

PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigates the philosophical perspectives of early childhood education, with particular implications for education in Nigeria. Giving the fact that every educational system is sustained by certain philosophical outlooks, this work attempts to explore the various philosophical influences from the classical era, to the present, with inputs discussed within the context of Nigeria, in terms of what thoughts are expressed in child rearing and educational practices. Based on this position, this work supports that educators ought to pay attention to the child's essential aspects of the educational process. Also, this work highlights the anomalies and challenges being experienced by early childhood education in Nigeria. However, it is the opinion of the researchers that the implications of the philosophies of early childhood education discussed in this paper, be made evident in the Nigerian early childhood level of education, for a better educational practice. Relevant recommendations are made for an effective result for a more pragmatic early childhood education in the Nigerian society.

Keywords: Philosophy, education, childhood, early child hood, early child hood education.

Introduction

The concept of early childhood education, in modern times which originated from Europe between the 16th and 19th centuries has with time spread to other parts of the world. Early childhood education encompasses all forms of education that pertain to rearing of children between the ages of about two to five years. These are children who are not yet ready for formal education. They are otherwise called pre-scholars. In the Western world, there is no one universal definition for this concept. For most historians and sociologists of education, the term early childhood education is more of a social invention. For instance, Adamson (2015) sees the concepts of motherhood", „ family" and „early childhood education" as a historically and culturally specific social construction. This view is related to the argument raised by Pollock (1983) and Aries (1962) in Jerry (2019) on the origin and need for childcare. According to Aries until the late Middle Ages, children were simply seen as miniature adults and no special treatment was accorded them. Pollock counteracts this view when he says that Aries may have been right about childcare and its treatment in certain parts of France, but this can certainly not be generalized to all European societies.

It therefore follows that all societies have specific aims about raising and educating their children right from nursery school age. In effect, most, if not all societies care about early childhood education. However, every society has its individual arrangements for such childcare and education that tend to be culturally and historically specific. Such arrangements could vary from one society to another. Johnson (2014) in describing the status of early childhood education in the United States has tried to explain this concept in terms of diversity. To him, the field of early childhood education reflects a number of contradictions.

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While it has developed as an international movement, in fact, programme so fearly childhood education are nation and culture-specific. While it build son a view of the natural development of children, its programmes are supposed to reflect and respond to the nature of children and childhood. In fact, it consists of contrived learning settings and invented educational methods, materials, and activities that are far from natural.

While the field continually articulates the importance of parents in the education of the young children, in fact it generally excludes parents by mystifying practice, and limiting practice to those with professional credentials. The most basic contradiction might be that while early childhood education represents a single unified field, the practice of early childhood education is set in divers Programmes and services for young children-programmes that might have different goals and even different contents.

It is clearly evident that early-year experiences have a significant influence on the all-round development and the later lives of any child. This influence, which maybe either positive or negative, has been emphasized across inter-disciplinary research. Nigeria in accordance with the Jomtien Declaration on Education for All (EFA) in Thailand in 1990, signed up in order to provide quality and comprehensive early childhood education and care for all preschoolers. Nigeria had early childhood centres prior to this but it was left to the private sector which either provided sub-standard services or charged very high fees, thereby making this educational provision inaccessible to every child. The Federal Government of Nigeria is now responsive to early childhood education by virtue of its inclusion in the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programmes and even moved a step further to inaugurate early childhood education policy on the 8th October, 2007. This constitutes a step in the right direction in the provision of good early childhood education. Irrespective of this bold step, there are still some pertinent issues which need to be examined if the goal of the education system is to provide the best possible education for all Nigerian children. It is on this score that this paper aims at exposing the anomalies if the education system of Nigeria with reference to early childhood education for a rethinking of the school programme.

Historical Perspective of Early Childhood Education in Nigeria

In the 1950s when Nigeria became more politically active and gearing her way towards the attainment of independence, the zeal for educational advancement was also on top gear. Thus, between 1955-1958, the whole idea of Universal Primary Education (U.P.E) scheme began to unfold in the then Western and Eastern regions of Nigeria. It was also at this time that the establishment of formal and organized preschool and child care education came into being. This innovation was to meet the demands of educated women who needed a place to keep their children while at work (Odigie, 2016). Thus, pre-school education at its inception was mostly for the elite, and so were their proprietors. It therefore follows that government did not interfere in the running of such schools.

This non-interference of government in pre-primary education continued until the 1969 curriculum conference. At the end of the conference, the committee recommended a head-start programme for toddlers and children. The nursery and kindergarten schools were

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to accommodate children between the ages of three and five years. It was suggested that the preschool program would help to bring about a smooth transition from home to school. It would also prepare the child for primary education. The preschool programme would also provide adequate care and supervision of children of working class parents. The conference recommended that private proprietors should run such schools.

Later in the 1970s, there was the urgent need for government to make more definite policies on the preparatory role of pre-school institutions. In response to this, the federal government, in its first major National Policy on Education, in 1981, had a full section on pre primary education. In that section, pre-primary education was referred to as, “the education given in an educational institution to children aged three to five years plus, prior to their entering the primary school. Also is the same stipulation in the National Policy on Education (2014). In line with this, the purpose of pre-school education was outlined as follows:

- (i) Effect a smooth transition from the home to the school
- (ii) Preparing the child for the primary level of education
- (iii) Providing adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work, (on the farms, in the markets, offices etc)
- (iv) Inculcating social norms
- (v) Inculcating in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, and the local environment, playing with toys, artistic and musical activities etc
- (vi) Teaching co-operation and team spirit
- (vii) Teaching the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms, etc, through play, and
- (viii) Teaching good habits, especially good health habits.

To fully achieve the above goals, the Nigerian government has specified in the National on Policy Education (2014) and through the UBE scheme that it would:

- a. Set and monitor minimum standard for ECCDE centres
- b. Develop and disseminate curriculum materials such as the Integrated Early Child Care Development (IECD) Policy, National Minimum Standard for the establishment of Early Child Care Education Centers, IECD Curriculum, IECD implementation Guidelines and all other materials that will enhance the implementation of ECCDE
- c. Encourage both community and private efforts in the establishment of ECCDE centres based on set standards
- d. Make provision in teacher education programmes for specialization in early childcare and education and for retraining of teachers.

- e. Ensure that the curriculum of teacher education is oriented towards play-way method
- f. Ensure that ECCDE Centres adopt the following caregiver infant ratio:
 - (i) Crèche shall be 1:10; (ii) Nursery 1:25
- g. Develop suitable ECCDE curriculum for nationwide implementation
- h. Supervise and control quality of ECCDE centres
- i. Make provision for the production and effective utilization of learning and instructional materials inadequate numbers, and
- j. Ensure that the medium of instruction is principally the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community, and to this end will:
 - Develop the orthography of more Nigerian languages and Produce textbooks, supplementary readers and other instructional materials in Nigerian languages.

Most tertiary institutions in Nigeria run teacher education (B.Ed.) Programmes that will lead the graduate to secondary or primary school teacher level, in subject areas other than early childhood education. Such specialists in early childhood education are few and because of low salaries and job insecurity associated with the private institutions, many otherwise interested teachers cannot afford to take these positions. The government up to date has not effectively addressed the lack of early childhood teacher education. It is on this basis that this paper advocates a better and unified early childhood educational theory and practice for the Nigerian society, with a borrowing from the philosophical ideas of great educational philosophy and a redressing of the unnecessary situations in the practice of early childhood education in Nigeria.

Philosophical Basis of Early Childhood Education

What we have today as early childhood education is in many ways a transformation and redefinition of Plato's idea of childhood education. Between 427 and 343 BC Plato was about the first to see the need and importance of what is today known as pre-school education. He recommended for the first stage of education, nursery schools for children between the ages of three to six years. For him, nursery education was intended to help the child appreciate the world through his intellect, and develop his muscles as well. He prescribed the play method as quite adequate in teaching the child at this stage.

Aristotle, Plato's successor believes that the mind of the child is quite impressionable at birth. Thus, the influence of instruction can bring out the best in the child. In his opinion, early childhood education has some positive effects on the growth of the child. Raines (1990) another philosopher agrees with Aristotle on the importance of early childhood education. He goes on to assert that the role of parents at this stage of the child's growth is of immense value. He therefore recommends adult education for parents, so as to equip them with the educational needs and interests of their children and wards. Interestingly, his ideal school age for children was six years, or earlier, in the case of a special child (intellectual).

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Generally speaking about a typical idealist educational programme, with particular reference to pre-school education, Plato has made considerable contributions. In his recommendation for pre-school learning as stated by Raines (1990:304) he says:

From birth to about six years of age, a child's body and health habits have to be developed. During his first three years of life, sanitary nursing is most important. From three to six years, sports, games, plays and songs are the best means of good breeding.

Plato has also stressed the need to build courage and self-discipline in the child. Here commends that this could be achieved by exposing the child to pleasure and pain and stories of heroic deeds of great men in the society, beginning from the first three years of his life. He also recommends reverence for tradition through inculcation of some elements of great national myths. In his conclusion on the importance of pre-school education, he has affirmed that the beginning of any task is an important part, especially for any creature that is young and tender. It is at this pre-school stage that the child as a learner is best molded. He easily takes in whatever ideas one wishes to impress upon him. Thereafter, he is prepared for more formal education at age six (Mkpa, 1999).

Froebel devoted most of his life to early childhood education. He begins from the premise that the notion of education centres on the fact that the interest and abilities of the child would naturally unfold after a period of time. Froebel's philosophic thought is derived from the flower metaphor. From it, he coined the word, kindergarten' meaning "the children's garden", another name for pre-school. In his explanation of the flower metaphor, the growing child is compared to a growing, (flowering) plant. This is in the manner in which the child's natural talents are revealed after a period of time, the same way the buds off lower sun fold (Uzoma, 2013).

Similarly, the child's teacher represents the gardener, while nature fertilizes and facilitates growth and development. These stages through which children pass could be successful or hindered, depending on the expertise of the teacher as the gardener. Froebel notes that everyone in society has a role to play in helping the learner develop his potentials.

Within the context of the liberal art tradition is the notion that pre-school education ought to help the child learn by opening the windows of the child's mind, as early as between age two and three. According to Johnson (2014) a classical Platonic idealistic proper education should actually begin at infancy. However, it should be done with some caution and care. Johnson (2014:101) further affirmed thus:

Children are the purest expression of divinely inspired nature. They are still in that organic unity with themselves and the universe, which most adults have forfeited. For this reason, they have a sure instinct than adults and are unerring in their ability to distinguish truth from counterfeit.

It is further suggested that the child's talent and knowledge should be applied more

meaningfully to spur his moral imagination. Generally, it can be said that the issue of moral discipline is quite crucial to the idealist theory of early childhood learning. Such is supported by Odigie (2016) who concurs that discipline is aimed at developing positive behaviours and attitudes in the child through early learning. This would help him learn to act in accordance with societal norms as he grows.

Furthermore, the idealist's curriculum for early childhood education is based on the premise that the whole concept and practice of education should first be seen as a symbolic activity. Within the context of epistemology, symbols should not be seen as mere tools of learning, but as instrument of the mind.

Consequently, the idealists would argue that symbols as a medium of learning and expression is quite crucial to helping the young learner acquire knowledge. For one thing, the use of symbols in pre-school teaching creates a suitable pedagogical environment.

It is also suggested that the classroom, as the environment where symbols are expressed, explained and visualized, should be made more meaningful to the child. Consequently, all that takes place in a typical nursery class should constitute an environment rich in symbols. This, they urge, can be achieved through the use of colourful pictures, diagrams, toys and other learning materials. These would help to stimulate the thoughts and feelings of the pre-schooler.

Progressivism favours experience as a basis of knowledge. This is quite in contrast to the authoritarianism and subject-centered education promoted by the idealists. Basically, advocates of pragmatism have used science and philosophy as means of evolving theory and practice of education. Their aim was to reconstruct and re-shape society. This method of teaching takes into consideration psychological understanding of the child and his learning environment.

According to Onibokun (1989) we cannot admit too fully or too freely the limit of our knowledge and depth of our ignorance in these matters. No one has a complete hold scientifically upon the chief psychological facts of any matter of human affairs. His ultimate aim is to teach the art of living. It is for this reason he paints the picture of a little boy who is allowed to grow in accordance with his own nature. In effect, he believes that a child should be allowed to grow naturally, as any interference with his normal growth would be negative. His expression of „negative’, Rusk (1969) in Odigie (2016) described as, “not the teaching of virtue or of truth, but in the preservation of the heart from vice and error”.

For Rousseau, education is a continuous process. It begins at birth and continues all through adulthood. Akinpelu (1981) in Suleman (2005) describes Rousseau's educational system as one of four levels based on the age of the individual. Infant education occurs within the first twelve years of the child's life. This is education provided in the first five years of the child's life. Rousseau characterizes this first stage as truly positive. For him, the child becomes fully aware of his relationships with other people through the educational process. In his characterization of Rousseau's idea for pre-school education, he states thus:

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Rousseau's plea is for a degree of freedom for the child, freedom to romp and play to his heart's content, to work or play when he feels, and not to be perpetually imposed upon and frustrated by adults. He should be allowed to learn the limits of freedom in real situations. He should be allowed to find resistance in this, not in men. He was not to be given books to read at this stage except if he asked for them and was considered, ready.

An ideal Rousseau's teacher in the opinion of Mkpa (1999) should be one who "does his best to harmonize his secret educational strategy with the natural conditions of a child's growth. He creates scenes and experiences favourable to the right conditioning of the pupils behavior and his preparation for life.

An analysis of Rousseau's works on early childhood education and its implication for contemporary day pre-school learning reveals that he appreciated the nature of education as genuine and not artificial. He believes strongly in the child as a naturally good person who needs care and compassion. However, this belief was quite in opposition to the prevailing Christian belief of his time. The child at this time was perceived as one born with the "sin of Adam".

In his assessment of Rousseau's contributions towards the general theory and practice of education, Rousseau recognized, and quite correctly that:

1. Education is more than what takes place in the formal school or classroom. The whole environment of the child is a resource for learning, and there are agencies of learning other than what the teacher's life itself teaches.
2. The readiness of the child for new items of learning has to be watched, and no new learning task should be presented to him, until he demonstrates that he is ready. The deciding factor is his eagerness for new learning.
3. The child is not a miniature adult and so should not be treated as such nor should his education consist mainly of preparation for adult life which could only destroy all the joy and the excitement of learning in the child.
4. Each child is a unique individual and should be studied and understood as such.
5. The teacher should cultivate affection for his pupils; he should deeply respect their individual nature, and, in general should be a sympathetic guide and adviser.

Pestalozzi shares Rousseau's view on true education as the outcome of personal experience. However, he has a deep faith in the educational possibilities of the ordinary life. The explanation here is that, while Rousseau holds the view that an ideal home with parents of exceptional ability and character can give the child the best education, Pestalozzi holds a contrary opinion. He has faith enough in the ordinary, peasant home. He believes that the opportunities for companionship and work, which is a characteristic of peasant homes is an instrument for education which if properly applied can produce the best results.

Pestalozzi strongly feels that a warm, trusting and affectionate home will give the infant so much security, self-confidence, and abroad outlook and positive social attitudes and a healthy relationship with others, as he grows. He sees the mother as the facilitator of this conducive home atmosphere. This is reflected in his book, „How Getrude teaches her Children’, with Getrude painted as such a mother. Essentially, Pestalozzi is of the view that education should actually begin at infancy with the mother playing a major role.

In relating this relationship between mother and the child to pre-school setting, Pestalozzi implies that teachers can and should equally play the role of a mother. Basically, the Pestalozzian method of teaching the pre-schooler especially by virtue of their age, centres on an expression of love, patience, kindness and understanding.

Thus, taking a cue from Rousseau, Pestalozzi recognizes, too, that within the child is a developmental pattern that teachers should take cognizance of, especially in the very early stages of his growth. Generally, the ideal educational process for Pestalozzi is one where the teacher, through a natural path tends the child. Simply put, the teacher in the Pestalozzian teaching practice occupies an important place in the scheme of things. The Pestalozzian educational method is today appreciated widely.

For the sake of clarity, even though experimentalism is an offspring of the progressive movement within the tradition of Rousseau, and Pestalozzi, there are yet some slight distinctions in their pragmatic ideas for the pre-schooler. Basically, Dewey and Montessori subscribe to the experimentalist approach which has an underlying theme of democracy. They hold the view that all processes should be viewed as democratic. The implication for early childhood learning is that at the critical beginning of school age, the child should be allowed to express himself especially through play. It is this commitment to democratic principles that has also been applied to all that takes place in the teaching - learning process. On this score, the experimentalists recommend a democratic classroom where children are given a chance to experience democracy by living democratically. In that case, the teacher is not perceived as the boss or master of the game, but a friend, a confidant, a guardian and a counselor.

They also emphasize team spirit by working cooperatively and mutually in resolving problems between teachers and learners and among learners themselves (Uzoho, 2000). Dewey first expressed his ideals for early childhood education when he established the famous laboratory school. Dewey’s experimental school, located at the University of Chicagoin 1896, adopted a kindergarten.

Dewey in Uzoma (2013:150) on the principles and practice of kindergarten school using his experimental school has said:

One of the traditions of the school is of a visitor who, in its early days, called to see the kindergarten. On being told that the school had not yet established one, she asked if there were not singing, drawing, manual training, plays and dramatizations and attention to the children’s social relations. When answered in the affirmative,

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she remarked that, that was what she understood by a kindergarten, and did not know what that saying that the school had no kindergarten meant... At all events, it suggests that in a certain sense, the school endeavours throughout its own course ... to carry into effect certain principles which Froebel was perhaps the first, consciously to set forth.

Dewey's philosophic principles are deeply rooted in democratic principles with scientific method of instruction. This has encouraged contemporary kindergarten teachers to develop curriculum based on the experiences in the lives of children and not totally on academic discipline.

Using his experimental kindergarten as the ideal school, Dewey projects his themes of 'experiencing' and 'experimenting' on early childhood training. Basically, he tries to establish a relationship between pragmatism and pre-school education, the preschool curriculum and content, the teaching method and the functions of a pragmatic teacher. He also relates the experiences of the child at home, and relating his roles in the larger society with his experiences at school. As explained by Dewey, the school is primarily a social institution. Education being a social process, the school is simply that form of community life in which all those agencies will be most effective in bringing the child to share in the inherited resources of their race, and to use his own powers for social ends.

In effect, Dewey sees the school as that social institution which socializes the child. It is more or less responsible for the induction of the young into a civilization to be accomplished by simplifying, purifying and balancing the environment and society.

Montessori is so interested in the mentally impaired children that she developed a special educational programme and teaching materials to match. The success of her children, who had less than average mental abilities, has brought her much recognition.

Essentially, the Montessorian Philosophy is based on practical education. The teaching method employed, provides the learner with adequate facts designed to help her young learners explore materials at their own pace. Her strategy of teaching described as auto-education encourages muscle training. This is aimed at encouraging the young learner, whom she best describes as a self-activated learner, to work in an already prepared environment of programmed materials. Adamson (2015) has described the Montessorian method of teaching as, 'auto-education' because of its reliance on self-teaching, self-discipline and self-expression.

Montessori is quite critical of traditional teaching methods employed for preschoolers' and some other children with less than average mental abilities. In experimenting with the children of the Montessori school (Casa dei Bambini), they were taught with special didactic materials. The idea was to allow the children some freedom to select from the range of activities that interest them, working at it without interference. Significantly, the teacher's role here is one of a guide and organizer. In describing the role of the Montessorian pre-school teacher, Onibokun (1989:155) has said thus:

A Montessori teacher must establish a climate of emotional support, helpfulness and consideration. The teacher must relinquish a pedantic role and serve more as a resource person. In a Montessorian class, deductive teaching is rare, inductive prevails.

He further asserts that one of the basic differences between conventional kindergarten practices and the Montessori method is the teacher-pupil relationship. The conventional school believes in the teacher-pupil relationship as quite central to the child's successful learning. For the Montessori school, the crucial relationship is that between the child, and his learning materials. As Oshokoya (2010) clearly explains that Montessori regarded the child's concentration as the key to pedagogy. The utilized educational materials must be sufficiently attractive and challenging to arrest the interest of the child and to direct his concentration. The didactic materials provide the learner with cues and feedback which will enable him correct errors.

The Montessorian method gives the pre-schooler „freedom of choice and self-development at the child's own pace. The child expresses himself, free from the constraints of competition and rivalry, on the one hand, and from false incentives of reward and anxiety-hidden punishment, on the other. Consequently, what evolves, as the Montessorian teaching method is a situation where the pre-schooler is helped to acquire motor, sensory and intellectual skills.

In generally assessing the Montessorian principles of learning and instruction at the preschool stage, Onibokun (1989) have noted the following peculiarities:

- (i) Heterogeneous grouping by age - A Montessori class consists of about thirty children varying in age from three to six years. Since children will be working at different levels they will neither want nor need the same materials at the same time.
- (ii) Active involvement - Montessori was committed to action and movement as the basis for learning.
- (iii) Self-selection and packing - Children are free to select designed alternatives to the didactic materials which suit them. The Montessorian education is quite individualized, her school was the first non-graded learning environment.

On the whole, the pre-school teacher forms a humanistic point of view as a facilitator of learning. He is one who is capable of creating a modest conducive learning environment- an environment that is real and open. A place where the child from a tender age learns to trust because he is accepted by an empathetic and understanding teacher.

Challenges of Early Childhood Education in Nigeria

The goal by the government was for the National Policy on Education's development plan in early-childhood education to be distributed effectively, but there are many flaws in the plan's process and implementation. One area is in the provision and distribution of policy guidelines for the establishment and management of early childhood or pre-primary institutions.

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One major problem of early childhood education was the federal government's decision to facilitate the objectives of pre-primary education by the granting of permission to private establishments of pre-primary education in the country, but not the full participation of the public schools in their establishment. Presently, there are many ill equipped and substandard pre-primary schools scattered all over the country. This is as a result of lack of supervision and inspection to ensure that standard and quality is maintained.

It is assumed that with the amount of money being charged by these commercial institutions, that the facilities should be of high standards, but thereverse is the case. Therefore, there is a need for the government to put measures in place to ensure standards. This is because early childhood education is the bed rock for a smooth transmission to the primary school. If the foundation is faulty, it will naturally affect the superstructure. The policy on education ironically failed in this aspect (Nkechi, 2015). Unfortunately a more serious significant provision is yet to be made in any public or private teacher training institution in Nigeria for the production of professional teachers in early childhood education.

The National Policy on Education (2014) ensures that the medium of communication for early childhood education institutions is principally the mother tongue (MT) or language of the immediate community (LIC), and orthography and textbooks of Nigerian languages will be produced to enhance MT and LIC. Ironically, in most pre-primary schools in Nigeria, the medium of instruction is primarily English language. As far as mother tongue instruction is concerned, Nkechi (2015) notes the value attached to native language as regards to protection, preservation, promotion of Nigerian culture, as well as its role in promoting inter-ethnic unity that enhances human dignity and subsequently help promote national unity and integration in the country. This policy is supported by the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and justified in the National Policy on Education.

The use of English Language for a child to the neglect of his mother tongue has a negative influence on the child's cultural background which the policy is meant to protect. Contrary to this point, parents want their children to be immersed in English language as early as possible because of the perceived advantages and belief that knowledge of English accelerates the teaching process for children entering the primary and other levels of the educational system. But on the other hand, evidence shows that, if children are taught with their mother tongue, they learn and develop faster, intellectually, cognitively, and psychologically (Fafunwa, 1991). Hence, the policy has also failed in the aspect of language implementation. The question is, does it mean that the teachers teaching those children do not speak their native languages? How do we promote our culture when our children cannot speak their mother tongue or dialect of their immediate environment. This question is for the policy makers to review and address.

Again, the National Policy on Education ensures 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. As a result of the government's inability to regulate and control private establishment and operation of pre-primary education in the country, some schools employ teachers who are neither trained to teach nor know how to handle or relate to children. Moreover, there is no standard curriculum to guide the activities of these teachers. Such people without teaching pedagogy cause the children to lose interest in education as they are unable to present the teaching and learning experiences to children in a stimulating, sequential and logical manner (Nkechi,2015). The input of government in terms of the financial aspect in pre-primary education has been very negligible as stated by Maduewesi (2001). Early childhood education is recognized by the federal government in the National Policy on Education, which states that financing education shall be a collective responsibility of the three tiers of government, but it is found that there is no financial provision for education at the pre-primary education level. The only time the government financed education at that level was through the Early Child Care (ECC) project of the NERDC which was founded through the collaboration of UNICEF and Federal Government of Nigeria including other international agencies (Maduewesi, 2001).

There are however still many unlisted nurseries run for profit by people with no training and knowledge of children's needs. Most often, the proprietors are not trained teachers in early childhood education. The following are the challenges of ECCDE in Nigeria.

- **Non Availability of Same Textbooks for Instruction**

Some of the textbooks used in ECCDC are not familiar to the Nigerian nursery schoolchildren. Nursery rhymes and songs used are according to the nature and environment of England and elsewhere. There is the need to teach according to the culture and environment of the children. Also, there is no uniformity in the use of same type of textbooks for ECCDE. The government schools, missionary schools and private schools, use different types of textbooks to teach their children. The textbooks in most cases are not enough for the children in government owned ECCDE centres and so they are meant to share in a ratio of 1:3or 1:4 as the case maybe.

- **Non Availability of Qualified Teachers**

Another major issue that constitutes a problem to nursery school education in Nigerian is the quality of teachers. Most of the nursery schools are staffed with teachers with little or no experience. A good nursery school teacher must have professional training, i.e. basic knowledge about child development, skills as well as ideal personal qualities. Lack of an organized body" to co-ordinate and control these nursery schools makes it easy for any of the nursery schools to operate a poor standard.

Although the government has started a training programme called "Jolly Phonics" where early childhood education teachers are trained on how to teacher and handle the children. However, this programme even though it is for teachers from early childhood levels to Basic 2 level, it is majorly on the learning of phonics excluding other aspects of training. Again, the availability of enough teachers is lacking. Most of the early childhood

teachers are the government's Npower teachers.

- **Methods of Instruction**

Deciding on the best method of teaching young children poses a major problem. The chief purpose of nursery school is to give children the opportunity to learn to play together, and to gain self-confidence. The children will also sing songs and recite poems, which will improve their speeches. But sometimes how really to present such knowledge becomes an issue. Hence the best methods should be taught (Odigie, 2016).

- **No Uniform Curriculum**

One of the major challenges of ECCDE is the lack of uniform curriculum and scheme of work. Different schools develop their own curriculum as seem fit for their learners. Some of the rich private school owners even adopt and use Cambridge, and Oxford curriculum and scheme which is developed with regards to their (western) environment. Some schools do not even have and teach the learners only writing and recitation of poems. In fact some government teachers of ECCDE borrow such foreign schemes from such schools just to have what to teach the learners with. And this poses a major challenge to them, trying to compete with such school even under little or no governmental financial assistance.

- **Incorporation of Nigerian Values**

It is evident that the western value system is totally different from that of Africans. Since the scheme and curriculum is developed from the western cultural environment, certainly the children will be taught based on the realities of their cultural values. Nigerian teachers and school owners will have to teach their children what their curriculum says and not what the NPE says (which does not acknowledge the Nigerian value system). Hence, our value system is gradually going into extinction. More so, since the scheme and curriculum are designed based on what the teacher wishes to teach his learners, it is expected that values will now be subjective and not objective.

- **Parents' Mindset**

It has been noted that since some parents send their children to government owned ECCDE centres for learning, that it is the sole responsibility of the government to provide all the learning and writing materials for the child. This is a wrong perception. Parents should learn to play their own roles by providing their children with the necessary basic needs while the government endeavours to do theirs.

- **Non Supervision of Early Childhood Education Programme**

No educational plan however excellent it may be can effectively be implemented if the school's supervision is ineffective. The issue of supervision is vital in the process of implementing early childcare education in Nigeria if success is to be attained. Supervision needs to be tailored towards constructive criticism and guidance so as to develop a sense of confidence and competence in teachers, there by leading to improvement (Maduewesi,

- **Teaching Aids**

Teaching and learning materials like furniture for both teachers and pupils, television sets /computer systems, nature corners, toys and models, charts and well drawings and playing equipment like see-saw, merry-go-round, slides, etc are highly found wanted in many childhood education centres. You only find them in very few of these schools and they are for children of the parents who can afford them. However if the government can endeavour to make these materials more available, they can go along way into enhancing ECE practices. Care should be given to incorporating Nigerian's to them, especially dismountable Nigerian maps, etc. It can go a long way in promotion learning.

The Need for a Proper Curriculum for Early Childhood Education in Nigeria

Curricular activities and facilities are to prepare the child for a natural interest in learning and formal schooling. Therefore what is actually studied and done should be determined by the interest of the particular children. It must be based also on what is considered worthwhile or valuable to learn. A worthwhile education must have a worthwhile curriculum content, which is operated in a planned environment. Nursery school curricular activities enhance the learning process in the child. Ultimately, the consideration of what is worth learning is based on a conception of desirable ends and objectives, which are normative (Odigie, 2016).

- i. **An experienced based Curriculum:** The nursery age deals with abstractions, so they need to have full and real experience replete with stimulation of senses through artwork, dramatic play and other verbal expressions. This was suggested by the experimentalist early childhood school of thought.
- ii. **The social background:** A curriculum therefore, must contain a conception of desirable ends towards which educational process can be channeled. Besides, it should also include instructional materials and time schedules.
- iii. **The curriculum of nursery school children should cover the whole range of living:** In some areas for instance, mathematics and only a few concepts are of concern to pre-primary school children. But the concepts are so important that they must be developed in a variety of situations so that they will be available as a foundation for- later studies. If the foundation is weak at this level, we cannot reasonably anticipate a solid intellectual and professional output at the tertiary level (Mkpa, 1999).

Implications of Idealistic Philosophy to Early Childhood Education in Nigeria

Plato being the first to note the relevance of infant education, emphasized that education of the child should begin from birth to about age six. To him, this education should strictly encompass the education of the child's mind, his health habits, his personality, and then his body through sporting activities, plays and songs. This he says are the best ways of good child breeding. He also emphasized on the relevance of building in

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the child, courage and self discipline by exposing the child to experiences of pain and pleasure. The implication of this is that in helping the child develop himself spiritually, he ends up developing and appreciating his spiritual values. As stated by the idealist school of thought, the prime aim of life is to achieve spiritual values, which are underlying and permanent. The realization of these values is the realization of God. If the infant in Nigerian pre-school can be taught to discover and appreciate his absolute values, he then can rise higher in the moral plan till he attains divinity. Hence, the curriculum of the pre-schoolers in Nigeria should be developed in such a way that the child's spiritual values can be attained.

Another implication of the idealistic school of thought is that of the preparation of the child for holy life. In the words of Froebel, "the object of education is the realization of a faithful, pure, inviolable and hence holy life". This may be possible by developing courtesy i.e. politeness, decorum, modesty, respect for public opinion, liberty, justice, etc in the preschooler in Nigeria. And this can only be achieved through a well developed curriculum.

The idealistic school of thought also encourages the conservation, promotion and transmission of cultural heritage, knowing that the child is nothing without his culture which is his identity. The implication of this is that the cultural heritage of the pre-schooler is of immense worth and value. It belongs to whole humanity and it is the purpose of education to preserve, develop and transmit it. It is for education to acquaint the child with his cultural heritage. This calls to say that for the child to be fully conformed to his social and cultural norms as stated in the National Policy on Education as one of the aims of ECE, the upright and moral teacher who is a role model, has a lot of work to do. For the Nigerian pre-schooler to be holistically educated, he must be immersed in his cultural milieu (Odigie, 2016).

Implications of the Progressive Philosophy to Early Childhood Education in Nigeria

The progressive philosophy for early childhood education, emphasized and aims at preparing children to live in a democratic society by, teaching them the importance of participation, first in school and then in life. They tend to see the need to revitalize teaching methods in order to meet the growing needs of a technologically advancing world. To them, the teacher serves less as an instructor and more as a guide. They believe that students who receive information passively are not well prepared to teach themselves and handle the problems in future. To this fact then they claim that talking and writing about issues in structured learning groups prepares the child to learn independently, because students who learn actively are also learning to read and study critically, they are better prepared to learn on their own.

The implication of this educational philosophy to early childhood education in Nigeria is that if only strong emphasis will be laid on problem solving and critical thinking in her pre-school level, it will enable the children to be able to learn how to tackle academic and life challenges. Although, some pre-schools in Nigeria today have adopted that method of teaching where dismountable toys, mockups and realia are used for teaching the child;

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where the child is expected to couple the already scattered play toys, or scattered maps (of the world or Nigeria). However, there are still very many of the pre-schools in Nigeria who are yet to adopt this method. They still see the teacher as the brain box, spoon feeding the child with her knowledge. Some still very much lack in instructional materials. This method is excellent as it helps the child and his teacher identify and discover his (learner) strengths and potentials.

However, it behooves on the government to ensure that passive nature of learning by the child should be discouraged. The pre-schooler should be actively involved in the teaching-learning process where he is to explore his environment through toys and other instructional materials. These instructional materials should also be created with the pre-schoolers environment in mind. The teacher is only expected to facilitate this process and only guide. Assessment of the child's academic achievements can be easily done through this method without out rightly condemning the child and failing him just because he cannot write whereas, he can use his hands and intellects through toys to show his potentials.

Implications of the Experimentalist Philosophy to Early Childhood Education in Nigeria

Whereas the other schools of thought lay emphasis of their educational philosophies on pre-schoolers without mental disorder, the experimentalists with Maria Montessori specifically, laid her emphasis on mentally impaired children. The experimentalists came up with a more refined understanding of the psychological needs and problems of the child.

The experimentalists believe that it is through the movement and manipulation of the senses that children would gain knowledge, critical thinking and problem solving skill, mathematics skills, independence, practical life, and discipline. Their idea of sensory education includes hands on activities that would require the child to tune into his five senses to heightening his intellectual abilities, since the hands and mind work together, making, the learning experience one of doing rather than simply observing. When the child uses his senses, he becomes more of an active participant in his education process and absorbs knowledge through his environment.

The implication of this philosophy if applied to the Nigerian preschool including other levels of Nigerian education, especially to special schools will enable the teacher, come to terms with the psychology of the child, know the relevance of the child's senses and acquaint himself with the knowledge that in learning, all of the child's senses must be linked through the learning experiences and the necessary instructional materials, creating that connection to the mind for a better development of the mind and an effective educational outcome. In the process of allowing the child that utmost freedom and democracy to learn at his own pace, the teacher is expected to be highly observant, to be able to observe and take cognizance of the child's prospective abilities and potentials exhibited in the cause of play.

Another aspect of the implication of the ideas of this school of thought is on the socialization aspect of the child. They view the school as that social institution which socializes the child. If the school inducts the pre-schooler into civilization to be

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accomplished by simplifying and balancing his environment and society, it therefore means this idea can help the child get easily socialized with his environment. The teacher is expected to be precise in her words in the cause of teaching. Brevity is the chief characteristics to avoid bugging the children with too much information beyond their capacity.

Conclusion

The attempt of this paper so far, has been an exploration of some philosophical tenets as they pertain to issues and rational for pre-schooling in Nigeria. Tracing early childhood education to western philosophical thoughts was to help in rethinking the philosophy of early childhood education in Nigeria. Knowing fully that the foundation of anything matters, this paper seeks to prescribe a better educational experience for children between the ages of 0 – 5 years in Nigeria. Following the philosophical tenets proposed in this paper, will help the Nigerian school system eradicate the challenges of childhood education and allow the Nigerian child have a holistic childhood education for a healthy competition in a globalized and competitive society.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis made in the course of this work, the following recommendations are made:

- It would be necessary to appropriate elements from the idealists, the progressivists, and experimentalists' philosophies for pre-school education for their positive implications. After all, this is what seems dominant at other levels of the Nigerian education.
- It is also recommended that the Federal Government of Nigeria, should endeavour to give their undivided attention to nursery school education. This they can do through the designing of a well defined philosophy of education for the pre-school level, mapping out a uniform pattern of instructional methods, textbooks, curriculum contents, and ensuring a regular based supervision exercise of ECCDE programmes.
- The Federal Government should also endeavour to continue training quality personnel or teachers as proposed, to be well groomed and made qualified with the basic knowledge and skills needed to be able to organize and coordinate nursery schools with high standard. Their salaries should be regulated so as to encourage the active participation of the teachers in the education process. The financial management should be enhanced.
- The textbooks, rhymes and songs used in nursery schools, should be domesticated, that is, they should not be derived from strange environment (western), and culture, rather from the local culture and environment of the Nigerian child.
- If the Nigerian society must comfortably talk about equality of educational opportunities and social justice, then it begins with equality of educational opportunities in early childhood education, which is the basis, and not at the tertiary level.

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