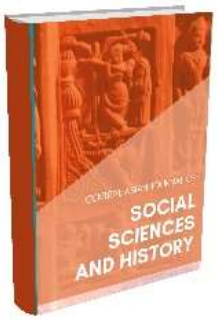
CENTRAL ASIAN JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HISTORY
VOLUME: 04 ISSUE: 8 | AUGUST 2023 (ISSN: 2660-6836)

CENTRAL ASIAN JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HISTORY

Journal homepage: https://cajssh.centralasianstudies.org



Examination of the Appropriateness of the Age of School Children in Primary Schools of Rivers State, Nigeria

Ibiye Omieibi-Davids
Department of Curriculum Studies and Instructional Technology, Faculty of Education, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria
Email: ibimieye@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract:
This is a descriptive survey that looked at children in primary schools of Rivers State, Nigeria, to determine the age of the pupils and their appropriateness. A total of Twenty-one thousand, three hundred and sixty-five (21,365) pupils were randomly selected from all the local government areas of the state. The study had two research questions and they were to find out what the age of school children in primary schools of Rivers State and to determine if the age of primary school children in Rivers State was appropriate. The result of the study showed that children in primary schools in Rivers State are generally younger than the stipulated age for most classes; they are being enrolled into the primary school far too young. It discovered that there were children as young as 2 and 3 years enrolled in primary schools. The conclusion was that schools and parents are not adhering to the stipulations of the National Policy on Education in enrolling children in schools. Recommendations and suggestions for further related study were made.

ARTICLE INFO
Article history:
Received 19-Jun-23
Received in revised form 25-Jul-23
Accepted 15-Aug-23
Available online 30-Aug-2023

Key word: School Age, Primary School, Appropriateness of School Age.

INTRODUCTION

Trends in education are tilted towards creating and adjusting the educational process according to the abilities, characteristics, needs, interest and background of the learner (Zunjic et al, 2015; Natividad

E-mail address: editor@centralasianstudies.org
(ISSN: 2660-6836) Hosting by Central Asian Studies. All rights reserved..

Copyright (c) 2023 Author (s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY).To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

et al, 2018). This according to Asiabaka & Mbakwem (2008) constitutes a learner-friendly school environment with learner-friendly instructional delivery systems. A learner-friendly instructional delivery system is that school system that is adapted to suit the characteristics and needs of the child by providing appropriate curriculum, appropriate infrastructural arrangement, appropriate teaching strategies, appropriate use of resources and appropriate skills needed to fit in and function effectively in the community (Bengtsson, 2009; Batista et al, 2007)).

To ensure that children learn what is appropriate and suitable to their characteristics and needs, the curriculum is deliberately planned and organized to provide appropriate content, learning activities and skills for different ages and levels of learners. The curriculum is planned to be developmentally appropriate (Morin, 2000). This means that it is planned based on what students are able to do cognitively, physically and emotionally at a certain age. This is said to reduce learning gaps, increase achievement and allow students to engage in the learning process while solving their own problems as they learn new information (Shipley, 2014). Developmentally appropriate curriculum is curriculum that is planned taking the mental and physical needs of the learner into consideration.

One of the biggest issues in planning a developmentally appropriate curriculum is that yardstick to determine the right age for learners to start school or to be in a particular class. Various things have been done in the past. One of these was making learners touch their left ear with their right hand across the top of the head. It was believed that once a child could do this, he/she was ready to start school. The reasoning behind this practice is unknown but it had effect on a lot of children because they were denied school entry over their much younger and taller sibling. Age has been another way to determine readiness to attend school or be at a particular class level. While some are in favour of this, others are of the view that age alone does not reflect maturity and readiness. They are of the opinion that biological maturity, personality, family, community and life experiences all contribute to readiness to participate in various activities, including school (Hansen, 2018).

Hansen (2018) states that the only reason age is the focus of developmentally appropriate curriculum and school policies is historical legacy. He says this happened because early Europeans who did not know much about human learning believed that separating children by age was the most efficient way to have developmentally appropriate learning. Van Praag et al (2023) agrees with Hansen (2018) that the use of age for organisational purposes in education stems from the idea that age provides an indication of the development of is associated with what they learn and how they learn. They are, however, of the view that there is not enough academic research on whether using age for planning educational practices and policies. This is asserted by Thomas (2023) that a lot of children in the school system are not coping within the school system because the age-grade principle of organising knowledge which is not favourable to every child.

E-mail address: editor@centralasianstudies.org
(ISSN: 2660-6836).. Hosting by Central Asian Studies. All rights reserved.

Copyright (c) 2023 Author (s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY).To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

There is a popular adage that 'age is just a number'. In education and learning age, which is the length of time an individual has lived, is not just a number (Van Praag et al, 2023). It determines how, what and why people learn. This is because people of different ages understand things differently. The way people take in information, organize the information, understand that information, act on it and remember or forget it depends on age (Gosalia, 2015). The mental and physical development of an individual is to a large extent dependent on the age of learner. An individual's intelligence maturity and experience are also, to a large extent, determined by his age (Slavin, 2000; Shipley, 2014).

Age is an important factor in education. Even though people can learn at all ages, education must mirror the developmental maturity of the individual for it to be effective (Gosalia, 2015). It determines the intelligence of a human being. This is because intelligence develops with age. The human ability to learn these concepts and skills, make use of these concepts and skills and how we learn them are all dependent on our level of intelligence which is determined by our age. Alfred Binet and his collaborator, Theophile' Simon assert that a 6-year-old is not an intellectual match for an average 9-year-old. For them it is not that the 6-year-old knows less; the 6-year-old is just not as smart as the 9-year-olds because of their natural development of intelligence (Gleitman, 1996).

Age determines how people learn thing, young people, especially between the ages of 10 and 20, generally learn more quickly and memorization is easier for them. This is because at this time they are making use of their natural intelligence (Gertman, 1996; www.discipleship.org). This type of intelligence is easy to use when knowledge deals with essential new problems (Cattell, 1963). When the problem at hand deals with applying new knowledge to solve existing problems or life situation, older people do better because they have the necessary experience, education and background to integrate learning to life. This is because they make use of their nurtured or crystallized intelligence which continues to grow until old age as long as the person is in an intellectually stimulating environment (Gleitman, 1996).

Age is important to what we learn. Swiss psychologist, Jean Piaget, believed that cognitive development is a matter of maturation, in part and whole. He is of the opinion that the level of cognitive development determines the individual's ability to learn various concepts and perform various skills. Piaget argued that a 4-year-old child cannot possibly be taught how to use a measuring cup correctly, no matter how attractive the reinforcement or how many the number of trials. He argued that 4-year-olds lack the pre-requisite concept of number and quality, so that any attempt to teach them these concepts is as useless as trying to build a third storey on a home without a second storey underneath it (Slavin, 2000).

Jean Piaget divides the cognitive development of human beings in four stages. These stages are the following:

a. Sensorimotor -0-2yrs
b. Preoperational -2-7 yrs.
c. Concrete operational -7-11 yrs.

E-mail address: editor@centralasianstudies.org
(ISSN: 2660-6836). Hosting by Central Asian Studies. All rights reserved.

Copyright (c) 2023 Author (s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY).To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

d. Formal operational -12 - adult hood

The sensori-motor stage occurs from birth to the age of 2. It is called the Sensori motor stage because at this stage the child uses his senses and motor skills to interact with his environment. The natural thing for a child to do at this stage is to grab things and put them into his mouth. For the child at this stage the only things that exist are the things he can see, hear, grab, and taste. This age of children learn only by physically manipulating objects (Slavin, 2000). Knowledge or cognitive development is based on physical actions such as crawling, walking. Children learn language from this stage and they realize that their actions can cause things to happen in the world around them. Their understanding is, however, restricted to events in present and immediate past.

The preoperational stage occurs between the ages of 2 and 7 years. This age of children are aware that things can exist and not physically be in their presence and so they can use symbols to represent objects. They do not, however, have conservation. For this group of children, the taller an object, the bigger it is, or the more the pieces the bigger the thing is. For example, five ₦100 notes is more than one ₦500 note. They are also egocentric. They see everything as having to do with them only. They do not understand the concept of reversion. They cannot understand that if 5 + 7 is 12, then 12 - 7 is 5. Their thinking is only in one direction and they do not see other views or the view of others. They can talk and use mental symbols. Thoughts are tied to physical actions and the way things appear to them. They can use scissors and colours (Slavin, 2000).

The concrete operational stage is the third stage of Piaget's cognitive development. It occurs between the ages of 7 and 11. Children of this age are no longer egocentric. They no longer see things only from their own view. They now realise that things can be seen from the view of other people. At this stage the children can arrange things in their logical order, arrange things according to height, biggest to smallest, smallest to biggest, and so on. They also understand the concept of reversibility that is 5+7=12 and 12-7=5. The formal operational stage, which is to last stage of Piaget's cognitive development, occurs from age 12 to adulthood. At this stage the child sees the link between causes and effects in various things which he could do at the previous level.

The stages of cognitive development of Jean Piaget inform us that people are able to learn and do different thing at different ages and they can only conveniently and successfully do these things when they get to the necessary age of maturity. Thus, people can only successfully learn certain things at the proper age. John Sweller (2011) agrees with Piaget's assertion that human being learn what is proper for them when he says that the extent to which any instruction is effective depends heavily on whether it takes the characteristics of human cognition into account. Mayer (2001) and Sweller (2011) are of the view that cognitive load has implication for learning from multimedia, and it should be a useful starting point for thinking about the design of resources that support efficient learning. Cognitive load is work that meets the cognitive level or level of mental development of the individual.

Cognitive load is important in education. The mental development and cognitive level of children is, to a large extent, determined by the age in children. This does not mean that all children developmental maturity at the same age. Some children develop earlier or later than their peers. Education needs to take the developmental maturity and readiness of the learner into consideration. This is because it is dangerous for learning to occur sooner than they are ready for it (Gosalia, 2015). When children are

E-mail address: editor@centralasianstudies.org
(ISSN: 2660-6836).. Hosting by Central Asian Studies. All rights reserved.

Copyright (c) 2023 Author (s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY).To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

made to learn when they are not ready the have difficulty coping (Thomas, 2023).

School Age in Nigeria

The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) stipulated 6 to 11+ years as the age of primary education. 6 years is the official starting age in Nigeria. This is an increase of one year from the previous policy on education (FRN, 2004) which stipulated 5 years as the starting age of primary school in the country. The appropriate start age for primary school in Nigeria is 6 years (FRN, 2013). This age is meant to be the minimum start age. The appropriate ages for the different classes of primary school in Nigeria are the following:
Primary 1 – 6 years
Primary 2 - 7 years
Primary 3 - 8 years
Primary 4 - 9 years
Primary 5 - 10 years
Primary 6 - 11 years

In spite of this provision in the National policy on education (FRN, 2013), however, school start age is a source of contention and major conflict in Nigeria. This conflict seems to be more pronounced in September and October of every year when the Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board (JAMB) starts processing admissions for students into the country's tertiary institutions. This is because the board placed a restriction which requires that candidates who are less than 16 years are not eligible and need not apply for a place in a Nigerian university (Lawal, 2022). In addition to the JAMB requirement, schools like the University of Ibadan and Lagos that are sought after by some of the brightest students place similar age restrictions. Nigeria's premier and best ranking university, the University of Ibadan, has an admission policy that undergraduate degree candidates should reach the age of 16 years on the first day of October in their year of admission for most courses. For students seeking admission into its nursing programme, however, the age requirement is 17 ½ years. The requirement for the University of Lagos differs slightly from that of Ibadan as it wants its candidates to be a minimum of 16 years by the 31st of October of the admission year. Thus, they have a 30-day edge of their counterparts in Ibadan. One school among the big universities in the country that does not place any age restriction on admission is the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, which is open to all academically able students irrespective of age (Techie, 2022).

The major conflict point of age is the start age of primary school, which is the foundation of formal education in the country. This conflict is between parents, parents/teachers and parents/school authorities. One of the conflicts occurs regularly between parents of children. One parent wants the child to start school before the official age while the other parent wants the child to wait to attend school at the official age. Adeniyi (2016) reports of an accountant father who wants his son to start primary school at 4 years but his event planner wife insists on the boy getting older by at least a year, if not the recommended age of 6. Thomas-Odia (2019) describes a scenario between a school proprietor and parents who insists on their children starting 2 years before the recommended age because they see their children as having advanced knowledge and skills in certain areas and need a speed-up of their educational progress. Thus, it is common practice to see under aged children, as in the pictures below, in the Nigerian school system.

E-mail address: editor@centralasianstudies.org
(ISSN: 2660-6836). Hosting by Central Asian Studies. All rights reserved.

Copyright (c) 2023 Author (s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY).To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

Fig 1: Pictures of under aged children in the Nigerian school system (Source: Field work)

There is also the conflict amongst teachers and educationists as to what age is suitable for children to start school. While some teachers/educationists advocate that education is not about intellectual prowess alone, as children need to be physically, emotionally, socially and mentally mature to withstand the stress associated with their various levels of education, and so need to meet the stipulated age requirement, others are of the view that injecting age limits arrest the advancement of academically intelligent children and negatively affect their competitive drive-in life (Ogwo, 2022; Lawal, 2022). People who advocate for the removal of restriction of school start age are quick to point to the achievements of Pele and Mbappe who excelled at the FIFA World Cup at the age of 17 and 19 respectively; Sylvester Opara who made A1s in all his subjects from secondary school at the age of 15; and Joshua Beckford who became the youngest person to have attended United Kingdom's prestigious Oxford University at the age of 6 (Lawal, 2022; Patil, 2022; Lekan, 2022).

From the foregoing discussion on the start age of school in Nigeria, it is easy to deduce that Nigerians favour starting primary school earlier than the stipulated age of the government (FRN, 2013). Sule et al

E-mail address: editor@centralasianstudies.org
(ISSN: 2660-6836).. Hosting by Central Asian Studies. All rights reserved.

Copyright (c) 2023 Author (s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY).To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

(2019) and Thomas-Odia (2019) are in agreement that primary education starts earlier than the stipulated age for majority of Nigerian children. They state 5 years as the most likely age, with some parents still pressing for 4 years and lower. This, for Sule et al (2019) say is particularly problematic as a lot of these children still go into secondary school by skipping the last year or two of primary school. There are, however, reports that Nigerian children enter school at an advanced age and leave well past the official age. Heubler (2005) reports that even though the official age of primary and secondary school is 6-11+ and 12-17 respectively, actual attendance shows that there are a lot of people in these schools at the age of 20. He reports that at 17 years, 7.8% of children were still in primary school. He insists that it is such delayed entry that causes the high drop-out rate and out-of-school children in the country; increase in poverty levels and reduces the potential to live productive lives.

The conflicts in the school start age of children indicate the importance of age in the educational system. It is so important that the schools who manage the academic development of children are having serious discussion and stipulating minimum age for children to attend school. It is not made a free for all affair whereby parents could enroll their children whenever they please. The Executive Secretary of Nigeria's National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), which is in charge of the affairs of a lot of teacher education institutions says there are crucial senses that have to be developed for children to reason, appreciate and get an orientation about themselves and their surrounding before proceeding to various levels of the educational system (Lagos State University Info, 2022).

The 2018 National Personnel Audit Report of the Universal Basic Education Commission presents a pupil population of 27,889,387 with 6.34% below the official school age and 6.46% above the official school age. This report gave Rivers State, which is the study area of this study a primary school population of 304,003 in 2018, with 23,516 representing 7.12% as being younger than 6 years while 19,562 representing 6.43% (UBEC, 2018).

Having children enroll in schools at ages that are not appropriate is not only a Nigerian thing. It occurs in various countries in the world. Studies carried out by the International Common Assessment for Numeracy (ICAN) in 14 countries revealed that there were differences in the age of children in one grade, and a substantial number of children were either younger or older than the recommended age for each age. This was as much as 75% for one of these countries. This means than only 25% of the children in this country were enrolled at the age officially recommended for their age (Thomas, 2023).

Statement of the Problem

The yearly results from external examinations conducted for the Nigerian educational system is not very encouraging. A situation where there has been only 4 years the country got a 50% pass and above in the West African Examination Council Senior Secondary School Examinations is something to be worried about. While there are various factors attributable for this poor performance, it is also necessary to know if age is part of the problems of the Nigerian educational system.

E-mail address: editor@centralasianstudies.org
(ISSN: 2660-6836). Hosting by Central Asian Studies. All rights reserved.

Copyright (c) 2023 Author (s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY).To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

Table 1: Analysis of WAEC result from 2004-2020

S/N	YEAR	NO. OF CANDIDATES	NO OF STUDENTS WITH 5 CREDITS INCLUDING MATHEMATIC & ENGLISH	PERCENTAGE
1	2020	1,538,445	1,003,668	65%
2	2019	1,590,173	1,020,519	64.18%
3	2018	1,571,531	756,726	49%
4	2017	1,471,151	923,486	59.22%
5	2016	1,544,234	878,040	52.97%
6	2015	1,593,442	616,370	38.68%
7	2014	1,692,435	529,425	31.28%
8	2013	1,543,683	599,103	38.81%
9	2012	1,672,224	649,159	36.57%
9	2011	1,540,250	471,474	30.90%
10	2010	1,351,557	337,071	24.94%
11	2009	1,265,090	356,981	25.99%
12	2008	1,369,142		17%
13	2007	1,249,028	287,276	23%
14	2006	1,149,277		24.95
15	2005	1,054,853		34.41
16	2004	1,019,524		34.47

{**Source:** WAEC Chief Examiner's Report. www.waecdirect; Head of National Office, WAEC, 2020. www.waecdirect;). (Statistic Office, WAEC, Lagos, 2009)

In 2018, 7.12% of the 304,003 pupils in Rivers State were younger than 6 years, while 6.43% were older. Is it likely that children are being sent to school too young and so are having difficulty coping with the content? Is it also possible that children are attending school way past the school age and so are distracted from their school work?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to determine the age and the appropriateness of the age of primary school children in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following questions:
1. What is the age of school children in primary schools of Rivers State?
2. Is the school age of primary school children in Rivers State appropriate?

Research Methodology

The study was a descriptive survey which examined the age of children from 350 public and private primary schools in Rivers State. It was carried out to cover as many local government areas as possible. It covered 17 out of the 23 local government areas of the state. Random and stratified sampling was used

E-mail address: editor@centralasianstudies.org
(ISSN: 2660-6836).. Hosting by Central Asian Studies. All rights reserved.

Copyright (c) 2023 Author (s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY).To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

to select the sample. Random sampling was used to select the local government areas to use, while stratified sampling was used to choose the schools and classes. The purpose of the stratified sampling was to ensure that private and public schools were included in the study; rural and urban schools were included; and riverine and upland schools were also covered. The study was carried out in the first two weeks of the 2022/2023 academic year which started in September, 2022 to ensure that the accurate age of the children for the class level was gotten for the majority of the children. The instruments of the study were document analysis and interview. Research assistants were used to help with data collection.

Presentation of Results

Research Question 1: What is the age of school children in primary schools of Rivers State?

Table 2: Age distribution of Primary school pupils in Rivers State

S/N	Age	Number of Pupils	Percentage	Number	Percentage
1	3	61	0.3%	2761	12.9%
2	4	714	3.3%		
3	5	1,986	9.3%		
4	**6**	**3,224**	**15.1%**	**17,123**	**80.1%**
5	**7**	**3097**	**14.5%**		
6	**8**	**3144**	**14.7%**		
7	**9**	**2776**	**13%**		
8	**10**	**2983**	**14%**		
9	**11**	**1,899**	**8.8%**		
10	12	1,040	4.7%	1481	7%
11	13	404	1.9%		
12	14	23	0.1%		
13	15	7	0.03%		
14	16	5	0.02%		
15	17	2	0.009%		
	Total	21,365			

Table 2 presents the information that answers the first research question. It shows that there were children of 15 different ages in primary schools in Rivers State, and they range from as low as 3 years to 17 years. 61 pupils representing 0.3% of the children enrolled in the school system are 3 years old; 714 representing 3.3% are 4-year-olds and 1,986 pupils representing 9.3% are 5 years old. There are 3,224 6-year-olds, 3097 7-year-old and 3144 8-years-olds, representing 15.1%, 14.5% and 14.7% respectively. 13% of the children are 9-year-olds, 14% are 10 years while 8.8% are 11-year-olds. The number of pupils for these ages are 2776, 2983 and 1,899 respectively. There are 1,040 12-year-olds representing 4.7%, 404 13-year-olds representing 1.9%, 23 14-year-olds representing 0.1% of the children. There are also 7 15-year-olds, 5 16-year-olds and 2 17-year-olds representing 0.03%, 0.02% and 0.009% of the pupils respectively.

Question 2. Is the school age of primary school children in Rivers State appropriate?

The answer to question number 2 is presented according to the various classes the children belong to, and they are as follows:

Table 3: Age distribution of Primary 1 in Rivers State

E-mail address: editor@centralasianstudies.org
(ISSN: 2660-6836). Hosting by Central Asian Studies. All rights reserved.

Copyright (c) 2023 Author (s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY).To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

S/N	Age	Number of Pupils	Percentage	Number of Pupils	Percentage
1	3	60	1.6%	1986	54.5%
2	4	594	16.3%		
3	5	1332	36.6%		
4	**6**	**1266**	**34.8%**	**1266**	**34.8%**
5	7	276	7.6%	389	10.7%
6	8	66	1.8%		
7	9	42	1.2%		
8	10	3	0.08%		
9	11	2	0.05%		
	Total	3641		3641	

This table shows that 1986 out of a total of 3641 children did not meet the 6-year mark stipulated in the National policy on education (FRN, 2013). This represents 54.5% of the children in this class. Only 1266, representing 34.8% of the children were enrolled at the stipulated age. 389 pupils representing 10.7% of the children are older than the recommended age for this class.

Table 4: Age distribution of Primary 2 children in Rivers State

S/N	Age	Number	Percentage	Percentage
1	4	120	3.2%	56.7%
2	5	570	15.4%	
3	6	1410	38.1%	
4	**7**	**1146**	**30.9%**	**31%**
5	8	294	7.9%	12.3%
6	9	90	2.4%	
7	10	30	0.8%	
8	11	36	0.9%	
9	12	5	0.1%	
10	13	3	0.08%	
	TOTAL	3704		

The result presented in this table shows that 2100 pupils representing 56.7% of the pupils in primary 2 do not meet the stipulated age for their class, which is 7 years. Only 1146, representing 31% are of the proper age. 458 children, representing 12.3% of the primary 2 pupils were above the recommended age.

Table 5: Age distribution of Primary 3 Pupils in Rivers State

S/N	Age	Number	Percentage	Percentage
1	3	1	0.02%	44%
2	5	84	2.2%	
3	6	384	10.0%	
4	7	1235	32.2%	
5	**8**	**1266**	**33.0%**	**33%**
6	9	612	15.9%	23%
7	10	144	3.8%	
8	11	54	1.4%	

E-mail address: editor@centralasianstudies.org
(ISSN: 2660-6836).. Hosting by Central Asian Studies. All rights reserved.

Copyright (c) 2023 Author (s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY).To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

9	12	54	1.4%	
10	14	3	1.1%	
11	15	3	1.1%	
	TOTAL	3,840		

The result presented in this table shows that 1706 pupils representing 44% of the pupils in primary 3 do not meet the stipulated age for their class, which is 7 years. Only 1266, representing 33% are of the proper age. 870 children, representing 23% of the primary 2 pupils were above the recommended age.

Table 6: Age distribution of Primary 4 pupils in Rivers State

S/N	Age	Number	Percentage	
1.	**6 years**	**144**	**3.9%**	**42%**
2.	**7 years**	**328**	**8.8%**	
3.	**8 years**	**1086**	**29.3%**	
4.	**9 years**	**1084**	**29.3%**	**29.3%**
5.	**10 years**	**892**	**24.1%**	**28.7%**
6.	**11 years**	**91**	**2.5%**	
7.	**12 years**	**72**	**1.9%**	
8.	**13 years**	**5**	**0.13**	
9.	**14 years**	**2**	**0.05**	
10.	**15 years**	**2**	**0.05**	
	TOTAL	3,708		

The result presented in this table shows that 1,558 pupils representing 42% of the pupils in primary 3 do not meet the stipulated age for their class, which is 7 years. Only 1084, representing 29.3% are of the proper age. 1064 children, representing 28.7% of the primary 2 pupils were above the recommended age.

Table 7: Age distribution of Primary 5 Pupils in Rivers State

S/N	Age	Number of Students	Percentage	Percentage
1	6	20	0.6%	35%
2	7	112	3.1%	
3	8	360	10.1%	
4	9	756	21.2%	
5	**10**	**1272**	**35.7%**	**35.7%**
6	11	576	16.1%	29.3%
7	12	336	9.4%	
8	13	108	3.0%	
9	14	18	0.5%	
10	15	2	0.06%	
11	16	5	0.1%	
12	17	2	0.06%	
	TOTAL	3,567		

1248 children, representing 35.7% of the children in primary 5 are below the recommended 10 years for this class, while 1047 children representing 29.3% are above. Only 1272 pupils, representing 35.7% are of the recommended age for this class.

E-mail address: editor@centralasianstudies.org
(ISSN: 2660-6836). Hosting by Central Asian Studies. All rights reserved.

Copyright (c) 2023 Author (s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY).To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

Table 8: Age distribution of Primary 6 Pupils in Rivers Sate

S/N	Age	Number of Pupils	Percentage	Percentage
1	8	72	2.5%	31%
2	9	192	6.1%	
3	10	642	22.1%	
4	**11**	**1140**	**39.1%**	**39%**
5	12	570	19.6%	30%
6	13	288	9.9%	
	TOTAL	2,904		

912 children, representing 31.4% of the children in primary 6 are below the recommended 11 years for this class, while 858 children representing 29.5% are above. Only 1140 pupils, representing 39.3% are of the recommended age for this class.

Discussion of Findings: The discussion of the findings of the study which examined the age of school children in primary schools of Rivers state is as follows:

1. The age of pupils in primary schools in Rivers State range from 3 years to 17 years.
2. The result of the study shows that school age was not appropriate for a large percentage of the children in primary schools.

Age of Primary School Pupils in Rivers State: Table 2 shows the age distribution of primary school children in Rivers State. It shows that the ages of children range from 3 years to 17 years. It shows the ages of children below the official age of 6 years, those of the official age of 6-11, and those above the official age of 11. It shows that 2761 children representing 12.9% of the pupils are below the appropriate age for this level of the educational system and are too young to be in these schools. These children are within the 3 to 5 years age bracket. 17,123 children representing 80.1% of the pupils are with the recommended age of 6 to 11 years, while 1481 representing 7% of the pupils are older than the school age for this level. This is because they are between 12 and 17 years. The result of this study is similar to that presented in the UBEC National Personnel Audit Report (UBEC, 2018) which showed 85.8% of Rivers school children to be within the appropriate age 6 to 11 years, 6.47% older and 7.12% younger.

Appropriateness of School age of Pupils in Rivers State: Table 3 to 8 shows a breakdown of the age distribution of the pupils into the various classes of primary school. The data presented on these tables show that there is no class in primary schools in Rivers State in which the age of the children is totally appropriate. In fact, the data shows that no class has an appropriateness level of 40%.

Table 3 shows an appropriateness level of 34.8% for primary 1. The children that were younger than the school age were a whopping 54.5%. This table shows that there were 60 children representing 1.6% of the pupils who were only 3 years. This is a whole 3 years below the recommended age. 594 children representing 16.3% of the pupils were 4 years old while 1332 representing 36.6% were 5 years old. The youngest children were 3 years old while the oldest were 2 11-year-olds.

Table 4 presents data on the age of primary 2 pupils. Out of the 3704 children for this class, the youngest were 4 years old while the oldest were 13 years old. Only 1146 representing 30.9% of the children were of the appropriate age of 7 for this class. 56.7% of the children were younger than the recommended age while 12.3% were older. The youngest children were 120 4-year-olds while the oldest were 3 13-year-olds.

Table 5 shows age distribution of primary 3 pupils in Rivers State. A total of 3,840 children were used

E-mail address: editor@centralasianstudies.org
(ISSN: 2660-6836).. Hosting by Central Asian Studies. All rights reserved.

Copyright (c) 2023 Author (s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY).To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

in this class level. Only 1266 representing 33% of the pupils were of the appropriate age of 8 when they stated the school year. The youngest child in this class was an unbelievable 3 years while the oldest children were 3 15-year-olds. 44% of the children were below the appropriate age of 8 and 23% were above it.

Table 6 presents the age distribution of primary 4 pupils in Rivers State. It presents a total of 3,708 children in this class, with an appropriateness age of 9. 1084 children representing 29.3% of these pupils were of this age. 1558 representing 42% were below the appropriate age while 28.7% were above it. The youngest children in this class were 144 6-year-olds while the oldest were 2 15-year-olds.

Table 7 shows the age distribution of primary 5 pupils in Rivers State. 1,272 representing 35.7% of the 3,567 pupils were of the appropriate age of 10 years for this class. 35% of the children were below this age with the youngest being 20 6-year-olds. 29.3% of the children were older than the appropriate age with the oldest being 2 17-year-olds.

Table 8 shows the age distribution of primary 6 pupils in Rivers State. This class has the least number of children as there were only 2904 pupils in the schools used for the study as against all the other classes that had over three thousand children. The explanation by the schools is that a lot of parents do not let their children do primary 6. They insist on the children going to secondary school from primary 5. Primary 6 has an appropriate age of 11 years which was met by 1140 representing 39.1% of the pupils. 31% of the children in this class were below the recommended age with the youngest being 8 years while 30% were above the age with the oldest being 288 13-year-olds.

Implications of the Result of the Study

The implications of the result of this study to the Nigerian educational system are as follows:

1. The children in primary schools in Rivers State are generally younger than the stipulated age for most classes.
2. The children are being enrolled into the primary school far too young. There are children as young as 2 and 3 years enrolled in primary schools.
3. The schools and parents are not adhering to the stipulations of the National Policy on Education in enrolling children in schools.
4. There seems to be disconnect between what the parents want for their children and what the government makes into policies.

Recommendation

The following recommendations have been made to help change the situation.

1. The government should carry out an enlightenment campaign to intimate parents, teachers and schools on the dangers of enrolling children in school too young.
2. There is a need to ensure that schools are implementing the provisions of the national policy on education.
3. There needs to be widespread consultation of the citizens before policies are made to ensure that they are adhered to.

Suggestions for Further Research

1. Is the school age of children determined by parents' occupation, economic level or ethnic group?
2. What gender of children are more likely to start school earlier or later?
3. Does mother's educational level affect school start age?

E-mail address: editor@centralasianstudies.org
(ISSN: 2660-6836). Hosting by Central Asian Studies. All rights reserved.

Copyright (c) 2023 Author (s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY).To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

References

1. Adeniji, G. (2016). Ideal school age for children. https://punch.ng.
2. Asiabakwa, I.P. & Mbakwem, J. (2008). Assessment of facility needs of government primary schools in Imo State, Nigeria: Some neglected areas. New York Science Journal 1(2) 22-29.
3. Batista, D.; Davila, E.; Gallagher, M.; Jarbawi, S.; Matsumoto, Y.; Mehta, S; Roux, O. & Singh, O. (2007). Learning Plus Initiative: Plotting an Assessment methodology for an Integrated School-Based Model of Learning and Delivery of Essential Services for Children in Rwanda and Lesotho. Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA). http://www.sipa.columbia.edu.
4. Bengtsson, S.E.L. (2009). Exploring the research process behind the UNICEF Learning Plus Initiative. A paper presented at the INEE Global Consultation in Turkey, March 31, 2009.
5. Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004). *National Policy on Education.* NERDC.
6. Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013). *National Policy on Education.* NERDC.
7. **Gosalia, P. (2015). Importance of Age-appropriate education. The Swaddle. https://www.theswaddle.com**
8. **Hansen, U.J. (2018). Why does age determine the How, What and With Whom of learning. Education Reimagined. https://education-reimagined.org**
9. **Heubler, F. (2005). Age and level of education in Nigeria. International Education Statistics. https://heubler.blogsport.com**
10. **Lagos State University Info (2022). NCCE Standard age for children to start primary 1 in Nigeria. https://lasu.info.com**
11. **Lawal, I. (2022). Mixed reaction over age limit for admission into varsities. The Guardian. https://www.guardian.ng**
12. **Lekan, B.K. (2022). Meet Joshua Beckford – the Nigerian who is the youngest ever Oxford student. https://www.newswirengr.com**
13. **Linde, S. (2022). Developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) in early education. https://www.study.com**
14. Movin, A. (2000). DA and your child's education. Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum.
15. Natividad, G.; Spector, J.M. & Evangelopoulos, N. (2018). Research topics and trends in educational technology; in Gloria Natividad, J. Michael Spector and Nicholas Evangelopoulos, *An analysis of two decades of educational technology publications: Who, what and where. Lecture notes in educational technology*. Springer.
16. **Ogwo, S. (2022). What has age got to do with tertiary education admission? Business Day. https://www.businessday.ng.**
17. Patil, S. (2022). Top five youngest FIFA World Cup winners. https://www.khelnow.com
18. **Sasu, D.D. (2022). Children per class in elementary schools in Nigeria, 2018, by State. Statista. https://www.statista.com**
19. **Sasu, D.D. (2022). Children in enrolled public elementary schools in Nigeria, by age and gender. Statista. https://www.statista.com**
20. **Shipley, T. (2014). Early childhood education: implementing developmentally appropriate practices in literacy instruction. http://www.wholechildeducation.org**
21. **Sule, I.D; Emmanuel, H.A.; Alabi, C.T.; Adebayo, I.; Eleweke, T.; Imam, A. & Bashir, M. (2019). Thousands of pupils skip primary 5 and 6 to JSS 1. Daily Trust. https://www.dailytrust.ng**

E-mail address: editor@centralasianstudies.org
(ISSN: 2660-6836).. Hosting by Central Asian Studies. All rights reserved.

Copyright (c) 2023 Author (s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY).To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

22. **Techie, T.M. (2022). Minimum admission age for 2022/2023 JAMB: age limit for universities, polytechnics and colleges. https://www.schoolcontents.info**
23. **Thomas-Odia, I. (2019). What's the right age to start pre-school? The Guardian Newspaper. 14th September, 2019.**
24. **Thomas, S.E. (2023). One size does not fit all: The reality of the age-grade principle of schooling in the Global South. Learning Portal. https://learningportal.iiep.unesco.org**
25. **Van Praag, L.; Van Candenberg, R. & Orozco, M. (2023). Age is more than just a number: The role of age and maturity in the process leading to early school leaving in Flanders (Belgium). *British Educational Research Journal* (BERA). 44(4), p.557-572. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj3334**
26. Zunjic, A.; Papic, G.; Bojovic, B; Matija, L.; Slavkovic, G. & Lukic, P. (2015). The role of ergonomics in the improvement of quality education. *FME Transactions* 2015, 43, 8

E-mail address: editor@centralasianstudies.org
(ISSN: 2660-6836). Hosting by Central Asian Studies. All rights reserved.

Copyright (c) 2023 Author (s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY).To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/