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Examining the Challenges of Early Childhood Education in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Early Childhood Education is an essential formal education given to children from conception to eight years for cognitive, social, and emotional development, language and speech development, and the development of fine and gross motor skills. Early childhood education reduces the rate of school dropout and higher school achievement and helps to curb the rate of juvenile arrests in society. However, early childhood education is faced with a lot of bottlenecks that intend to hinder the effectiveness of early childhood in Nigeria. These challenges comprise poor infrastructure facilities, poor numeration of teachers' salaries, inadequate implementation of early childhood curriculum, employment of unqualified and incompetent teachers with little or no in-depth knowledge of early childhood Developmental Appropriate Practices, corruption, and poor funding of early childhood programs. Proliferation of early childhood according to National Policy on Education is a pertinent issue that has led to a poor standard and lack of proper regulation of early childhood institutions across the country, the language of the immediate environment as a medium of instruction is not strictly adhered to most states in Nigeria among others. The study revealed that these challenges could be solved by adequately implementing, proper funding and supervision of early childhood programs in Nigeria.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education is a starting point for a child's development and a key foundation of a sustainable educational system. It is a crucial period of brain development of a child and the root formation of individual potential. Early childhood education is faced with the challenges of the use of the language of the immediate environment as a medium of instruction beyond the primary six levels although the National Policy on Education stipulates that children should be taught the language of their immediate environment from pre-nursery to basic three while English Studies is offered as a subject. In line with the above assertion, [Adeyemi and Ajibade \(2014\)](#) maintain that low implementation of the use of language as a medium of instruction is not implemented in the southwestern part of Nigeria. The challenges of early childhood education as a shortage of trained teachers, lack of adequate infrastructure, shortage of instructional materials, poor numeration of teachers' salaries, and lack of adequate funding.

However, [Olaleye and Otomayo \(2009\)](#) assert that some recent factors have relatively brought early childhood education to the forefront of public awareness. These factors include the fundamental changes in the economy of the country and its impact on family life, rising cost of living, emergence of a single-parent household, increased number of teenage parents, decrease in the impact of the extended family, and the call by many professionals who advocated for the right of children. These recent phenomena no doubt stressed the need for quality early childhood education. Therefore, early childhood education is an effective tool that will provide a good start in life.

Furthermore, Early Child Education is also known as Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), Early Childhood Care and Development Education (ECCDE). Early childhood is not only a crucial period in the life of children but also a very significant stage in a child's life. It is a period of rapid brain development of individual children which takes place between zero to 6 years (0- 6 years), during this period a child has the same brain as that of an adult.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria in National Policy on Education (FRN) states that ECCDE is the care, protection, stimulation, and learning given to children aged 0-4 years in a crèche or nursery. Some reports defined early childhood education as a holistic education that enhances pupils' potential for survival in future careers. Universal Basic Education Commission describes early childhood education as a care protection and stimulation center aimed at enhancing learning in children from zero to five years. [Obidike \(2012\)](#) asserts that early childhood education is a type of education given to children below the official school-age mainly to prepare them for primary education.

Early Childhood Education is defined as a period of linguistic, cognitive, social, and emotional development that determines human potential in the future. National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and Education for Early Years (EYE) define early childhood Education as a type of formal education given to children between the ages of zero to eight years old(0-8years). This means that early childhood education extends from crèche to primary three. Some reports defined early childhood education as a process designed by professionals to provide holistic development in children from birth to before middle childhood. Early Childhood Education as education provided for children below the official age of primary education. [Akinrotimi and Olowe \(2016\)](#) describe Early Childhood Education as the education given to children from birth to eight years, which enhances intellectual, socio-emotional, language, and physical development in children. [Nakpodia \(2011\)](#) defines Early Childhood Education as a formal education given to children from age one to five-plus

before entering into the primary level of education. Classify early childhood into Creche, Day-care, Playgroup, Nursery, and Kindergarten.

The National Policy on Education outlined these purposes of early childhood education:

- (i) To affect a smooth transition from the home to school.
- (ii) To prepare the child for the primary level of education.
- (iii) To provide adequate care, supervision, and security for children while their parents are at work.
- (iv) To inculcate social, and moral norms and values.
- (v) To inculcate in the child, the spirit of inquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music, and the use of toys among others.
- (vi) To develop a sense of co-operation and team- spirit.

2. METHOD

This study was a literature review. Detailed information on how the process for the literature review is explained elsewhere ([Azizah et al., 2021](#)).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Origin and Development of Early Childhood Education and Western Education in Nigeria

In Nigeria, Early childhood education started as a Sunday school with the children teaching them literacy skills and Bible stories during the Colonial era. This was done to preserve and provide basic education to the children of colonial masters and children converts of the missionaries. The school can only be held on Sunday because that was the only day parents can release their children. As churches were established, schools were equally established mainly to take care of the children of the colonial masters and the children of a few Nigerian elites. After independence in 1960, the demand for early childhood education increased and the church began to charge fees which made early childhood education accessible to few rich Nigerians.

During the post-colonial era, Nigerians acquired wealth which changed their taste and cultural value system, hence sending children to early childhood became a status symbol. With various economic changes, married women needed to work to assist their husbands in the home because the economic situation in the country was no longer favorable. Formerly, young children were kept at home with house help. With the introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1977 which ushered in free and compulsory education extended family system was gradually giving way and house helps went back to school including illiterate mothers who desired to finish their education and take up employment opportunities.

However, in the 1980s formal early childhood education emerged Mothers were anxiously searching for a suitable and conducive place to keep their children mainly for custodial care while they are away for work or school. This led to the establishment and rapid growth of early childhood education in the cities to aid working mothers to provide adequate care, and protection for their children while they are at work. This also led to the emergence of Jele-Osimi, Ota-Akara, and different variations of other high and low-class privately-owned pre-schools. Most early childhood education schools established during this period were owned by the missionaries and later individuals started establishing their nursery schools because of the high demand for early childhood education.

3.2. Advantages of Early Childhood Education

Early Childhood education is of great importance to society because it helps in character formation that enhances human potential in the later years. Highlight the advantages of early childhood education as follows:

- (i) It promotes higher school achievement. Children who attend early childhood education perform excellently in their later school years and graduate as when due.
- (ii) Early childhood education reduces the need for placement in special education. When children start school at an early stage it helps the caregiver to detect any abnormality in the child such as speech disorders, and visual and hearing impairment. The early referral will reduce placement in special education.
- (iii) It promotes lifelong learning experiences from early years to adulthood and a life span.
- (iv) It enhances cognitive, social, emotional, language, and communication development in children to adulthood.
- (v) It reduces juvenile arrests and helps to curb crimes in society.

3.3. Challenges of Early Childhood Education in Nigeria

The following are some of the challenges of early childhood education in Nigeria:

- (i) The proliferation of early childhood education. National Policy on Education recognizes the importance of Early Childhood Education in Nigeria. The proliferation of early childhood according to National Policy on Education is a pertinent issue that has led to a poor standard and lack of proper regulation of early childhood institutions across the country.
- (ii) Corruption. Corruption is seen as a destructive worm that destroys the educational system in Nigeria. Corruption was one of the factors that led to the failure of Universal Primary education in 1977. This aligns with [Osunyikanmi \(2018\)](#) maintains that corruption led to underfunding of early childhood education in Nigeria.
- (iii) Lack of competent and unqualified teachers and caregivers. Competent and qualified teachers and caregiver enhances children's readiness and motivation to learn. NAEYC stipulates that early childhood teachers must have an in-depth knowledge of DAP in educating young children. Most early childhood centers in Nigeria are managed by unqualified and incompetent teachers who lack the instructional skills of teaching and imparting knowledge to the children. [Amadi \(2013\)](#) affirm that government-owned public schools are characterized by a lack of competent and unqualified teachers and caregivers. In line with the above assertion, the lack of qualified and incompetent teachers in early childhood education is another major issue.
- (iv) Inadequate Monitoring and Supervision. Inadequate monitoring and supervision are seen as another bottleneck experienced in early education in Nigeria. Some report posits the need for adequate supervising and proper monitoring of early childhood centers for regular implementation of early childhood programs (see <http://cess.unobi.ac.ke/sites/default/files/cees/final%20final%20pdfo.pdf>). On the hand, [Sooter \(2013\)](#) affirms that early childhood centers in Nigeria are not properly and adequately supervised. Supervision as an indispensable implementation key of any given organization. lack of implementation on the teacher-to-pupil ratio. National Policy on Education stipulates that one teacher is expected to teach a maximum of twenty-five pupils in a class but reversed is the case in Nigeria's Early Childhood classroom, especially in government-owned schools.
- (v) Inadequate infrastructure facilities in the classroom. Poor infrastructure facilities in Early Childhood Education hinder the enrollment of children in schools. Early childhood

education is faced with the problems of low quality of teachers and a lack of adequate infrastructure facilities in the classrooms (see <https://www.sunnewsonline.com/a-case-for-early-childhood-education-in-Nigeria/>). *Ishola (2016)* agrees that most early childhood schools lack a national curriculum and experience a shortage of instructional materials used in the teaching and learning process.

- (vi) Insensitivity of Nigerian Government to Early Childhood Education. The Federal Government of Nigeria neglected the need for early childhood early because early childhood education was not recognized in the National Policy on Education until 2004. *Evans and Ikpekogu (2016)* agree that the official curriculum of early childhood was first drafted in 1988 by the Nigerian Education Research and Development Council (NERDC) after many years of Nigeria's independence due to the Nigerian Government's insensitivity to early childhood education. Hence, *Viatonu et al. (2011)* assert that stakeholders responsible for implementing early childhood curriculum lack the basic skills due to government insensitivity to pass through the right channels by using early childhood professionals.
- (vii) Poor Funding. Early Childhood Education has been characterized by poor funding as one of the major challenges. *Jacob and Samuel (2020)* affirms that early childhood education has not been adequately funded from 1999 up till 2014 with a budgetary allocation of less than 12% for every fiscal year. *Alabi and Ijaiya (2014)* assert that early childhood education in Nigeria is characterized by poor funding and planning which has reduced the quality of teaching and staff employment. Some reports reported that only 2% of its consolidated revenue is allocated to the funding of early childhood education in Nigeria and also the funding of Early Childhood education is the sole responsibility of the state and local government.

4. CONCLUSION

Early childhood education deals with the holistic development of children. Any negative impact that is not corrected during the early years of an individual will adversely affect the human potential, future careers, and national development of that particular country. Conclusively, the federal government should see early childhood education as a necessity and a ladder to capital and human development and also implement all the policies in early childhood as recommended by UNICEF, NAYEC, and JOMITEN among others. The following recommendation will help to solve the problems of early Childhood in Katsina State:

- (i) The use of English as a medium of instruction should be introduced in upper basic school.
- (ii) More qualified and competent teachers should be employed to solve the issue of the teacher-to-pupil ratio.
- (iii) Teachers should be trained and retrained on new trends in early childhood.
- (iv) Government should increase funding for early childhood education because it is a basic rock for other levels of education.
- (v) Inclusion of home-grown feeding should be extended to pupils in pre-primary schools.
- (vi) Early childhood specialists should be included in the education policy making.
- (vii) There should be adequate monitoring and supervision by the ministry of education.

5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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