# INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) AS IT RELATES TO EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE EDUCATION

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**Abstract**

This paper looked at the place of information and communication technologies (ICTs) as it relates to early childhood care education. In Nigeria, progress has been very slow in the Early Childhood Care Development Education sub-sector of the Education system owing largely to some key challenges until the integration of early child care and Education into the Universal Basic Education (UBE) in 2004 when ECCDE began to witness Government interest and support. Early childhood, also called the formative years, can be said to be the period between 0 – 5 years. Rapid physical development in early childhood is combined with changes in body proportions, strength, and coordination that enable them to be very active. The parents need to provide good food, comfortable accommodation, space, play materials and equipments, pay attention to questions posed by the children, participate in the children's activities, liaising with the care givers.  Since both parents and care givers may not be fully knowledgeable on all issues that concern early care development education, the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) could enhance their efficiency.

In Nigeria, progress has been very slow in the *Early Childhood Care Development Education* sub-sector of the Education system owing largely to the key challenges of low awareness about benefits of ECCDE to the society, low government commitment, poor policy and planning issues, poor funding, poor and inadequate service delivery, paucity of ECCDE facilities and lack of qualified teachers (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – (UNESCO) 2004).  It was only the integration of Early Child Care Development Education (ECCDE) into the Universal Basic Education (UBE) in 2004 that ECDE began to witness Government interest and support.

Early childhood, also called the formative years, can be said to be the period between 0 – 5 years, although some of the Early Childhood Care Development (ECCD) group extend the period to eight years.  Until the 1980s most early childhood programs used the phrase 'Early Childhood Education' (ECD).  According to ECD Group website, the word 'care' was added to the phrase in order to bring attention to the need that children have for "care and nurturing" as well as education. Once regarded as egocentric, preschoolers and eaters of bean balls ('ota akara') the early childhood period is now viewed by developmental psychologists as the most impressionable and fundamental to human development and achievement. Rapid physical development in early childhood is combined with changes in body proportions, strength, and coordination that enable them to skip, throw a ball, ride a tricycle, draw with a crayon, and perform other feats.

As children become taller, heavier, and less top-heavy by age five - six, their body proportions resemble those of adults and they

become adventurous. However, their high activity level and exuberance, together with limited judgment, make accident prevention a major concern of parents and caregivers. Protection of the children from accidents and other activities of care givers and parents to a large extent could be the determining factors that affect their normal all round development, performance and achievement.

The Nigerian National Policy for Early Childhood Development (2007 p. 11) outlined the roles and responsibilities of the parents and caregivers as:

1. "Fulfillment of the basic rights of the child to good health, nutrition, environment, psycho-social stimulation, protection and participation"
2. Ensuring understanding and practice of the key household practices.

These ideas will be the focus of this discussion, but a full understanding of the psychological bases of children's social behaviour will throw more light in the reason for parents and care givers participation in early childhood care development education.

Erikson (1963) outlined the psychosocial theory of social development, which he refers to as changes in one's interaction with others that helps in self understanding of the environment. Environment refers to different types of surroundings in which a developing child finds himself or herself. The crux of Erikson's thesis is that the ability to master one's environment, to perceive oneself and the world realistically, and to show unity of the various aspects of one's personality, is prime in mental health and productive life. The first three stages which cover the early childhood are worthy of mention here, and include: - Basic Trust versus Basic Mistrust (0 – 1 ½ years), Autonomy versus shame and doubt (1 ½ o

adequate - 3 years) and Initiative versus Guilt (3 – 6 years).

At the first stage children depend on the care givers for satisfaction of their needs and stimulation to do the right things; which concomitantly leads to self trust and trust of others, reliance on outside providers and the capacity to adequately respond to life urges. At the second stage shame and doubt may possibly become established as pathological trends, as opposed to autonomy for those who have learnt to trust. At the third stage guilt is established as pathological trend, as opposed to initiative which makes the child to always allow others to initiate action.

**The role of parents:** Environmental factors do indeed influence growth and development. Other environmental factors as listed by Durojaiye (1976) include: health and the physical condition of the home, social and emotional climate of the home, diseases, ventilation and lightening. In these days of environmental pollution and chemical weapons, efforts should be made to guard against exposure of children to severe and harsh conditions that follow wars and deprivation from wars.

The type of nurturance given to an individual, and the type of parenting style - whether permissive, democratic or autocratic affects the child, so does the socio-economic status of the family, belief system, values and attitudes of the society. All these are also very important for development at the early childhood period. The role of parents in children protection and participation in early childhood care development education can be listed as follows:

**Provide good food for the children**. The nutrition of a growing child is very important as malnutrition often originates from inadequate diet, resulting to stunted growth and retarded

developmental strides, so good food should be provided by the parents.

**Provide good accommodation,** with good lightening and good ventilation which are necessary for proper eye sight and fresh air**.**

**Provide suitable space** for the children to play and run around at home to avoid putting them in a tight corner.

**Provide play materials and equipment** that are suitable for developmental stages of the children. These materials must be made from non-toxic materials and be in good order, non-sharp or rough to avoid harming the children.

**Participate in their activities** by taking part in what they do and showing interest in what they do at home, including telling them stories or helping them to socialize with other people around them. The home is the primary socialization agent, so parents should help their children to acquire socially accepted habits.

**Pay attention to and answer questions posed by the children:** Many a time parents shout on children when they ask 'silly' questions, thereby suppressing the inquisitive and creative instinct in them. Simple honest questions from the children also demand simple answers or explanations.

**Liaise with care givers:** This will help to let the children know that their parents are in agreement with the care givers and hence strengthen whatever is done in the centre or school. Parents need to go to the children's classroom from time to time.

**The role of caregivers:** According to Noddings (2007) children begin to experiment with language by making sounds that imitate the tones and rhythms of adult talks, they read gestures and facial expression and they begin to associate sound sequences. They have great pleasure listening to jingles, sound and stories. Education at this level should be resource based as it is with the use of play materials and equipments that the spirit of cooperation, team work, inquiry and creativity will be fostered. Care givers need to employ a lot of play materials in teaching in order to meet the set objectives. Specifically, the Care giver should:

**Help the children to adjust** to the new learning environment, since they are leaving home for the first time.

**Help the children to learn and master the use of their body parts**: Many of the children are still being bathed and wiped by their parents and older siblings, so they need to gradually learn how to do these things by themselves.

**Provide space for the children:** Early childhood care centres should be spacious enough to allow free movement, and other activities of the children. Space even at the play-ground should be given great attention in order to avoid colliding by the children as they fly like a bird or jump like a frog. As part of the developmental activities according to Myers (1993) children have to be taken outside to play, therefore centres should set aside a portion of each day's activities for playtime or recess.

**Provide stress free environment for the children**:
A totally child-centred environment, which includes the interest of the care giver should be the ultimate. If the environment makes the care giver to be anxious about the children's safety, he/she cannot relax and play with the children. Again if the room arrangement does not allow them to find things easily, they may get frustrated and waste precious time.

**Participate in the children's activities**, in order to observe them properly, but there must be a time out corner for the care giver, in other to avoid burn-out.

**Provide for the Safety of the Children:**
One of the most fundamental services for young children is to ensure their safety and well-being. The skills, knowledge and attentiveness that care givers need to prevent injury and handle accidents appropriately cover a broad range of concerns. For instance, outdoor and indoor areas need to be free from dangerous conditions and hazardous materials like sharp objects, chipped paint, un-cushioned surfaces under climbing equipment, and exposed electrical outlets, medicines, matches or lighters and unguarded stairways. Protection of the children means that the environment should make the young children feel secure and free from danger; they should also be able to protect themselves and to look out for others. Care givers should know basic first-aid procedures, including how to assist a child who is choking; a current list of emergency service phone numbers and safety equipment like fire extinguishers.

In addition the care giver should know how to respond immediately and sympathetically to a child's injury, by giving first aid in cases of minor injuries. The very young ones must be attended to carefully since they are vulnerable and helpless. The crib rail must be locked during nap and diapers must be changed as and when due. The mobile infants need to be followed to avoid hazards that could be brought about by their movements including climbing and reaching out for things beyond their reach.

**Attend to the psychological needs of the children:** Children sometimes use words to communicate their moods, needs or wants, but they also send signals through sounds, gestures, facial expressions and seeking or avoidance of contact. They, therefore, become securely attached when parents and other care givers read these signals and try to respond with sensitivity. Being responsive to children's signals for support or attention helps the children to develop basic trust; otherwise, basic mistrust will follow as concluded by Erickson (1968). So, by responding warmly and quickly, you are putting in place the connection in children's minds that they should trust and explore the world around them. Other things that could help the children placed in one's care will include - wearing a smiling face, holding/touching and snuggling them, not over-stimulating them, not using threats, and not labeling them.

**Liaise with parents:** Care givers should be able to keep in touch with the parents of children put in their care to have continuity in nurturance style. Paying home visit or having the phone numbers of parents could help to save situation during emergency. The above roles of the parents and caregiver can be aided by the use of the information and communication technology (ICT).

**ICT and Early Child Care Education**
Okenwa (2000), defined Information and communication technologies (ICTs) as the various modern devices and applications, such as cable, satellite, the online network and telemetric applications that facilitate the circulation of ideas and create a link between data and human beings.

Amadi (2011:142) observed that "Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are simply communication gadgets, equipments or facilities that improve the manner in which message is shared, relayed, disseminated, preserved and recalled for meaningful communication purposes. It is also the soft and hardware innovations for

normalizing and enhancing interaction, in the society". Information and communication technology include films, slides, video tapes, audio tapes, radio and television programmes, computer, CD rom and internet are used as E-learning facilities in schools. The Internet according to Encarta (2009) is composed of many interconnected computer networks. Each network may link tens, hundreds, or even thousands of computers, enabling them to share information and processing power. The Internet has made it possible for people all over the world to communicate with one another effectively and inexpensively. Unlike traditional broadcasting media, such as radio and television, the Internet does not have a centralized distribution system. Instead, an individual who has Internet access can communicate directly with anyone else on the Internet, post information for general consumption, retrieve information, use distant applications and services, or buy and sell products. This media can now make early childcare education easier for parents and caregivers.

**Conclusion**

In Nigeria, progress has been very slow in the ECCDE sub-sector of the Education system owing largely to some key challenges until the integration of early child care and Education (ECCE) into the Universal Basic Education (UBE) in 2004 that ECDE began to witness Government interest and support. Early childhood, also called the formative years, can be said to be the period between 0 – 5 years, although some of the early childhood Care Development (ECCD) group extend the period to eight years. Rapid physical development in early childhood is combined with changes in body proportions, strength, and coordination that enable them to be very active. However, their high activity level and exuberance, together with limited judgment, make accident prevention a major concern of caregivers and parents who should be involved in their protection and participate in what they do since environment is to a large extent a determining factor that affects performance and achievement.

Children who are exposed to stimulating environments during their formative years of life achieve better grades than those who do not. The parents need to provide good food, comfortable accommodation, space, play materials and equipments, pay attention to questions posed by the children, participate in the children's activities and liaise with the care givers. Since both parents and care givers may not be fully knowledgeable on all issues that concern early care development education, the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) could enhance their efficiency.

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