

Exploring the Implementation of the Nigerian Child's Participation Right in the School Setting

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Abstract: The Nigerian Constitution makes provision for the protection and respect for the fundamental rights of all citizens, adult and children alike. This constitutionally guaranteed rights are in agreement with the general principles of the convention on the rights of the child viz non-discrimination, best interest of the child, right to life, survival, development and respect for the views of the child. However, there are inadequate laws designed to protect these rights and the few available ones, the government seldom enforce them. The school practices are also deficient in the protection of the rights particularly the participation right. This study therefore, explored the implementation of the right of participation among five year old children in the school setting in Ibadan Nigeria. The study revealed that the staff working with the children are aware of the participation right but misconstrue it to mean a range of school activities such as play, conversation, reading, writing, religious activities, etc. Whereas, participation in the context of their human right means right to express views freely, right to be heard in all matters, right to have their views taken seriously, etc. It shows therefore, that the teachers do not have the sensitivity, orientation and clear perspective on the participation right. Therefore, an intervention programme was designed to re-orient the children in facilitating access to more skills to be able to express their views freely and for the teachers to listen to the children in all matters affecting them, take their views seriously, respect their views and support them in their self initiated activities.

Key words: Exploring the implementation, child participation, school setting, activities, teacher

INTRODUCTION

The Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in Resolution 44/25 on 20 November, 1989 and entered into force on 2nd September, 1990. This ratification has stimulated work for the children's rights the world over (Anna, 2001). Many countries including the United Kingdom, New Zealand, etc created the post of Commissioner for Children in 1989. Several Canadian Provinces have appointed advocates for various aspects of children's rights. Nigeria, as a signatory to the Jomtien Declaration, the World Summit Convention and Organisation of African Unity Charter on the rights of the child ratified the Convention in 1990. (UNICEF, 2002) Thereafter, a number of developments have also taken place to enhance the implementation of the rights of the child. Among these are:

- The setting up of National Programme of Action to focus on the survival, protection, development and participation of the Nigerian child.
- In November 1994, a National Child Right Implementation Committee was inaugurated.

- Child Rights issues have been infused into the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) Early Child Care Curriculum (Maduewesi, 2005).

All these developments are politically crucial and they constitute real progress now and the potential for real change in the future. However, these efforts are being spear-headed by non-governmental organizations such as the UNICEF and OMEP. Maduewesi (2005) observes that there are inadequate laws designed to protect these rights and the few available ones, the government seldom enforce them.

The Convention on the rights of the child principally enshrines children's participation in all matters affecting children. Article 12 states that "State parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his/her own views the rights to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child. The views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child" (Lansdown, 2005). This means every child has the right to freely express his ideas, opinions and thought on any issue concerning his/her interest subject to restriction under the law (UNICEF, 1995).

Participation in the context of child rights involves taking part or sharing in some things and discussing common affairs with others, reflecting upon common goods, learning to bear responsibility, to judge and to decide (Voet, 1998). Participation therefore, is a precursor to sustainability. Maduewesi (2005) opines that participation is central to the human development approach in order to expand choice and realize human potential. She says that it is a means to development and children and adolescents do not develop by being passive. Participation right is not an inherited capability, it therefore, must be learned. For this reason, the school must be responsive to this essential need of the Nigerian child.

Early childhood period is a critical period for imbibing skills that will facilitate the acquisition of the rights. Early childhood period is when children experience the most rapid growth and changes in terms of maturing, increasing communication skills, intellectual capacities and rapid shifts in their interests. At this period, they establish relationships; they learn to negotiate and coordinate shared activities, resolved conflicts, keep agreements and accept responsibilities. Children's experiences at this period are powerfully shaped by the cultural practices and beliefs of their environment. Thus the need to create access to wider opportunities, more skills, awareness of rights, sense of efficacy and empowerment and greater self esteem and self confidence for them at home and in school. The condition for promoting effective participation include the need to start early through the socialization of adults that are responsive to the needs of children and are respectful of their rights. These adults would encourage exploration, enquiry and responsibility.

The importance of participation right cannot be over emphasized. Participation promotes children's development (Rogoff *et al.*, 1996; Maduewesi, 2005). It protects children better because children who are encouraged to express their views are less vulnerable to abuse and better able to contribute towards their own protection. Participation is a fundamental human rights and everyone has a right to express their views when decisions that directly affect their lives are being made (Lansdown, 2005). Implementing participation right in early childhood is an effective way to help prevent personal, social and education difficulties during the later childhood and adolescence period.

In promoting these rights, the school system has a lot of responsibility. The school is a human organization where interactions between teachers and pupils are largely guided by prevalent values of the society (Oduolowu and Ogunyemi, 2001). The facilitation of the participation right requires the creation of a new culture in

the school (Oduolowu, 2004) which will offer mechanisms for respecting the rights of young children to be heard necessitates a preparedness to create the space to listen to their views in ways appropriate to them through music, drawing, painting, story-telling, role play, through dialogue, etc. These no doubt requires the provision of time, adults who are willing to listen, encourage and support children's initiatives in an environment where children feel safe and comfortable. Children are spending more and more time in school and parents are having less time with children. The school settings become ideal communities wherein the participation right can be facilitated.

Objective of the study: The objective of the study was to explore the level of knowledge of the teachers of the participation right, assess the school setting whether it promotes participation and apply intervention to enhance the participation skills of children. The questions raised focused on:

- Whether the teachers of these children are knowledgeable about the participation right.
- Whether the primary school setting promotes the participation right.
- Whether the intervention package designed by the researcher facilitated participation skills among the children.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research team comprised one researcher/educator, two research assistants/undergraduates of Early Childhood Education and the class teachers of Primary one of the sampled school.

The sample comprised of Nursery Primary school teachers who attended OMEP workshop organized for caregivers and class teachers of children between birth and eight years in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria and Primary One children age between 5 and 7 years of University of Ibadan, Staff School.

Instruments: Three main instruments were designed by the researcher for the study. They include:-

Early childhood education teacher questionnaire: This instrument was designed by the researcher. It consisted of two parts. Section A comprised the demographic data of the respondents. In Section B, the awareness and knowledge of the respondents were investigated with 10 items based on the participation right.

School observational schedule: This is a researcher-designed instrument. It consists of 12 items based on the teachers' understanding of the participation right, supportive activities of teachers to promote the skills, child-friendly environment to support, sufficient time available, adult sensitivity and recognition of the needs for participation.

Children's checklist of participatory skills: This is a researcher-designed instrument to assess the influence of the intervention package of the researcher to facilitate acquisition of participation skills after 12 weeks.

The study was conducted in 3 phases. The first phase involved the administration of the Early Childhood Education Teachers Questionnaire. This instrument was administered to Nursery Primary school teachers during a workshop for teachers organized by OMEP Oyo State. The teachers came from all over the 36 Local Government Areas of the State but only 45 of them completed and returned the questionnaire distributed to them during the workshop.

The second phase involved visitation to Nursery Primary schools to carry out observation on school practices as relevant to participation right of the child. Permission was taken from the head teachers of the selected schools. The researcher and 2 trained assistants visited the schools for 6 weeks on a daily basis. Nursery, Primaries 1 and 2 classes were visited with the researcher designed observation schedule. Records of classroom activities and routines were kept and rated by the researcher and the assistants.

The third phase involved the implementation of the researcher's designed package to enhance children's participation skills. Only one school was selected for the intervention. There are 40 Primary one children in the class selected. The class teacher agreed to allow the researcher, 1h, three times a week to work with the children. Two class activities-story telling and drawing, were selected for the period. The intervention package was simple. It involves allowing children to be in-charge during story telling and drawing activities.

The researcher designed intervention package focused on:

- Creating opportunities for the children to progressively exercise their participation rights. This is based on the philosophy that :
- All children are capable of expressing a view.
- They have the right to express their views freely.
- They have the right to be heard in all matters affecting them.
- They have the right to have their views taken seriously.

- Creating space to listen to their views during story-telling, role play and drawing.
- Creating opportunities for them to discuss what they want to do, how they want to go about it, why they want to do and the doing.
- Supporting children in achieving the tasks or responsibilities identified or initiated.

The intervention aimed at empowering children to learn about responsibilities and rights and develop respect, communication skills and confidence. The Researcher-designed intervention mainly involved participatory processes. Opportunities were provided for children to be:

- Actively involved in the development of activities of their choice.
- They are responsible for the implementation.
- They decide on the mechanism of monitoring.
- They design the evaluation processes.
- The researcher provided time to listen to the views and options of the children.
- Provided information where need be and supplied resources where need be
- Adopted a child-centered attitude
- Respected their dignity and their individual points of view.

Prior to the intervention, the teacher of the children selected for the study used to tell the children stories during story time and the children will listen attentively. After the story questions will be asked. The researcher reversed the order during the intervention. During story time, children re-arranged their sitting arrangement, made rules to guide their discourse e.g. telling their stories in turn, changing their style when they are bored i.e., dramatizing or writing or drawing the stories, what you do when you don't have a story etc. Listening to one another's story. Re-arranging the class after story time.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic data analysis: Table 1 reveals that 45 Nursery primary school teachers were involved in this study, out of which 84.4% are female and 15.6% are male.

Majority of the teachers were working in a Nursery/ Primary school (84.4%) while 15.6% were in pre-school only.

The largest population of the teachers had first degree in Education (40%), 17.8% attended Teacher College II, 20% had Diploma certificate in Education, 15.6% had NCE, 2.2 % had Masters in Sciences and 2.2% had Ph.D.

Table 1: Distribution of teachers based on gender, school type and qualification

Variable		f	(%)
Gender	Male	7	15.6
	Female	38	84.4
	Total	45	100.0
School type	Pre-School only	7	15.6
	Nursery/primary school	38	84.4
	Total	45	100.0
Teachers' qualification	T C II	8	17.8
	B.A/ B.Ed	18	40.0
	S.S.C.E	1	2.2
	Diploma in education	9	20.0
	N.C.E	7	15.6
	M.Sc	1	2.2
	Ph.D	1	2.2
	Total	45	100.0

Table 2: Teachers' Knowledge about participation right

Statement	Responses given	f	(%)	
What is child's right?	Right to learn	1	2.2	
	Right to develop their knowledge	8	17.8	
	Right to live	10	22.2	
	Given a privilege	13	28.9	
	Right to education	14	31.1	
	Right to communicate	8	17.8	
	Entitled to legality	7	15.6	
	Proper training	9	20.0	
	No response	19	42.2	
	Are you aware of the child's right?	Yes	43	95.6
		No	2	4.4
List as many of them as you can remember	Education	30	66.7	
	Development	14	31.1	
	Right to live	22	48.9	
	Health care	7	15.6	
	Good shelter	1	2.2	
	Play	9	20.0	
	To be creative	16	35.6	
	Caring	7	15.6	
	Freedom	13	28.9	
	Expression	8	17.8	
	Religion	6	13.3	
	Protection	7	15.6	
	What is participation right?	It is an interaction act	8	17.8
It is an act of communication		7	15.6	
Allow child to be involved		28	62.2	
To develop to learn		2	4.4	

Answering the research questions: Research Question 1: Are the primary school teachers aware or are knowledgeable about the participation right of the child?

Table 2 shows the knowledge of the teachers about participation right.

Out of these teachers, 2.2% of them defined child right as right to learn, 17.8% defined it as right to develop their knowledge, 22.2% defined it as right to live, 28.9% defined it as a child given a privilege, 31.1% defined it as right to education, 17.8% defined it as right to communicate, 15.6% defined it as being entitled to legality, 20.0% defined it as proper training, while 42.2% failed to respond to the question.

Table 3: School setting and participation right of the children

No	Statement	Responses given	f	(%)
List the activities that children in your class participate in	Writing		29	64.4
	Reading		24	53.3
	Answering questions		7	15.6
	Singing		9	20.0
	Sporting		21	46.7
	Asking questions		7	15.6
	Playing		7	15.6
	Colouring		2	4.4
	Creative arts		28	62.2
	Drawing		14	31.1
Describe how and the level of children's participation	Solving problems (sums)		14	31.1
	Teaching		14	31.1
	Participation in writing		15	33.3
	Participation in story telling		7	15.6
	Participation in reading		14	31.1
	Assume role of character in a play		7	15.6
	It motivate them		2	4.4
	Colouring and story telling		1	2.2
	Class activities		7	15.6
	State ways by which you can create an environment to enhance participation	Friendly teaching		13
Play work			14	31.1
Make class more practical			7	15.6
Conducive environment			14	31.1
Doing things to attract them			2	4.4
Story telling			7	15.6
Using instructional materials			16	35.6
Call their attention			2	4.4

Almost all the teachers were aware of child right (95.6%) and they were able to list the type of child right as education right (66.7%), development (31.1%), right to live (48.9%), health care (15.6%), good shelter (2.2%), play (20.0%), to be creative (35.6%), caring (15.6%), freedom (28.9%), expression (17.8%), religion (13.3%) and 15.6% listed it as protection.

17.8% defined participation right as an interaction act, 15.6% defined it as an act of communication, 62.2% defined it as an act of allowing children to be involved while 4.4% defined it as developing to learn.

Research question 2: Is the school setting promoting the participation right?

Table 3 shows that while the teachers were listing the activities the children do participate in, 64.4% wrote writing, 53.3% wrote reading, 15.6% wrote answering questions, 20% wrote singing, 46.7% wrote sporting, 15.6% wrote asking questions, 15.6% write playing, 4.4% wrote colouring, 62.2% wrote creative arts, 31.1% wrote drawing, 31.1% wrote solving problems (sums) and 31.1% wrote teaching.

The teachers were asked to describe how and the level of participation, 33.3% wrote participating in writing, 15.6% wrote participating in story telling, 31.1% wrote

Table 4: Classroom practices of children after interaction

Statement	Yes (%)	No (%)	Not always (%)
I like to do things for myself	39 (86.7)	1 (2.2)	- (0.0)
My teacher allows me to do things for myself	26 (57.8)	6 (13.0)	8 (20.0)
I depend on others to do things	17 (37.8)	16 (35.6)	7 (15.6)
I am afraid that I cannot do things on my own	3 (6.7)	32 (71.1)	5 (11.1)
I believe I can do many things on my own	36 (80.0)	3 (6.7)	- (0.0)
I have opportunities to express my ideas/opinions	25 (55.6)	9 (20.0)	6 (13.3)
I have contributions to make to my life	19 (42.2)	14 (31.1)	7 (15.6)
I can contribute to the well being of myself	31 (68.7)	6 (13.3)	3 (6.7)
I can initiate ideas/projects	23 (51.1)	3 (6.7)	14 (31.1)
I can carry out my initiated ideas successfully	37 (82.2)	- (0.0)	3 (6.7)
I can handle complex situations on my own	16 (35.6)	15 (33.3)	9 (20.0)
I like to do things on my own without my teacher watching me	30 (66.7)	10 (22.2)	- (0.0)

participating in reading, 15.6% wrote assume role of character in a play, 4.4% wrote it motivates them, 2.2% wrote colouring and story telling and 15.6% wrote class activities.

Teachers could create an environment to enhance participating by friendly teaching (28.9%), 31.1% wrote through play work, 15.6% will make class more practical, 31.1% proposed to provide conducive environment, 4.4% proposed to do things to attract the children, 15.6% wrote story telling, 35.6% wrote using instructional materials and 4.4% of the teachers wrote call their attention.

Research question 3: Will intervention facilitate the development of participatory skills?

Table 4 shows that after intervention, the pupils like to do things for themselves (86.7%), their teachers allowed them to do things for themselves (57.8%), they believed they could do many things on their own (80%), they had opportunities to express their ideas/opinions (55.6%), they could carry out their initiated ideas successfully (82.2%) and they like to do things without their teacher watching them (66.7%)

All these show that the intervention given has a positive effect on the children because they show evidences of having acquired the participation skills such as self esteem, confidence, communication skills etc.

- There are more female teachers (84.4%) than male teachers (15.6%) in Nursery Primary Schools in Oyo State.
- The teachers of Nursery Primary Schools are highly qualified (95.6%).
- A majority of the teachers are aware of the Rights of the child (95.6%).
- The concept of the participation right is misconstrued. None of the teachers could give a correct definition of what participation right is.
- The school setting is deficient in facilitating the participatory right.

- Children showed evidence of participation skills at the end of the intervention.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The highlights of the findings revealed the level of ignorance of the teachers about the concept of participation right. The school practices are grossly deficient in enhancing the acquisition of skills. There were scarce educational resources and the curriculum methods did not reflect, they did not facilitate, motivate or equip the children with the skills to exercise participation right. However, the children displayed full energy to be involved, they were asking questions, ready to take up responsibilities during the intervention which promoted participation right. At the end of the intervention, the children were able to display high degree of self esteem and self confidence, awareness of their participatory right and a sense of efficacy and empowerment.

Arising from the foregoing, it is relevant to make the following recommendations in order to foster participatory skills in school children. First, the teachers need re-orientation and broadening their knowledge about what participatory right is all about and how they can structure their classroom practices to foster the skills in the children. Being aware is not enough, they should be able to integrate the knowledge and skills into the daily lives of the children in the school setting because the children spend more time with them than their parents. The teachers could be acquired the knowledge and skills through reading, attending relevant workshops and seminars and exposure to current affairs.

Second, the school setting should be child friendly and child centered. Relevant educational resources should be provided to meet the developmental needs of children. The school programmes should be flexible and allowances should be made for flexibility on the time-table. The school goals should not be only examination result oriented, meeting appropriate developmental needs of the

children should be part of the school goals. The school should provide guidelines and other tools that are children oriented that will facilitate development of living skills for the children.

Finally, children are experts in their own lives, they are skilful communicators and active agents of their environment, therefore the children are to be encouraged and supported by the teachers and parents to develop participatory skills. Listening to children's views, giving them opportunities to express their views and taking up responsibility and giving weight to their views will foster the required skills in them.

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