

## **Emerging Issues in Implementing Early Childhood Care Education Programme in Nigeria: The Way Forward**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examined the emerging issues in implementing Early Childhood Care Education Programme in Nigeria and the way forward. Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) Programme refers to the education given to children between the age of 3 to 5 years plus in an educational institution before they enter primary schools. The programme is aimed at providing care, love, protection and supervision of children by well-trained and skilled pre-school teachers and caregivers. However, this paper reviewed concepts such as Early Childhood Care Education, Early Childhood Care Education from Historical Perspective and Objectives of Early Childhood Education. Some of the issues in implementing Early Childhood Education in Nigeria included government non-participation in pre-primary education, inadequacy of space and equipment, poor teaching methods and materials. Inadequate professionally qualified caregivers/teachers, early childhood curriculum, professional development, supervision and staff-child ratio. The responsibility of the government in pre-primary education is also inadequate. It was suggested that government should improve its services to include not only giving licenses to proprietors to operate learning centers but participate in providing pre-primary education through

establishment of government- owned centers so as to enhance funding, monitoring and evaluation of the ECCE, provide adequate qualified teachers and other personnel to be employed to manage pre-primary schools in order to enhance productivity in ECCE. The proprietors should from time-to-time organize professional development programme for the personnel through workshops and seminars. Quality assurance department in the Ministry of Education should be provided with adequate resources to discharge their statutory functions effectively and staff-pupils ratio should be 1:25 to enable effective learning and management of ECCE Centres in Nigeria.

### **Introduction**

Globally, early years in life are widely believed to be the most important period which the children experience cognitive, language, perceptual, socio-emotional and motor development which they will need for future achievements and social functioning (Amadi, 2013). This is the genesis why this period needs to be handled with care and ultimate attention. Estes (2004) has described the early years as a remarkable period of growth and development in the lives of children. Oduolowu and Olowe (2011) submitted that the early years of children are years of extreme vulnerability and tremendous potentials, during which adequate protection, care and stimulation are essential to provide the foundation for well-being and development. In providing this basis for children's effective functioning in the future, Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) also known as Pre-School becomes a necessity.

Generally, ECCE is aimed at promoting holistic development of children from birth to age 5. According to Olowe, Kutelu, and Majebi (2014), ECCE is any programme designed to promote children's intellectual development, socio-emotional development, language development, physical development and learning from birth to age. In agreement with Mahuta (2007), Sooter (2013) stated the aims of ECCE to include: fostering proper development of children, identifying and addressing their problems, harnessing their potentials, molding their characters, enhancing their learning and

equipping them for life so that their actions are channeled towards positive personal, communal and global development. It is crucial to note that all ECCE programmes are geared towards giving positive early experiences to children. The paramount importance of the early years is widely acclaimed in various international documents and developmental goals such as UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Education for All (EFA) goals among others (Akinrotimi, & Olowe, 2016). The documents above stressed that the government of Nigeria is among the member states that ratified these documents and goals, and this has made the government to come up with various interventions which are geared towards providing quality ECCE for Nigerian children.

As part of the interventions of the government in ECCE, there was enactment of UBE Act (2004) which has an expanded scope that includes programmes and initiatives for early childhood education and development (UNESCO-UBE, 2006 in Akinrotimi, & Olowe, 2016). The UBE programme made provision for every public primary school to have a pre-primary school linkage to cater for children, and this resulted in increased government ownership and participation in ECE provisions (UNESCO-UBE, 2006 cited in Akinrotimi, & Olowe, 2016).

Osanyin (2012) noted that there was the development of National Minimum Standard for Early Child Care Centers in Nigeria while in the same vein; Oguntuashe (2010) reported the development of curriculum for in-service teacher training and caregiver training manual. Another notable intervention is the development of a policy referred to as National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Development that integrates interventions from various sectors to promote an integrated holistic approach to the development of the child (FGN, 2007). One other intervention that is worth mentioning is the development of a Unified Early Childhood Education Curriculum which was all encompassing and divided into two sections to cater for age 0-3 and 3-5 years respectively. Again,

the federal government included ECCE programmes in curriculum of Colleges of Education. The most recent innovation seems to be the new National Policy on Education (2014) in which the programme of ECE is brought under Basic Education in Section 2. It is now divided into two programmes namely Early Childhood Care, Development and Education (ECCDE) and Kindergarten Education.

Despite all these interventions and the efforts of the government, it is glaring that the implementation of ECCE programmes is still affected by many challenges both at pre-primary school level and tertiary level. These issues, as identified in this paper relate to both human and material resources as well as management. However, let's define the concept early childhood care education (ECCE).

#### **Concept of Early Childhood Care Education**

The Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) as contained in the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 2014) is the first formal Education for children aged between 2 to 6 years of life in preparation for primary schooling. ECCE aimed to provide the care, love, protection and supervision of well-trained and skilled pre-school teachers and care-givers. According to Akinola (2004), the ECCE arrangement involves how to teach young child to acquire basic knowledge, skills and abilities that will enable them as young children to progress smoothly to primary school level and indeed other levels of education.

Early Childhood Care Education with duration of 3 years requires that children just like very tender growing plants should be carefully nurtured into stable personalities. This again, demands that requisites facilities and materials be made available for the full and proper engagement of the potentials of the young children. Contributing, Eluwa (1985) in Amadi (2013) contended that the objectives of the ECCE can only be realized when pre-school teachers are professionally prepared and humanly disposed in being patient with the kids; avoid shouting with loud voice, scolding or unnecessary flogging as these may seriously interfere with their learning process.

Preschool teachers should rather be very friendly, fun-loving, playful and ever-ready in story-telling, these being qualities that characterize the preschools environment and which according to Botton (1976) in Amadi (2013), is enjoyed by both normal and physically-challenged children. Botton added that at this stage, children with challenges are identified, problems diagnosed for possible remediation. It however depends on a well-qualified teacher of the preschooler to effectively take up these challenges. It therefore, requires that preschool teachers are given special training that grooms them to be caring and empathetic, teaching them the rudiments of numbers, letters, shapes, colours as well as inculcate in them social norms and values, spirit of enquiry, inquisition and creativity through play, and to develop a sense of cooperation, team spirit and to acquire good habits in some other socially acceptable dimensions (Akinola, 2004; Amadi, 2010).

#### **Early Childhood Care Education from Historical Perspective**

The advent of the Early Childhood Education can be traced back to the era of Nigerian independence in the year 1960 when the colonial masters established some pre-primary schools to cater for their preschool-age children, though few children of Nigerian elites benefited from this (Afe, 1992). The introduction of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1976 was another factor that consolidated pre-primary schooling since more boys and girls enrolled into primary schools. This development inadvertently led to the establishment of Day-Care Centres in some cities by private individuals and churches. Matterson (1978) cited by Amadi (2013) reported that some few Nigerians who travelled abroad came in contact with international organizations like UNESCO and UNICEF which not only broadened their perception about children educational needs but also made them to realize the importance of education for future development. The situation led to the initial attempt to include Early Childhood Care Education in the National Educational Policy enunciated by the federal government in 1981((Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 2008).

**Objectives of Early Childhood Education**

The objectives of early childhood education according to FRN (2014) 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.
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:

1. Establishing pre-primary sections in existing public schools and encouraging both community and private efforts in the provision of early childhood education
2. Making provision in teacher education programmes for specialization in early childhood education.
3. Ensuring that the medium of instruction will principally be the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community; and to this end: developing the orthography for many more Nigerian languages and producing textbooks in Nigerian languages.
4. 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
5. Regulating and controlling the operation of early childhood education – to this end, the teacher pupil ratio is set at 1:25.
6. Setting and monitoring a minimum standard for early childcare centres in the country.

7. Ensuring full participation of government, communities and teachers' associations in the running and maintenance of early childhood education facilities (Amadi, 2013).

### **Challenges of Implementing Early Childhood Education in Nigeria**

Amadi (2013) identified the following as challenges to effective implementation of pre-school programme in Nigeria:

1. **Government Non-Participation in Pre-Primary Education:** The government in spite of its efforts to set up policy framework for ECCE has not demonstrated enough commitment in terms of funding, monitoring and evaluation as well as establishment and management of ECCE schools the bulk of which still belong to private investors whose main objective is profit making. Eresimadu (1998) opined that the government has failed to assist the private sector in the establishment and management of pre-primary schools, provision of facilities and teaching aids, stressing that the government only provides policy guidelines.
2. **Funding:** Funding needs to be given maximum consideration by all stake holders because it is very crucial to achieving success in any educational enterprise. In ECCE, adequate funds need to be made available for provision of many resources and activities which include stimulating materials for teaching, training and re-training of staff (teachers and caregivers), enrichment and sensitization of programmes through regular workshops, monitoring, feeding, supervision and inspection, report writing, publications, school meals and training manuals among others (Alabi, & Ijaiya, 2014). This indicates that the importance of funding to successful implementation of ECE in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized.

The sad thing however is that Nigerian ECE is ridiculously underfunded. This could be linked to the low budgetary allocation to the education sector in the nation. Perhaps, this is the reason for the report of The Good Planet Foundation (2013) on Nigeria that spending on essentials

such as textbooks, instructional materials, in-service training, operations and maintenance is inadequate. The underfunding of ECE at pre-primary school level in Nigeria has been documented in several academic papers and researches (Osakwe, 2011; The Good Planet Foundation, 2013; Alabi, & Ijaiya, 2014).

- 3. Inadequacy of Space and Equipment:** Facilities such as classrooms, libraries, staff, laboratories, and furniture are grossly inadequate in a greater number of the ECCE schools (Eresimadu, & Eze, 1998 in Amadi, 2013). Amadi (2013) opined that some pre-schools are located in uncompleted buildings, makes shifts and car garages that are poorly ventilated most of which have only mats as furniture and that this situation can never guarantee effective teaching and learning of these children whose lives are further jeopardized.
- 4. Poor Teaching Methods and Materials:** In pre-school teaching, toys, diagrams, charts, pictorials and many more are invaluable instructional requirements that are lacking in most of the ECCE schools presently. Decrying the pathetic state of implementation of ECCE curriculum, Maduwesi (1998) in Oguntuashe (2010) blamed the sustained use of poor teaching methods on government's lip service as indicated in poor supervision by the Ministry of Education and absence of well-planned teaching modules.

Although it was recommended in the National Policy on Education (2014) that the state Ministries of Education should monitor the establishment and management of pre-schools, Amadi (2010) in his study revealed that quality is always compromised as these officials are 'settled' with huge sums of money leaving the innocent children at the mercy of charlatans. Lending their support to this revelation, Adenokun and Okhaware (1996) in Amadi (2013) revealed the inability of state arm of government to provide the required checks and balances has also hindered the system operating ECCE. Hence, they recommended regular supervision and inspection of the schools



and workshops for proprietors.

Similarly, Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016) identified the following as issues and challenges in effective implementation of pre-school programme in Nigeria:

1. **Inadequate Professionally Qualified Caregivers/ Teachers:** It is widely acknowledged that early childhood educators with required professional qualification provide more appropriate, nurturing and responsive care and education experiences for young children (Amadi, 2013). This underscores the importance of giving children the opportunity to learn under professionally qualified caregivers/teachers. Unfortunately, the situation is contrary in most pre-primary schools in Nigeria where most teachers who possess no training in ECE are often found in children classrooms.
2. **Resources:** When resources are available for ECE programme at pre-primary school level, it helps the caregiver/teacher to nurture and support the development of young children, and to successfully implement the curriculum. According to Chukwbikem (2013), the quantity and quality of resources available for any educational programme would determine schools systems capacity for the implementation of the type of educational programme. What this implies is that resources are critical to successful implementation of any ECE programme. In spite of the fact that resources are critical to successful implementation of ECE programme, they are not found in many Nigerian pre-primary schools. Many researchers in Nigeria who have assessed the resources that are available for ECE at pre-primary school level have confirmed this same situation through the findings of their studies (e.g., Viatonu, Usman-Abdulqadri, & Dagunduro, 2011; Amali, Bello, & Okafor, 2012).
3. **Early Childhood Curriculum:** Curriculum is what and how of any educational enterprise. It is the vehicle through which any educational programmes can be successfully implemented. The ECE curriculum is an important written plan that includes goals for children's development and

learning, experiences through which they will achieve the goals, what staff and parents do to help children achieve the goals and the materials needed to support the implementation of the curriculum (National Centre on Quality Teaching and Learning (NCQTL), 2012).

The early childhood curriculum helps to ensure that staff or teachers cover important learning areas, adopt a common pedagogical approach and reach for a certain level of quality across age groups. These descriptions about ECE curriculum indicates that it is an indispensable material in the business of implementing ECE programme. Its indispensability spurred the government of Nigeria to see to the development and production of National Early Childhood Curriculum for Ages 0-5years by NERDC, with the support of UNICEF. This curriculum according to Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016) was launched in 2007. The unfortunate thing however is that this curriculum, since it was launched, is not found in almost all pre-primary schools in Nigeria.

The non-availability of the National Early Childhood Curriculum for Ages 0-5years in pre-primary schools has been confirmed in findings of researches conducted in different states in Nigeria (e.g., Viatonu, Usman-Abdulqadri, & Dagunduro, 2011; Amali, Bello, & Okafor, 2012; Okewole, Iluezi-Ogbedu, & Osinowo, 2015).

4. **Professional Development:** The teacher holds the key to successful implementation of any educational enterprise. This is why the federal government of Nigeria stated in NPE (2014) that no education system may rise above the quality of its teachers (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 2013). On this Jibril (2007) submitted that whatever input is made into an educational system in respect of management, resources, facilities and array of instructional materials, will be of little avail if the teacher is unskilled, poorly trained or even ignorant. This is to say that whatever facilities provided to improve ECE will be of little effect if pre-primary school teachers are not given constant professional development through training and re-training.

The professional training and retraining is needed for all the personnel in the ECE at the pre-primary schools to enhance effective goals realization. To Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016), teachers in Nigeria pre-schools are either not trained or trained in other fields not relevant to ECE. Goble and Horm (2010) also submitted that whatever a person's profession is, the need for professional development is universal because professionals need to continually enrich their knowledge and increase their sense of professionalism over the course of their careers so as to implement current research based practice. Thus, according to Goble and Horm (2010), early childhood professional development brings to the forefront the significance of the early years for children's learning and development and highlights the central role early childhood educators play in children's successful outcomes.

In fact, some researchers have confirmed that the teachers lack adequate professional development training (e.g., Olaleye, & Omotayo, 2009). This lack of professional training for the teachers is likely to worsen the problems of implementing ECCE in Nigeria. This is because almost all the teachers in Nigerian pre-primary schools are not professionally qualified (Akinrotimi, & Olowe, 2016).

5. **Supervision:** To ensure effective implementation of any educational enterprise, supervision must be given adequate attention. In regards to ECCE, Awino (2014) noted that it is important to supervise the programme in order to gather information from children, caregivers, parents, communities, and general ECCE environment. Supervision of ECCE can be used to correct errors, modify practices where necessary and motivate as well as encourage all involved in its implementation (Awino, 2014).

Usually, the changes that result from supervision of ECCE or pre-school programme can strengthen the implementation of such ECE programme. Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016) stated that supervision in ECCE enables efficient implementation of the curriculum, checks whether the objectives of the programmes have been achieved,

promotes maintenance of basic standards, identifies problems and constraints, motivates, enriches and promote personal as well as professional growth of all those involved (Awino, 2014). Despite the immense benefits that supervision has to offer the ECE, the Nigerian ECE at pre-primary school level is not provided with these benefits as it is usually left unsupervised (Akinrotimi, & Olowe, 2016). This cannot allow effective implementation of ECE programmes at pre-primary school level in Nigeria. Researchers have consistently lamented this lack of supervision in ECCE (Osakwe, 2011; Sooter, 2013).

6. **Staff-Child Ratio:** High staff-child ratios are absent in pre-schools while smaller number of children per staff, are usually found to enhance ECE quality and facilitate better developmental outcomes for children (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), undated in Huntsman, 2008 as cited by Akinrotimi, & Olowe, 2016). When there is higher staff-child ratio, caregivers are able to interact better with children, they experience less stress and they are able to provide more supports to different children's developmental domains. Huntsman (2008) noted further that higher staff-child ratio makes children become more co-operative in activities and interactions and children also tend to perform better in cognitive and linguistic assessments.

On the contrary, lower staff-child ratio in ECE settings will make caregivers to give less attention to children and they will not give optimal performance. This will in turn affect children as they may experience neglect and poor development in all domains. The lower staff-child ratio is the scenario in Nigerian ECE at pre-primary school level. This has been reported in several papers and researches on ECE; for example, ( Sooter, 2013). In fact, in a report series to the UN Special Envoy for Global Education, it was specifically reported that classrooms in early childhood development (ECD) centers in Nigeria are crowded, with an average of more than 130 children per classroom in the North (The Good Planet Foundation, 2013).

### **Conclusion**

From the literature reviewed in this paper, the emerging issues in the implementation of ECCE are many and it is concluded that there is need for qualitative and quantitative provision of resources both human and material to boost the effective implementation of Early Childhood Care Education in Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

This chapter recommended that:

1. There should be more responsibility of the government in pre-primary education through more participation in providing pre-primary education and establishing government owned centers so as to enhance funding, monitoring and evaluation of the ECCE.
2. Educational planners should be involved in ECCE planning to ascertain effective provision of facilities such as classrooms, playgrounds, libraries, staff, laboratories, furniture and the likes in the ECCE centres.
3. Adequate instructional materials in pre-school teaching, toys, diagrams, charts, pictorials and many more should be provided in ECCE schools to facilitate achievement of the stated goals as stated in the National Policy on Education.
4. Adequate qualified teachers and other personnel should be employed by the government private or the communities to manage pre-primary schools in Nigeria.
5. In order to enhance productivity in ECCE, the proprietors of schools should from time-to-time organize professional development programme for the personnel through workshops or seminars.
6. Monitoring and Quality Assurance Department in the Ministry of Education should be provided with adequate resources to discharge statutory functions effectively in ECCE.
7. Staff-pupils ratio should be 1:25 as stated in the National Policy on Education to enable effective learning and management of ECCE Centres in Nigeria.

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