitioner 3 of the JC setting
T1/JO-setting	Practitioner 1 of the JO setting
T2/JO-setting	Practitioner 2 of the JO setting
T3/JO-setting	Practitioner 3 of the JO setting
T1/RU-setting	Practitioner 1 of the RU setting
T2/RU-setting	Practitioner 2 of the RU setting
T1/VA-setting	Practitioner 1 of the VA setting
T2/VA-setting	Practitioner 2 of the VA setting
T3/VA-setting	Practitioner 3 of the VA setting
T1/W-setting	Practitioner 1 of the W setting
T2/W-setting	Practitioner 2 of the W setting
T3/W-setting	Practitioner 3 of the W setting

Appendix M: Ethical Approval

The ethical approval for this research has been sought and given by the University of East London's Research Ethics Committee under the reference EXP 1718 70 of the original approved application on 13.09.18 and the amendment reference AMD 1819 21 on 27.03.19. However, due to confidential information contained within the ethical approval letters, they are not included in this thesis.