

AN ANALYSIS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (ECE) AND INTEGRATED EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (IECD) IN NIGERIAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT: Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a pre-primary care and education given to aid physical, social, psychological and mental growth and development of the child in a setting outside the home. This form of education is what is captured differently as Day-care, Creche, Play-class, Kindergarten and Nursery. It is the children's care, development and education from birth to the period of exposure to primary schooling experience in the formal, informal and non-formal settings. This paper analysed early childhood education in Nigerian public schools and demonstrated how the implementation of the integrated early childhood development (IECD) will meet the objectives of early childhood education. The paper suggests that parents, guardians, and care givers should therefore be actively involved as the integral part of the early childhood education process in the Nigerian public schools and the provision of early childhood education facilities (classrooms, instructional resources and equipment) needed for the success of the programme by the government of the day.

Key Words: Early Childhood Education, Development, Implementation, Policy.

I. INTRODUCTION

Every child has the right to education. This was the concern of the world summit on the state of global children which led to the inclusion and expansion of Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) in the global Education for All Programme (Abba, nd). During the summit in 1990 at Jomtien, it was declared that learning begins within the preview of basic education. That declaration, however, contributed little to the expansion of ECE in countries. Ten years later, the world community renewed its commitment to ECE in Dakar framework for Action, whose first goal was to expand access, improve quality and ensure equity in ECE (UNESCO, 2004).

According to Fowowe (2011), despite its short existence, ECCDE has acquired quite a variety of names with complementary acronyms to match. Each name betrays different emphasis and sometimes different contexts of usage. It may be called Early Childhood Care Development and Education (ECCDE), or Early Education Care and Development (EECD), and sometimes, it is referred to as Early Childhood Education (ECE) or Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE). In Nigeria and some other developing countries, however, the preferred name is ECCDE and or ECE and it runs a policy of Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) in the ECCDE programmes. Early childhood development and education is the overall development of the child socially, physically and intellectually. It encompasses the care, development, and education of children below the age of 6 years (Wordu, 2019).

Early Childhood Care Development and Education (ECCDE) in Nigeria

ECCDE is a pre-primary care and education given to aid physical, social, psychological and mental growth and development of the child by people other than their family or in setting outside of the home. It is the concept commonly used to describe the formal teaching and care of young children by people other than their family or in settings outside the home. This form of education is what is captured differently as Day-care, Creche, Play-class, Kindergarten and Nursery. It is the children's care, development and education from birth to the period of exposure to primary schooling experience in the formal, informal and non-formal settings. The care in this context is given from birth and the aspect of education takes off from around the age of two when

cognition begin to manifest, that is, ability to acquire knowledge: the mental faculty or process of acquiring knowledge by the use of reasoning, intuition or perception. Both the care and education promote the child's growth and development.

In Nigeria, ECE started as far back as the pre-colonial era in the form of nursery school or pre-primary education, though the demand for each education was low until recent time (Abba n.d). Early Childhood Education in the form of nursery school or pre-primary education as we know it today in Nigeria is largely a post-colonial development. The semblances of ECE during the colonial era were the Kindergarten and the infant classes, which consisted of groups of children considered not yet ready for primary education. And since grouping for instruction in schools then was not age-based, some children aged six or even more, could be found in some of the infant classes (Tor-Anyiin, 2008). With the phasing out of infant classes, some parents began to feel the need for nursery schools.

During the pre-colonial period also, all efforts for provision of early childhood education were confined to the voluntary sector and received little or no support from the government. It was for the first time in 1977 with the introduction of the National Policy on Education by the then military government of Nigeria that the importance and need for ECE was given official recognition and linked with the child's educational performance in primary school. Gradually, early childhood institution stayed, and by 1985, Nigeria has about 4,200 early childhood education institutions. Then by 1992, the number increased to about 8,300 (Federal Government of Nigeria/ UNICEF, 1993).

Currently, ECE institutions are located in various places and buildings, Universities and Colleges campuses, premises of some industries and business organisations, Churches and Mosques premises and even residential buildings with unprecedented expansion owing to the high demand for early childhood care and education by parents. An investigation conducted in 2003 revealed that more than two-fifth (42%) of the sample ECCE facilities in Nigeria was private-owned. Government owned accounted for 34%, and 21% by local communities (Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 2007). As time went on, it became necessary for the government to increase its involvement in pre-school education in Nigeria. By 2004, this segment of education had been integrated into the Universal Basic Education programme by the UBE Act 2004. All children within the pre-school age bracket were entitled to be admitted without paying school fees into any ECE Centre, which was planned to be integrated into every public primary school. For the year 2003/2004, the gross and net enrolment ratios were 14.7% and 10.9% respectively and the normative age groups under consideration were 3 to 5 years of age (EAGMR, 2007).

In the National Policy on Education (NPE), Early Childhood Education is labelled as pre-primary education and is defined as the education given in an educational institution to nursery school children prior to their entering primary school (NPE, 2013).

The purpose of pre-primary education according to the National Policy on Education is:

1. Effecting a smooth transition from the home to the school
2. Prepare the child for the primary level of education
3. Provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work (on the farms, in the markets, offices, etc.);
4. Inculcate social norms.
5. Inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys, etc.;
6. Develop a sense of co-operation and team spirit;
7. Learn good habits, especially good health habits; and
8. Teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms, etc. through play (NPE, 2013).

The policy further stated what is expected from government for an effective and successful delivery of the programme:

- a. Establish pre-primary section in existing public schools and encourage both community and private efforts in the provision of pre-primary education;
- b. Make provision in teacher education programme for specialization in early childhood education;
- c. Ensure that the medium of instruction is principally the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community; and to this end will:
 - i. Develop the orthography of many Nigerian languages, and
 - ii. Produce textbooks in Nigerian languages.
- d. Ensure that the main method of teaching at this level shall be through play and that the curriculum of teacher education is oriented to achieve this; regulate and control the operation of pre-primary education. To this end the teacher-pupil ratio shall be 1:25;
- e. Set and monitor minimum standard for early childcare centres in the country; and ensure full participation of government, communities and teachers association in the running and maintenance of Early Childhood Education Facilities. Generally, ECCE is aimed at promoting holistic development of children from –birth

to age 8. It is designed to promote children's intellectual, socio-emotional cognitive physical development and learning from birth to age 8 (Olowe, Kutelu&Majebi, 2014).

Emergence of ECCDE as Part of Universal Basic Education (UBE) in Nigeria

The Universal Basic Education in Nigeria now has an expanded scope which includes programmes and initiatives for ECCDE. ECCDE is now an integral part of UBE. Contained in the National Policy on Education 2004, 2013 and the Universal Basic Education Act (2004) is the recognition of ECCDE as a component of UBE.

Pertinent issues to ECCDE were prominent in the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the child (United Nations General Assembly, 1989), the world Conference on Education for All (EFA) (UNESCO, 1990), and the Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2007). The latter included ECCE as number one of the 6 EFA goals by placing emphasis on "expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children" (UNESCO, 2007:17).

The Nigerian government is a signatory to each of these decisions and has included ECCDE as one of the compulsory levels of UBE through which every Nigerian child must pass. As articulated by the Nigerian government, UBE focuses on provision of nine years of schooling which includes ECCE provision, primary education and the first three years of secondary education. Government has prescribed that this level of education must be free, universal, compulsory, functional and of high quality. Pre-school services are offered by central and local governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations (CBOs) and private entrepreneurs.

Before now, formalising ECCDE was considered needless in Nigeria because the society was safe, conducive for child's learning, growth and development. Adult members of the society were readily available and willing to help and guide the child in the developmental processes, even with or without the presence of the parents. Nowadays, the environment is hostile and not safe, mothers are economically engaged and children cannot safely be in the care of neighbours, because of the increasing incidences of child's sexual molestation, kidnapping, food poisoning, child trafficking, and child labour and ritual killings. In averting this menace, better option is in ECCDE which is a more affordable and reliable childcare practice, providing essential support for working parents, especially mothers and enhances women empowerment and household income and welfare. But even then, study (Ibrahim, 2014) have shown that 85% of parents in Nigeria do not value pre-primary school education due to distrust, poor quality, high cost and the notion that the child must be close to the warmth of the mother before primary age.

The Implementation of ECCDE in Nigeria

Generally, ECCDE is aimed at promoting holistic development, care and early stimulation of nursery and primary school children, especially those in disadvantaged and low socio-economic strata. The specific objective was to provide access for early child care and pre-school education of Nigerian children as well as improve children-rearing skills of mothers. Thus it was meant to be community based, low cost and affordable.

Sooter (2013) lists the aims of ECCDE which 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. Thus all ECCDE activities and programmes are geared towards giving early educational experiences to children. In this consideration, the importance of the early years is widely acclaimed in various international documents and developmental goals such as the United Nations Convention on the Right of the child, African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA) goals among others.

The Nigerian government 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 ECCDE for the Nigerian children. Hence Nigeria developed a unified early childhood education curriculum which was all encompassing and divided into two sections to cater for age 0 to 3 and 3 to 5 years respectively. Again, the federal government included ECCDE programmes in curriculum of colleges of education and the universities. The most recent innovation in this area is the new National Policy on Education (2013 edition) in which the programme of ECCDE is brought under Basic Education in section two. Currently, it is divided into two programmes namely, Early Childhood Care, Development and Education (ECCDE) and Kindergarten Education.

Despite all these interventions and the efforts of the government, it is glaring that the implementation of ECCDE programmes is still affected by many challenges both at pre-primary school level and tertiary level. These challenges relate to professional qualification of caregivers and teachers, resources, early childhood curriculum, professional development training, staff- child ratio, funding and collaborative effort and input of all stakeholders just to mention a few.

Challenges in Delivery of ECE in Nigeria

The Nigerian government has now accommodated ECCDE as part and parcel of national educational provision, making it a more expanded programme of pre-primary level of education. The national education policy has recognised ECCDE from 0-4 years and pre-primary education from 5-6 years (FRN, 2013). What is still observable in the real sense of practice is the gap which exists, which is the non-implementation of specific policy on early childhood education.

The implementation of ECCDE programmes is still affected by many challenges both at pre-primary school level, primary school level and tertiary level. These challenges as identified by Akinrotimi&Olowe (2016) include:

1. *Resources*: In spite of the fact that resources are critical to successful implementation of any ECCE programme, they are not found in some Nigerian pre-primary sections especially in the pre-primary section of public primary schools that belong to the government. Researchers who have assessed the resources that are available for ECCE at pre-primary schools level have confirmed this same situation through the findings of their studies (Akinrotimi&Olowe, 2016).
2. *Early Childhood Curriculum*: This refers to what and how of any educational enterprise. There has been National Early Childhood Curriculum for ages 0-5 years by NERD with the support of UNICEF launched in 2007. Since then, it is not found in almost all public pre-primary schools in Nigeria.
3. *Professional Development*: Teachers hold the key to successful implementation of any educational enterprise. This is why the federal government of Nigeria stated in NPE (2013) that no education system may rise above the quality of its teachers. The professional development training is particularly needed as most of the primary schools level is either not trained or trained in other fields not relevant to ECCE. The pre-primary school teachers in public and private school seldom receive professional development training. Some researchers have confirmed that the teachers lack professional development training (Olaleye&Omotayo, 2009; Viatonu, 2011).
4. *Staff-Child Ratio*: Higher staff-child ratios, referring to a smaller number of children per staff are said to enhance ECCDE development and facilitate better developmental outcomes (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development OECD, (n.d); Huntsman, 2008). The lower staff-child ratio is the scenario in Nigerian ECCDE at pre-primary school level. This has also been reported in several papers and researches on ECE (Sooter, 2013; Osho, 2014). The ideal staff-child ratio of 1:25 is the policy position but this is not implemented likely due to lack of supervision or monitoring by the authorities that be.
5. *Funding*: Funding is crucial to achieving success in any educational enterprise and this should be given prompt attention. The sad thing is that Nigerian ECCE in public schools is ridiculously underfunded. This issue has been documented in several academic papers and researches (Osakwe, 2011; Amadi, 2013; Alabi&Ijaiya, 2014).
6. *Professional Qualified Caregivers and Teachers*: 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, NAEYC, 2007). Unfortunately, the situation is contrary in most Nigerian public school. In pre-primary sectors of public schools, old female teachers with no qualification in ECCE are often seconded to children studies conducted by researchers in Nigeria have consistently confirmed this situation (Amadi, 2013; Okewole, Iluezi-Ogbedu&Osinowo, 2013; Osho, Ahyu, Kolie&Onifade, 2014). This lack of professional training for the teachers is liable to worsen the problems of implementing ECCDE in Nigeria. This is because 95% of the teachers in Nigerian pre-primary schools are not professionally qualified (Amadi, 2013).
7. *Language policy implementation*: In spite of the laudable provision of the language policy, nothing much seems to have been achieved. The position of Nigerian language as a medium of instruction has turned out hard to come by. The FGN/UNICEF (1993) reported that about 93.2% of teaching and learning in Nigeria pre-schools was done in English language instead of language of the immediate community. This also could be as a result of attitude of the teachers towards the implementation of the policy and or due to supervision or monitoring and even shortage of personnel in the local language.

From the foregoing, to address the situation in the practice of ECE in Nigeria, a number of things must be taken into consideration. Such include:

1. The implementation of ECE requires the collaborative effort and input of all stakeholders, including the government, parents, guardians, and school authorities. While the government is expected to provide the necessary teaching and learning resources and facilities, the availability of relevant age-grade children and cooperation of parents and or guardians in enrolling their children or wards cannot be overemphasised. Others as proposed by Maigida (2017) include the following:
2. Strengthening and implementing the policy which has been formulated;
3. Existing experts of ECCDE can be commissioned to champion the development of uniform curriculum on ECCDE which presently non-existent;

4. Sincere and committed involvement of governments in the various states of the federation should be demonstrated with high level of seriousness and passion, as the carefree attitude has left only the providers playing active role and with ultimate goals of making profit, often times sacrificing quality;
5. In the training of teachers for this level of education, research in the early childhood education programme, government should motivate the stakeholders of the programme and encourage or mandate the establishment of Departments/Units of ECCDE in the various Faculties of their universities and colleges of education; and
6. Retraining of teachers and training of available specialist teachers of ECCDE by various state governments in the country (pre-service and in-service. Refresher courses/workshops to be organised for the existing teachers) during vacations.

How to Implement IECD policy to meet the Objectives of ECCDE in Nigeria

ECCDE in Nigeria should be implementing the Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) policy. ECCDE is a wide range of programmes aimed at the physical, cognitive and social development of children before they enter primary schools-theoretically from birth to 6 years. The objectives of IECD as contained in the Federal Republic of Nigeria document (FRN, 2007:4) are:

- (a) Provide care and support that will ensure the rights of the child to:
 - (i) Good nutrition and health;
 - (ii) Healthy and safe environment;
 - (iii) Psychosocial stimulation; and
 - (iv) Protection and participation.
- (b) Inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creating through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys etc.; and
- (c) Provide adequate care and supervision for the children, while parents/guardians are at work (on the farms, in the markets, offices industry, etc.).

In Nigeria, organized education of the child below primary school age did not gain official recognition until the early 90s. From that moment, early childhood educational institutions are located in various places and buildings, campuses of universities some industries and business organizations, church and mosque premises, residential buildings with unprecedented expansion owing to the high demand for early childhood care and education by parents (Ehijah, 2006). The flip side of this proliferation of early childhood institution is that, the issues of standard and regulations have been waved off (Sooter, 2013). The end result is that the young minds are offered substandard and irregular education that cannot breed egalitarianism and self-reliant individuals of the society and leaders of tomorrow.

In August 2004, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) with the support of United Nations Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) convened a meeting of experts and stakeholders in early childcare to agree on the minimum standard for operating childhood care centres in an integrated way in Nigeria. This effort resulted in the production of what is today the National Minimum Standards for Early Childcare Centres in Nigeria. Furthermore, research evidence from many fields of study showed that the care and support received by a child in terms of good health, nutrition and psycho-social care and protection are crucial in the formation and development of intelligence, personality and social behaviour (Obiweluzor, 2011). Over the years, early childhood education in Nigeria has metamorphosed from a single sector to a multi-sector pursuit, conveying interventions in health, nutrition, care, stimulation, protection, and participation of the child.

According to Obiweluzor (2011), an analysis of the current situation indicates that, to a great extent, the Nigerian child suffers deprivation from lack of good social services in terms of poor nutrition, healthcare, and access to safe water and sanitation, general protection from environmental hazards and insecurity. All of these gave justification for the formulation of National policy for Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) in Nigeria, which was officially launched in October, 2007. This provided early childhood care and development in Nigeria to adopt an integrated approach for the care and support given to children aged 0 through 5 years.

This approach will meet the objectives of ECCDE in Nigeria, considering the fact that it is a holistic approach in which the Federal ministry of education collaborates with other ministries including Health, Environment and Housing, Women Affairs, Information and Communication, Finance, Agriculture and Water Resources as well as the National Planning commission to provide interventions for the cognitive, physical, social, moral, and emotional development of the child.

Hence the curriculum for ECCDE should be developed to create awareness, promote positive attitudes, interest and orientations in parents and caregivers who would enhance the holistic (physical; health, cognitive, language, emotional, social skills creative) development of the Nigerian child, irrespective of his or her

residential, gender, ethnic, political, and religious status. This is already on point as Fowowe (2011) observed in what he calls Nigeria's score card on ECCDE which includes:

1. Inclusion of IECD principles, theories and practices in the ECCE curriculum of Colleges of Education (COE)
2. Establishment of IECD minimum standards for COE by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE).
3. Creation of IECD centres for children 3-5 years in existing public schools in the 2004 National policy on Education.
4. Development of IECD care giver training manuals by NERD/UNICEF in 2006.
5. Adoption of National policy on IECD in November, 2007
6. Development of guidelines for the implementation of national policy on IECD (FNE/UNICEF) in Press.
7. Establishment of a National Resource for IECD in Abuja.
8. The involvement of cooperating ministries, development partners and civil society organisations.

Therefore, early childhood education provides that vital physical, psycho-motor, affective, cognitive, social potentials which are fundamental to human life that will play very essential roles in the academic, social and economic success of children in the primary, educational level and even more in the later life of the individual child.

II. CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, early childhood education have a lot of implications on the later life of individuals. Early involvement in education exposes the child to all fields which make her more apt to learn in the further level as the confidence in her learning capabilities which she acquired from the nursery school is lifted to the next level. A child who fails to acquire early education may suffer emotionally, socially, intellectually and even physically if he or she is trusted into the primary education without a sustainable early childhood education involvement that will give her a solid foundation in the primary school. Parents, guardians and care givers should therefore be actively involved as the integral part of the early childhood education process in the Nigerian public schools. This calls for the provision of early childhood education facilities (classrooms, instructional resources and equipment) needed for the success of the programme by the government of the day, and for proper enlightenment campaign on the importance of early childhood education.

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