

# Issues and Challenges of Implementation of Early Childhood Education in Nigeria

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**Abstract-** Since the commencement of the implementation of the National Policy on Education in Nigeria which seeks to ensure an optimal and qualitative Early Childhood Education (ECE), stream of concerns have been raised by stakeholders in respect of the quality of education in ECE and its actual implementation. Despite all measures put in place by the Federal Ministry of Education in Nigeria, there are still some lapses in the implementation and non-implementation of this programme. There is no doubt that the implementation of ECE requires the collaborative effort/input of all stakeholders, including the government, parents/guardians, and school authorities. However, the trust of this paper is on issues and challenges of implementation of ECE in Nigeria. The paper gives input on the benefits derivable from ECE, the paper equally points out the recommendations that will lead to effective implementation ECE. This includes employment of more ECE specialist teachers, training/retraining of caregivers/teachers, effective quality monitoring by Ministries of Education, provision of logistic support to ensure that minimum standards are maintained in both public and private preprimary institutions in Nigeria among others.

**Index Terms-** Issues, Challenges, Implementation, Early Childhood, Education and Nigeria.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The foundation of education of the child is the pre-schools education which forms an integral part of his or her early education which may be formal or informal, which is given in an educational institution to children aged 1 to 5+ prior to their entering the primary school (Nakpodia, 2011). This educational level of the child provides for the physical, motor, health, nutritional, intellectual, aesthetic, emotional and social development of the pre-school child. If child education can provide these vital necessities which are fundamental in human life, it is not therefore unlikely to have an important and strong relationship with the pupils' performance at the primary school level and perhaps at the secondary and tertiary levels (Nakpodia, 2003).

Maduewesi (1999) refers to early childhood care education as the education offered to children who have not yet reached the statutory age of beginning primary school. He further maintained that it is a semi-formal education arrangement, usually outside home where by young children from about the age of 3 years are exposed through play like activities in a group setting through mental, social and physical learning suited to their developmental stages, until the mandatory age of government approved formal

schooling. FRN (2004) refers to early childhood care education (pre-primary education) as an education given in an educational institution to children aged 3-5 plus prior to their enrollment in the primary school.

## Objectives of Early Childhood Education

The objectives of early childhood education according to FRN (2004) are:

1. Effect a smooth transition from home to school
2. Prepare the child for the primary level of education
3. Provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work (on the farm, in the market or offices)
4. Inculcate social norms
5. Inculcate in the child the spirit of inquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys and so on.
6. Develop a sense of cooperation and team spirit
7. Learn good habits, especially good health habits and.
8. Teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, and forms and so on through play.

The achievement of the stated objectives of early childhood education and care in Nigeria is brought about via the following means:

- establishing pre-primary sections in existing public schools and encouraging both community and private efforts in the provision of early childhood education;
- making provision in teacher education programmes for specialization in early childhood education;
- ensuring that the medium of instruction will principally be the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community; and to this end: (i) developing the orthography for many more Nigerian languages; and (ii) producing textbooks in Nigerian languages;
- ensuring that the main method of teaching in the childhood education centres will be through play, and that the curriculum of teacher education is appropriately oriented to achieve this;
- regulating and controlling the operation of early childhood education – to this end, the teacher pupil ratio is set at 1:25;
- setting and monitoring a minimum standard for early childcare centres in the country;
- ensuring full participation of government, communities and teachers' associations in the running and maintenance of early childhood education facilities.

The contents of the policy are detailed and planned because it is the stated goal of the Nigerian government that its education system should be comparable to all others in the world.

### Reasons for Early Childhood Education

Underpinning the importance attached to early childhood education which pre-primary education is an integral part, the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in 1990 undertook a joint commitment to make an urgent universal appeal to give every child a better future. In addition, the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child emphasized urgent priority to ensure access to and improve the quality of education for all children (Maduewesi, 2001).

Ajayi (2007) documented eight reasons given at these fora in support of the provision of affordable, quality programmes of early childcare that are community based, and which are linked with health care and nutrition as part of an integrated approach to meeting the needs of the young child. These reasons include:

1. From conception of six years of age, children, according to research findings, undergo rapid mental, social and physical development to the extent that by the age of six, their brains would have developed to almost the size of an adult;

2. The convention on the rights of the child stipulates that children have a right to live and develop to their full capacity;

3. Moral and social values postulate that through children, societies pass on values and culture from generation to generation;

4. Supporting the development of the child physically and mentally leads to increased enrolment, improves performance and the society generally.

5. Provision of early childcare facilities and offer equal opportunities to children from both the privileged and disadvantaged homes.

5. A programme in early childhood development should be used as an entry point for other developmental activities which will benefit the entire community;

6. ECC (Early Child Care) projects should be linked with other developmental activities for women, nutrition, health, water and sanitation.

7. There is a growing demand for better ways of caring for children through an ECC project given the advancement in science and technology which now ensures the survival of many more children, thereby increasing population growth.

The National Policy on Education for Nigeria became necessary to avoid the previous half-measured educational policies, administration and control which was a hallmark of the missionary and regional eras of education in the country. The policy is meant to put in clear perspective the educational jurisdiction of the Federal Government, including that of the State and Local Governments.

### Early Childhood Education: Issues and Challenges

Nigerian education system since independence can best be described as a system riddled with crisis. It is not strange for this to be so, because we had inherited the system from our colonial master (Eriba, 2011). Judged against this premise, it becomes very challenging for Nigerians to manage the educational system passed to them by the British. So the system becomes inundated

with diverse crises since independence. According to Eriba (2011), the educational system has been in a state of permanent crisis that it has lost quality, efficacy and functionality over the years. Early childhood education in Nigeria is not left out in these crises which tend to make the gains of education less spectacular. These challenges are:

#### Teacher: Pupil Ratio Syndrome

The policy position of teacher pupil ratio of 1:25 is also not implemented due to lack of supervision or monitoring. The teacher: pupil ratio of 1:25 with a helper/an assistant stated in the National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004) for the pre-primary class is likely to be a problem in the sense that the developmental characteristics and the needs of the pre-scholars have not been considered. The children at this level are so restless, extremely active and full of energy to expend. They are still dependent on adults for almost all their basic needs – physical, intellectual, language, emotional and social skills – and therefore they require their full attention and diverse activities to help to satisfy their basic needs. It is not yet clear how smaller class sizes influence the quality of teaching in such centres.

The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (2002) cited in Ajayi (2008) condemned a similar practice in Ireland and stated that such a practice is unfavourable to child initiatives or to individual attention being given to the children (even on the part of the teacher, it would be frustrating and extremely difficult to achieve any worthwhile work). Tassoni *et. al* (2005) then suggested a ratio of 1:4 for age three and a ratio 1:8 for ages four to six as providing opportunities for adequate individual attention to every child in the class and, hence, aiding optimal development of the children. If the ratio is not feasible in Nigeria it would probably be the result of a shortage of manpower. The highest ratio for this level ought not to exceed 1:15 with one assistant or 1:25 with two assistants.

#### Poor Funding of Early Childhood Education Programme

To achieve success in any public service, the issue of finance/funding cannot be overlooked. If education is poorly funded, it will affect the staffing, pupil: teacher ratio, the provision of infrastructure and the like, which would have a grave effect on what is likely to be the quality of the output. This is the reason many developed nations make provision for the funding of the services for their preschoolers. The funding of this segment is given a prime place in the nations' budget. For instance, America estimated the cost of providing a quality preschool education to be 'just under \$70 billion a year', 'based on an annual cost-per-child of around \$8700'. This estimation covers 'the full costs of the programs, including facilities, administration, and support services ... so that every child could participate'.

In Ireland between 2000 and 2006, the total funding made available for child care is 436.7 million euros (US\$580 million). This is comprised of national funds of 27%, with 73% coming from European sources. These nations have identified the economic and social benefits of educating preschoolers as a way of creating more proficient learners who will later become more productive citizens. The benefits span the lives of the children. Other gains highlighted are: reduction in the rates of special education placement; better class retention and lower attrition rates; reduction of public expenditure on the criminal justice

system because the crime rates are reduced while children are juveniles; as well as many more benefits. No wonder the international consensus now is that 'no nation can be said to be serious if she does not place the required emphasis on comprehensive childhood care and education'.

In light of this, now that Nigeria is committed to early childhood care and socialization, it can learn from other nations that support 'education, the right of every child'. It requires the government to make realistic budgets for this educational sector. At the same time, there should be a proper monitoring and coordination of the disbursement of the funds earmarked for the sector so that every child is truly taken care of (Ajayi, 2007).

#### ▪ **Supervision of Early Childhood Education Programme**

No educational plan however excellent it may be can be effectively implemented if the school supervision is ineffective. The issue of supervision is vital in the process of implementing early childhood care education in Nigeria if success is to be attained. There is the need to point out that laudable programmes with adequate facilities will eventually crumble if there is no supervision. Nwagbara (2003) and Ogunsaju (2006) have identified supervision as an indispensable management key of any organization or organisational programme. This then means that supervision should of necessity be an integral part of early childhood education programmes so that the goal(s) may be achieved.

Supervision needs to be tailored towards constructive criticism and guidance so as to develop a sense of confidence and competence in teachers, thereby leading to improvement. In this way, regular and appropriate supervision in early childhood care education will help in evaluating the programme as well as in decision-making processes (Sooter, 2013).

#### ▪ **Proliferation of Early Childhood Institutions**

The official provision made in the National Policy on Education (FGN 2004) mandated the Government to encourage private efforts in the provision of early childhood education in the country. More so, owing to the high demand for early childhood education by parents, it does not take a long time for newly established early childhood institutions to grow and develop.

According to Nwakaego (2007) and Nakpodia (2011), it is becoming customary to operate an early childhood institution in every household. Currently, early childhood education institutions are located in various places and buildings—campuses of some universities and colleges, premises of some industrial and business organizations, church premises, residential buildings some part or the whole of which are hired for use as early childhood schools (Ejeh, 2006). The flip side of this proliferation of early childhood institutions is that, the issue of standard and "regulations" have been waved off. The end result is that the young minds are offered "substandard" and "irregular" education that cannot breed egalitarianism and self-reliant individuals of the society and leaders of tomorrow.

#### ▪ **Poor Quality and Qualification of Teachers**

The quality of the teachers determines the strength of any educational system and the value of the learners (Okoro, 2004). In Nigerian early childhood institutions today, the teacher quality is generally low. It is only a few of the nursery schools especially

those owned by educational institutions, private companies and wealthy individuals that can afford to engage the services of university graduate teachers and holders of Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) qualifications, competent and committed teachers and are also capable of retaining such teachers (Oyewumi *et al.*, 2010).

Most others employ a few NCE teachers (if any at all), who are usually underpaid, while others employ mainly Grade Two teachers and secondary school leavers with school Certificate or General Certificate (ordinary level) qualification. In a situation where most of the teachers in our early childhood institutions are unqualified and/or unprofessional, effective teaching and learning cannot be achieved (Ajayi, 2008).

#### ▪ **Negligence on the Part of Government**

Of all the measures that Federal Government undertook in order to facilitate the achievement of the objectives of early childhood education, the only one it has effectively accomplished is the granting of permission for private efforts in the provision of early childhood education in the country, with virtually less or non participation by the public sector. This, in addition to lack of supervision to ensure the maintenance of standards, has led to increases in numbers of early childhood education institutions in the country (Obidike, 2012).

Significant provision is yet to be made in public or private teacher training institutions in the country for the production of specialist teachers, it is doubtful if it can attract many clients, as neither the Federal nor any state government has established any nursery or early childhood schools where graduates of such a programme can be employed. Work in private nursery or early childhood institutions would probably have no attraction for specialist in early childhood education teachers because of low wages and job insecurity associated with teaching in such institutions (Ejeh, 2006; Oluwafemi, *et al.*, 2014).

## II. CONCLUSION

The importance of a solid foundation in education is obvious. Early childhood education is where the foundation is laid. Poor performance in the other levels of academic can be traced to this foundation level. So a thorough knowledge of what, and how education is been handled at this level is imperative. It is a worthwhile step in the right direction for the Nigerian government to have agreed to have full participation in the education of early childhood education. All Nigerian children deserve the best, and education is the only legacy that can be given to set them on the road to optimal development. To ensure an effective implementation of early childhood education in Nigeria, training and retraining of caregivers/teachers should be made a vital part of the education process.

## III. RECOMMENDATIONS

- There is need for State Ministries of Education officials to enforce the regulations laid down by the Federal Ministry of Education as regards to the provisions of early childhood education for improvement.
- Effective quality monitoring units should be set up by Ministries of Education and provide with necessary

logistic support to ensure that minimum standards are maintained in both public and private preprimary institutions in Nigeria.

- Government should regulate salary of all teachers in early childhood education as well as school fees to encourage teachers and parents.
- Regular supervision and monitoring with stiff penalties for offenders will help to maintain the teacher-pupil ratio.
- Effective measures should be ensured in the training of early childhood/pre-primary teachers through adequate scholarships, approving the mounting of such programmes in all Universities, Institutes of Education and Colleges of Education.
- Teaching and learning materials like furniture for both teachers and pupils, television sets/computer systems, nature table/corners, toys and models, charts and well drawings and playing equipments like see-saw, merry-go – round, slides etc. should be made a vital provision in all learning centres for effective teaching and learning.

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