

## RE-ENGINEERING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION THROUGH FOSTERING AND PROMOTING CREATIVITY IN CHILDREN

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### ABSTRACT

This study examined Re-engineering of Early Childhood Education through Fostering and Promoting Creativity in Children, in Rivers State Education Zones. Descriptive Survey research design was adopted in carrying out the research. The population of the study consist of two thousand, eight hundred and sixty (2,860) public nursery school teachers in Rivers State local education authority. A total of one hundred and forty-three (143) nursery school teachers were purposefully sampled for the study. Three research question guided the study. The researchers developed a thirty (30) item structured questionnaire titled “Practices for Fostering Creativity Questionnaire (PFCQ)” which was used to source information from teachers. The instrument was face validated by three experts, two in the Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education and one in Measurement and Evaluation unit of the Department of Educational Foundations all from Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State. The corrections and suggestions which they made were carefully made in the final draft of the questionnaire. Reliability test was conducted using Cronbach Alpha to ascertain the internal consistency and a reliability index of 0.82, 0.95 and 0.76 were obtained for the three clusters. The overall reliability obtained was 0.84. Mean and Standard Deviation were used to analyze the research questions. The findings of the study revealed that to foster and promote creativity in early childhood education, the classroom should be flexible and very spacious for children to easily and freely play around, and explore without undue restraints. Furthermore, emphasis should be laid on process rather than product while solving problem with children. Parts of the findings also identified preparing children for a successful future, and helping children to gain confidence in their capacities and raise their self-esteem; as the benefits of fostering and promoting creativity in early childhood education. Based on the findings, it was recommended that more Emphasis should be laid on process rather than product while solving problem with children.

**Keywords:** Creativity, Early Childhood Education, Practice, Fostering and Rivers State.

### Introduction

The beauty of early years of life lies in the fact that it is filled with exploration, and discovery. Right from the very moment children are born, their exploration of the new

environment outside the womb begins. The child's first cry tells a lot about his awareness in the change of his environment. subsequently and gradually, the child will naturally begin his journey of exploring his new environment and discovering the components of his new environment. Obiweluzo and Nosike (2016), stated that children in their early years of life are characteristically and intellectually curious, inquisitive, physically active and explorative in nature. They experiment with things and are eager to discover things for themselves. They seem to enjoy investigating and studying the world around them. These processes of exploration and discovery, spontaneously brings out the innate ability of creativity which every child is endowed with. Yildirim (2010), opined that creativity is one of the traits that a person has since birth. As creativity is not a learnt behaviour, it is easy to observe in children. The urge of satisfying children's curiosity instinct propels them in making inquisition which is tantamount to their exploring and discovering of the environment. kohl in Nnonyelum (2016), submitted that creativity is all about thinking, exploring, discovering and imagining. Creativity is not a concept that can be taught, however it can be harnessed and groomed in a receptive and stimulating environment. Creative children are seen to be reflects of imagination, thoughts, purpose and novelty with the end product of inventions and values.

Creativity literally means the ability to use imagination to produce a novel idea or a product. Anyakoha (2005), defines creativity as the ability to see problems, generate new idea, find out solutions and solve human problems. Creativity can be seen as what brings into existence, new ideas, original ways of doing things and new creation of all kinds (Bruce as cited in Nnonyelum 2016). According to Bloomberg in Zeynep (2019), creativity is the total of the skills in the divergent thinking category. These categories have been defined as fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration. Fluency is the ability to produce and the number of ideas on the topic. Flexibility is the change of perspectives to the problems. Originality is producing unique ideas. Elaboration is detailing the added ideas. Creativity has also been considered by other scholars as the interpersonal and intrapersonal process by means of which original, high quality, and genuinely significant products are developed (Chukwuma-Ezugoh, Ofojebe, &Olibie 2016). Creativity can be defined as the potential of being able to produce something that is original, unique and appealing or generate an idea straight from the imagination and thoughts of an individual through the means of exploration and discovery. Creativity is as old as history of humanity; resulting to its consideration as a significant concept in the education process. The education process begins from its very foundation known as early childhood education.

Early childhood education refers to the education given in an educational institution to children prior to their entering primary school. It includes the crèche, the nursery and the Kindergarten (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014). Early childhood education creates an avenue for helping children in reaching their unique potentials. This is as a result of early

years education being the basics and the foundation of all other levels of education. The early years of life are the best opportunity to lay the foundations for a child's future. The Council of Australian Government in Nnonyelum (2016), explained that by getting it right in early childhood, the seeds for tomorrow's engaged active student, productive and skilled worker, confident and loving parents are planted. The aim of early childhood education is to foster the proper development of children, identify and address their problems, harness their potentials, mould their character, enhance their learning, equip them for life so that their actions are channeled towards positive, personal, communal and global development in all ramifications of life (Mahuta&Karuika in Bosah, Obumneke-Okeke, &Offem 2017). The importance of early childhood education, made the federal government of Nigeria to recognize its relevance in the National Policy on Education (2014), with the following as its objectives to:

- a. Effect a smooth transition from the home to the school.
- b. Prepare the child for the primary level of education.
- c. Provide adequate care, supervision and security for the children while their parents are at work.
- d. Inculcate social, moral norms and values.
- e. Inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and the use of toys. Etc.
- f. Develop a sense of co-operation and team-spirit.
- g. Stimulate in the child good habits, including good health habits, and
- h. Teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms, etc, through play.

The above objectives of the early childhood education have its fifth objective to be; inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music, and the use of toys. This projects the inevitable existence of creativity in the early years. Zeynep (2019), asserts that one of the basic principles of early childhood education is the mobilization of imagination and creativity in children. To enable this, relevant opportunities should be provided. All the activities to be planned should support creativity. Therefore, creativity should be cultivated in young children (Saracho&Starko as cited in Frank 2014). According to Emenike (2016), creativity is identified as the major activity of early childhood children. Children of early childhood age by nature are creative and if the environment is stimulating, inviting, conducive and attractive, creativity in children will increase. The implication of this is that the caregiver which comprises of both parents and teachers have major roles to play in fostering creativity in children. Teachers ought to understand that creating the "amiable classroom" is the kingpin of fostering creativity in early childhood education (Malaguzzi as cited in O'Connor 2012).

The amiable classroom is characterized with beauty, comfort, spacious, natural and artificial materials for play and exploration, ventilation, light, trust, support, feedback,

practicals, age appropriate toys. Learning centers and fun-filled activities. Brewer in Emenike (2016), identified the classroom learning environment as the critical locus for children's exploration, creativity, interpersonal and educational development. As a living room, the classroom for children's learning ought to be attractive through adornment (natural and artificial) and every material in the room should be functional and within the developmental age of the children (Emenike 2016). The teacher's attitude and knowledge is very significant in fostering and nurturing creativity in young children. Teachers need to shower children their ever caring presence filled with smiles and arms spread wide open ever ready to embrace the children, especially when children make mistakes. Teachers need to always be ready to answer the millions of questions thrown to them by children. Sequel to this, teachers need to always have it in their mind and consciousness, that the millions of questions which children ask is as a result of their inquisitive and exploratory nature, triggered by the urge of satisfying their curiosity. Answering these questions, treating children with love and effectively organizing the classroom environment; will help teachers in gaining the children's trust and also encourage and nurture creativity in children. Teachers and parents need to ensure that children's play is self-directed and spontaneous. Children need to be given freedom within limit to play and explore the environment. Both parents and teachers ought to allow children to carry out tasks by themselves, often-times engage children in discussions, even if the topic seems to be childish, it will be supportive of parents and teachers to also come down to the children's level and flow along with them in the discussion. According to Nnonyelum (2016), fostering creativity in young children is a process where teachers must open their own channels of allowing, accepting and turning over some control to the children themselves. Even though creativity is innate in children, the more opportunities are provided to encourage and develop these creative skills, the better chances of eliminating barriers that will stifle the creative potentials inherent in young children, which will be useful to them in future, as they advance in life. Against this backdrop, the researchers intend to find out the practices that will help in fostering and promoting creativity in children.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Early childhood education practices in Nigeria seem not to give much attention to fostering and promoting the innate creativity in children. Starting from the school environment, the classroom arrangement and the teacher; all seem to be less supportive in nurturing and enhancing the creative potentials of young children. The school environment is not colourfully beautified and aesthetically inviting to arouse children's interest in exploration. The traditional classroom pictorially presents the teacher's table and chair in front of the classroom, and that of the children behind. The classroom has little or no space to trigger children's interest in spontaneous activities and exploration, through which their innate creative abilities will be exhumed. The classroom atmosphere is not rich enough to appeal to children's gallery; thereby providing children with poor affection for real creative and

intellectual growth. The classroom arrangement is not flexible to support numerous and varieties of activities that will engage children. Teachers seem not to encourage social interactions with and among children. Teaching rudiments seem not to provide sufficient time for children to play out to their fulfillment. There seem to be poor availability of playing toys and materials for exploration and self-discovery for children. Teachers seem to be ignorant of the creative skills which children are endowed with and how best to nurture, develop, promote and foster these creative skills for the benefit of the children, parents, teachers and the society at large.

It is against these backdrops that the researchers embarked on this research; to find out the practices for fostering and promoting creativity in early childhood education.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the practices for fostering and promoting creativity in children. Specifically, this study intends to;

1. Find out the practices for fostering and promoting creativity in early childhood education.
2. Find out the benefits of fostering and promoting creativity in early childhood education.
3. Determine the barriers that stifle the fostering and promoting of creativity in early childhood education.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the practices for fostering and promoting creativity in early childhood education?
2. What are the benefits of fostering and promoting creativity in early childhood education?
3. What are the barriers that stifle the fostering and promoting of creativity in early childhood education?

### **Method**

The study adopted a descriptive survey design to determine the necessary practices for fostering and promoting creativity in early childhood education. The study was carried out in Rivers State local education authority. Three research questions guided the study. The population of the study consist of two thousand, eight hundred and sixty (2,860) public nursery school teachers. The sample of the study was made up of one hundred and forty-three (143) public nursery school teachers through a purposive sampling technique. The researchers developed a thirty (30) item structured questionnaire titled “Practices for Fostering Creativity Questionnaire” (PFCQ) which was used to source information from teachers. The instrument was face validated by three experts, two in the Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education and one in Measurement and Evaluation unit of the Department of Educational Foundations all from Ignatius Ajuru University of

Education, Rivers State. The corrections and suggestions which they made were carefully made in the final draft of the questionnaire. Reliability test was conducted using Cronbach Alpha to ascertain the internal consistency and a reliability index of 0.82, 0.95 and 0.76 were obtained for the three clusters. The overall reliability obtained was 0.84. A four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) were weighted 4,3,2, and 1 were used to answer the research questions. Mean and Standard deviation were used to analyze the research questions. Mean response of 2.50 and above were regarded as agree while those below 2.50 were regarded as disagree.

## Results

### Research Question 1

What are the practices for fostering and promoting creativity in early childhood education?

#### Table

Mean score of respondents on the practices for fostering and promoting creativity in early childhood education.

S/N	Practices for fostering and promoting creativity in ECE Includes:	$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision
1.	The classroom needs to be flexible and very spacious for children to easily and freely play around, and explore without undue restraints.	3.53	0.89	Agree
2.	Emphasis needs to be laid on process rather than product while solving problem with children.	3.79	0.93	Agree
3.	The classroom environment needs to be properly organized according to learning centers, well ventilated, and brightly lightened.	3.67	0.86	Agree
4.	Teachers need to always support children's divergent ways of solving problems.	2.86	0.65	Agree
5.	Exposing children on how to explore and interact with the natural phenomenon such as hills, mountains, valleys, trees, cave, forests, water, under the teacher's supervision.	3.14	0.78	Agree
6.	Teachers need to adapt to children's ideas rather than trying to structure the children's ideas to fit the adults.	3.25	0.91	Agree
7.	Teachers need to use creative problem solving in all parts of the curriculum.	3.81	0.92	Agree
8.	Teachers need to teach children using analogies of problems that naturally occur in everyday life.	3.39	0.81	Agree
9.	Children need to be encouraged to always interact with one another and carry out tasks by themselves.	3.16	0.79	Agree

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10. Teachers need to always answer children’s questions correctly.	2.97	0.72	Disagree
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Table 1 showed that all mean scores of teachers are above 2.50; indicating that they agreed that; the classroom should be flexible and spacious, classroom environment should be properly organized according to learning centers, well ventilated and brightly lightened, teachers should always support children’s divergent ways of solving problems, teachers should always answer children’s questions correctly, among others are the practices for fostering and promoting creativity in early childhood education.

### Research Question 2

What are the benefits of fostering and promoting creativity in early childhood education?

**Table 2**

Mean ratings and standard deviations of the benefits of fostering and promoting creativity in early childhood education?

S/N	Benefits of promoting creativity in early childhood education includes:	$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision
11.	Creativity prepares children for a successful future.	3.42	0.97	Agree
12.	Creativity helps children to learn appropriate problem solving skills	3.13	0.81	Agree
13.	Creativity enables children to understand how to dissect their situations to really take a hold of their potentials.	3.22	0.92	Agree
14.	Creativity delays children’s intellectual growth	2.15	1.03	Disagree
15.	Exploring and manipulating tools helps children to develop their fine motor skills, control and coordination.	3.45	0.93	Agree
16.	Creativity teaches children to consider alternatives, analyze them and decide how to apply them in the appropriate context.	3.00	0.72	Agree
17.	Through interaction, sharing ideas, and problem solving together; children’s communication skills are effectively developed.	2.94	0.98	Agree
18.	Creative arts can help children release their feelings by putting them on a specific piece of artwork.	3.08	0.90	Agree
19.	Creativity helps children to gain confidence in their capacities and raise their self-esteem.	3.35	0.85	Agree
20.	Creativity helps to exhume the innate abilities and skills of children which might be neglected or unnoticed in other learning subjects.	3.31	0.83	Agree

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Table 2 revealed that the nursery school teachers agreed that all the listed items except item number 14 are the benefits of fostering and promoting creativity in early childhood education. All the item statements with the exception of item number 14, scored up to the

acceptable mean of 2.50 or above. Item 14 has a mean score of 2.15. The item statements comprise of; creativity prepares children for a successful future, creativity helps children to learn appropriate problem solving skills, creativity helps children to gain confidence in their capacities and raise their self-esteem, among others. Item number 14 states that creativity delays children’s intellectual growth.

**Research Question 3**

What are the barriers that stifle the fostering and promoting of creativity in early childhood education?

**Table 3**

Mean ratings and standard deviations of the barriers that stifle the fostering and promoting of creativity in early childhood education.

S/ N	Barriers of promoting creativity in early childhood education includes:	$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision
21	Teacher’s ignorance and poor knowledge of how to foster and promote creativity in early childhood education.	3.04	0.86	Agree
22	Teacher’s choice of teaching curriculum subjects over fostering and promoting creativity and exploration.	3.17	0.82	Agree
23	The education system does not value creativity.	2.83	0.96	Agree
24	Pressure on teachers to perform both administrative duties and classroom work.	3.18	0.99	Agree
25	Socio-economic status of children’s families, affects their opportunities for creativity and exploration.	3.14	0.85	Agree
26	An unaesthetic and disorganized classroom makes fostering and promoting of creativity difficult.	3.07	0.79	Agree
27	Limited number of experiences for creative teaching and exploration.	2.91	0.94	Agree
28	Lack of materials like toys and little or no space for free play.	3.29	0.85	Agree
29	The education system is too reliant on testing and assessment.	2.84	0.93	Agree
30	Teachers are restricted from straying outside the curriculum	2.63	1.01	Agree

Table 3 revealed that the respondents agreed that all the listed items are the barriers that stifle fostering and promoting of creativity in early childhood education, as all the item statements scores were above the mean benchmark of 2.50. The item statements include; teacher’s ignorance and poor knowledge of how to foster and promote creativity in early childhood education, lack of materials like toys and little or no space to play, an unaesthetic and disorganized classroom, among others.

**Discussion**

The findings in this study identified the necessary practices for fostering and promoting creativity in early childhood education to be; the classroom should be flexible and spacious,

emphasis should be laid on process rather than product while solving problems with children, the classroom environment should be properly organized according to learning centers, well ventilated and brightly lightened, teachers should always support children's divergent ways of solving problems, teachers should teach children using analogies of problems that naturally occur in everyday life, among others. This finding is in consonance with Kohl in Nnonyelum (2016) who highlighted on how teachers can encourage creativity to be; emphasize on process rather than product, and use the problems that naturally occur in everyday life. Pierce, Miller and Cunningham in Emenike (2016), also concurred to this by suggesting that, to foster creativity in early childhood education, the classroom environment has to be spacious, with learning materials properly arranged and sorted to areas and enabling physical climate.

Findings also enumerated the benefits of fostering and promoting creativity in early childhood education to be; prepares children for a successful future, helps children to learn appropriate problem solving skills, helps children to gain confidence in their capacities and raise their self-esteem, develops children's communication and social skills through interaction and sharing of ideas with one another, among others. In support of this, Onyeizuan Okosun (2016), maintained that creativity prepares children for a successful future and also helps children to learn appropriate problem solving skills. More so, Obiweluozo&Nosike (2016) supported this by suggesting that creativity helps to develop self-confidence, self-worth and dignity in young children.

Findings further showed the barriers that stifle fostering and promotion of creativity in early childhood education to be; teacher's ignorance and poor knowledge of how to foster creativity in early childhood education, pressure on teachers to perform both administrative duties and teaching, the education system is too reliant on testing and assessment, lack of materials like toys, and little or no space for free play, teachers are restricted from straying outside the curriculum, the education system does not value creativity, among others. Edelman (2013), identified; the education system is too reliant on testing and assessment, lack of materials like toys and little or no space for free play, and teachers are restricted from straying outside the curriculum, to be barriers that stifle fostering and promoting of creativity in early childhood education. The findings of Aysun and Serap (2020), are also in support of this view, which identified the barriers that stifle fostering and developing creativity in young children to be; pressure on teachers to perform both administrative and classroom work, ignorance and poor knowledge of teachers on creativity and the education system does not value creativity. Also, in correspondence to this finding.

## **Conclusion**

Creativity in the early years is similar to a germinating seedling which needs maximum support and meticulous care for its germination. The present early childhood education practices need to be re-visited, re-engineered, and redirected, to be able to achieve its aim and objectives, as stated in the National Policy on Education. The barriers which stifle the

fostering and promoting of creativity in early childhood education has to be checkmated for its total eradication and prevention. With these in place, the benefits of fostering and promoting creativity in early childhood education will not be far-fetched from young children, teachers, parents and the society at large.

### **Recommendation**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Teachers should ensure that the classroom is flexible and very spacious for children to easily and freely play around, and explore without undue restraints.
2. Teachers should be sensitized and oriented on how to foster and promote creativity in early childhood education.
3. Adequate provision of materials like toys should be made to encourage and engage children in creative and exploratory activities.
4. School authorities should always encourage and support teachers in cultivating and harnessing children's creative skills and innate abilities.
5. Government should adequately and occasionally make provisions for instructional materials, play facilities, creative learning curriculum, creative learning environment, training teachers, remunerating teachers and financial support to schools.

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