

Impact of Childhood Education on Nigeria's Education System

George Christian Chukwudi

Department of Psychology, Gregory University, Uturu, Abia State, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

Childhood Education involves vital programmes and activities which are critical to general development, academic success and future achievements of children. Childhood Education is accepted in Nigeria as a foundational and essential programme that every Nigerian child must experience. As a result of this, the government pays exceptional attention to it by embarking on several initiatives such as the formulation of policy documents and network of relationships among different sectors. These notwithstanding, a number of problems continue to inhibit the effective implementation of Childhood Education in Nigeria. It is in line with this, that this paper evaluates the impact of Childhood Education in the Nigerian system of education with special focus on the problems, challenges, and the measures to enhance its effectiveness. This paper maintains that the Federal Government of Nigeria in its National policy on Education has officially acknowledged the development and provision of early childhood education in the country. This, alongside other numerous issues, gives rise to an unparalleled increase in the establishment of child care and early childhood education institutions in Nigeria. Nevertheless, nearly all the early childhood education in the country is made available by private administrators. This paper equally recognizes the incapability of government among others to come up with effective measures it stated in the National Policy on Education designed to ensure that the policy objectives are accomplished.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Teachers, Pupil, Professional, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is the education given in educational institutions to children prior to entering the primary schools. This form of education is generally aimed at promoting holistic development of children from birth to age of 5. According to [1], ECE is designed to promote children's intellectual development, socio-emotional development, language development, physical development and learning from birth to age 6. [2] agreed with [3] by stating the aims of ECE to include fostering proper development of children, identifying and addressing their problems, harnessing their potentials, moulding their characters, enhancing their learning and equipping them for life so that their actions are channelled towards positive personal, communal and global development. It is pertinent to note that all ECE activities and programmes are geared towards giving positive early experiences to children. This further underscores the importance of early years. The

paramount importance of the early years is widely acclaimed in various international documents and developmental goals such as UN Convention on the Right of the Child, African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Education for All (EFA) goals among others. The government of Nigeria is among the member states that ratified these documents and goals, and this has made the government to come up with various interventions which are geared towards providing quality ECE for Nigerian children. Nevertheless, it is very glaring to note that despite all the interventions and the efforts of the government, the implementation of ECE programmes is still being affected by numerous problems and challenges both at pre-primary school level and tertiary level. These problems and challenges are discussed in this paper as well as the measures to enhance the effective implementation of Early Childhood Education in the country.

Problems of Childhood Education in Nigeria

Some of the problems that inhibit the implementation of Early Child education Policy in Nigeria are:

i. Quality and Qualification of Teachers

In Nigerian early childhood institutions today, the teacher quality is generally low. It is only a few of the nursery schools especially those owned by educational institutions, private companies and wealthy individuals that can afford to engage the services of university graduate teachers and holders of Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) qualifications, competent and committed teachers and are also capable of retaining such teachers [4].

ii. Proliferation of Early Childhood Institutions

The official provision made in the National Policy on Education [5] mandated the Government to encourage private efforts in the provision of early childhood education in the country. It was however discovered that owing to the high demand for early childhood education by parents, it does not take a long time for newly established early childhood institutions to grow and develop. [6] observed that it is becoming customary to operate early childhood institution in every household.

iii. Ineffective Supervision of Early Childhood Institutions

[7] stated, no educational plan however excellent it may be can be effectively implemented if the schools supervision is ineffective. To ensure effective implementation of any educational enterprise, supervision must be given adequate attention. In regards to ECE, [8] noted that it is important to supervise in order to gather information from children, caregivers, parents, communities, and general ECE environment. Unfortunately, in spite of the immense benefits that supervision has to offer the ECE, the Nigerian ECE at pre-primary school level is not provided with these benefits as it is usually left unsupervised.

iv. Teacher-Pupil Ratio

Smaller number of children per staff, are usually found to enhance ECE quality and facilitate better developmental

outcomes for children (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), [9]. When there is higher staff-child ratio, caregivers are able to interact better with children, they experience less stress and they are able to provide more supports to different children's developmental domains. On the other hand, lower staff-child ratio in ECE settings will make caregivers to give less attention to children and they will not give optimal performance [10]. This will in turn affect children as children may experience neglect and poor development in all domains.

Challenges of Implementing Early Childhood Education in Nigeria

These include:

i. Funding:

In ECE, adequate funds need to be made available for provision of many resources and activities which include stimulating materials for teaching, training and re-training of staff (teachers and caregivers), enrichment and sensitization of programmes through regular workshops, monitoring, feeding, immunisation, supervision and inspection, report writing, publications, school meals and training manuals among others [11].

ii. Qualified Caregivers/Teachers:

Early childhood educators with required professional preparation provide more developmentally appropriate, nurturing, and responsive care and education experiences for young children (National Association for the Education of Young Children [12]. This aligns with the submission in an Issue Brief by National Governors Association Centre for Best Practices (2010) that the knowledge and skills of early childhood care providers and teachers are critical factors in their delivery of high-quality developmental and educational experiences to young children. In confirmation of this, [13] reported the result of a study conducted in 2002 by National Institute of Child Health & Human Development (NICHD) and The Early Child Care Research Network (ECCRN) in which it was found that providers with BA degrees in ECE provided higher quality learning experiences for children in their care [14]. This underscores the importance of giving children the opportunity to learn

under professionally qualified caregivers/teachers. Unfortunately, the situation is contrary in most pre-primary schools in Nigeria. In privately owned pre-primary schools, teachers with no training in ECE are often found in children classrooms while in pre-primary sections of government owned public schools, old female teachers with no qualification in ECE are often seconded to children classrooms [15].

iii. Early Childhood Curriculum:

Curriculum is the vehicle through which any educational programmes can be successfully implemented. The ECE curriculum is an important written plan that includes goals for children's development and learning, experiences through which they will achieve the goals, what staff and parents do to help children achieve the goals and, the materials needed to support the implementation of the curriculum (National Centre on Quality Teaching and Learning [16]). The early childhood curriculum helps to ensure that staff or teachers cover important learning areas, adopt a common pedagogical approach and reach for a certain level of quality across age groups. These descriptions about ECE curriculum indicates that it is an indispensable material in the business of implementing ECE programme.

iv. Professional Development:

The teacher holds the key to successful implementation of any educational enterprise. This is why the federal government of Nigeria stated in [17] that no education system may rise above the quality of its teachers (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 2013). [18] has submitted that whatever input is made into an educational system in respect of management, resources, facilities and array of instructional materials, will be of little avail if the teacher is unskilled, poorly trained or even ignorant. This is to say that whatever intervention the federal government of Nigeria makes to improve ECE will be of little effect if pre-primary school teachers are not given constant professional development. The professional development training is particularly needed as the almost all the teachers in the ECE at the pre-primary school level are either not trained or

trained in other fields not relevant to ECE. [19] have submitted that whatever a person's profession is, the need for professional development is universal because professionals need to continually enrich their knowledge and increase their sense of professionalism over the course of their careers so as to implement current research based practice. According to [20], early childhood professional development brings to the forefront the significance of the early years for children's learning and development and highlights the central role early childhood educators play in children's successful outcomes. Unfortunately, the pre-primary school teachers in Nigeria in both public and private school seldom receive professional development training. In fact, some researchers have confirmed that the teachers lack professional development training [21]. This lack of professional training for the teachers is liable to worsen the problems of implementing ECE in Nigeria. This is because almost all the teachers in Nigerian pre-primary schools are not professionally qualified [22].

Measures to ensure Effective Implementation of Childhood Education in Nigeria

First and foremost, all the caregivers/teachers at the pre-primary school level in Nigeria would need to undergo professional development training from time to time. This is the only way by which ECE at pre-primary school level can be successfully implemented in Nigeria at the moment. Even though many of the teachers may be qualified in their respective fields which are often not in ECE, they would need the professional development training to equip them with necessary skills and knowledge required for effective implementation of ECE at the pre-primary school level [23]. This training would help the teachers to understand the significance of the early years for children's learning and development and it would highlight the central role they are to play in children's successful outcomes. In relation to funding, these stakeholders would also need to be effectively involved. This is particularly important as it is often said that the federal government alone

cannot singlehandedly provide all financial supports that the educational system requires. Each of the stakeholders would need to devise means of making fund available for ECE especially at the pre-primary school level [24]. Whatever the government provides would therefore be strengthened by their own contributions [25]. In regards to supervision, all the stakeholders would also need to be involved since they are working towards specific goals of ECE. However, there would be need to give them appropriate orientation on how they can carry out effective supervision of ECE programmes in their specific areas. In addition, evidences have shown lack of relevant resources for ECE at pre-primary school level. This also is not a problem that does not have solution. There would be need to involve all bodies that are networking to provide ECE for the Nigerian child. This is particularly necessary as ECE is no longer a one man affair in the country but inter-sectoral activities involving the parents/family, education sector, health sector, Ministry of Women Affairs, the media, community members, religious groups and legal sector among others. If

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

From all indications, the implementation of ECE in Nigeria, especially at the pre-primary school level, is faced with diverse challenges. However, since Childhood Education at pre-primary school level is under the control of UBEC, the body should organise seminar for all pre-primary school caregivers/teachers, including those in private schools, to equip them with knowledge and skills needed for

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all these stakeholders put all hands-on deck towards providing resources for ECE at pre-primary school level, the issue of lack of resources will become a history [26]. Also, there is a way out of the challenge of not having the ECE curriculum in pre-primary schools. Meanwhile, it should be noted first of all, that the government produced and launched the National Early Childhood Curriculum for Ages 0-5 years in 2007 with believe that copies would be available to pre-primary schools in order to provide uniform ECE programme for all Nigerian children. This plan of the government did not change but could have been improperly executed by those saddled with the responsibility of disseminating the curriculum to schools [27]. To overcome this problem, there would be need to resort to using the internet [4]. The curriculum should be uploaded unto to the website of UBEC and information should be circulated to all school administrators about this [9]. It should be made mandatory for all pre-primary schools, both public and private, to ensure that the curriculum is available and used in the school. Lastly, the challenge of staff-child ratio can also be tackled [21].

successful implementation of ECE programme. Also, the commission should organize a forum where all stakeholders in ECE would be enlightened about their roles towards the implementation of ECE. Such forum should discuss how the stakeholders could assist in making resources available and in funding and supervision of ECE.

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