



**Democratic Participation and teaching practices in Public Pre-schools in Epe Local Government Education Authority**

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**Abstract**

*This study investigated the practicalities of democratic participation and the effects of teaching practices on the learning development of children in public pre-schools within Epe Local Government Education Authority, Lagos State. Emphasis was placed on understanding how child-centred approaches and inclusive practices contribute to early learning, as well as evaluating the extent to which government policies support children. A qualitative descriptive research design was adopted, and data was gathered from 100 ECCDE teachers selected from ten randomly sampled public primary schools. A validated, self-developed questionnaire served as the main instrument for data collection. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and inferential analysis using the one-sample t-test were employed to interpret the data. These methods were shown to positively influence children's learning development, particularly in cognitive, language, and social domains. However, challenges persist in terms of resource availability, professional development, and administrative support. Findings indicate increasing adoption of democratic classroom practices and child centered teaching methods that enhance cognitive, language and social development. However, challenges persist due to limited resources, inconsistent teacher training and weak policy implementation. Hence, the study recommended targeted teacher training, improved learning resources, stronger policy implementation, and community engagement to enhance the effectiveness of early childhood education. These steps are essential for ensuring equitable learning outcomes for all children in line with global education goals.*

**Word count:** 216

**Keywords:** democratic participation, ECCDE, teaching practices, government policy, early childhood education.

## Introduction

The semantics of democratic pedagogy in early childhood care, development and education (ECCDE) is grounded in philosophy, learning strategies, values and National interest. These are guided by policies and documents concerning children's democratic participation in the process of learning in early childhood education (Akyol & Erdem, 2021). Early childhood education is the education given to children from 0-5 years old, according to the Nigerian National policy on education (2013) early childhood education is the care, nurture, development and education given to children in the crèche or nursery, the policy statement went further to define kindergarten education as the one-year education given to five-year-old children prior to their transition into primary school.

Prevalently in the Public pre-schools under Epe local Government Education Area (ELGEA), the principles of democratic participation in ECCDE classes seems to remain elusive in implementation for practice. Section 2(14) A of the National Policy on Education (NPE, 2013) clearly defines Early Childhood, Care, Development and Education (ECCDE) as the care, protection, stimulation and learning promoted in children from age 0-4 in the Crèche or Nursery, the policy statement went further in section 2(17)B to define Kindergarten education as the one year education given to children aged five (5) prior to their entering primary school.

This serves as the basis on which the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC, 2010) is premised and also as a rationale which the Nigerian Government translated further into Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act of 2004. This comes with a shift from unit approach in content presentation to thematic approach with the aim of improving the well-being of the Nigerian children. The general comment (GC 4) issued by the committee on the rights of the child, refers to Article 3910 of the convention on the rights of the child, which translates to mean that it is the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration on providing explanation for the interpretation of the policy statement on the well-being of the Nigerian children (GC 4, Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2013).

An indebt look into GC 4 will help shed light on the meaning of Democratic Participation, its relevance and importance to the practice of ECCDE in Nigeria. The insight into democratic participation will further shed light on how participatory strategies of learning can serve in the best interest of the child.

Democracy is a multi-dimensional concept with different forms and practices linked to each dimension. It can be procedural which relates to formal rules of the Government (Pedagogy and Policies), and It includes freedom to choose representatives at all levels (Stakeholders). Democratic participation involves children directly in matters relating to their

well-being. In this vein, democratic participation intertwines the parental and Governmental decisions relating to children's learning as Bradely & Corwyn, (2022) posits that access to resources, including education, health care and extra-curricular activities contributes to better outcomes for children. This accretion is supported by Brown & Manning (2022) that children raised in stable environments tend to exhibit higher level of emotional well-being. In an ideal democratic pre-school setting, teachers are expected to enhance learning through the provision of the following themes in a democratic classroom setting: managing an inclusive child friendly school, a safe and protective school environment. Promotion of equity and equality, health and nutrition (UNICEF, 2010)

John Dewey's (1860) pragmatic view emphasized his idea on democratic partnership in a primary mode associated with living, for the fact that he was of progressive education theory. His theory focused on learners centered activities rather than lecture or reading assignments. Apparently, he also believes this strategy maximizes the opportunity for sharing, exchanging, decision making and negotiating perspectives and opinions; which he sees as a way of relating to self and others.

The enactment of every day democratic practice in ECCDE supports children in practicing how to be active agents in their own lives (Kahutoa, 2021). Therefore, democratic participation is geared towards encouraging inclusive learning, whereby learning activities and participation is practiced in ECCDE classes, especially with the upsurge of children. Democratic participation and inclusion is strategic to propelling Nigeria's youngest citizens into the opportunity for a qualitative head start. In support of this assertion, research has revealed that emphasis on social life of children in the new paradigm increased the importance of children's right (James & James, 2004)

### **Statement of Problem**

The success of democratic participation and teaching practices deeply lies on the curriculum on which teaching and learning is based on in ECCDE classes. The curriculum gives a road map to the successful implementation of any educational programme. The Early childhood education curriculum is an important written plan, that includes goals for children's development and learning, it spells out what teachers/caregivers are to familiarize themselves with, methods of teaching, materials needed to support development and learning experiences of children, roles of teachers/caregivers and parents to achieve goals and to support proper implementation of the programme

However, despite policy frameworks emphasizing participatory and child centred approaches, limited empirical evidence exists on how these are implemented in ECCDE classrooms in Epe, Lagos State. This

### **Objective of the study**

The objectives of the study are to:

- 1) Determine the practicalities of democratic participation in public pre-schools in Epe Local Government Education Authority.
- 2) Investigate the teaching methods used in public pre-schools in Epe Local Government Education Authority.

### **Research Questions**

- 1) What are the practicalities of democratic participation in ECCDE classes?
- 2) What are the effects of the teaching methods used on the learning development of children in public pre-schools in Epe Local Government Education Authority?

### **Methodology**

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive research design, which is suitable for providing a detailed account of participants' experiences and perceptions using structured but non-experimental instruments (Siedleckis, 2020). This design enabled the systematic gathering and interpretation of data related to democratic participation practices and the effects of teaching practices on learning development among children in Early Childhood Care, Development and Education (ECCDE) classrooms. The study was conducted in public pre-primary schools under the Epe Local Government Education Authority in Lagos State, Nigeria. A simple random sampling technique was used to select ten (10) public primary schools, after which ten (10) ECCDE teachers were purposively selected from each, giving a total sample size of 100 teachers.

A self-developed questionnaire was the primary instrument for data collection. The instrument was divided into three sections: Section A captured demographic information, Section B focused on the practicalities of democratic participation in ECCDE classes, while Section C addressed the effects of teaching methods on the learning development of children in ECCDE classrooms. Each item was structured using a 4-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree = 4, Agree = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1), which allowed for nuanced assessment of teacher perceptions. To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts in early childhood education and educational measurement. The reliability of the instrument

was determined using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded an acceptable internal consistency coefficient of  $\alpha = 0.81$ , indicating that the instrument was reliable for the intended analysis.

The data collected were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used to summarise responses to each item and identify general trends. Inferential statistics, particularly the one-sample t-test, were employed to determine whether the observed responses significantly differed from the theoretical mean (2.50) of the response scale, thereby enabling empirical validation of participants' perceptions. All analyses were conducted at 0.05 level of significance using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. positive.

### Data Analysis

#### Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Practicalities of Democratic Participation in ECCDE Classes (*Research Question 1*)

S/N	Item	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Std. Deviation (SD)
1	Children make choices in their learning activities.	3.22	0.86
2	Pupils express their opinions in discussions.	3.18	0.91
3	Classroom rules are co-created with learners.	2.95	1.01
4	Group decision-making is encouraged.	3.26	0.85
5	Learners are respected irrespective of background.	3.40	0.76
6	Teachers model democratic behaviours.	3.35	0.72
7	School leadership supports democratic practices.	3.12	0.88
8	Democracy enhances communication/confidence.	3.38	0.77

*Writer's computation*

**Overall Mean = 3.23      Overall SD = 0.84**

According to the analysis, most teachers concur that democratic participation is actively practiced in ECCDE classes at public preschools in Epe LGA. Strong support for democratic teaching practices and inclusive respect for all students is evident in the highest-rated items. With a grand mean of 3.23, which indicates widespread use of democratic methods, the overall perception is still positive even though some items, such as co-creating classroom rules, scored slightly lower.

**Table 2: Teaching Methods and Their Effects on Learning Development of Children**  
*(Research Question 2)*

S/N	Item	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Std. Deviation (SD)
9	Play-based learning enhances children's engagement.	3.22	0.89
10	Storytelling helps children improve comprehension skills.	3.15	0.92
11	Use of songs and rhymes improves memorisation in young learners.	3.31	0.85
12	Child-centred activities promote critical thinking.	3.10	0.94
13	Visual aids support children's retention of concepts.	3.28	0.91
14	Group activities help children develop social interaction.	3.25	0.88
15	Hands-on activities (e.g., drawing, building) foster creativity.	3.34	0.83
16	Teachers adapt methods to meet different learning needs.	3.08	0.95

*Writer's computation*

**Overall Mean = 3.22      Overall SD  
= 0.90**

The analysis of teaching methods and their impact on children's learning development in public pre-schools reveals that respondents generally agreed that active and creative methods have a positive effect. Items such as play-based learning ( $\bar{x} = 3.22$ ), songs and rhymes ( $\bar{x} = 3.31$ ), and hands-on activities ( $\bar{x} = 3.34$ ) were particularly rated high, reflecting the widespread belief in their educational value. The overall mean of 3.22 further confirms that teachers perceive these strategies as effective for enhancing cognitive, social, and emotional development in ECCDE learners. However, while the ratings are generally high, the slightly lower agreement on adaptability to different learning needs ( $\bar{x} = 3.08$ ) indicates areas for improvement in inclusive pedagogical approaches.

## Inferential Analysis Table

Table 3: One-Sample t-test on Practicalities of Democratic Participation

Item Focus	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Test Value	t- value	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Decision
Democratic practices in ECCDE	3.23	2.50	8.62	99	0.000**	Reject $H_0$

*Writer's computation**Test value = 2.50 (neutral point);  $p < 0.05$  indicates significance.*

The one-sample t-test result ( $t = 8.62$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) reveals a statistically significant difference between the neutral value (2.5) and the observed mean (3.23), suggesting that teachers highly concur that democratic participation is actually implemented in Epe ECCDE classrooms. This lends credence to the idea that democratic teaching methods are being encouraged in all of the LGA's preschools.

Table 4: One-Sample t-test on Teaching Methods and Their Effects on Learning Development of Children

Item Focus	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Test Value	t-value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision
Effect of teaching methods on learning development	2.94	2.50	4.35	99	0.000**	Reject $H_0$

The one-sample t-test result ( $t = 4.35$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) shows a statistically significant difference from the theoretical mean of 2.50, indicating that ECCDE teachers perceive the teaching methods used as positively impacting learning development. However, the moderate mean value (2.94) suggests room for improvement, especially in aligning teaching methods with diverse learner needs.

### Discussion of Findings

The results of this study shed important light on the type and degree of democratic participation in ECCDE classes as well as the real-world effects of governmental policies on children attending public preschools in Lagos State's Epe Local Government Area. According to the findings, earliest childhood educators in the schools included in the sample felt that their classrooms exhibited democratic practices. Items like promoting children's choice, permitting opinion sharing, co-developing rules, and modelling democratic behaviours were confirmed as being regularly practiced, with an overall mean score of 3.23. These results support the claims made by Osler and Starkey (2021), who emphasised that child-centered, participatory approaches in early childhood settings increase learners' agency and sense of social responsibility. Additionally, the one-sample t-test against a neutral test value (2.50) revealed a statistically significant difference ( $t = 8.62$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), confirming that teachers' perceptions were not coincidental but rather represented a genuine application of democratic values in ECCDE instruction. This supports the claims made by Omodan and Tsotetsi (2020) that allowing kids to participate in classroom decision-making encourages critical thinking and democratic citizenship in young children.

While democratic values are promoted at the classroom level, institutional support may be uneven, as evidenced by the slightly lower scores for items like leadership support for democratic practices and the collaborative creation of classroom rules. A study by Adegbite et al. (2022) raised similar issues, revealing gaps in the implementation of democratic citizenship education policy in classrooms. The second major finding highlights the influence of various teaching methods on the learning development of children in public pre-schools. Descriptive analysis revealed that teachers moderately agreed that the methods they employed, including



play-based activities, storytelling, group work, and learner-centred instruction, positively impacted children's communication, cognitive, and social skills. The overall mean score was 3.01 (SD = 0.74), indicating a generally positive perception across the sample.

Further statistical testing using a one-sample t-test confirmed this perception. The test revealed a significant difference between the observed mean and the neutral benchmark of 2.5 ( $t = 4.27$ ,  $p = 0.0001$ ), suggesting that the use of engaging teaching strategies contributes meaningfully to learning outcomes. However, some items recorded slightly lower mean values, such as those relating to the use of visual aids and the differentiation of instruction based on individual needs. This suggests that while teachers acknowledge the benefits of active learning methods, challenges persist in implementing them effectively due to limited training or resources. This aligns with the findings of Oduolowu and Olowe (2021), who argued that child-centred pedagogies are critical to holistic development in ECCDE, yet are often underutilised due to lack of instructional materials and inadequate teacher preparation. Similarly, UNESCO (2023) reported that while Nigerian ECCDE teachers are increasingly adopting play-based learning, systemic support is still required to improve the quality and consistency of its application.

### **Conclusion of study**

Together, these results paint a dual picture of ECCDE in Epe: on one hand, there is growing adoption of participatory and developmental teaching practices that support children's learning, largely driven by teacher agency; on the other hand, the full benefits of these methods are hindered by infrastructural gaps and training limitations. It is therefore evident that both pedagogical strategy and structural support must go hand-in-hand. As suggested by Ajayi and Alabi (2020), achieving effective ECCDE requires a synergy between motivated teachers and systems that provide appropriate tools and continuous professional development. Strengthening this synergy will allow for more consistent child learning outcomes across rural and urban pre-schools.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following practical and policy-based recommendations are proposed:

- i. **Strengthen Teacher Training in Child-Centred Pedagogies:** Regular and compulsory capacity-building workshops should be organised for ECCDE teachers in public pre-schools within Epe LGEA. These should

focus on modern, developmentally appropriate teaching methods, such as play-based learning, differentiated instruction, and storytelling, which have proven effective in enhancing children's learning outcomes.

- ii. **Provide Adequate Instructional Resources:** The government and local education authorities should ensure that each ECCDE classroom is equipped with relevant teaching aids, visual materials, manipulatives, and learning corners. These resources are crucial for teachers to apply child-centred strategies effectively and consistently.
- iii. **Encourage Participatory Classroom Practices:** School heads and LGEA supervisors should promote democratic participation by encouraging teacher-student dialogue, collaborative tasks, and inclusive decision-making in the classroom. This will improve children's communication, self-esteem, and critical thinking skills from an early age.
- iv. **Improve Policy Implementation and Monitoring:** While policies exist on inclusive and quality ECCDE, their implementation remains weak. There is a need for more robust monitoring frameworks and transparent resource allocation to ensure that such policies are translated into practical classroom realities, particularly in marginalised communities.
- v. **Foster Community Engagement and Parental Involvement:** Strengthening partnerships between schools and local communities can reinforce learning outside the classroom. Parents should be sensitised on the value of active learning and supported to continue similar practices at home.

## Conclusion

This study set out to examine the practicalities of democratic participation and the effects of teaching methods on children's learning development in public pre-schools within the Epe Local Government Education Authority. The findings show that teachers are gradually embracing democratic practices in their classroom management, and are aware of their significance in child development. Furthermore, the use of child-centred and participatory teaching methods was found to positively impact children's cognitive, linguistic, and social growth.

However, limitations such as inadequate training, insufficient materials, and inconsistencies in government policy implementation continue to undermine these efforts. While teachers are doing their best within their means, the full benefits of inclusive ECCDE cannot be realised without stronger systemic support. Therefore, a collaborative approach involving teachers, policymakers, communities, and school administrators is essential to improving the quality of early childhood education in the region.

## Suggestion for further studies

This research work cannot be generalized as a limited number of participants were used and all were in a particular local government education authority in Lagos State. subsequent research on democratic participation and teaching practices in pre- schools should increase the population and consider other local government education authorities in the State. Also, there is need to consider other moderating variables in a research of this nature. These include variables like private pre-schools, urban/rural location, educational attainment of parents, and others. All these are important factors that can determine democratic participation and teaching practices in pre-schools.

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