

**RESEARCH AND INNOVATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE
DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION (ECCDE) IN NIGERIA: A PANACEA TO
THE ACHIEVEMENT OF UBE**

Dr Mirian Ndidi Obizue

*Department Of Social Science Education,
Faculty of Education,
Imo State University, Owerri,
Imo State.*

Nora Ihuoma Nwanguma

*Dept Of Educational Foundatons/Counselling Psychology (Early Childhood Section)
Lagos State University,
Lagos State.*

And

Dr Evelyn Onyeanusì

*Faculty of Humanities,
Imo State University, Owerri,
Imo State.*

Abstract

Early Childhood Care Development Education (ECCDE) is conceptualized as the care, development and Education of children below the age of six years or better called pre-school age. Before independence, Nigeria had very few day care centers or pre-school institutions. Most Children stay at home in the care of nannies, grandmothers, siblings and other relatives. Adequate care for these children became a concern for working mothers and women in politics. Today, experience from research and innovation has influenced the formalization of ECCDE. This paper examined ECCDE as a formal education that involves a lot more than parenting and custodial care as a panacea for the achievement of UBE programme. It also considered UBE as one of the laudable educational programmes in Nigeria which has attracted huge capital and material resources investment. This paper suggests that the government should through the UBEC and SUBEB enhance the sponsorship of UBE programme in the area of ECCDE and also train specialist teachers in ECCDE.

Keyword: Research and Innovation, Early Childhood Care Development Education

Research is a careful study of the subject or matter of the discussion or the problematic issue so as to proffer lasting solutions. Innovation in the same vein tries to introduce new things into an existing and problematic situation or an outright or novel concept to better or improve lives of the citizenry.

In the ancient times, children were cared for, socialized and raised in their homes by fulltime mothers, hired maids, helpers, maiden, aunts, grandmothers and other older siblings of the family (Whiting & Edward, 1988). Currently there is a shift from the family and kin-centered child rearing towards institutionalized group care of young children. This has no doubt created problems for nursing mothers who work outside their homes to look for alternative ways of caring for their children while they are away at work. This has also led to the fact that pre-school institutions are established to solve this problem.

Early Childhood Care and Education are given in Day Care Centers, Nursery and Kindergarten schools. Individuals and religious bodies constitute the most important proprietorship, while government agencies provide a mere 10 percent under an 'alibi' of running model schools. Patronage of early childhood education is largely in metropolitan areas where those children are catered for either in an institution or at home by paid helpers. Others are either cared for by relations or by mothers who combine this responsibility with gainful employment. The administration of early childhood education is shared between the Ministry

of Health in respect of control of the day care centers and the Ministry of Education in charge of nursery and kindergarten schools. Many Nigerian families who would have liked to benefit from good childcare institutions are usually unable to do so because of their weak financial background and also because such institutions are few and far between (Abidoye, 2009). On the other hand, nursery schools and day care centers are lacking in places where the living and working habits of the population deprive children of stimuli for optimum physical, social and intellectual development. Also, many factories and industrial concerns do not provide much needed childcare facilities for their workers' children. Consequently, while both parents are at work, some children under five years of age who are not old enough for primary school are left at home under nobody's care and they are the ones most affected by this situation. UBE programme came up with ECCDE to remedy this situation, yet, lapse exist, hence the need for research and innovation. This paper focuses on examining Early Childhood Development Education as a formal institution that involves a lot more than parenting and custodial care and as a panacea for the achievement of UBE being one of the laudable educational policies.

The Need for Childhood Care Development Educational (ECCDE)

Indeed, it is in response to the need for childcare arrangements for working mothers that the first pre-school

institutions began to spring up in Nigeria in the sixties and seventies. Agiobu-Kemmer (2001) noted some short comings and challenges of the system to include the fact that many proprietors and teachers of pre-schools do not have any knowledge or qualifications in the area of early childhood education. They lack the appropriate skills for this important profession. They go into daycare or nursery school business with the misconception that they do not need any special training once they have had the experience of bringing up their own children. This attitude however, is changing as more people in the society are beginning to realize that early childhood education involves a lot more than parenting and custodial care.

Various programs have been developed and implemented by non-governmental organizations. Notably, some pioneering work was done in the early eighties by the National Council of Women Societies (NCWS) and World Organization for Preschool Education (WOPE). These initial efforts were done in collaboration with the Institutes of Education of the Universities of Lagos and Ibadan, with support from UNESCO and the Federal Ministry of Education. Pioneering work was also done in this area at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in the late 1980's. Akukwe (2011) asserted that the programs were developed and implemented to provide short-in-service training courses for daycare assistants in urban nursery schools. These pre-schools had been set up by the Froebel or Montessori trained proprietors who

constituted the membership of NCWS at that time. In the late 1980's, at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, ran several training workshops for nursery school teachers and proprietors in the region

In this 21st century, Children need more stimulation and learning opportunities than their parents can provide. Therefore the education of young children must be effectively organize and pursued vigorously by the Government through well articulated programs like the UBE (Osiyale, 2010).

Early Child Care Development and Education (ECCDE) Programme in NERDC

The successful implementation of the Integrated Community Health and Development (ICHHD) and the Primary Health Care (PHC) programs in Nigeria helped in reducing child mortality rates and ensuring the survival and promotion of other efforts geared towards child care and development (Osileya, 2010). Such efforts were aimed at providing a conducive atmosphere for the optimal attainment of the educational potentials of children. The education of young children in Nigeria was then given a priority attention. In 1986, the Federal Government and the United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF) in collaboration with Bernard Van Leer of the Netherlands had a Cooperation agreement for the upliftment of the situation of children in Nigeria. The Nigerian Education Research and Development Council (NERDC) as the Federal Government's implementing

agency, started the ECCDE program in 1987 in five pilot local government areas (Agusiobi, 2002).

The aim of ECCDE program was the total development, care, and early stimulation of children aged 0-8 years especially those in disadvantaged and low socio-economic strata. The main objective was to provide access for ECC/Pre-school education for Nigerian children as well as improve childrearing skills of mothers. The ECCDE program is community based low-cost and affordable. It utilizes relevant local resources and the inter-sectoral approach as a strategy for its implementation. Abidoeye (2009) recorded that the first phase of the project terminated in 1990. The second phase covered the period 1991-1995 and covered 10 UNICEF assisted states. It was during this second phase that ECCDE program became recognized under the umbrella of the Basic Education program, an aftermath of the Education For All Conference and the Jomtien World Summit for Children in 1990. At the point of transition from one phase to the next, there was physical expansion of the program. Bertly and Edward (2010) added that the five pilot local government areas that were covered in the first phase of the project expanded to 59 local government areas (LGA's) during the second phase. While Agiodukemmer (2001) asserted that in the 1997-2001, there was physical expansion of the program from one phase to the next. He added that during the 1997-2001 phase, it was expected that there will be further expansion on a nationwide coverage to include greater number of disadvantaged

children such as children in Koranic schools, home-based children in regular primary schools and other identified specific groups. Emphasis was on early Childhood Care ECC in all its ramifications and the main objective was: To increase access to early child stimulation for children under 6 years through parental education, community/NGO initiatives and inter-sectoral linkages (FME, 2000).

For the new FGN/UNICEF country program of Cooperation (2002-2007) more emphasis is given to survival growth and development in early childhood care. The new Country program goals are to protect the rights of Nigerian children and women, enhancing the capacity of both government and civil society to ensure that Nigerian children have the best possible prospects for survival, growth, development, protection and participation.(Osiyale, 2010)

NERDC as the lead agency on ECCDE in Nigeria has planned to review curricula in line with the new integrated approach, develop Users Guide to the Curricula, carry out inventorisation of ECCDE models/facilities in Nigeria and document key household practices (Akukwe, 2011). This will provide the necessary information to improve ECCDE practices, dialogue on policy drive by stakeholders and the general public, encourage pre-primary school linkages for more access and services for children. and also for positive interventions in ECCDE programming in UBE.

UBE Achievements in the ECCDE Programme

According to Agusiobo (2002) the progress in ECCDE through UBE so far includes;

- Guidelines for establishment of ECC centres/Resource raining centres have been developed.
- A curriculum titled the ECCDE Curriculum was produced by NERDC and approved by the National Council on Education (NCE) in 1994.
- Based on the curriculum about twenty-eight titles of pre-school readers for different age-ranges have been produced and distributed to ECCDE Centers and nursery schools to assist the child in learning:
- *Caring for the African Child: A Handbook for care-givers* has been produced.
- Training manuals/Guides for lead trainers, child educators and care-givers have also been developed and are being distributed as necessary.
- Modules for Training Early Childhood Educators and Care-givers (in collaboration with the Regional Resource and Training Center (RTRC), Kenya Institute of Education). For example: Module on Child Development, Child Health, Food and Nutrition, ECCDE Childhood Resource Center, Learn As You Play, Supervision of Services for Children and so on.
- A textbook on Child Development Health and Nutrition in Nigeria was produced as a learning material for

education, health and social services professionals.

- Survey reports on child rearing practices in 5 pilot states and 10 UNICEF assisted states have been written.
 - ECCDE concepts have been infused into curriculum of Colleges of Education and ECC is now offered as Courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels of some universities in Nigeria.
 - An Anthology of Nigerian songs, stories, games, poems, riddles and tongue twisters for children has been produced in form of a Handbook for parents and Care-givers. (Awaiting publication).
 - Development of a Child Assessment Instrument (Awaiting standardization).
- According to Abidoye (2009), early childhood education is the education given in an educational institution to children aged 3 to 5, prior to their entering the primary school. The National policy on Education (2014) stated the following purposes of pre-primary level of education.
- Effecting a smooth transition from home to the school
 - Preparing the child for the primary level of education
 - Providing adequate care and supervision for children while their parents are at work (on the farms, in the market, in the offices and so on)
 - Inculcating social norms,
 - Inculcating in the child the spirit of inquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature and the local environment through playing with toys,

through artistic and musical activities and so on.

- Teaching cooperation and team spirit.
- Teaching the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms etc through play and;
- Teaching good habits especially good health habits

Government also saw its role essentially as follows, while leaving early childhood education to the private sector.

1. Encourage private efforts in the provision of early childhood education.
2. Make provision in teacher training institutions for students' teachers who want to specialize in early childhood education.
3. Ensure that the medium of instruction will be principally the mother tongue or the language of the immediate Community and to this end will:-
 - a) develop the orthography (study of spelling) for many more Nigeria languages and
 - b) produce textbook in Nigerian languages (some of these developments are already being pursued in the linguistics departments of universities and under the auspices of some State's Ministries of Education. The Federal Government has also set up a language center as part of the educational service complex under the Federal Ministry of Education. This Language Center: will be expanded to have a wider scope.
4. Ensure that the main method of teaching in the early childhood education will be through play and the curriculum of

teacher training colleges is appropriately oriented to achieve this.

5. Regulate and control the operation of early childhood education as well as ensure that the staff of preprimary institutions is adequately trained and that essential equipment is provided.

To achieve these aims, the appropriate level of government will review and enforce the educational laws that relate to the establishment of nursery schools, to make sure that schools that re-opened are well run and that early childhood teachers are qualified and that other academic infrastructure is provided. Ministries of Education will make regular inspection to ensure maintenance of high standards. However, this policy on pre-primary education has conspicuously neglected children of ages 0-3; the ECCDE program has recognized the total care, development and rights of children from birth. The policy document has a heavy emphasis on education of the Nigerian child.

In 1987, after a thorough review, the new National Policy on Education (NPE) substantially elaborated on its guidelines for early childhood education in Nigeria, though there were no changes in its objectives. (Berty and Edward, 2010). In consonance with the Jomtien Declaration, World Summit on Children and the Convention on the Rights of the child (CRC), ECCDE became part of Basic Education program component with the realization that Learning Begins at Birth. This has provided supportive policy implications at different sectors:- Health, Social services, Agriculture etc. Many States have worked out their own

guidelines for operating early childhood care programs. For example as far back as 1977 Anambra State prepared a detailed application form for permission to establish a nursery school. According to Akukwe (2011) the form seeks information on the staffing, curriculum, buildings, equipment and school closings. A zonal inspector of education must give approval of the application. The Anambra State Government was the first to prepare a document titled: Nursery School Regulations.

Nursery School Regulations

To ensure uniformity of practice and maintain standards in the states the Federal Ministry of Education prepared Guidelines on early childhood Education (1987), a yardstick for inspecting officers to use in assessing the standards of work in pre-primary schools. The Guidelines cover the following topics:

- Objectives of early childhood education (as stated in the UBE, 2004)
- Government attitude towards early childhood education (no direct involvement thus advocating participation by private sector)
- Requirements regarding types of establishment, teaching facilities, equipment (for example prohibition of residential nursery school except for those serving the handicapped)
- Specification on playgrounds, furniture, fees, teacher and side qualifications
- Teacher-pupil ratio (1:25)

- Language of instruction (mother tongue)
- Books (locally appropriate)
- Record keeping (administration and academic)
- Inspections (by officer of the State Ministry of Education)
- Conformance to Federal Education Law
- Provision for the handicapped
- Criteria for school closure (non-compliance, inadequate facilities, unqualified staff)
- Institutions of higher learning provide training in early childhood education
- Religion (Conformance with religion of parents)
- Heath (including hygiene and sanitation)

This document can be regarded as the first working document on early childhood education in Nigeria. (Agusiobo, 2002)

Although it is recognized by Government in the National Policy that financing education was a collective responsibility of all tiers of government, it made no direct financial provision before the Primary school. Government does not provide direct funding for Early Childhood Education; there is some indirect government input in terms of fund for training, monitoring and evaluation in various collaborating projects with international agencies. These provisions have however not been quantified monetarily. In addition Government needs to confirm its acceptance of the entire preschool years 0+ to 5+ as valid for

childhood care and education. The circumstances of parents and their wards including the differing conditions of urban and rural should reflect in all models and programs for the pre-school ages 0+ to 5+ years. Financing of education should be further liberalized through increased share to education and facilitating private education funding. Other incentives given by government towards the development of children include paid maternity leave for mothers working with government.

Document Policies on ECCDE in Nigeria

The ECCDE Curriculum developed by NERDC in line with the National Policy on Education and approved by the National Council on Education NCE (1994) is a policy document. The approved curriculum has provided a basis for the development and production of various ECCDE training manuals, guides, pre-school reader and other instructional materials earlier discussed.

The National Child Welfare Policy of 1989: The policy has more elements for the total child and is also in line with the NPE, 1981. The educating role of the family is distinctly stated as the primary unit and agency for early child education. Recently in year 2002, this policy was revised and has been approved by the then Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo; Nigerian Children were given a voice (National Summit, October, 2002) in the shaping of the affairs of the country concerning their needs. This action was a follow up of the United Nations Special

Session on Children held in New York 8-10th May, 2002.

Also certain States have assumed the responsibility for setting standards with regards to Day Care facilities within their States. For example in Lagos State, the Day Care Center Control of Operation Law, 1983, concern children aged 6 weeks to 3 years. The law has empowered the Commissioner to register premises being used as Day Care Centers in the State, inspect centers amongst others. Under this law the commissioner may make regulations for the following matters among others:

- Prescribe the maximum number of children to be registered
- Prescribe qualification for workers and regulate adequate staffing and equipping of Day Care centers etc.

Nutrition/Breast Feeding Policy

This policy document of the Federal Ministry of Health has been approved. Most recently in September 2002, the NERDC was statutorily mandated by the Federal Government to review the current Federal Republic of Nigeria, National Policy on Education (1998) in view of emerging issues. Some inputs and recommendations have been made on ECCDE. In addition there is the Convention on the Rights of the child, which led to the setting up of implementation committees that have harmonized National Laws and Policies in the provision of the convention. Recently, the Bill on CRC was processed for approval at the National Assembly. Unfortunately the Bill was struck out due

to certain cultural reasons. However, renewed efforts are being made by all ECCDE stakeholders and the Nigerian public to ensure that the Child Rights Bill is approved eventually, of course, Children's Rights cannot be fully achieved if Women's Right is not also in place.

Thus Women's Rights (CEDAW) issues for legislation will probably be the next step as that supports the capacity of families to care for children.

The Need for Policy on Children

Earlier sections have discussed some social changes in the situations of children and their family roles. Not much attention has been given to the field of early child care and education as well as family issues in Nigeria. The incidence of women in the work force will continue to have implications for children, parents and their work. These have started generating widespread debates.

Issues springing up as a result of these changes include grade repetition and increases in school dropout rates, incidence of malaria and infant diseases and infant mortality rates lack of affordable and accessible health care, lack of access and quality services for teenage groups, pregnancy, child abuse, child trafficking and labour, HIV/AIDS, issues of orphans etc. The linking of these changes will help in formulation of policies for better future for the Nigerian child.

Conclusion

There will be a tremendous improvement in all aspect within our country, Nigeria, if there is a shift in the public understanding of the importance of raising the next generation. Early childhood education is important for all children.

A lot of research and innovation has taken place since the inception of early childhood education by UBE – I give them kudos but more need to be done for more viable result in achieving the goals of ECCDE, and its full establishment in our educational system just as the nursery, secondary and our tertiary institutions.

More importantly early childhood teachers should see it as a job of interest and devote much of their time in the training of these children not minding its financial gain.

Recommendations

- A National Policy on the care, education and total development of the child should be formulated as a guiding document for ECC and everyone involved with children.
- Government needs to recognize ages 0+ to 5+ years as valid for ECCE.
- The Child Rights Bill should be passed so as to ensure the best interests of the child vis-a-vis survival, growth, development, protection and participation.
- There should be a National Survey on models/facilities to provide the necessary data base for planning interventions and improvements in ECC.

- Priority attention should be given to families and communities where children are at risk or disadvantaged, and all children must be reached.
- Research and development should guide new policy initiatives
- Government should finance ECC/pre-school education and make adequate services available for children.
- Need for more support from International Agencies especially in the area of research in ECC in Nigeria.
- Need to provide more ECC services and facilities for children.
- Need to develop more interests and advocacy on children's issues.
- Government should support the training of pre-school teachers/care givers to upgrade their knowledge and skills on current ECC concepts and practices.
- Cultural relevance must reflect in all policies taking into consideration rural/urban circumstances.
- Need for policy dialogue with government to see ECC within the right-based programming and integrated approach.
- Government should participate more actively in ECC/ pre-primary education especially in setting up special centers for under-privileged children and providing more access.
- Need for well qualified practitioners and the institutionalization of the training program for early childhood education.

References

- Abidoeye, B.C. (2009) Quantity and Quality of pre-school provision. *Journal of Early Childhood Association of Nigeria* V 1 (1)
- Agiobu-Kemmer, I. (Ed) (2001). *Readings in Early Childhood: Care Development and Education*. Ibi Agiobu Kemmer, Deutchetz Publishers.
- Agusiobo B.C. (2002) Policy Regulations on Early Childhood/Pre-school Education in Nigeria-*paper presented at the Dialogue to generate inputs for policy Formulation/Review on Early Childcare in UNICEF D Field held at Kano SPEB conference Hall, Kano State Nigeria October*
- Akukwe O.M. (2011) *Early Childhood Care and Education in Nigeria on How Nations young Children: profiles of Child Care and Education in 14 Countries pp 219-240* Eds.P.P. Olmsted and D.P. Wekart, (Eds.) Michigan: High Scope Press
- Berty C R & Edward J N(2010) *Education for Relevance*. Benin City. Peecee Publishers Ltd.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014). *National Policy on Education*, Lagos: Government Press, Lagos.

- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014). *National Policy on Education*. Abuja: Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council.
- Federal Ministry of Education (2000) *Comprehensive Education Analysis Project (Secondary data report)* FGN/UNICEF/UNESCO/UND September p.35-49
- NERDC (2012). *Report on the Study on Management and Organization of pre-primary schools in Lagos metropolis*, Lagos NERDC Press.
- Olmsted P.P & D.P (2010). *How Nations Serve Young Children: Profiles of Child Care and Education in 14 Countries*. USA .The High Scope Education Foundation.
- Osiyale, O. (2010) The role of Government in pre-primary education in Nigeria – *key-note address at a workshop on Culture from the Cradle organized by the National Institute for cultural Orientation at the University of Lagos*, July.
- Onibokun, O.M. (1989) *Early Childhood Care and Education in Nigeria on How Nations Serve Young Children: Profiles of Child Care and Education in 14 Countries* pp 219-240 Eds. P.P. Olmsted and D.P. Weikart, (Eds.) Michigan: High Scope Press.