

**ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION  
LINKAGE SCHOOLS PROGRAMME IN TWO SELECTED STATES IN SOUTH-WEST,  
NIGERIA**

**BY**

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**Abstract**

*The Universal Basic Education (UBE) linkage schools programme was introduced in Nigeria to improve early childhood education by connecting nursery schools to primary education. Despite its potential to enhance access to quality Early Childhood Care and Development Education (ECCDE), its effective implementation is in doubt. Consequently, this paper assessed the implementation of the UBE linkage schools programme in two selected states in South-West, Nigeria. It addressed three research questions and tested three hypotheses. Descriptive survey research design was adopted, with a sample size of 1,757 respondents, including 1,143 teachers and 614 stakeholders from Lagos and Oyo States. Data were collected via questionnaires. The data collected were analysed using mean, standard deviation and independent t-test at 0.05 level of significance. Findings showed that the level of community involvement in the UBE linkage school programme is moderate; the male and female respondents have good perceptions about the pedagogical methods used in the UBE linkage schools; and the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) strategies for the UBE linkage school programme are effective to a moderate extent. The paper concluded that the implementation of UBE linkage schools programme is moderately effective in the selected states in South-West, Nigeria. The recommendations of the paper include improving community involvement, teachers' utilisation of differentiated and culturally responsive pedagogical methods and strengthening monitoring and evaluation systems.*

**Keywords: Community Involvement, Early Childcare Development, Linkage Schools Programme, Monitoring and Evaluation and Universal Basic Education**

**Introduction**

Globally, early childhood education is emphasized in policy documents as a critical aspect of sustainable development. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4.2, highlight the importance of ensuring that "all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education" (United Nations, 2015). In Nigeria, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme was established in 2004 to provide quality and accessible education for all children, particularly focusing on basic education as a fundamental human right. It is significant that Nigeria also recognizes Early Childhood Care, Development, and Education (ECCDE) as the cornerstone for lifelong learning, cognitive development, and emotional well-being. This reflects in her emphasis on the importance of early childhood education in the various policy documents and in paving way for the operation of the preschools across the country.

To cater for the category of children that are excluded from pre-primary education on account of their vulnerability status, the Federal Government's intervention came in form of the UBE Linkage School Programme initiative, established through the UBE Act (2004), which aims at facilitating a seamless transition of children from the public nursery centers to the public to primary schools. Thus, the Linkage schools (sometimes referred to as "ECCDE schools") are public pre-schools attached to the public primary schools for effective transition of children into the public primary schools in Nigeria. The UBE Act of 2004 further formalized the integration of ECCDE into the national education system by mandating the establishment of linkage schools. This act aims to ensure that children from ages three to five receive quality early childhood education that prepares them for primary schooling. Linkage schools are intended

to create a continuum of care and education, thereby reducing learning disruptions and enhancing pedagogical continuity between ECCDE centers and primary schools (FME, 2004). This integrated approach aligns with global best practices, emphasizing the importance of a well-coordinated education system that supports children throughout their formative years.

It is important to note that community involvement is pivotal to the success of the UBE Linkage School Programme. Community members play a crucial role in supporting children's education through various means, such as volunteering, providing resources, and advocating for improved educational facilities (Epstein, 2011). However, it would appear that in many parts of Southwest Nigeria, community participation remains limited due to socio-economic barriers, cultural perceptions, and a lack of structured engagement initiatives (Ajayi, 2022). Evaluating the level of community involvement can reveal both strengths and weaknesses in the programme's implementation and inform strategies for fostering more robust partnerships. The perceptions of teachers, parents, and community members regarding pedagogical methods employed in UBE Linkage Schools can significantly influence the programme's effectiveness. This is based on the fact that teachers and other stakeholders may hold varying views on teaching strategies and classroom management practices which has the tendency to affect their support for the linkage school programme. Also, cultural beliefs and values can shape perceptions of educational practices among teachers and other stakeholders in UBE linkage school programme. In line with this view, Ajayi (2022) reported that in some communities, traditional views on education may conflict with modern pedagogical approaches, leading to resistance to new methods.

Furthermore, the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) strategies associated with the UBE linkage school programme are often ineffective to assess programme impact and guide improvements due to insufficient resources and poorly structured frameworks. However, effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E) strategies are critical for assessing the implementation and impact of the UBE linkage school programme. M&E provides a systematic approach to collecting and analyzing data on various aspects of the programme, including curriculum effectiveness, teachers' performance, and students' outcomes (Baker, 2015). The approach will enable a more nuanced understanding of how the programme is functioning and where adjustments are needed.

The perceptions of the UBE linkage school programme's effectiveness can vary significantly between different participants, such as teachers, parents, and community stakeholders. Understanding these differences is crucial for tailoring interventions and support to meet the diverse needs of stakeholders (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). For instance, teachers may focus on pedagogical challenges and curriculum implementation, while parents may be more concerned with their children's overall well-being and academic success. Additionally, power dynamics within communities can influence perceptions of effectiveness (Mizrachi, 2015). Thus, the implementation of the UBE Linkage School Programme in Southwest Nigeria presents a critical opportunity to enhance educational outcomes for young children. Without a systematic evaluation of the implementation of the ECCDE linkage school programme, it is difficult to identify gaps, make informed policy adjustments, or allocate resources effectively to where they are most needed (Olaogun, 2017). This realization calls for a thorough evaluation of the programme to ensure that it meets its intended objectives and contributes to achieving the broader educational goals of the nation.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In Nigeria, the effective implementation of the school linkage programme seems to be undermined by varied factors. Several survey reports (e.g. UNICEF 2013; Ige, 2020) indicated that ECCDE facilities do not exist in many rural areas and in some urban areas across the country. Such reports also noted that even in some urban areas where ECCDE centres exist, many of the caregivers working among children in those centres do not use the appropriate pedagogical methods for instructions and the activities of these centres are not effectively monitored. All these problems undermined the realisation of the objectives of school linkage programme of the UBE. If this issue is not given adequate attention, the education of Nigerian future leaders is a mirage. There will be increase in the number of vulnerable children without basic education and this may fuel the rate of crimes among youths in the nearest future. Consequently, the allocation of funds to education for ensuring continuous development of human resource to enable them

make significant contributions to the growth and development of Nigerian economy will amount to waste of resources. Given the importance of community linkage schools, it would be expected that there should be volumes of studies on the programme providing feed-back in forms of objective assessment reports to governments, and the various stakeholders. However, apart from the UNICEF and UNESCO's periodic reports and a few studies incorporating some of these aspects of community school linkages, there seems to be little evidence of evaluative studies in the area of linkage school programme. To fill this gap therefore, this study seeks to assess the implementation of the UBE linkage schools programme in two selected states in South-West, Nigeria.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This paper assessed the implementation of the UBE school linkage programme in two selected states in South-West, Nigeria. Its' specific objectives were to:

1. Ascertain the level of community involvement in the UBE linkage school programme;
2. Examine the male and female respondents' perceptions of pedagogical methods used in the UBE linkage schools; and
3. Assess the effectiveness of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) strategies for the UBE linkage schools programme.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions guided this paper:

1. What is the level of community involvement in the UBE linkage school programme?
2. What are the male and female respondents' perceptions of pedagogical methods used in the UBE linkage schools?
3. To what extent are the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) strategies for the UBE linkage school programme effective?

### **Research Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were tested in the study:

1. There is no significant difference in the teachers' and stakeholders' perception of the level of community involvement in the UBE linkage school programme.
2. There is no significant difference in the male and female respondents' (teachers and stakeholders) opinion on the appropriateness of pedagogical methods used in the UBE linkage schools.
3. There is no significant difference in the opinion of teachers and stakeholders on the effectiveness of the strategies for monitoring and evaluation of the linkage school programme.

### **Methodology**

The paper adopted the descriptive survey research design. This study covered Lagos and Oyo states in the South-West, Nigeria. Lagos and Oyo states were selected because they are cosmopolitan in nature, bearing characteristics similar to those in other states in the southwest, Nigeria, and they both have public primary schools with sections dedicated to the UBE linkage school programme in some of their communities. The population for this study comprised all the 998 public pre-primary schools in Lagos and 2,548 public pre-primary schools in Oyo; all the 11,430 teachers comprising 9,075 teachers in Lagos pre-primary schools and all the 2,355 officially estimated teachers pre-primary school teachers in Oyo pre-primary schools (Nigeria Education Management Information System (NEMIS) Data on Number of Schools by State and Teachers 2019-2021), as well as all the stakeholders of UBE linkage schools in Lagos and Oyo States.

The sample size for this study was a total of 1,757 respondents comprising 1,143 teachers and 614 stakeholders. In calculating the sample for the teachers, the 10% sampling rule was adopted. The 10% sampling rule suggests that a sample size of 10% of the population is sufficient for representative results (Israel, 2013; Groves et al., 2011). The multi-stage sampling method was used in this study. At the first stage, a purposive sampling technique was used to select the two states involved in the study, i.e. Lagos and Oyo states in South-West, Nigeria. The two states were purposively selected because, in addition to being cosmopolitan in nature, they both have public primary schools with sections dedicated to the UBE linkage school programme in some of their communities. At the second stage of the sampling process, a simple random sampling technique was used to select ten (10) Local Government Areas in each of the two

states selected for the study. Thus, a total of twenty (20) local government areas were selected for the study. At the third stage, quota sampling technique was used to select a total of 170 linkage schools made up of 100 pre-primary schools in Lagos and 70 in Oyo states respectively. The breakdown shows that ten (10) UBE linkage schools and seven (7) UBE linkage schools were selected from each of the selected local government areas of Lagos and Oyo state respectively. There are 9,075 and 2,355 pre-primary teachers in Lagos and Oyo pre-primary schools respectively. At the fourth stage, a total of 1,143 teachers made up of 908 and 235 teachers from Lagos and Oyo States were selected for the study, using quota sampling technique. The use of quota sampling is based on the differences in the number of schools with linkage school teachers and need to ensure that certain characteristics such as caregivers’ sex, age and others were represented in certain proportion so as to have an appropriate view of the population. At the fifth stage of the sampling process, the purposive sampling technique was used to select the 403 and 211 stakeholders (parents, head teachers, PTA chairmen/chairmen of parents’ forum, and community leaders) from Lagos and Oyo states respectively. The stakeholders were selected on the basis of being involved in the administration and evaluation of the linkage schools in the areas of study.

The research instruments used to elicit needed the data and information from the respondents are UBE Linkage School Teachers’ Questionnaire (ULSTQ), and UBE Linkage School Stakeholders’ Questionnaire (ULSSQ). The face and content validation of the two questionnaires was two experts in the field of Early Childhood Education and research methods. On the other hand, the reliability of each of the questionnaires was determined using test re-test method and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to correlate the data obtained in the first and second administrations at 0.05 level of significant. Consequently, the coefficients of reliability obtained were 0.87 and 0.87 for ULSTQ, and ULSSQ respectively. In order to collect the required data for this paper, four research assistants were recruited and trained on the purpose and ethics of the research and how to administer the instruments. The researcher and the research assistants administered all the copies of the research instruments to the respondents. Also, the copies of the questionnaire administered were retrieved from the respondents almost immediately after completing the questionnaires. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviations; while all the three hypotheses in this paper were tested using independent t-test at 0.05 level of significance.

**Results**

**Research Question 1:** What is the level of community involvement in the UBE linkage school programme?

**Table 1: Level of Community Involvement in UBE School Linkage Programme**

S/N	Items	Mean	S.D	Remarks
1	The community members participate in decision making of the UBE linkage schools (ULS).	1.99	0.97	Moderate
2	Local resources are provided by community members for teaching and learning in ULS.	2.31	0.75	Moderate
3	The community members participate in the monitoring of the activities of ULS.	2.13	1.18	Moderate
4	Community members embark on supervision of pedagogical practices/instructions in the ULS.	1.48	1.02	Low
5	The community members assist the ULS in the area of security of lives and properties.	2.54	0.78	High
<b>Grand Average</b>		<b>2.09</b>	<b>0.94</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

Source: Field Survey

**Scales:** Very High ( $x \leq 4$ ), High( $x \leq 3$ ), Moderate( $x \leq 2$ ), Low( $x \leq 1$ )

Table 1 shows that the mean ratings of the five items is 2.09 with a standard deviation of 0.94. This shows that the mean is approximately 2.0. This implies that the level of community involvement in the UBE linkage school programme is moderate.

**Research Question 2:** What are the male and female respondents’ perceptions of pedagogical methods used in the UBE linkage schools?

**Table 2: Male and Female Respondents’ Perceptions on Pedagogical Methods used in the UBE Linkage Schools**

S/N	Items	Male Mean	S.D	Female Mean	S.D	Remarks
6	The use of storytelling method is good for children at linkage schools.	3.48	0.62	3.51	0.71	Not Differ
7	Role play method is suitable for children at linkage schools.	3.35	0.59	3.43	0.77	Not Differ
8	The use of inquiry learning strategy is appropriate for children at linkage schools.	3.34	0.69	3.22	0.65	Not Differ
9	Play way method is proper for children from ages 3 – 5.	3.41	0.54	3.36	0.53	Not Differ
10	Generally, the methods used for implementation of UBE linkage school programme (ULSP) curriculum promotes all round development of children at linkage schools.	3.22	0.67	3.11	0.84	Not Differ
<b>Grand Average</b>		<b>3.36</b>	<b>0.62</b>	<b>3.33</b>	<b>0.70</b>	<b>Not Differ</b>

**Source:** Field Survey

**Scales:** Very Good ( $x \leq 4$ ), Good ( $x \leq 3$ ), Fair ( $x \leq 2$ ), Bad ( $x \leq 1$ )

Table 2 shows that the mean ratings of the five items for male respondents is 3.36 with a standard deviation of 0.62; while the mean ratings for female respondents is 3.33 with a standard deviation of 0.70. This shows that the mean for male and female respondents is approximately 3.0 each. This implies that both male and female respondents were of the opinion that: the use of storytelling method is good for children at linkage schools; role play method is suitable for children at linkage schools; the use of inquiry learning strategy is appropriate for children at linkage schools; play way method is proper for children from ages 3 – 5; and the methods used for implementation of UBE linkage school programme (ULSP) curriculum generally promotes all round development of children at linkage schools. Hence, the male and female respondents have good perceptions about the pedagogical methods used in the UBE linkage schools.

**Research Question 3:** To what extent are the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) strategies for the UBE linkage school programme effective?

**Table 3: Effectiveness of the Strategies for Monitoring and Evaluation of the UBE Linkage School Programme**

S/N	Items	Mean	S.D	Remarks
11	The method(s) used for assessment of classroom teaching is/are effective.	2.68	0.95	Moderate Extent
12	The strategy used for monitoring classroom teaching and learning activities in the UBE linkage schools (ULS) is/are effective.	2.97	0.78	Moderate Extent
13	The techniques used for evaluation of learning achievement among the pupils are effective.	2.93	0.88	Moderate Extent
14	The methods used for recording/keeping track of events in the ULS are effective.	2.67	0.98	Moderate Extent
15	The method(s) used for performance reporting in ULS are effective.	2.89	0.65	Moderate Extent
<b>Grand Average</b>		<b>2.68</b>	<b>0.95</b>	<b>Moderate Extent</b>

**Source:** Field Survey

**Scales:** High Extent ( $x \leq 4$ ), Moderate Extent ( $x \leq 3$ ), Low Extent ( $x \leq 2$ ), Very Low Extent ( $x \leq 1$ )

Table 3 shows that the mean ratings of the five items is 2.68 with a standard deviation of 0.95. This shows that the mean is approximately 3.0. This implies that the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) strategies for the UBE linkage school programme are effective to a moderate extent.

**Test of Hypotheses**

**Ho1:** There is no significant difference in the teachers’ and stakeholders’ perception on the level of community involvement in the UBE school linkage programme.

**Table 4: Difference in the teachers’ and stakeholders’ perception on the level of community involvement in the UBE school linkage programme**

Variables	N	$\bar{X}$	Standard Deviation	t	Sig.
Teachers	1143	2.08	0.89	.408**	.072
Stakeholders	614	2.10	0.99		

\*\*Not Significant, df =1755

Table 4 showed that calculated value of “t” (0.408) resulted in a p-value of 0.072. Since, the p-value of 0.072 is greater than 0.05 alpha level, the null hypothesis which stated that “There is no significant difference in the teachers’ and stakeholders’ perception on the level of community involvement in UBE school linkage programme” was accepted. Thus, no significant difference exists in the teachers’ and stakeholders’ perception on the level of community involvement in UBE school linkage programme.

**Ho2:** There is no significant difference in the male and female respondents’ opinion on the appropriateness of pedagogical methods used in the UBE linkage schools.

**Table 5: Gender difference in the respondents’ opinion on the appropriateness of pedagogical methods used in the UBE linkage schools**

Gender	N	$\bar{X}$	Standard Deviation	t	Sig.
Male	575	3.36	0.62	.728**	.132
Female	1182	3.33	0.70		

\*\*Not Significant, df = 1755

Table 5 showed that calculated value of “t” (0.728) resulted in a p-value of 0.132. Since, the p-value of 0.132 is greater than 0.05 alpha level, the null hypothesis which stated that “There is no significant difference in the male and female respondents’ opinion on the appropriateness of pedagogical methods used in the UBE linkage schools” was accepted. Thus, no significant difference exists in the male and female respondents’ opinion on the appropriateness of pedagogical methods used in the UBE linkage schools.

**Ho3:** There is no significant difference in the opinion of teachers and stakeholders on the effectiveness of the strategies for monitoring and evaluation of the linkage school programme.

**Table 6: Significant difference in the opinion of teachers and stakeholders on the effectiveness of the strategies for monitoring and evaluation of the linkage school programme**

Variables	N	$\bar{X}$	Standard Deviation	t	Sig.
Teachers	1143	2.88	0.86	1.066**	.101
Stakeholders	614	2.83	0.83		

\*\*Not Significant, df =1755

Table 6 showed that calculated value of “t” (1.066) resulted in a p-value of 0.101. Since, the p-value of 0.101 is greater than 0.05 alpha level, the null hypothesis which stated that “There is no significant difference in the opinion of teachers and stakeholders on the effectiveness of the strategies for monitoring and evaluation of the linkage school programme” was accepted. Thus, there is no significant difference in the opinion of teachers and stakeholders on the effectiveness of the strategies for monitoring and evaluation of the linkage school programme.

**Discussion of Results**

This paper found that level of community involvement in the UBE linkage school programme is moderate. This implies that the level of community involvement in the UBE linkage school programme is significantly high. In addition, it was found that no significant difference exists in the teachers’ and stakeholders’ perception on the level of community involvement in UBE school linkage programme. In line with the finding of this study, Akinpelu (2020) and Amadi (2021) reported that community

participation in early childhood education initiatives is important as it leads to better resource mobilization, higher enrolment rates, and stronger programme sustainability. It was found that community participation includes local fundraising, volunteer teaching, and infrastructure development. However, in some communities there was limited community involvement, largely attributed to a lack of clear communication and perceived exclusion from decision-making processes. This aligns with findings of Nnadi and Adeyemi (2019) which showed that top-down approaches to programme implementation can alienate community members and hinder effective participation.

This study revealed that pedagogical methods used in ECCDE linkage schools are appropriate. This involved the use of play-based and inquiry-based strategies. In addition, this paper found no significant differences in opinions of both male and female respondents regarding the appropriateness of pedagogical methods used in the linkage schools. Supporting this finding, Mustapha (2020) the use of play-based and inquiry-based strategies as pedagogical methods align with contemporary early childhood education research, which advocates for experiential learning approaches that engage children in a meaningful context. Also, Ige (2024) reported that effective pedagogical methods, such as play-based and inquiry-based learning, are foundational to quality early childhood education.

This paper also found that the teachers and stakeholders perceived the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) strategies in the UBE linkage schools programme to be moderately effective. In addition, the test of research hypothesis revealed that no significant difference existed in the perception of the teachers and stakeholders on the effectiveness of the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) strategies in the UBE linkage schools programme. The shared perceptions of the effectiveness of M&E strategies among teachers and stakeholders suggest that current practices are broadly accepted. However, Leithwood et al. (2008) reported that the lack of significant differences could indicate complacency or a lack of awareness of more innovative M&E frameworks that could better capture the complexities of educational processes and outcomes. Contrary to the finding of this paper, Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016) found that despite the immense benefits that supervision has to offer the ECE, the Nigerian ECE at pre-primary school level is not provided with these benefits as it is usually left unsupervised. This may be why Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2021) advocated for a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data to provide a holistic view of programme outcomes.

### **Conclusion**

The study established that the level of respondents' awareness of the UBE linkage schools programme varies among the respondents, community involvement is moderate, the programme uses appropriate pedagogical methods, while monitoring and evaluation mechanisms is one of major obstacles to the effective implementation of the programme. It can be concluded from the valuable insights and perceptions of teachers and stakeholders regarding the UBE linkage school programme in Nigeria that the implementation of the UBE linkage schools programme is moderately effective in the selected states in South West, Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are made on the basis of the findings of this study.

1. There is a need for critical stakeholder engagement activities to scale up the status of the linkage school programme through effective and sustainable community involvement in all communities across South-West, Nigeria.
2. Linkage school teachers should endeavour to use and promote differentiated and culturally responsive pedagogical methods that cater for diverse learning styles and needs, and enhancing engagement and inclusivity in the classroom.
3. All agencies concerned with the management of the linkage school programme should strengthen Monitoring and Evaluation Systems by developing more comprehensive and participatory M&E frameworks to capture a more holistic picture of educational processes and outcomes.

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