

TRANSFORMATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN NIGERIA FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This paper examined the existing management strategies for funding Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Nigeria with a view to proposing better funding approach and sustainability. It recognized the commitment of the Nigerian Government (Federal, State and Local), the support of the community, individuals and donor agencies in funding ECE programmes. It argued that, nevertheless, much more needs to be done towards providing adequate funds for quality training of teachers/ caregivers, provision of appropriate ECD facilities, and stimulating learning materials as well as supervision/ monitoring of ECE programmes. Towards this end, increased government allocations, sustained international support, financial allocation to ECE teacher training institutions, equity funding and cost-sharing strategies were recommended.

Keywords: Early Childhood, Education, Funding, Strategies, Sustenance

Introduction

Education is increasingly attracting more attention all over the world as the foundation of human capital development and knowledge economy and taking care of the child's development right from birth is now recognized as the best option starter. (Alabi & Ijaiya, 2015). Thus, the nature and intensity of care, nutrition and stimulation a child receives during this period determines to a large extent the level of physical, cognitive and psychosocial development a child can attain (UNICEF Nigeria, Undated). The learning process starts from the community, parents at home and then moves to the teachers in the school.

Early Childhood Education (ECE), also called Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in China and Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) in Nigeria, refers to the education that children receive during the early stage of their childhood (REAP, 2001). Early Childhood Education could also be a major input into a child's formal education. The importance of Early Childhood Education includes development of mental functions of children in areas such as language, motor skills, psychosocial, cognitive and learning (Bowman, Donovan and Burns, 2001). Furthermore, Early Childhood Education develops in children school readiness, with positive economic and social impacts lasting well into adulthood from higher education attainment and less chance of involvement in criminal activities, to higher status employment and higher earnings (Schweinhart, 2007, Sparling, Ramey and Ramey, 2007).

Concept of Early Childhood Education

Early Childcare and Development has been variously defined (Uzodinma and Akinware, 2001):

the education provided for children 0-3 years in Day Care centres and for 3 years to under 6 years in Nursery schools.

a community-based, low-cost project for the holistic development of the child from 0-6 years.

a comprehensive approach to policies and programmes for children from birth to 8 years of age, their parents and caregivers with the purpose of protecting the children's rights to develop their full cognitive, emotional, social and physical potentials.

Early Childhood Education is flexible in structure with baby-friendly and learner-friendly environment. The infrastructure has specification and varieties with tender and sensitive furniture. The establishment and management of Early Childhood Education centres are facilitated and regulated by government rules and regulations, which ensure standardization but very little uniformity.

In Nigeria today, with the incorporation of Early Childhood Education into the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in 2004, every public primary school is to integrate Early Childhood Education into its programme. This integration is backed by government financing and supported by the community, individuals and donor agencies. For instance, In Niger State, Model Early Childhood Education is run in public schools with support mainly from the national purse, through counterpart funding, international donor agencies such as the World Bank, UNICEF, and the state government through State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB).

Principles of Early Childhood Education

Every child deserves the best possible start and support to achieve their potential in life. A child's early life experiences has a major impact on his future life chances. A secure, safe and happy childhood is important for a good future. It provides a foundation for children to make the best of their abilities and talents as they grow up. Piaget, Vygotsky, Erikson and others according to (Bredekamp, Knuth, Shulman 1992), have propounded theoretical principles of child development and learning to include the following:

- a. Children learn best when physical needs are met and they feel psychologically safe and secure.
- b. Children also construct knowledge. Knowledge is constructed as a result of dynamic interaction between individual and physical environment and social environment. In a sense the child discovers knowledge through active experimentation. By experimentation children make constructive errors that are necessary for mental development. Children need to form their own hypotheses and keep trying them out through their mental actions and physical manipulations, observing what happens, comparing their findings, asking questions, and discovering answers and thereafter adjust their models or alter the mental structures to account for the new information.
- c. Children learn through social interaction with other adults and other children. A prime example is the parent child relationship, at school the teacher encourages and fosters this relationship as was relationship with peers and other adults by supporting the child in his or her efforts and later allowing the child to function independently. The teachers' role is one of supporting, guiding and facilitating development and learning.
- d. Children learn through play. Play provides opportunities for exploration, experimentation and manipulation that are necessary for constructing

- knowledge and contributes to the development of representational thought. During play, children examine and refine their learning in the light of feedback they receive from the environment and other people. It is through play that children develop their imaginations and creativity. As they grow older their play becomes more, rules oriented and promotes the development of autonomy and cooperation which contributes to social, emotional and intellectual development.
- e. Children's interests and "need to know" motivate learning. Children have a need to make sense of their experiences. In a developmentally appropriate classroom, teachers identify what intrigues their children and then allow the students to solve problems together. Activities that are base on children's interest provide motivation for learning. This fosters a love of learning, curiosity, attention, and self-direction.
 - f. Human development and learning are characterized by individual variation. A wide range of individual variation is normal and is to be expected. Each human being has an individual pattern and timing of growth development as well as individual styles of learning. Personal family experiences and cultural backgrounds also vary.

It is in the light of these principles that early childhood educational centers are expected to be safe, full of various learning facilities to engender play and exploration from which learning can take.

Importance of Early Childhood Education (ECE)

Childhood education is important owing to the fact that, if the needs of children are not met during the earlier years of life it can lead to behavioural problems and various other physical or mental disabilities in later life. Childhood education being holistic focuses on the intellectual, social, emotional and physical development of children is of utmost importance for the sound growth of children. According to (Corinne, 2009) many people believe that the sooner we introduce our youngest children to reading, math's and science, the more capable their brains will be to capture more advanced concepts. More importantly early childhood education develops the child's social skills sometimes called character education, social/emotional learning, etc. This is the kind of education that enables a child to participate effectively in an educational environment, get along with others, develops a sense of self and an appreciation of group work.

ECE encourages aesthetic appreciation. Children develop personalities and values at a young age. The exposure of children to nature when they are young will help them cultivate an appreciation for the environment. Such educated kids will grow into environmentally-conscious adults. Educating children in the early years will help them cope with the sudden step up on the concepts they will have to learn when they begin school formally. According to Drake (2011) ECE is a good foundation for a lifelong education for sustainable national development. It is the basic building block for language learning, and literacy is formed during early childhood education period before children get to primary school.

Children are resourceful during their adult life when their potentials are developed at their early years of life. According to (Saylor 2011) early childhood education enables each child reaps the benefits of greater productivity in the adult years, "empirically, an

increase in educational attainment significantly reduces subsequent violent and property crime, yielding sizable social benefits". A nation can thus lower the probability that they will become involved in gangs and crime and spend time behind bars. Therefore society benefits when children are educated young because it makes them more astute learners in school and later become more competent members of the workforce.

In the long term early education program can reduce expenditures on remedial education programs. According to (Drake 2011), a 2005 MIT study showed that schools spend less money on remedial and special education when children participate in early education program. Students are less likely to drop out of grades. Upon completion of their schooling, children who receive early education make higher average incomes and pay higher taxes, thus providing more financial support for government programs. Preschool not only prepares children for kindergarten, it also teaches parents how to interact with their children's school system. A 2002 Harvard Family Research Project study showed that parents of preschoolers took a greater involvement in their children's schooling and had higher aspirations for their kids than parents whose children did not attend preschool. Parents of preschoolers also benefit from being a part of the network of preschool parents.

ECE can lay a foundation for gender equality. A well designed ECE has a potential of challenging gender stereotypes in the society. Attending early childhood education schools helps bring equality for both boys and girls in the primary school. Research in the developing countries indicates that girls who attend early childhood education are more ready for primary education, cope better, and stay longer in the school system than girls who do not attend Early Childhood Education, UNESCO Bangkok Asia-Pacific Programme of Education for All (2008). Early Childhood Education is important for children with disability because it can help to identify problems early and increase the possibility for treatment. Early childhood education therefore benefits not just the child for his greater potentials to be unveiled but also has a social, economic and parental benefit which will in turn have a positive impartation for the nation's transformation agenda.

Concept of Educational Management

Educational management is a complex concept, which has many definitions in local and foreign literature but none have gained universal acceptance (Tume, 2015). The term educational management can mean different things to different people in a variety of ways at different times. It has to do with planning, initiating action, designing and monitoring school activities to produce results out of allocated resources (Oluwale, 2007). In support of this view, Akpakwu (2008) defined educational management as the ability of the educational manager to judiciously utilize the human, materials, financial and time resources towards the efficient and effective achievement of the objectives of educational institution. Peretomode (2012) affirmed that, educational management is concerned with the planning and formulation of educational policies and programmes with a view to achieving educational goals. From the definitions above, this paper believes that educational management is a variety of designed; systematic and related activities carried out in an educational system in order to effectively and efficiently accomplish the goals of the school and needs of the society.

Concept of National Transformation

Transformation is a blue print on key policies, programmes and projects to be implemented during the period 2011-2015 (Lawal, 2009 in Tume, 2015). It serves as a framework for actualization of the Federal government economic growth agenda during this period. This is a medium-term developmental strategy aimed to speed up Nigerias; match towards becoming one of the twenty largest economies by the year 2020. That the whole idea is hinged on the pillars and target of the Nigerian vision 20:20:20 (NV 20:20:20). In other words, it is a medium-term roadmap for turning around the Nigerian economy to meet the needs of competitive and leading global player as envisaged in the Nigeria vision 20:20:20.

National transformation agenda is not a precisely defined list of targets or strategies but seems to be an acknowledgement of the need to change the way things are done in the country. According to Nwadiani (2008), transformation is all about reforming the economy, governance, power sector, security, job creation, infrastructure and all other aspects of the national life and advancement of the country. Nothing can be transformed in the desired manner with illiteracy or half education. Therefore, the education system is the ultimate engine of the transformation agenda in this 21st century and beyond. National transformation therefore is a process of profound and radical changes that orients a nation into a new direction and takes it to a higher level. This emphasizes the significance of education as the tool for national transformation.

Management of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Nigeria

To ensure that Nigeria achieves her national transformation through management of early childhood education, she must look back and see the past, present and consider what the future will be. In other words, she must ask herself “where the rain started to beat her” this can only be achieved through education, which means re-defining education in the context of our contemporary situations. This has been greatly emphasized by Webster (2006).

If we work on marble, it will perish. If we work upon brass, time will efface it. If we erect temples, they will crumble to dust. But if we work upon man’s immortal minds, if we imbue them with high principles, with the just fear of God and love of their fellowmen, we engrave on those tables something that no time can efface and that will brighten and brighten to all eternity. (Webster, 2006).

Education must equip the learner with high principles, high values, and the search for meaning to their life among others. The pre-primary education should address social, political, economic and ethical issues. Pre-primary education should help children with social transformation by unleashing the full potential of the individual as a corollary of society in an effort to achieve socio-economic advancement.

The ECE Curriculum

Every education system is formulated with a plan to achieve a designed purpose, set goals, aims and objectives following a laid down procedure. Curriculum is a structured series of intended learning experiences. It is the means by which educational institutions are able to mould individuals according to the needs and aspirations of the society. The early childhood education curriculum in Nigeria is intended to stimulate learning through play, exploration, interaction, manipulation and self discovery. National Open University (2010) states that the ECE curriculum is designed to provide self directed experiences through the use of indoor and outdoor learning areas including:

- Dramatic play
- Arts not limited to painting
- Listening and reading
- Reading and writing
- Mathematics
- Sand/water
- Games, puzzles, manipulations
- Woodwork
- Music, nursery rhymes and science

Role of Federal Government

The Federal Government in the management of ECE is to promote training of qualified preprimary school teachers which are inadequate number, contribute to the development of suitable curriculum, supervise and control quality of such institutions, and establish preprimary section in the existing public schools (National Open University 2010).

Role of the State Government

The major responsibility of state government in the provision of ECE is supervisory. The National Association for Education of Young Children (NAEYC) affirms that the responsibility of state governments is to monitor and regulate the establishment of early childhood care and education centres and schools. The fundamental purpose of public regulation is to protect children from harm from their physical environment and also the harm of long term development impairment. States are vested with the responsibility of licensing all facilities that provides services to the public including all centres, schools. On the site inspection should be carried out before granting permission to operate.

All stake holders, practitioners, parents and community leaders from both public and private sectors, should be involved in the control and supervision in all aspect of programme planning and delivery. This paper opines that managing early childhood education for national transformation is the duty of all stakeholders. First and foremost, it is unarguable that classroom organization and management is in the hands of the teachers. Within the framework of this belief, the teachers owe the nation a duty. It is the duty of the teachers to lay first the educational foundation upon which every other system rests. This could be achieved through the solid educational

foundation they (the teachers) give to the children. This view is further buttressed by Akpakwu (2008:145) that; “there is no substitute for teachers who are dedicated to their profession, duties, students and their nation. It is for this reason that many nations of the world lay emphasis on the importance of getting the very best of people into teaching and making every effort to keep them there”. The values of ECE eg creativity, inquisitiveness, cooperation, team spirit and early stimulation are achievable through the knowledge and competence of teachers. The future of our nation rest in the hands of its teachers, for the qualities they posses today will inevitably be reflected in the characters of the children they have helped to shape in the educational advancement of the country.

The Role of Proprietors/Child Care providers

In Nigeria management of ECE centers is mostly in the hands of private individuals, Communities and Religious Organizations etc. Proprietors or Child care providers are expected to provide quality child care service as provided by the government regulatory body. It is the responsibility of the care givers to provide both human and material resources that meet the standard to ensure qualitative childhood education.

Resources (Human)

This consists of the Head Teacher, Nursery Teacher, Nursery Assistant, Cleaners, Accountant, Clerk/typist etc. The head teacher is responsible for the coordination of both human and material resources in the school. He assigns duties to the teachers and other staff who are directly responsible for the implementation of the curriculum. These are: the nursery teachers, assistants, cleaners (Musaazi, 2002).

Parents

This paper opines that parents participate in the education of their children through individual discussion with the head teacher or teachers, and through participation in the school PTA or fund raising, payment of mandatory fees and provision of support materials. They are to enrich the home environment too.

Funding of Early Childhood Education

Funding is very crucial to achieving success in any public service. In support of the above statement Akpakwu (2008:173) maintains that “the success of any school programme depends very much on the way the financial inputs are managed and this, in turn, affects the overall performance of each school”. In a study conducted by Alabi (2003) on Evaluation of Universal Basic Education Process on Primary School Enrolment in Kwara state, Early Childhood Education was not implemented at all. Among the reasons for zero percent implementation had to do with funding policies. In Early Childhood Education, adequate funds need to be made available for provision of many resources. These resources include: facilities and stimulating materials for teaching, training and re-training of staff (teachers and caregivers) in appropriate institutions such as colleges of education and universities), enrichment and sensitization of programmes through regular workshops, monitoring, uniforms, feeding, immunization, supervision and inspection, report writing, publications, school meals and training manuals. As rightly observed by Ijaiya (2001), with

adequate resources, access to education can be increased while quality suffers with poor funding.

In developed countries, the funding of pre-school education is usually given a prime place in the nations' budgets. America for instance estimated the cost of providing a quality preschool education to be \$70 billion a year with annual cost per child of about \$8,700 (Ajayi, 2008). Likewise in Ireland, the total funding made available for childcare is 436.7 million Euros (\$580 million). Other countries that realise the economic and social benefits of pre-school education and invested greatly in it include Brazil, Zambia, Niger, South Africa and Ghana. (Ramires, Paira and Almeida, 2009). With the emergence of Early Childhood Education integrated into public primary schools, government's participation and ownership is expanding, courtesy of the UBE Act (2004). Funding is mainly through FGN-UBE counterpart funds where both federal and state governments supply funds to Basic Education. According to UBEC (2009), this is the first time that Basic Education has a quantum of funds being pumped into it. Sources of financing are both external and internal.

1. Internal Sources

- a. UBE Intervention Fund from the Federal Government of Nigeria's Consolidated Revenue Fund.

Table 1 shows the FGN/ UBE Matching Grant between 2006 and 2010

Table 1: Budgetary Allocations from the FGN-UBE Matching Grant (2006-2010)

Year	Releases	Disbursement	Unaccessed
2006	21,336,000,000	21,308,459,363	27,540,637
2007	24,710,000,000	24,041,404,787	668,295,213
2008	30,800,000,000	23,119,020,296	7,680,979,703
2009	19,651,500,000	10,776,863,151	8,874,636,849
2010	23,042,932,729	4,668,022,704	18,374,910,024
Total	119,54,04,32,729	83,913,770,301	35,598,821,788

Source: UBEC (2011) update on the Activities of UBEC

The UBE law stipulates that 5% of these grants are allocated to Early Childhood Education and Development in all the 36 states and the FCT. However, the drawback here is that many states have been found wanting in honouring the system of counterpart funding put in place to boost UBE implementation. This development has drawn the displeasure of the Federal Government and the Minister of Education in recent times. In fact, a recent meeting of the Minister of Education with State Governors centred mainly on educating the latter on the counterpart funding and the way States' attitude is adversely affecting the implementation of UBE, including ECCD.

Other sources are

- a. Complementary funding from State and Local Governments
- b. Funds or consolidated contributions in form of Federal guaranteed credits
- c. Local individual/corporate, as well as international donor grants.

2. External sources

- a. World Bank - providing grants for Early Childhood Education model centres and training of teachers, caregivers and also providing stimulation materials through school grant.
- b. UNICEF and UNESCO - in some local communities do provide funds for training of caregivers, scholarship to students on training etc.

In spite of these varied sources of funding, much more still need to be done in terms of quality of Early Childhood Education teachers and caregivers, supply of facilities and learning materials, providing a conducive learning environment, monitoring/supervision of ECCD programmes as well as production and distribution of appropriate manuals, materials and publications.

To be able to generate adequate funds to turn around Early Childhood Education for good, the following funding strategies are recommended:

Increased Government Allocation

Since early childhood education is given a prime place in the developed nations', ECCD needs to be specially budgeted for and/or increase its percentage of UBE matching grant to at least 10%. This is necessary in view of the recognized immediate and long-term benefits of Early Childhood Education to the recipients such as improved cognitive abilities, social and motor skills (Osakwe, 2009). In recent time, Niger State government reviewed its budgetary allocation from 5% to 15%. Such increased funds should be focused on improving the quality of all resources - human and material- to provide a more conducive environment for the achievement of Early Childhood Education objectives. There is, therefore the need to make realistic budget for ECCD subsector. The Nigerian education budgets may need to be substantially increased and or increased percentage accorded to preschool programmes. State Governments also need to improve their attitude to counterpart funding system to make it work for ECCD.

Sustained International Support

Various international organizations have contributed funds, materials and technical support to get Early Childhood Education to its present level/status in Nigeria. Such organizations include UNICEF, UNESCO, ESSPIN and World Bank. In order to sustain and possibly increase such contributions, efforts need to be made by the various governments and their agencies (UBEC, SUBEB etc) towards prudence and accountability in their use of such supports. The donors should insist on at least two years of independent private monitoring and fund it.

Financial Allocation to Early Childhood Education Teachers Training Institutions

One major oversight of the government in educational planning is the unpreparedness of the teachers for policy implementation. It has been the bane of educational development (Ijaiya, 2004). The ECCD has suffered the same fate throughout Nigeria. Few educational institutions run Early Childhood Education as a discipline in Nigeria. Eighteen (18) focal colleges were selected, three (3) from the six (6) geo-political zones of the country. Niger State College of Education, Minna was among the eighteen institutions which started the programme in 2008 with the technical supports of UNCEF. The states had to resort to transferring primary school teachers to ECCD classes as an alternative. Some had an emergency training of five days. Some did not. Teachers hold the reign to the success of any educational policy, more so for 0-5 years. Therefore, more funds need to be directed to mount Early Childhood Education programmes in teacher education institutions. The extra allocation would be needed to equip the relevant section of the institution with appropriate and adequate resources and materials to train Early Childhood Education teachers and caregivers.

Financial Focus on Establishment of Early Childhood Education Centres

For now, every public primary school should have a well-equipped section dedicated to Early Childhood Education so that it can be brought to parents' doorstep. With time, purely Early Childhood Education centres should be established to create the unique environment required for this level of education. This requires a lot of planning of which funds- immediate and sustained, constitute a very crucial part. In addition, matching grants and other grants should be given to communities to set up Early Childhood Education centres which are run at reduced cost to parents.

Stakeholders and Beneficiaries of Education Cost- Sharing

Though it is good that the different tiers of governments should shoulder a lot of responsibilities, the reality on ground is that Nigeria is still a third world country. It cannot afford to carry all the burden of education and other competing demands (health, social services, there is therefore a need to share the cost of education.

Universal Basic Education Law implies that education is free but the “free” education concept is a relative term. Education has never been free anywhere. So, if parents are feeding their children already, there is the need for nutritional education on the quality of meals that children need for growth and development. Due to ignorance, many parents serve children meals that are not beneficial to the body such as gam, eba and especially biscuits children take to school that are laden with all sorts of additives and preservatives such as caffeine and colouring. Instead, parents and children should be educated in the school, on television and radio on the type of food needed by children. Nigeria is blessed with many fruits all year round the year. Many schools do not allow snacks or fizzy drinks only food and fruits. Schools can prescribe the fruits that are in season e.g. oranges, banana, carrot, apple, and garden egg for children to bring to school. On weekly or daily basis, teachers can tell children the types of snacks to bring to school at low cost. It will go a long way to educate the parents and children on the quality of food needed to grow and develop along the lines expected by ECCD.

Challenges

There are many problems militating against management of early childhood education in Nigeria. This paper however focuses on two major ones. These include;

- (a) Inadequate fund arising from economic recession and competition for funds by other sectors. Consequently, the inadequate funds have not allowed for proper maintenance of available facilities.
- (b) Non-challant attitude of school heads, teachers and pupils to “government” property. There is overt lack of maintenance culture among Nigerians (Ayodele, 2004)

Conclusion

The Federal Government of Nigeria has no doubt demonstrated more commitment to Early Childhood Education and Development (ECCD). This is evident from the inauguration of ECCD policy in 2004, backed up by government financing and supported by the community, individuals and foreign sponsorship. However, much more still needs to be done in terms of adequate funds for quality teachers/caregivers, supply of facilities and learning materials as well as monitoring of ECCD programmes. The future of any nation's socio economic and political wellbeing lies with the quality of education the children receive. This possibly is so because the future of any nation can only be assured because of its off springs. If children's education is fundamentally faulty, it will certainly affect their lives when they grow into adults as no building is stronger than its foundation. For a nation to completely enjoy a turnaround from its negative trend for a positive dimension in its socio economic and political development, its future must hinge on the quality of education and orientation the children who will lead tomorrow receive today. The early years, from birth to five years of age, is an important time in any child's life. During this period children go through a huge variety of learning stages, making great steps and what they learn at a young age offers an important foundation for their learning in later life. According to Piaget children develop intellectually in an invariant sequence of stages from infancy to post adolescent stage (Adjoh 2005). Early gains in school readiness due to early childhood education have shown to have enormous positive economic and social impacts lasting well into adulthood UNESCO Bangkok Asia-Pacific Programme of Education For All (2008).

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