

**CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND SOCIETAL PROBLEMS: NIGERIAN
EXPERIENCE**

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Abstract

Today, Childhood Education and societal problems are at the centre of Nigerian discourse. If given, good attention will help to reposition Nigeria in the global market. This paper had a crucial look at the position of the Nigerian child; and what should be done to make it better if the cry for a better tomorrow will be a reality.

Keywords: Childhood Education, Nigerian child, societal problems

Introduction

Education is the process of individual development into a useful member of the society. Peters as cited in Ike and Onyekwelu (2014) defined education as the transmission of what is worthwhile. What this means is that, education is the intentional bringing of a desirable state of mind in a morally acceptable manner. Education by implication is associated with learning. Learning, apart from being a rigorous exercise is procedural. If a child gets a particular step wrong at threshold of her learning or does not get it at all, it becomes a very big problem for the child.

It is for these, reasons and many more, that educationist for the past few decades had advocated for universal access to high quality childhood education. This is because it guarantees the child the experiences needed to thrive in the wider society. Childhood Education

is the basis for human development. In line with this, United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF,1999) observed that, good care during early years is emphasized because experience, confirmed by research and practical wisdom show that children who receive good care during childhood are more likely to benefit from later education and other social services. In support of these ideas, Maduwesi (2005) noted that, there are money savings to the community because these kids grow up to get better jobs than they would otherwise, pay better taxes and of course, there will be a drop in crime rate.

Scientifically, the early years are important in the formation of personality, intelligence and social interaction (UNICEF,1999). This agrees with neuroscience research which opined that 90 percent of the child's brain development occurs in these foundation years, 0 to 5years (Onyekwelu 2015) as cited in save the child website. The past few decades have seen dramatic growth in educational services provided to young children (0-8years).The federal government in line with this has increased the number and types of services provided by the school system in area of childhood education Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN,2013).Supporting these efforts made so far in enhancing childhood education, Maduwesi(2005) opined that a guidance for establishing childhood care centers have been developed and modules for training childhood educators been developed.

However, observations confirmed by research findings have shown that childhood education are challenged by untrained nursery and primary school teachers (Guyana, 2000), funding (Morison,2001),leaving the childhood education at the hands of private sectors (Obisanya 2001),poor condition with teacher factor being the critical factor.(Nigerian Educational and Research development Council (NERDC) and National Council for Colleges of education(NCCE,2004).

Addressing the crucial position of childhood education in solving many societal problems, Onyeneto (2000) noted that a good childhood education will serve as a tool for solving many societal problems, such as unemployment, starvation and technological backwardness. That is to say, the need for education is worthless if it cannot find its use in everyday life. These are possible if Childhood Education is sound. If Childhood Education is poor it will create many societal problems like: policies which have neither direct nor indirect bearing with our problems, curriculum that has no relationship with work place and societal needs, embezzlement of funds meant for educational development purposes, ritual killings, rape, abduction, kidnapping, employment of unqualified personnel, misplacement of priorities, poor or lack of research and development, poor teacher motivation, lack of creativity on the part of both teacher and the taught, science education and technical laboratories not available

for practical works, bribery and corruption in schools and examination malpractice. All these and many more are the problems bedeviling our education sector and society for which urgent attention is needed, if we really need to empower the youths and transform the nation. If this could be done, good Childhood Education is the answer.

In line with the above view, Nasir&Nazil (2010) noted that sustainable economy needs skilled manpower which is raised through productivity and efficiency of an individual that is only possible through good childhood education. Illiteracy as we know is a main barrier to technological advancement. Good childhood education is perceived as one of the main vehicle for promoting literacy and invariably economic growth and improving living standards in both developed and developing nations. It is the first stage of compulsory education and establishes the academic foundation of pupils. If this is true, for any change to take place in the society it has to be preceded by an educational revolution. To do this, childhood education needs to be re-assessed and re-organized in area of man-power, organization, funding management curriculum planning, implementation and ownership.

In support of the above, the FRN (2014) viewed education as the most important instrument of change, that any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any nation has to be preceded by an educational revolution. This is because; it is at the childhood stage that character formation takes place. If pupils have shaky foundation when it comes to education, it will surely affect their quality of work input, their lives when they are adults and in turn affect the entire society. This makes a child who is taught by a qualified teacher with a (good curriculum) in an organized environment better disposed with creative skills. The child will be armed with meaningful learning, increase in productivity and will show more patriotism in his discharge of duties. This makes education a utilitarian education rather than theoretical and certificate oriented with little effect on the lives of the people and economy.

If education at this level is sound, it will lead to a balanced personality development and on the long run stable society. If otherwise, it will lead to maladjustment on the part of the possessor of such an education. It can even breed conflict if not well managed. For these and many more reasons, the curriculum has consistently taken the center stage in educational discourse theory and practice. While the questions: What to teach? to whom? how and when? still remains with us, new issues and challenges have emerged which will continue to attract the attention of researchers, developers, planners and implements. One of the emerging issues is A Critique of Nigerian Childhood Education and Societal Problems.

Concept of Childhood Education

Childhood education is conceptualized as the spring bud for lifelong learning. Maduewesi (2005) defined it as the care, development and education given to children aged 5-11+. FGN (2014) defined it as education given to children aged 6-11+. Oguntuashe (2013) opined that, childhood education and care emphasizes on nutrition, psychology, sociology, economic, law, gender studies and child development. Childhood education as used in this paper is the overall development of the child, socially, morally, physically and intellectually from 6-11+. It has the following objectives as stipulated by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2014);

Prepare the child for the secondary level of education; Inculcate social norms and values; Learn good habits, especially good health habits; Learn the rudiments of numbers; Childhood education is perceived as poor if the education and the development of the child were not given a good attention. Once this is done, it effects the overall development of the child-socially, emotionally, physically, morally and mentally. There are some characteristics of a good childhood programme, before it will be called a childhood programme.

The Situation Now

Nations have paid dearly for their failure to invest in the development of the child in their childhood years. Like the health sector that struggled to cure diseases without first investing on prevention, the education sector characterized by high rate of school dropout, examination failure, under achievement and examination malpractice, and failure to first invest in the care and development of the child in their formative years. UNICEF (1998) observed that the survival, growth and development of children are treated as interdependent objectives achievable through a broad range of services, health, nutrition, education, safe environment and poverty eradication.

For these and many more, the past few decades have emphasized on the importance of childhood education for overall development of the child. In support of the above view, Obama (2006) noted that our task is to identify those reforms that have greater impact on children's' overall development and fund them adequately. Among others, he emphasized on good childhood education. In line with these, Education for All (EFA) was launched with fanfare in 1993 at Education summit of nine high-populated countries in New Delhi, India otherwise called the E-9 countries.

In Nigeria circumstances, Maduewesi (2005) opined that guidance for establishing childhood centers have been developed and modules for training childhood educators have been developed. In this direction, United Nations Educational Scientific and cultural Organization (UNESCO)(2005) reported that between 1999 and 2009, the gross enrolment rate in pre-primary education increased. During the same period, the net enrolment rate in primary education improved from 84% to 89% as the number of out-of primary school children within the E-9 countries was reduced from almost 50 million to less than 30 million between 1999-2009. Youth and adult literacy grew better from 85% to 89% and 76% to 79% respectively. The gender parity indicates (the rate of girls to boys in school) ameliorated from 0.92 to 0.97 at the primary level and 0.96 to 0.97 at the secondary level. Adult literacy rates are also above 90% in Brazil, China, Indonesia and Mexico. Despite all these achievements, this situation can rarely be seen in Nigerian scenario. For instance, Nigeria is still bedeviled with a lot of problems in child hood education. Some of the problems are:

Lack of Qualified Teachers: National Research Council (NRC, 2000), observed that specialized training, including postsecondary education has low turnover. Decent salaries are key predictors of the program quality and positive child outcomes. They went further by saying that high quality teachers make the difference. For example, in 2008, Kwara state tested 19, 125 teachers in primary four Mathematics... Only seven (7) teachers attended the minimum benchmark for the test in Mathematics. Only one of 2,628 teachers with degree passed the test, 10 graduates scored zero. The literacy assessment recorded only 1.2 percent pass. (NERDC& NCCE 2004). They went further by saying that the most ridiculous of all was the recent reported dismissal of three graduates of the Enugu state University of Science and Technology from National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) for falling below the standard expected of graduates. The University is reported to have declared an academic emergency.

In support of the above view, Kola (2014) noted with dismay on the amount spent on the child education, which he described as being low stressing that the teachers to teach the children were not enough and not well motivated. Only few have the right type of skill to secure the job.

Poor Quality of our products: The quality of what the schools shun out yearly are very poor. In support of the above, Nwaura(2010)observed that the following are the percentage of students who obtained 5 credits including English and Mathematics in the May/June WAEC over the last 5 years: 23% (2008), 26% (2009), 31% in 2011 and 39% in 2012. NECO, failure rate was 98% in 2008, 88% in 2010, 92% in 2011 and 68% in 2012. Percentage of students

who scored 200 and above (out of 400 total) in JAMB in the last 4 years ranged between 36% (2010) and 46% (2009) overall average 42%. In 2012, only 3 of 150,393 candidates scored 250 and above. The single biggest problem in Nigeria Universities is the abysmal quality of the intake; the vast majority of the students barely know their grammar (Haruna, 2012) These problems are traceable to poor background in early childhood education.

In line with these problems, Mohammed, Onwuka&Damilola (2015) opined that former British prime minister of United Nations Brown has identified population expansion and low pace of expansion of educational failures as the main reason Nigeria has not made much progress in meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the education sector. He argued further, that Nigerian situation should best be captured by a school built for 2,000 pupils but has to cater for over 3,000 pupils due to population explosion. The population rise according to him is putting extra pressure on educational facilities.

Interference between Nigerian Childhood Education and Societal Problems.

The researchers have earlier observed that childhood is symbolized as a period that is sensitive to growth. Social values as well as a cognitive development which is associated with success in societies are formed during this period. A number of documented studies have shown that there is positive correlation between early childhood and later life success. For example, Mexico succeeded in enrolling 76% of its populace between age three-six into good early childhood education programme which now proves to be the best among the E-9 countries (Levine 2005).

In recognition of the above, Ethiopia identified her shortfall of education for children .The nation observed that adequate education could change the nation for better. In response, the Ethiopian Ministry of Education merged with various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to improve education for kindergarten through the secondary level (save the child website)

Good early childhood education will help to address children deprived of the basic human rights. These children when well trained will become useful to self and the society. Adequate early childhood education will change the nation for better- high income per head, high standard of living, improvement in health and nutrition, general economic well being of the citizenry and reduction of poverty rate. In support of the above view Nwaura (2010) noted that good early childhood education will help children to have less remedial programme and they are less susceptible to training and criminal tendencies.

In a situation where education foundation is weak, it will create many societal problems - rape, armed robbery, cultism, ritual killings, kidnapping and abduction. Generally, the education sector and technological advancement will be affected. All these can clearly be seen in the Nigerian situation. Good early childhood education encourages creativity and critical reasoning and above all balanced personality development. An English philosopher Whitehead noted that, Creativity is highly treasured in schools, while bright children learn whatever we teach, a highly creative children go beyond our teaching and make discoveries on their own (Segal, Bardige, works & Leinfelder 2006). No wonder the revised Blooms taxonomy of educational objectives creativity is being re-emphasized at the last stage. (Anderson, Krathwohl, Airosian, Mayers Pint rich, Rath & Withrock 2000).

In the past few decade research studies show that early childhood education is critical in preparing a child for a balanced personality development for later life. This early preparation diminishes the risk of social-emotional problems, mental and health problems, maladjustments, thus increasing their self sufficiency as adults in the wider society. The number of theories of learning and psychology are in agreement to these variables.

A number of, organizations such as; National Association of Education of Young Children (NAEYC), (OMEP) commonly called World Organization for Early Childhood Education are rooted in the quest for a good early childhood education and care for children during crucial years. (Maduwesi, 2005). Similarly, National Institute of Literacy (NIL, 2001), Texas Reading initiative (TRI, 2002), National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000), National Early Learners Panel (NELP, 2000), Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are all in agreement to these variables that support the critical importance of early childhood education.

In the practical sense, man's present level of civilization is a product of his ability to develop his potentials through tapping the natural resources for development of self. The role of meaningful learning in early childhood stage as relevant formular cannot be over-emphasized.

In Nigeria circumstances, the child is faced with a number of problems. In terms of the nursery education, it is the privileged few that have access to nursery education. Majority from low income class may be using theirs as playground until their parents are back. In the words of Sigmund Freud, all these unsatisfied early childhood experiences of the child will go and stay on his unconscious mind and will continue to influence his behavior later in life. These will lead to maladjustment and misbehaviour in him later in life in an attempt to fight the society that neglected him. This will manifest itself in the form of behaviours like; armed

robbery, cheating, dishonesty, kidnapping, rape, abduction, child trafficking and prostitution. In reaction to this, United Nations (UN,1989) in Raul &Melgosa (2005), called for children as holders of right to care. The extent of its implementation is still in the waiting game.

Researchers demonstrated that education is the key that unlocks the door to modernization. In this case, early childhood education holds the key. As a nation, Nigeria is passing through many problems, childhood education that involves families and communities in design and implementation should be developed to address the issues. If we invest now in early childhood education, we enjoy long-term savings, more vibrant nation and healthy achieving children. If we failed to make the investment now, the country will pay the price in increased delinquency, greater educational failures, lowered productivity, less economic competitiveness and fewer matured adult prepared to be effective, loving parents to the next generation of children.

Recommendations

In other to address some of the problems in the early years of the child's life, policies should be made, strategies developed resources mobilized;

- i. Train early childhood educators differently for lower and upper levels.
- ii. by placing highly qualified teachers in the lower levels of education.
- iii. Devise teacher training curricular to include guidance on young children's learning needs, language and bilingual development.
- iv. To make environment of the classroom conducive and that can ensure meaningful learning that increases productivity.
- v. There is need to have minimum Essentials for Nursery Education (MENE) without standards for running nursery schools.
- vi. To offer programmes that will prevent child abuse and promote healthy social development for the child.
- vii. A programme called "Week of the Young Child" This week will be used to bring to the notice of everybody the importance of the child and early childhood education and development. The child will also feel that he is cared for. Patty Smith Hill did all these in Washington D.C in 1920s when there was proliferation of nursery schools in Washington D.C. This led to the establishment of National Association of Education of Young Children (NAEYC). In Nigeria circumstances, who will "bell the cat? This is a "Million Dollar Question"

- viii. To ensure a pedagogical approach that moves from teacher- centered to child-centered approach that will be inclusive enough for all levels of children..

Conclusion

The researchers have shown a considerable evidence to show that good early childhood education is the basis for a balanced personality development and the panacea to solve our societal problems. Learning to read and write is the most critical input to education for all and ultimately for lifelong learning. Mastery of these skills in the early years of life should be the most urgent priority for educational planning and development. Teacher education, teaching and learning materials development curriculum and supervision geared towards enhancing learning in the early years should be the subject of educational research at both school, national and international levels.

In reality, these early years are the prime sources of the deficiencies in the later lives of the children. This research work has outlined and reviewed the impact of early childhood education and life success; the situation now and the characteristics of high quality early childhood education. The issue of pedagogy, teacher qualification and methodology, should be treated as critical issue of policy in order to facilitate and mobilize necessary strategies for change. This implies that all stake holders in education should ensure quality early childhood education, otherwise we will remain at a loss in attempt to solve our education and other societal problems.

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