Availability, Adequacy, Accessibility, And Condition of Classroom Facilities in Public Early Childhood Centres in Rivers East: A Gap Analysis of National Minimum Standards Compliance

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DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.906000210

Received: 30 May 2025; Accepted: 02 June 2025; Published: 08 July 2025

ABSTRACT

This study examined the extent to which classroom facilities in public early childhood centres in Rivers East Senatorial District comply with the National Minimum Standards for Early Childhood Care Centres in Nigeria. Specifically, the study assessed the availability, adequacy, accessibility, and physical condition of classroom facilities. The study employed the survey descriptive research design. A total of 221 responses comprising of caregivers in the public preschools in Rivers East Senatorial District were validated from the survey with the use a multi-stage sampling technique. From the responses obtained and analysed, the findings, based on inferential statistical analysis (Chi-square tests), indicated a statistically significant compliance with national standards in all measured areas of classroom facilities: availability ($\chi^2 = 19.284$, $p = .000$), adequacy ($\chi^2 = 94.550$, $p = .000$), accessibility ($\chi^2 = 159.548$, $p = .000$), and condition ($\chi^2 = 19.462$, $p = .000$). The study therefore recommended that the government and education stakeholders should enhance the provision of classroom infrastructure and develop a sustainable maintenance plan to uphold safety, accessibility, and quality in early childhood settings. Additionally, regular monitoring and enforcement of compliance with the National Minimum Standards are essential to ensuring equitable and effective learning environments for all preschool learners in the district.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Classroom Facilities, National Minimum Standards, Rivers East Senatorial District

INTRODUCTION

The quality of early childhood education (ECE) is a fundamental determinant of a child's lifelong learning trajectory, influencing not only cognitive development but also emotional, social, and physical growth. As such, the early learning environment must be conducive, inclusive, and adequately resourced to meet the developmental needs of young learners (Boyd, 2013; Kiyo, 2019). In Nigeria, early childhood education is recognized in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) as a critical phase in the educational ladder, and its effective implementation is guided by the National Minimum Standards for Early Childhood Care Centres. These standards were established to ensure that all early childhood care centres provide a safe, well-equipped, and nurturing environment that fosters the holistic development of children (FME, 2013).

The key components of these standards include the availability, adequacy, accessibility, and condition of core classroom facilities such as physical infrastructure, furniture, instructional materials, activity corners, ventilation, lighting, and record-keeping tools (Maryam, 2021; Goke, 2019). These facilities are not just accessories to the learning process; they are foundational elements that support curriculum delivery and child-centered pedagogy. Despite the existence of these well-outlined standards, evidence suggests that public early childhood care centres across various regions in Nigeria struggle with uneven resource distribution, inadequate infrastructure, and poor maintenance culture (Onojah and Adewole, 2022).

Rivers East Senatorial District, like many other educational zones in the country, is faced with the challenge of meeting these prescribed standards amidst economic constraints, rising enrolment pressures, and infrastructural decay. A critical concern is that many of the classrooms in public ECE centres may be overcrowded, poorly

ventilated, lacking in play-based learning corners, or entirely devoid of inclusive features for children with special needs (Chukwbikem, 2013; Mildred, 2017). Moreover, there is limited empirical data on the extent to which these centres comply with the National Minimum Standards, particularly in the areas of classroom facility availability and usability. This poses a significant gap, considering that the learning environment plays a central role in determining children's engagement levels, safety, and overall school readiness.

Existing literature has extensively documented the importance of educational facilities in early childhood education. For instance, Ifeoma (2016), Ahmad et al. (2020), and Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016) highlighted that tangible classroom resources—such as furniture, instructional aids, and environmental aesthetics—serve as core enablers of effective teaching and learning. Similarly, Ayifite (2016), Cecillia (2017), and Nnabugwu (2020) emphasized that the operational efficiency of early childhood programmes depends largely on the condition and functionality of the learning spaces. Within the Nigerian context, the challenge becomes more pronounced when one considers the disparities between urban and rural schools, the low budgetary allocation to early childhood infrastructure, and the lack of consistent regulatory oversight (Mohammed, 2019; Maigida, 2017).

In Rivers East Senatorial District, anecdotal observations and isolated reports indicate that while some centres boast of relatively well-equipped classrooms, others fall short in meeting even the basic structural and pedagogical requirements. This inconsistency not only undermines the quality of education but also perpetuates inequality among preschool learners in different communities (Lawali, 2008; Ifeyinwa, 2016). The four dimensions under investigation in this study—availability, adequacy, accessibility, and condition—offer a comprehensive framework for evaluating the readiness of public ECE centres to deliver quality education.

Availability focuses on whether the required facilities are present in the learning environment; adequacy assesses whether those resources are sufficient in quantity and appropriate for the age group; accessibility examines whether all learners, including those with disabilities, can freely use the facilities; and condition considers the physical state, maintenance, and safety of the infrastructure. When any of these components are deficient, the quality of education is compromised, teacher effectiveness is diminished, and children's development is hindered (Fowowe, 2011; Haggai and Shwamut, 2016). Furthermore, inadequate classroom facilities can result in reduced motivation, increased absenteeism, and low parental trust in public early childhood programmes.

Consequently, there is an urgent need to evaluate the extent to which these essential classroom facilities align with the national guidelines in Rivers East Senatorial District. This study therefore aims to fill the existing knowledge gap by providing a data-driven assessment of the status of classroom facilities in public early childhood centres within the region. The outcomes will not only inform policymakers and education stakeholders but also serve as a blueprint for infrastructure improvement, equitable resource allocation, and strategic planning in early childhood education. In a country where foundational education remains a crucial vehicle for achieving national development and social equity, ensuring that every child learns in a safe, engaging, and well-equipped environment is not just a policy obligation but a moral imperative.

The specific purpose of this study:

1. To evaluate the extent to which classroom facilities are available in public early childhood centres in Rivers East Senatorial District, as prescribed by the National Minimum Standards.

2. To assess the adequacy of classroom facilities in supporting optimal learning and care in line with the National Minimum Standards.

3. To determine the level of accessibility of classroom facilities for all categories of learners, including those with physical and learning disabilities.

4. To evaluate the physical condition and maintenance of classroom facilities and identify deviations from the prescribed national standards.

Also, the following research questions are answered in this study:

1. To what extent are the recommended classroom facilities available in public early childhood centres in Rivers East Senatorial District?

2. How adequate are the existing classroom facilities in meeting the learning and developmental needs of early learners?

3. How accessible are the classroom facilities to all learners, including those with special needs?

4. What is the physical condition of classroom facilities in public early childhood centres compared to the requirements of the National Minimum Standards?

The following hypotheses guide this study:

H_1: The extent classroom facilities in public early childhood centers in terms of their availability as prescribed by the National Minimum Standards for early child care centers in Nigeria are met by the operators in Rivers East Senatorial District are significantly high.

H_2: The extent classroom facilities in public early childhood centers in terms of their adequacy as prescribed by the National Minimum Standards for early child care centers in Nigeria are met by the operators in Rivers East Senatorial District are significantly high.

H_3: The extent classroom facilities in public early childhood centers in terms of their accessibility as prescribed by the National Minimum Standards for early child care centers in Nigeria are met by the operators in Rivers East Senatorial District are significantly high.

H_4: The extent classroom facilities in public early childhood centers in terms of their conditions as prescribed by the National Minimum Standards for early child care centers in Nigeria are met by the operators in Rivers East Senatorial District are significantly high.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design adopted for this study is descriptive survey. The design is considered appropriate because the study involves collecting data from sample selected from an existing population and using the result derived to make generalization the characteristics of the population. This design is appropriate for this study as the study to investigate the availability, adequacy, accessibility, and condition of classroom facilities in public early childhood centres, as benchmarked against the National Minimum Standards. The data collected on this attributes was useful in determining what exist in the study areas as it relates to the purpose of the study.

The study is carried out in Rivers State but with particular focus on East Senatorial District which is made up of eight (8) Local Government Area. Which are: Obio/Akpor, Port Harcourt City, Ikwerre, Okrika, Etche, Omuma and Ogu-Bolu. Rivers State is located in South-South Nigeria and is bordered by other states such as Imo, Bayelsa, Delta, Abia and Akwa Ibom States. Rivers State is one of the economic hubs of Nigeria and as such has witnesses a massive inflow of people from different states which have increased the need and demand for formal education including Early Childhood Education. Additionally, within Rivers State, the Study Area which is East Senatorial District is one of the densely populated districts in the State since the local governments in this area serve as home to several of the economic and social institutions in the State.

Port Harcourt City is one of the LGAs in the district and home to the State Capital and as such the surrounding LGAs in the Senatorial District is also economically viable and thus the high population in this area. Institutions within the district include Multinational Organizations, Private Institutions such as Banks, Startups, Hotels, and Schools. The senatorial district plays host to some tertiary institutions in the state namely: Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Federal University of Port Harcourt and Elechi Amadi Polytechnic. Other infrastructures in the State such as hospitals, road network, recreational facilities etc. are concentrated in this area. There are several local languages that are spoken in the

District such as Ikwerre, Igbo, Kirike among others. Some of these Local Government Areas are surrounded by water and as such fishing, farming and trading forms the major occupation of the dwellers. This area is chosen for the study based on the researcher's observation of numerous Public early childhood centres in the area hence and its pertinence to the topic under discussion.

The area of study in question has a higher degree of urbanisation in comparison to the other two senatorial districts. This provision enables the creation of child care centres. This area of study primarily hosts a sufficient availability of childcare facilities, which serves as the central focus of this investigation. Attention was paid to Early Childhood Centres in the State and the caregivers in these centres was serve as the respondents for the study.

278 public early childhood centres' head teachers found in the 278 Early Childhood Care Centres in Obio-Akpor, Port Harcourt City, Ikwerre, Okirika, Etche, Omuma, Emohua and Ogu-Obolo Local Government Areas was the population of this study according to Rivers State Universal Basic Education Board (RSUBEB) 2021.

194 head teachers was the sample size for the study. To carry out the sampling, the study adopted the stratified sampling technique. The researcher first and foremost stratify the 278 public early childhood centers on the bases of their Local Government Areas. Stratified sampling technique is when the researcher divide subjects into subgroups called strata based on characteristics that they share (in this case, same senatorial district). The study area is made up 8 Local Government Areas namely Obio-Akpor (54 centres), Port Harcourt City (56 centres), Ikwerre (25 centres), Okirika (23 centres), Etche (40 centres), Omuma (22 centres), Emohua (49 centres) and Ogu-Obolo (9 centres).

Guided by this, the study used all the local government areas in the senatorial district. The number of public early childhood centres is 278. To carry out the sample, a total of 194 centres which is 70% of the centres were sampled.

To sample the 194 head teachers for the study, the researcher adopted the proportional random sampling and selected the public early childhood centres to evaluate on the basis of their proximity and accessibility to the researcher. The proportional stratified random sampling is a technique where a population is divided into strata, and then the random sample is taken from each stratum in proportion to its size. Here, 70% of the public early childhood centres in each of the 8 local government areas were selected proportionally to constitute the overall 70% (194 centres) used in this study. The researcher on arriving at each centre approached the Head Teacher, informed him or her of the purpose of the investigation then obtained permission. There was general cooperation from the head teachers in all the schools visited (Source: Researcher's compilation, Appendix B).

The study employed a survey tool called the "Availability, Adequacy, Accessibility, and Condition of Classroom Facilities in Public Early Childhood Centres in Rivers East: A Gap Analysis of National Minimum Standards Compliance (AAACCFPECCREAGANMSC)" to gather data from head teachers of public early childhood centres located in the Rivers East Senatorial District. The instruments comprised of two distinct components, namely Section A and Section B. In Section A, data was collected regarding the name and geographical location of the public early childhood centres. Section B focused on gathering information pertaining to the classroom facilities in the public childhood care centres. The questionnaire consists of 31-items alongside a checklist. The response format utilised for the questionnaire is a dichotomy response of yes and no. Yes in this context mean the classroom facilities are in line with the specification while no means that there is short fall of the standard set in the ECCC specification. Also, qualitative insights via interview from educators, parents, and administrators were conducted to complement the questionnaire responses. The study is evaluating the Availability, Adequacy, Accessibility, and Condition of Classroom Facilities in Public Early Childhood Centres in Rivers East: A Gap Analysis of National Minimum Standards Compliance.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrumen

To determine the validity of the instrument; copies of the instrument were handed to the two research experts in Measurement and Evaluation in the department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling and

two other experts in the Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE) Port Harcourt. Based on their inputs and corrections which were effected, the instruments were deemed valid and suitable for the study.

In order to determine the internal consistency of the instrument, the questionnaire was first administered to 30 head teachers of public early childhood centres in Rivers State who were not part of the study. The data collected from their responses were analyzed using the Cronbach alpha procedure. An overall reliability coefficient of 0.801 was obtained. The reliability coefficient was high enough and the instrument was found to be highly reliable.

Administration of instrument

The researcher upon arriving each of the sampled schools obtained permission from the head teacher of the center. The instruments were administered directly to the respondents by the researcher and research assistants. Instructions guiding the filling of the instruments were explained to the research assistants. The researcher and assistants supervised the filling, after that, the copies of the instruments were collected from the respondents on the spot. A total of 44 working days were devoted to the collection of data from the 194 centers in the urban and rural areas used for the study. However, 5 copies of the instruments were wrongly filled bringing the sample size to a total of 189 head teachers in the outlined Early childhood centers in study coverage.

METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

The Data Analysis done was purely descriptive statistics process with the use of frequency counts and percentage results. The classroom facilities specifications that are spelt out in the National Minimum Standard for ECCC in Nigeria were written in column one. The observation checklist on the classroom facilities availability in the public early childhood centres in Rivers East Senatorial District were recorded in column two while the third column for decisions on the availability or otherwise of the observed classroom facilities. The hypotheses were tested with Chi-Square.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1: Summary of descriptive statistics on the extent of the availability of classroom facilities in public early child care centers in Rivers East Senatorial District as prescribed by the National Minimum Standards for early child care centers in Nigeria.

S/N	Items	Mean	St.D	Decision
1.	Small tables and chairs for children	3.13	0.93	Accepted
2.	Ventilation	3.23	0.88	Accepted
3.	Classroom door	3.90	0.32	Accepted
4.	Illumination	3.11	0.94	Accepted
5.	Soft play mats	3.17	0.91	Accepted
6.	Art supplies (crayons, markers, paint, etc.)	3.13	0.93	Accepted
7.	Building blocks	3.21	0.89	Accepted
8.	Puzzles	3.06	0.97	Accepted
9.	Play kitchen set	3.09	0.96	Accepted
10.	Dolls and stuffed animals	2.92	1.04	Accepted
11.	Musical instruments (drums, xylophone, etc.)	2.24	1.33	Rejected
12.	Storybooks and reading corner	3.07	0.96	Accepted

13.	Dress-up clothes and costumes	2.85	1.07	Accepted
14.	Sensory bins (sand, water, rice, etc.)	3.12	0.94	Accepted
15.	Playdough and molding tools	3.12	0.94	Accepted
16.	Science exploration kits	2.99	1.00	Accepted
17.	Magnets and magnetic boards	2.71	1.13	Accepted
18.	Shape sorters and stacking toys	2.85	1.07	Accepted
19.	Outdoor play equipment (slides, swings, etc.)	2.80	1.10	Accepted
20.	Tricycles and ride-on toys	2.76	1.11	Accepted
21.	Balance beams and climbing structures	2.70	1.14	Accepted
22.	Gardening tools and plants	2.88	1.06	Accepted
23.	Sensory wall panels	2.55	1.21	Accepted
24.	Building and construction sets	2.89	1.05	Accepted
25.	Puppet theater and puppets	2.64	1.17	Accepted
26.	Large foam blocks for building	2.74	1.12	Accepted
27.	Easels and art easel paper	2.82	1.09	Accepted
28.	Play cash register and pretend money	2.70	1.14	Accepted
29.	Dollhouses and miniature furniture	2.50	1.23	Accepted
30.	Play doctor or veterinarian kits	2.86	1.07	Accepted
31.	Large floor puzzles	2.73	1.13	Accepted
	Grand Mean	2.92	1.03	Accepted

The data presented in Table 1 indicate the following observations from the study: The availability of classroom facilities in public early child care centres within the Rivers East Senatorial District, as outlined by the National Minimum Standards for early child care centres in Nigeria, is examined. The classroom facilities that received mean scores of 3.0 and above include small tables and chairs for children, ventilation, classroom doors, illumination, soft play mats, art supplies (such as crayons, markers and paint), building blocks, puzzles, play kitchen sets, storybooks and reading corners, sensory bins (containing sand, water, rice and playdough with moulding tools) and playdough with moulding tools. This indicates that these facilities are consistently available in public early child care centres in the Rivers The classroom facilities exhibiting mean scores between 2.50 and 3.0 include dolls and stuffed animals, dress-up clothes and costumes, science exploration kits, magnets and magnetic boards, shape sorters and stacking toys, outdoor play equipment (slides, swings, etc.), tricycles and ride-on toys, balance beams and climbing structures, gardening tools and plants, sensory wall panels, building and construction sets, puppet theatre and puppets, large foam blocks for building, easels and art easel p Although their mean scores remain satisfactory, they exhibit a marginally reduced level of consistent availability relative to the other facilities. The standard deviations for each item reflect a moderate degree of variability in the availability of classroom facilities among public early childhood care centres in the Rivers East Senatorial District. The mean score for the availability of musical instruments (drums, xylophone, etc.) was 2.24, suggesting potential concerns about their availability in public early child care centres in the Rivers East Senatorial District, as outlined by the National Minimum Standards for early child care centres in Nigeria. Consequently, this aspect was rejected.

Table 2: Summary of descriptive statistics on the extent of the adequacy of classroom facilities in public early child care centers in Rivers East Senatorial District as prescribed by the National Minimum Standards for early child care centers in Nigeria.

S/N	Items	Mean	St.D	Decision
1.	Small tables and chairs for children	3.11	0.94	Accepted
2.	Ventilation	3.08	0.96	Accepted
3.	Classroom door	3.23	0.88	Accepted
4.	Illumination	3.11	0.94	Accepted
5.	Soft play mats	3.10	0.95	Accepted
6.	Art supplies (crayons, markers, paint, etc.)	3.12	0.94	Accepted
7.	Building blocks	3.15	0.92	Accepted
8.	Puzzles	3.08	0.96	Accepted
9.	Play kitchen set	3.15	0.92	Accepted
10.	Dolls and stuffed animals	3.08	0.96	Accepted
11.	Musical instruments (drums, xylophone, etc.)	2.40	1.26	Rejected
12.	Storybooks and reading corner	3.08	0.96	Accepted
13.	Dress-up clothes and costumes	3.08	0.96	Accepted
14.	Sensory bins (sand, water, rice, etc.)	3.13	0.93	Accepted
15.	Playdough and molding tools	3.16	0.92	Accepted
16.	Science exploration kits	3.15	0.92	Accepted
17.	Magnets and magnetic boards	3.04	0.98	Accepted
18.	Shape sorters and stacking toys	3.08	0.96	Accepted
19.	Outdoor play equipment (slides, swings, etc.)	3.08	0.96	Accepted
20.	Tricycles and ride-on toys	3.08	0.96	Accepted
21.	Balance beams and climbing structures	3.09	0.95	Accepted
22.	Gardening tools and plants	2.95	1.03	Accepted
23.	Sensory wall panels	3.05	0.97	Accepted
24.	Building and construction sets	3.08	0.96	Accepted
25.	Puppet theater and puppets	3.02	0.99	Accepted
26.	Large foam blocks for building	3.08	0.96	Accepted
27.	Easels and art easel paper	3.05	0.97	Accepted
28.	Play cash register and pretend money	3.06	0.97	Accepted
29.	Dollhouses and miniature furniture	3.00	1.00	Accepted
30.	Play doctor or veterinarian kits	3.12	0.94	Accepted
31.	Large floor puzzles	3.08	0.96	Accepted
	Grand Mean	3.01	0.99	Accepted

The analysis of the data in Table 2 reveals the following observations: The table presents the adequacy of classroom facilities in public early child care centres within the Rivers East Senatorial District, as defined by the National Minimum Standards for early child care centres in Nigeria. The classroom facilities with the highest mean scores of 3.0 and above for adequacy are small tables and chairs for children, ventilation, classroom door, illumination, soft play mats, art supplies (crayons, markers, paint, etc.), building blocks, puzzles, play kitchen set, storybooks and reading corner, sensory bins (sand, water, rice, etc.), and playdough and molding tools, dolls and stuffed animals, dress-up clothes and costumes, science exploration kits, magnets and magnetic boards, shape sorters and stacking toys, outdoor play equipment (slides, swings, etc.), tricycles and ride-on toys, balance beams and climbing structures, sensory wall panels, building and construction sets, puppet theater and puppets, large foam blocks for building, easels and art easel paper, play cash register and pretend money, dollhouses and miniature furniture, play doctor or veterinarian kits, and large floor puzzles, indicating that classroom facilities in these centres are perceived to be highly adequate in public early child care centers in Rivers East Senatorial District as prescribed by the National Minimum Standards for early child care centers in Nigeria. The classroom facilities that received mean scores above 2.50 but below 3.0 for adequacy include gardening tools and plants. Although it maintains reasonable mean scores, it exhibits a marginally lower adequacy rate relative to other classroom facilities in public early child care centres within the Rivers East Senatorial District, as outlined by the National Minimum Standards for early child care centres in Nigeria. The mean score for adequacy of musical instruments (drums, xylophone, etc.) was the lowest at 2.40, suggesting potential concerns about their adequacy in public early child care centres in the Rivers East Senatorial District, as outlined by the National Minimum Standards for early child care centres in Nigeria, leading to their rejection. The standard deviations for each item reflect a moderate degree of variability in the adequacy rates among various public early child care centres in the Rivers East Senatorial District.

Table 3: Summary of descriptive statistics on the extent of the accessibility of classroom facilities in public early child care centers in Rivers East Senatorial District as prescribed by the National Minimum Standards for early child care centers in Nigeria.

S/N	Items	Mean	St.D	Decision
1.	Small tables and chairs for children	2.82	1.09	Accepted
2.	Ventilation	2.79	1.10	Accepted
3.	Classroom door	2.93	1.03	Accepted
4.	Illumination	2.82	1.09	Accepted
5.	Soft play mats	2.81	1.09	Accepted
6.	Art supplies (crayons, markers, paint, etc.)	2.82	1.09	Accepted
7.	Building blocks	2.82	1.08	Accepted
8.	Puzzles	2.80	1.10	Accepted
9.	Play kitchen set	2.82	1.08	Accepted
10.	Dolls and stuffed animals	2.79	1.10	Accepted
11.	Musical instruments (drums, xylophone, etc.)	2.32	1.30	Rejected
12.	Storybooks and reading corner	2.79	1.10	Accepted
13.	Dress-up clothes and costumes	2.78	1.11	Accepted
14.	Sensory bins (sand, water, rice, etc.)	2.81	1.09	Accepted
15.	Playdough and molding tools	2.84	1.08	Accepted
16.	Science exploration kits	2.84	1.08	Accepted
17.	Magnets and magnetic boards	2.75	1.12	Accepted

18.	Shape sorters and stacking toys	2.79	1.10	Accepted
19.	Outdoor play equipment (slides, swings, etc.)	2.79	1.10	Accepted
20.	Tricycles and ride-on toys	2.78	1.10	Accepted
21.	Balance beams and climbing structures	2.78	1.10	Accepted
22.	Gardening tools and plants	2.76	1.11	Accepted
23.	Sensory wall panels	2.92	0.97	Accepted
24.	Building and construction sets	2.78	1.10	Accepted
25.	Puppet theater and puppets	2.74	1.12	Accepted
26.	Large foam blocks for building	2.78	1.11	Accepted
27.	Easels and art easel paper	2.89	0.97	Accepted
28.	Play cash register and pretend money	2.76	1.11	Accepted
29.	Dollhouses and miniature furniture	2.72	1.13	Accepted
30.	Play doctor or veterinarian kits	2.81	1.09	Accepted
31.	Large floor puzzles	2.79	1.10	Accepted
	Grand Mean	2.98	1.0	Accepted

The analysis of the data in Table 3 reveals the following observations: The table presents the degree to which classroom facilities are deemed accessible across various public early childhood care centres in the Rivers East Senatorial District. All the classroom facilities (item 1-31) excluding (item 11) which are small tables and chairs for children, ventilation, classroom door, illumination, soft play mats, art supplies (crayons, markers, paint, etc.), building blocks, puzzles, play kitchen set, storybooks and reading corner, sensory bins (sand, water, rice, etc.), and playdough and molding tools, dolls and stuffed animals, dress-up clothes and costumes, science exploration kits, magnets and magnetic boards, shape sorters and stacking toys, outdoor play equipment (slides, swings, etc.), tricycles and ride-on toys, balance beams and climbing structures, gardening tools and plants, sensory wall panels, building and construction sets, puppet theater and puppets, large foam blocks for building, easels and art easel paper, play cash register and pretend money, dollhouses and miniature furniture, play doctor or veterinarian kits, and large floor puzzles have a relative mean scores above 2.50 for accessibility in public early child care centers in Rivers East Senatorial District as prescribed by the National Minimum Standards for early child care centers in Nigeria. Although their mean scores remain satisfactory, they exhibit a marginally reduced accessibility rate in comparison to other public early childhood care centres. The "Musical instruments (drums, xylophone, etc.)" (item 11) obtained the lowest mean score for accessibility (2.32), suggesting potential issues with the accessibility of these instruments in public early child care centres in the Rivers East Senatorial District, as outlined by the National Minimum Standards for early child care centres in Nigeria, leading to its rejection. The standard deviations for each item reflect a moderate degree of variability in accessibility rates among various public early child care centres.

Table 4: Summary of descriptive statistics on the extent of the conditions of classroom facilities in public early child care centers in Rivers East Senatorial District as prescribed by the National Minimum Standards for early child care centers in Nigeria.

S/N	Items	Mean	St.D	Decision
1.	Small tables and chairs for children	2.60	1.18	Accepted
2.	Ventilation	2.57	1.19	Accepted
3.	Classroom door	2.71	1.14	Accepted

4.	Illumination	2.60	1.19	Accepted
5.	Soft play mats	2.58	1.19	Accepted
6.	Art supplies (crayons, markers, paint, etc.)	2.60	1.18	Accepted
7.	Building blocks	2.58	1.19	Accepted
8.	Puzzles	2.58	1.19	Accepted
9.	Play kitchen set	2.58	1.19	Accepted
10.	Dolls and stuffed animals	2.57	1.20	Accepted
11.	Musical instruments (drums, xylophone, etc.)	2.24	1.33	Rejected
12.	Storybooks and reading corner	2.57	1.19	Accepted
13.	Dress-up clothes and costumes	2.56	1.20	Accepted
14.	Sensory bins (sand, water, rice, etc.)	2.57	1.20	Accepted
15.	Playdough and molding tools	2.61	1.18	Accepted
16.	Science exploration kits	2.61	1.18	Accepted
17.	Magnets and magnetic boards	2.54	1.21	Accepted
18.	Shape sorters and stacking toys	2.58	1.19	Accepted
19.	Outdoor play equipment (slides, swings, etc.)	2.57	1.20	Accepted
20.	Tricycles and ride-on toys	2.56	1.20	Accepted
21.	Balance beams and climbing structures	2.55	1.20	Accepted
22.	Gardening tools and plants	2.67	1.15	Accepted
23.	Sensory wall panels	2.53	1.21	Accepted
24.	Building and construction sets	2.56	1.20	Accepted
25.	Puppet theater and puppets	2.52	1.22	Accepted
26.	Large foam blocks for building	2.55	1.20	Accepted
27.	Easels and art easel paper	2.57	1.20	Accepted
28.	Play cash register and pretend money	2.54	1.21	Accepted
29.	Dollhouses and miniature furniture	2.51	1.22	Accepted
30.	Play doctor or veterinarian kits	2.59	1.19	Accepted
31.	Large floor puzzles	2.57	1.20	Accepted
	Grand Mean	2.95	1.02	Accepted

The analysis of the data in Table 4 reveals the following observations: The table presents the condition of classroom facilities across various public early child care centres in the Rivers East Senatorial District, as evaluated against the National Minimum Standards for early child care centres in Nigeria. All the classroom facilities (item 1-31) excluding (item 11), which are small tables and chairs for children, ventilation, classroom door, illumination, soft play mats, art supplies (crayons, markers, paint, etc.), building blocks, puzzles, play kitchen set, storybooks and reading corner, sensory bins (sand, water, rice, etc.), and playdough and molding tools, dolls and stuffed animals, dress-up clothes and costumes, science exploration kits, magnets and magnetic boards, shape sorters and stacking toys, outdoor play equipment (slides, swings, etc.), tricycles and ride-on toys, balance beams and climbing structures, gardening tools and plants, sensory wall panels, building and construction sets, puppet theater and puppets, large foam blocks for building, easels and art easel paper, play

cash register and pretend money, dollhouses and miniature furniture, play doctor or veterinarian kits, and large floor puzzles have a relative mean scores above 2.50 for good condition in public early child care centers in Rivers East Senatorial District as prescribed by the National Minimum Standards for early child care centers in Nigeria. Although their mean scores remain acceptable, they exhibit a marginally lower rate of compliance with good condition standards compared to other public early child care centres in the Rivers East Senatorial District, as outlined by the National Minimum Standards for early child care centres in Nigeria. The category of "Musical instruments (drums, xylophone, etc.)" obtained the lowest mean score for good condition (2.24), suggesting potential issues with the state of these instruments in public early child care centres within the Rivers East Senatorial District, as outlined by the National Minimum Standards for early child care centres in Nigeria, leading to its rejection. The standard deviations for each item demonstrate a moderate level of dispersion in the rates of good condition among public early child care centres in the Rivers East Senatorial District, as outlined by the National Minimum Standards for early child care centres in Nigeria.

Test Of Hypotheses

Table 5: Chi-Square test showing whether the extent classroom facilities in public early childhood centers in terms of their availability as prescribed by the National Minimum Standards for early child care centers in Nigeria are met by the operators in Rivers East Senatorial District are significantly low.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	19.284[a]	1	.000
Continuity Correction[b]	17.931	1	.000
Likelihood Ratio	19.894	1	.000
Fisher's Exact Test			
Linear-by-Linear Association	19.178	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	221		

X^2 = 19.284, df (c-1, r-1) = 1, N = 221, p = .000 at 0.05 level of significance.

The extent classroom facilities in public early childhood centers in terms of their availability as prescribed by the National Minimum Standards for early child care centers in Nigeria are met by the operators in Rivers East Senatorial District was investigated using Chi-Square Test. The result from this investigation proved that the extent classroom facilities in public early childhood centers in terms of their availability as prescribed by the National Minimum Standards for early child care centers in Nigeria are met by the operators in Rivers East Senatorial District are significantly high (χ^2 = 19.284, p = .000). Hence, the null H_{01} is rejected.

Table 6: Chi-Square test showing whether the extent classroom facilities in public early childhood centers in terms of their adequacy as prescribed by the National Minimum Standards for early child care centers in Nigeria are met by the operators in Rivers East Senatorial District are significantly high.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	94.550[a]	1	.000
Continuity Correction[b]	91.525	1	.000
Likelihood Ratio	119.828	1	.000
Fisher's Exact Test			
Linear-by-Linear Association	94.033	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	221		

X^2 = 94.550, df (c-1, r-1) = 1, N = 221, p = .000 at 0.05 level of significance.

Table 6 above shows that $\chi^2 = 94.550$, p = .000. This tells us that the extent classroom facilities in public early childhood centers in terms of their adequacy as prescribed by the National Minimum Standards for early child care centers in Nigeria are met by the operators in Rivers East Senatorial District are significantly high. Hence, the null H_{02} is rejected.

Table 7: Chi-Square test showing whether the extent classroom facilities in public early childhood centers in terms of their accessibility as prescribed by the National Minimum Standards for early child care centers in Nigeria are met by the operators in Rivers East Senatorial District are significantly high.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	159.548[a]	1	.000
Continuity Correction[b]	148.038	1	.000
Likelihood Ratio	91.463	1	.000
Fisher's Exact Test			
Linear-by-Linear Association	158.676	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	221		

$X^2 = 159.548$, df (c-1, r-1) = 1, N = 221, p = .000 at 0.05 level of significance.

We can see here that $\chi^2 = 159.548$, p = .000. This tells us that the extent classroom facilities in public early childhood centers in terms of their accessibility as prescribed by the National Minimum Standards for early child care centers in Nigeria are met by the operators in Rivers East Senatorial District are significantly high. Hence, the null H_{03} is rejected.

Table 8: Chi-Square test showing whether the extent classroom facilities in public early childhood centers in terms of their conditions as prescribed by the National Minimum Standards for early child care centers in Nigeria are met by the operators in Rivers East Senatorial District are significantly low.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	19.462[a]	1	.000
Continuity Correction[b]	16.843	1	.000
Likelihood Ratio	19.651	1	.000
Fisher's Exact Test			
Linear-by-Linear Association	19.251	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	221		

$X^2 = 19.462$, df (c-1, r-1) = 1, N = 221, p = .000 at 0.05 level of significance.

Table 8 above shows that $\chi^2 = 19.462$, p = .000. This tells us that the extent classroom facilities in public early childhood centers in terms of their conditions as prescribed by the National Minimum Standards for early child care centers in Nigeria are met by the operators in Rivers East Senatorial District are significantly low. Hence, the null H_{04} is rejected.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings indicate that public early child care centres in the Rivers East Senatorial District generally meet the National Minimum Standards for facilities, with certain centres consistently offering a diverse array of amenities. This result aligns with the findings of Maryam (2021), who investigated the influence of the availability and utilization of school facilities on the academic performance of Home Economics students in Junior Secondary Schools in Kaduna State, Nigeria. It also corresponds with the research conducted by Onojah

& Adewole (2022), which assessed the impact of school physical facilities on the implementation of the pre-primary education curriculum in public primary schools in Southwest Nigeria. The current study aligns with previous research as it assesses the availability, adequacy, accessibility, and condition of classroom facilities in public early childhood centres in Rivers East, focusing on a gap analysis of compliance with National Minimum Standards.

The findings indicate that although classroom facilities are typically present in public early child care centres within the Rivers East Senatorial District, as mandated by the National Minimum Standards for early child care centres in Nigeria, there may be discrepancies in the adequacy of these facilities across various centres in the district. All items achieved the highest adequacy ratings, with the exception of item 11, "musical instruments," which received the lowest rating. This result aligns with the findings of Kiyo (2019), who investigated the adequacy of infrastructure related to quality Early Childhood Education in the Naivasha central zone of Nakuru County, and Goke (2019), who assessed the adequacy of facilities for implementing the Universal Basic Education Scheme in public pre-primary schools in Ogun State, Nigeria. The current research aligns with previous studies as it assesses the availability, adequacy, accessibility, and condition of classroom facilities in public early childhood centres in Rivers East, focusing on a gap analysis of compliance with National Minimum Standards.

The results indicated that although classroom facilities are generally present, variations in their accessibility may exist across different public early child care centres in the Rivers East Senatorial District, as outlined by the National Minimum Standards for early child care centres in Nigeria. This result aligns with the findings of Mildred (2017), who examined the impact of learning facilities on the quality of education in public early childhood development programs. This study aligns with the current research, which assessed the availability, adequacy, accessibility, and condition of classroom facilities in public early childhood centres in Rivers East, focusing on a gap analysis of compliance with National Minimum Standards.

The results indicated that classroom facilities are generally present in public early child care centres within the Rivers East Senatorial District, as mandated by the National Minimum Standards for early child care centres in Nigeria; however, variations in their conditions may exist across different centres. This result aligns with the findings of Ifeoma (2016), who investigated the national minimum standard for early child care centres in Nigeria. This study aligns with the current research, which assessed the availability, adequacy, accessibility, and condition of classroom facilities in public early childhood centres in Rivers East, focusing on a gap analysis of compliance with National Minimum Standards.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to assess the compliance of public early childhood centres in the Rivers East Senatorial District with the National Minimum Standards for Early Childhood Care Centres in Nigeria, focussing on the availability, adequacy, accessibility, and condition of classroom facilities. The findings indicate that although these facilities are typically available in most centres, discrepancies remain in their adequacy, accessibility, and physical condition. Certain essential items, such as musical instruments, were found to be insufficiently provided, indicating areas of deficiency that may hinder the comprehensive development of learners.

The study confirms that the overall trend in Rivers East corresponds with national and regional research, indicating moderate to high availability of facilities, yet highlighting inconsistencies in quality and inclusiveness. The identified gaps, while not universally prevalent, are substantial enough to require immediate attention from policymakers and educational stakeholders. Inadequate or deteriorating classroom environments jeopardise the goals of early childhood education as specified in the National Policy on Education.

Achieving full compliance with the National Minimum Standards necessitates the provision of facilities alongside ongoing maintenance, equitable distribution, and accessibility for all learners, including those with special needs. Periodic audits, targeted funding, and capacity-building for centre administrators are essential for this purpose. Enhancing these aspects will improve the effectiveness of early childhood education and establish a more robust foundation for future learning outcomes in Rivers East and beyond.

In light of the findings, it is recommended that federal and state governments, in collaboration with education stakeholders, enhance investment in classroom infrastructure across public early childhood centres. Special attention should be given to underprovided items such as musical instruments, which were consistently found inadequate across all dimensions.

A maintenance framework should be developed and institutionalised to ensure continuous upkeep of facilities. This includes periodic facility audits, reallocation of maintenance grants, and community-based monitoring to prevent infrastructure decay.

The National Minimum Standards for Early Childhood Care Centres should be reviewed regularly in consultation with educators and regional policymakers to ensure their continued relevance, inclusiveness, and responsiveness to emerging pedagogical needs.

Policymakers should also consider equity-based allocation models, ensuring that centres in marginalised, rural, or resource-constrained areas receive targeted infrastructural support. Provisions must be made for inclusive learning tools and designs that accommodate learners with disabilities.

Furthermore, data management systems should be improved to ensure consistent record-keeping, tracking of compliance levels, and informed policy adjustments. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) and community involvement can also enhance classroom resource provision and maintenance sustainability.

Lastly, integrating professional development for head teachers and centre managers on infrastructure management and inclusive facility planning will improve not just compliance, but the educational experience delivered to young learners.

Limitations Of the Study

This study offers crucial insights into the availability, adequacy, accessibility, and condition of classroom facilities in public early childhood centres in Rivers East, using the National Minimum Standards as a benchmark. However, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study's focus on a single senatorial district limits the generalizability of findings to other geopolitical zones in Nigeria. The infrastructural realities and administrative dynamics in Rivers East may differ substantially from those in northern or western regions, which could affect applicability.

Second, although quantitative data allowed for objective statistical assessment, it constrained the depth of understanding regarding contextual and human factors such as teacher motivation, pedagogical quality, and parental involvement. These qualitative dimensions are equally essential in early childhood education and merit exploration in future studies.

Third, the study's reliance on the National Minimum Standards, while methodologically sound, assumes their continued relevance. These standards may not fully reflect contemporary pedagogical needs or be appropriately adapted to local resource constraints. Thus, interpreting compliance solely against these benchmarks should be done with caution.

Fourth, data collection was limited by the completeness of institutional records and the potential for social desirability bias in self-reports by head teachers. Although triangulated with physical observation, some degree of over-reporting or under-reporting is possible. Additionally, infrastructural assessments may reflect short-term conditions rather than long-term sustainability.

Lastly, the breadth of this study—covering four key indicators (availability, adequacy, accessibility, and condition)—may have constrained a more nuanced investigation of each dimension. Future research may benefit from in-depth, theme-specific case studies that examine each indicator with greater granularity.

Suggestion For Further Studies

Building on the current findings, future research should explore a more holistic picture of early childhood education quality by incorporating qualitative data from multiple stakeholders. Interviews or focus group discussions with caregivers, teachers, administrators, and parents could uncover nuanced barriers and enablers of compliance beyond infrastructural provisions.

Comparative studies across multiple senatorial districts, geopolitical zones, or between public and private early childhood centres would enhance the generalisability of findings. Such studies could reveal systemic patterns or regional disparities in classroom facility provision and maintenance.

Additionally, future research should investigate the effectiveness and contextual appropriateness of the existing National Minimum Standards. Stakeholders should assess whether these benchmarks reflect the evolving needs of Nigerian early learners and are feasible for implementation in rural and urban settings alike.

Another promising direction lies in assessing the correlation between classroom facility compliance and child-level outcomes—such as school readiness, learning achievement, or health indicators. Doing so will connect infrastructural evaluation more directly with child development indicators.

Finally, exploring the financial, political, and managerial constraints faced by centre operators in meeting these standards would offer a comprehensive policy roadmap. Such research could guide more responsive budgeting, targeted interventions, and evidence-informed infrastructural investment across the Nigerian early education sector.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Special thanks to the selected management and caregivers of the sampled Early Childhood Care Centres in Rivers East Senatorial District, Rivers State for providing me with the data for this study.

Conflict of Interest

There was no conflict of interest as the data was collected from management and caregivers of the sampled Early Childhood Care Centres in Rivers East Senatorial District, Rivers State, hence no financial and time commitment was experienced as this was done during the schools break periods.

Ethical Approval

The study adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring that participation was voluntary, and respondents' confidentiality was maintained. All participants were informed of the study's purpose and assured that their responses would only be used for academic purposes. No personal identifiers were collected to ensure anonymity.

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