

## ROLE OF THE FAMILY IN CHILDHOOD AND CARE EDUCATION AS AN INTEGRAL ASPECT OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

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### Abstract

*Education continues to present opportunities to increase the value chain of any nation. Early Childhood and Care education is the most important aspect of a nation's building and development. It is important to note that early childhood care is quite very necessary in every child. The better a child is cared in this stage of life; the more opportunity paves way for him/her in life, both in education and life as adult in the society. Considering the foregoing, therefore, the paper discusses the important work of family in the upbringing of a child especially in childhood stage, it highlighted the function of education at that stage and challenges that accompany early childhood education. School is the larger family in which the child sees himself or herself. The life in the family is a precursor to school life. Therefore, the success of a child in his education depends largely on the positive or negative influence the child had in the family. Furthermore, the mélange of these institutions in a positive way will give the child a balance in his/her academic pursuit as an adult.*

**Keywords:** Family, Childhood Education, Challenges, Quality Caregiver, Competent Teachers.

### Introduction

In the first years of life, children establish the cognitive, emotional and social foundations upon which they can build their futures. Early childhood is the most significant developmental period of life. A baby who is visually stimulated, continuously engaged in interactive activities, hugged, cooed to and comforted is more likely to fully develop cognitive, language, emotional and social skills, all of which are vital for success in school, in the community and subsequently in life (UNICEF, 2012). According to a renowned German-born American Psychologist Erik Erikson, Social, emotional development begins with the first Psychosocial Stages, Trust vs. Mistrust. An infant develops trust when he experiences his needs being met in a consistent, nurturing relationship with a primary caregiver. In a secure relationship, an infant can form attachments with the help of family relationship. The family

and school are the two institutions that are vital to the growth and sustenance of modern society. The family produces the individuals that constitute the society. The school integrates these individuals into the society. It is important for society that these two institutions work harmoniously in its service (Odimegwu, 2000). When these two join harmoniously to form a child the society is improved. There can never be a nation without individuals

### **FAMILY AS A CRADLE STAGE OF EDUCATION**

The family is the cradle stage of life the smallest unit of the society. (Okeke in Odimegwu, 2000) maintains that the family is the first natural society of man. It is also the font of new human life. It is one of the oldest and universal institutions of humankind. The term ‘family’ refers primarily to a household or home, a group of people who have blood relation with each other and who are bound by kinship ties and feelings (Odimegwu 2000). The family is cemented by relationship that springs up from marriage, parenthood and home. It is often described as a household or domestic family because it forms a home where members find food and develop multi-stranded bonds of affection between one another. In it children begin to acquire the values, symbols and skills of their culture. Some schools of thought maintain that early childhood and care education has been there since human existence. In the African Tradition, according to Abdullahi (2003) as quoted in Okewole et al, (2015) maintain that early childhood education (e.c.e) was the responsibility of the immediate family with the active involvement of the extended family members. Such early childhood education involved washing of face in the morning, cleaning of the teeth and greeting of the elders, proper meal habits, playing and resting, the learning of moral codes, physical fitness, norms and customs in the society were essentially supervised by the elders in the immediate environment (Okewole et al, 2015). Every family is a product of culture of the society in which she finds herself. It is the cradle of society. Thus all known human societies are organized on the basis of the family. In this, Pope Francis (2016) posits that “Families are not a problem; they are first and foremost an opportunity.”

### **EARLY CHILDHOOD AND CARE EDUCATION**

Early childhood and care Education is the education offered to children who have not yet reached the statutory age of beginning primary school. It is a semi-formal education arrangement, usually outside home whereby 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 (Sooter, 2013). FRN (2004) refers to early childhood care and 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.

Nelson Mandela in one of his speeches maintains that “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world; Education is a road out of poverty”. According to Association for Childhood Education International, a quality education provides an opportunity for a sustainable future. Education opens doors to higher learning, dignified employment, and social mobility. Education starts from the cradle, (UNESCO, 2011). Experts say catching children young with quality education remains a veritable tool to lifelong development. In credence to this assertion, Taiwo (1980) writes “Of special significance are childhood and adolescence, a most impressionable period of life”. The future of a nation's socio-economic and political wellbeing lies with the quality of children's education because

they are the future leaders. Children are the foundation of sustainable development. The early years of life are crucial not only for individual health and physical development, but also for cognitive and social-emotional development. Events in the first few years of life are formative and play a vital role in building human capital, breaking the cycle of poverty, promoting economic productivity, and eliminating social disparities and inequities (Association for Childhood Education International).

As education in the broadest sense covers the whole of life, from the cradle to the grave, the formal education system exercise a potent influence in its results on the lives of all who pass through it (Taiwo, 1980). If they have a shaky foundation when it comes to education, it will surely affect their lives when they are adults and in turn affect the nation. Early childhood education is very important and is the organized practice of educating those who are in early childhood, one of the most vulnerable stages in life (Global Movement for Children All African). According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), it spans the human life from birth to age eight. The early years, from birth to five years of age, are an important time in any child's life. Children go through a huge variety of learning stages during this time, making great steps, and what they learn at a young age offers an important foundation for their learning in later life. The learning process starts from home and then moved to the school and its responsibility lies upon the parents who are at home and the teachers who teach them in school (Global Movement for Children, 2011). Studies in developing countries show that early childhood development (ECD) programmes lead to higher levels of primary school enrolment and educational performance, which in turn positively affect employment opportunities later in life. On the contrary, children who start school late and lack the necessary skills to be able to learn constructively are more likely to fall behind or drop out completely, often perpetuating a cycle of poverty (Sooter, 2013).

### **TRACING THE ORIGIN OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN NIGERIA**

The history of childhood education in Nigeria posits that in Nigeria, organized education of the child below primary school age did not receive official recognition until very recently receive the attention it deserved (Sooter 2013). The concept of infant schools was introduced in Nigeria by the missionaries in the early 20th century when such schools were set up in the Western and Eastern regions of Nigeria. Early Childhood education in the form of nursery school or pre- primary education as we know it today in Nigeria is largely a post-colonial development. The semblances of it during the colonial era were the Kindergarten and infant classes, which consisted of groups of children considered not yet ready for primary education. As grouping for instruction in schools was not age-based during that period, some children aged six or even more, could be found in some of the infant classes (Tor-Anyiin 2008). With the phasing out of infant classes, some parents began to feel the need for nursery schools. During that period, (pre-independence) all efforts for provision of early childhood education were confined to the voluntary sector and received little or no support from the government (Tor- Anyiin in Sooter, 2013). It was for the first time in 1977 with the introduction of National Policy on Education by the then military government of Nigeria that the importance and need for early childhood education was given official recognition and linked with the child's educational performance in primary school. Gradually, early childhood institution stayed, and by 1985, Nigeria had about 4200 early childhood educational institutions while by 1992 the number increased to about 8,300 (Federal Government of Nigeria/UNICEF 1993). Nowadays, early childhood educational institutions are located in various places and

buildings in campuses of universities and Colleges, premises of some industries and business organizations, church premises, residential buildings with unprecedented expansion owing to the high demand for early childhood care and education by parents (Ejeh, 2006). This supposes that the early childhood care and education is not given the required attention

### **CHALLENGES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

Pre-school age corresponds to a critical period of rapid physical, cognitive and psychosocial development of the child. The quality and intensity of care, nutrition and stimulation a child receives during this period determines to a large extent the level of physical and cognitive development a child can attain. Though appreciable progress has been made in early childhood care and education in the past four years due to government policy requiring every public school to have a pre-primary school linkage, the proportion of children enrolled in pre-primary Early Childhood Care Centres still remains low at approximately 2.3 million children (UNICEF, 2019). This represents about 21 per cent of the population of children in this age group.

UNICEF's first-ever global report dedicated to early childhood education highlights a lack of investment in pre-primary by the majority of governments worldwide. The government of Nigeria is not excluded in this report. For instance, caregivers of these centers are generally unqualified and there are no provisions for their training. About 85 per cent do not possess basic qualifications and more than half have no formal education. Another major issue in Nigeria's early childhood care and development is the poor state of the infrastructures, equipments, facilities and learning resources, predicaments like lack of quality caregiver, competent teachers, inadequate teaching materials and lack of appropriate implementation of Curriculum of early childhood education system are challenges ravaging early childhood and care education. Essential learning resources are lacking in most facilities while the national curriculum is not yet widely operational. This information is according to Unicef/Nigeria (Early childhood care and Education).

The challenges of early childhood education are enormous, and have to be addressed with utmost carefulness. It is important to mention at this point that childhood education system especially when planning reforms towards transformation can become overwhelmed with minor issues and agenda that are actually symptoms of deeper issues. According to Onyia (2013) Education thinkers are advised to stay focused on selecting core educational-improvement goals and staying with them relentlessly. In addition they should focus on capacity building consisting of strategies that systematically develop the skills resources, and motivation of individuals and groups to put in the effort to get results, as well as to sustain that improvement effort. In order to sustain the improvement effort the government should take it as their responsibility to provide all the necessary instructional media like, Caregiver, Competent teachers, Adequate teaching materials and appropriate monitoring the implementation of Curriculum of early childhood education.

### **Qualitative Caregiver**

In addition to the general quality of care for infants and toddlers, discrete practices may influence the development of infants and toddlers. One practice that is currently attracting substantial interest is the provision of continuity of caregivers for young children. Continuity of caregivers means that infants and toddlers remain with the same teacher(s) during a

significant part, if not all, of their first years in a program (Cryer et al., 2003). For children, school is not always a positive experience. Some endure difficult conditions, ranging from the phobia of leaving the comfort of the family (Mother's attachment), to a larger environment the school and the fear of meeting other children and teachers or caregivers (Eric, 2003). It is not easy for children to leave the family that period, therefore, teachers who take care of the children or caregiver should be trained in that specialty.

### **Competent Teachers**

The quality of the teachers determines the strength of any educational system and the value of the learners (Okoro, 2004). Hence the place of a teacher in the training of the learner can never be over emphasized. Therefore, training and education of infant and toddler caregivers is one important factor associated with the quality of child care they provide. In response to research showing that high-quality care supports positive development in young children, policymakers have established training and education requirements for licensed providers and launched numerous initiatives to train and educate caregivers for better handling of our youngest children (Kreader et al., 2005). Teaching in this aspect (Caregiver) is a professional job that has its art and skill of service, therefore, care should be taking to avoid half-baked literates to handle the work. Albeit, there are informal ways of teaching adopted in life but the work of a caregiver should be rendered professionally. Caregivers themselves believe training and education to be important, including relative and unregulated family child care providers, many of whom express interest in accessing training although not required by regulation to do so (Kreader et al., 2005). 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 capable are good to retain such teachers (Sooter, 2013).

### **Adequate Teaching Materials**

In teaching the toddler/children less than three years of age teaching materials are very much important because of how they learn. The play-way method of teaching which develops the cognitive, affective and psychomotor aspects of child's educational demands those instructional media for teaching must be available. This period, the reasoning ability both the intelligence Quotient (IQ), Emotional Quotient (EQ) Social Quotient (SQ) and Adversity Quotient (AQ) of children have not developed. Therefore teaching materials like toys and television and other instructional aides are very much important for a quality teaching and care giving. At this stage children don't need hard educational task rather their emotional, social and adversity quotients should be developed through programme of activity and these need innovative instructional media. These instructional media should be provided because inadequate of them puts unnecessary pressure on both the teacher and the learner at this stage.

### **Appropriate monitoring of Curriculum Implementation**

According to UNESCO (2007), the curriculum for Early Childhood Education in Nigeria was reviewed and revised in 2003/2004 using an integrated bottom up approach, targeting children age 0-5 years. This revised curriculum has been approved for use by the government, and a training manual to facilitate use of the curriculum; is in process of development. The

training manual is expected to promote the integrated approach and cover all sectoral interventions- health, nutrition, water and environmental sanitation, psycho-social care, early learning and creating a conducive environment for them to service, live, learn and reach their full potentials (Sooter, 2013). However, the proprietors of these schools employ unqualified teacher who cannot interpret as well as carryout the curricula/syllables the way it should be because their concern is not education but the profit therein. Therefore, government should monitor the implementation of early childhood and care curriculum

## CONCLUSION

Family education and pre-primary education are synergic educational systems that form and inform children in a better way to face the society as well as adaptation. It is important to note that the work of family in the life of the children can never be over emphasized. Family is a mini society where the parents exercise the executive, legislative and judiciary power in the training of their offspring. The family prepares children with norms and custom of the land in an informal and non-formal education. The ethics and discipline imbibed in the family serves as a precursor to the formal education which equips children for life in the society at large. It is the work of education then to harness and unravel the nature's potentialities imbued in the children which they rely and make use of when they become adults. Therefore, by and large, it is the responsibility of the government to work simultaneously with these agents of socialization in the upbringing and training of her citizenry. Government should endeavour not to leave the task and responsibility of such to individual families and institutions. In order to achieve the objective of Universal Basic Education (UBE), which states education for all, government must come into the responsibility of training children in their childhood stage. Some families due to poverty prefer menial jobs to education for their children to make ends meet. Some are put into child labour in other to train others in the family. It is then the work of the government to subsidize the cost of education so that education should be for all in that level of academic.

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