

## EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION (ECCE) IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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### **Abstract**

Education is the right of the every child and must not be denied it for any reason. This has been the assertion of the world summit on the state of global children, which has led to the inclusion and expansion of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in the global education for all programme (EFA). The world community renewed its commitment to ECCE in Dakar framework for action, whose first goal is to expand access, improve quality and ensure equity in ECCE ", (UNESCO 2004) the paper therefore examines early childhood care development and education (ECCE) In Nigeria: Challenges and prospects. Recommendations were given in to make the educational programme a reality in the Nation and in the interest of the children.

Education is the right of every child and must not be denied it for any reason. This has been the assertion of the world Summit on the state of global children, which has led to the inclusion and expansion of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in the global Education for All programme (EFA). During the summit in 1990, at Jomtien, it was declared that "learning begins at birth, and embraced Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) as being within the purview of basic education. That declaration, however, contributed little to the expansion of ECCE in countries. Ten years later, the world community renewed its commitment to ECCE in Dakar Framework for Action, whose first goal was to expand access, improve quality and

ensure equity in ECCE." (UNESCO, 2004).

Pre-primary education is the education given in an educational institution to children aged from 3 to under 6 years prior to their entering the primary school. It includes the kindergarten, playgroup and nursery schools. What happens - or doesn't happen - to children in the earliest years of their lives is of critical importance, both to their immediate well-being and to their future.

If you received the best start in your earliest years of life, you are more likely to have grown healthily, developed language and learning capacities, gone to school and led a productive, rewarding life. Every child must be ensured the best start in life - their future, and indeed the future

of their communities, nations and the whole world depend on it.

Pre-primary education is the education given in an educational institution to children aged from 3 to under 6 years prior to their entering the primary school. It includes the kindergarten, playgroup and nursery schools. It is interpreted in the universal basics education Act, 2004 as "Basic Education which means Early Childhood Care and Education and nine years of formal schooling" (Tahir, 2001) in other words, the UBE programme has an expanded scope which covers, among others, Early Childhood Care, Development and Education, (ECCDE). Meanwhile, the programme (ECCDE) is not compulsory, (FGN, 2011) although, parents are strongly encouraged to enroll their children/wards in early childhood care centers, and on the other hand government is expected to provide ECCDE centers of good quality.

#### **Brief Historical Background**

In March 1990, the international education community, gathered in Jomtien, Thailand, announced the World Declaration on Education for All (known as the Jomtien Declaration), recognizing that all human beings have a right to equal opportunities to meet their basic learning needs. The Jomtien Declaration, which focused on the concept of basic education, that "learning begins at birth," and placed early childhood within the purview of basic education. It further stated that provision of these early childhood services could be made through arrangements involving families, communities or

institutional programmes. The statement affirms that early childhood; the foundation of all human learning is an area of education that requires national policy attention. Early childhood was no longer to be considered the private domain of the family. (UNESCO, 2004).

UNESCO (2004) further stated that "the Jomtien Declaration provided conceptual and policy inspiration, but has not spurred much progress in the expansion of early childhood services in countries. According to a study conducted in 2000 for the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Jomtien Declaration, the vision of learning from birth is far from becoming a reality. In most countries, early childhood care and education is still understood as pre-primary education for children over three. In the successive political and economic transformations sweeping over the former socialist countries, early childhood services have proven vulnerable to national and austerity." (UNESCO, 2004).

The world education community that reassembled in Dakar for the 10th anniversary of Jomtien Declaration reaffirmed its commitment to ECCE and agreed that the first of the six global goals would be devoted to ECCE: "Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children." (UNESCO, 2004). Although the goal was stated, but without setting a numerical target or a fixed time frame, but the governments were specifically urged to expand access,

improve quality and ensure equity in ECCE services.

In Nigeria, early childhood care in the form of nursery school or pre-primary education is largely known as post-colonial development. One can say that, the semblance of it during the colonial era were kindergarten and infant classes, which consisted of groups of children considered not yet ready for primary education. (Tahir, 2001), in an effort to expose the history and background of the Universal Basic Education Programme, stated, " the establishment of the UBE Programme in 1999 by the Obasanjo administration is an expression of the desire of government to entrench viable participatory democracy and enhance national socio-economic development as a consequence of a free and compulsory regime of basic education. In addition, UBE was intended as evidence of Nigeria's commitment to the World Declaration on Education for All, at Jomtien (1990) and Dakar (2000), as well as to the New Delhi Declaration of 1991 and the Follow-up Conference in Beijing in 2001, requiring stringent efforts by the E-9 Countries (nine countries of the world with the largest concentration of illiterate adults) to drastically reduce illiteracy within the shortest possible time. The programme also demonstrates Nigeria's acceptance of the Durban statement of Commitment (1998) and OAU Decade of Education in Africa (1997-2006) requiring African States to broaden access to quality basic education as a foundation stone for the sustainable socioeconomic development of the continent. "

### **Early Childhood Care, Development and Education in Nigeria**

As stated earlier, Early Childhood Care, Development and Education started in Nigeria as far back as the post-colonial era in the form of nursery school or pre-primary education, though, the demand for such education was low until recent time. In 1970s however, the Nigerian educational administrators, policy makers and the then military governments of Nigeria had realized the need for early childhood care and education in the country and gave it official recognition in the National Policy on Education in (2004).

It is stated in the National Policy on Education that, early childhood education is labeled as pre-primary education and is defined as "the education given in an educational institution to children aged three to six plus prior to their entering the primary school." (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004).

The purposes of pre-primary education according to the National Policy on Education are:

- a) Effecting a smooth transition from the home to the school;
- b) Prepare the child for the primary level of education;
- c) Provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work (on the farms, in the markets, offices etc);
- d) Inculcate social norms;
- e) Inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the

- exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys, etc;
- f) Develop a sense of co-operation and team spirit;
  - g) Learn good habits, especially good health habits; and
  - h) Teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms etc through play. (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004) Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) 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/private efforts in the provision of pre-primary education;
    - b) Make provision in teacher education programmes 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 centers in the country; and Ensure full participation of government, communities and teachers association in the running and maintenance of Early Childhood Education facilities.

### **Some Challenges Faced in the Delivery of Early Childhood Care Development Education in Nigeria**

Now, we understand that, Nigerian government is committed as one of the E-9 countries that promised to drastically reduce the rate of illiteracy. It sets objectives as earlier mentioned, based on these therefore; the objectives and purposes of early childhood care, development and education set by the government will be used as criteria to determine the challenges that the programme (ECCDE) is facing. In addition, it must be clear that, the UBE programme has made provision for every public primary school to have early childhood care, development and education/pre-primary school linkage to cater for children aged 3-5 years. Federal and state inspectorate services, in collaboration with Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEB) have statutory mandate for basic education in terms of supervision and coordination; though, Early Childhood Education is said to be non compulsory programme, as such there is every tendency for it to be fragile. (UNICEF, 2000). With the above therefore, it is

indicated that, the programme (ECCDE) is simultaneously run with primary education in the schools. In other words, the teachers, infrastructure and other school facilities meant for primary education are used for the purpose of early childhood care, development and education programme in the country.

Rapid expansion of the Nigerian educational system at all levels is another constraint to the development of Childhood Care Development and Education, as well as the shrinking economy in the country. The economic recession that has gripped the nation since the 1980s has resulted in reduction of expenditure on social services including education. In other words, fund allocations are often grossly inadequate to maintain and expand services at acceptable standards. Hence, a series of disparities now exist in our educational system. Such disparities include disparity between urban and rural schools, between schools owned and controlled by the Federal Government and those owned and controlled by the States and private agencies; gaps between male and female enrolments and between admission figures and available teaching resources.

To date, Nigeria has few established institutions for the training of trainers/professionals in early childhood care, development and education. Some Colleges of Education that handle part of the early year's education do exist. As such, teachers trained for older children are being adapted to teach in primary and

nursery schools. This is not enough to provide every young child with the foundation they deserve. ([http:// www .globalgiving.org/projects/early-childhood-development-training - in- Nigeria](http://www.globalgiving.org/projects/early-childhood-development-training-in-Nigeria)).

Furthermore, the number of schools, facilities and teachers available for basic education (primary and junior secondary schools) itself remain inadequate for the eligible number of children and youths. This is more so in urban areas where there is population pressure. Under these conditions, teaching and learning cannot be effective; hence the outcomes are usually below expectation. Universal Basic Education Act, much has been achieved in the reconstruction of dilapidated school buildings and construction of new ones, supply of desks and other needed furniture as well as the provision of toilet facilities. However, the child friendly school concept, which UNICEF is advocating for, is not comprehensively adopted by the various States in Nigeria. Caregivers must uniquely care for each using Developmentally Appropriate Practice, Individually Appropriate Practice and Culturally Appropriate Practice. Care should support families rather than be a substitute for them. ([http://cn.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early \\_childhood \\_education](http://cn.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_childhood_education)).

If a young child doesn't receive sufficient nurturing, nutrition, parental/caregiver interaction. And stimulus during this crucial period, the child may be left with a developmental deficit that hampers his or her success in

preschool, kindergarten, and beyond.

### Conclusion

Pre-primary education in Nigeria is noted to be purely and entirely informal, left in the hands of private operators, the parents and the local community. The responsibilities of government for pre-primary education are therefore to provide enough funds to cater for the needs of the programme such as to promote the development of a suitable curriculum, supervise and control the quality of such institutions. Development of an institutional arrangement for government support (technical, infrastructural and financial) of childhood education entrepreneurs in the country.

### Recommendations

I wish to emphasize that as education is the right of every child, care must be taken in ensuring that early childhood education is managed properly so that it become effective. Based on the discussion and conclusion draw in this paper, the following recommendations are made.

1. Government should show more interest in early childhood education by providing some facilities and funds.
2. Government should make sure that all those measures stated in the policy document are put in place
3. Stakeholders should be involved in order to have a collective role to play so that Nigerian teachers should be of high quality.
4. Incentives should be given to teachers more especially those in the rural

areas.

5. Parents should be strongly encouraged to enroll their children in early childhood care centers.

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