

EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Early Childhood care development and education is a holistic field of study geared towards ensuring sustainable national development. For a child to live to survive, cope, adapt and contribute to sustainable national development requires a viable Early Childhood Care Development and Education. Sustainable development is a long term and enduring road maps associated with well-groomed individual socially, morally, economically, scientifically and technologically across human endeavours. This paper presents a conceptual framework to Early Childhood Care Development and Education and its underlining cardinal objectives as codified in National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Care Development and Education in Nigeria. It examined the impacts and prospects bearing in mind its implications on sustainable national development. In a bid to expand the coast of the nation in this hectic – global periods depends largely on the collective and sacrificial efforts of the professional caregivers, surrogate mother and guardian whose keen interest ventured on child education.

Keywords: ECCDE, sustainable, national development, child, caregivers

Introduction

The issue of sustainability has become imperative in Nigeria and beyond in recent times and for the economy to be sustained requires rebranding of human development with positive attitudes, skills and values, psycho-social and emotional traits for successful transition of the child from home to school thereby preparing them for a more worthwhile, participatory and effective leaders of tomorrow. For this assumption to be realistic and achievable with time bound requires a well-planned early childhood care development and education programme under a professional caregivers with mastery of child's caring and nurturing.

Early childhood care and development programs have continued to attract more attention in recent time, owing to policy inclusiveness geared towards integrat-

ing every Nigerian child irrespective of their physical or cultural inclination into the four-walls of formal schooling in the on-going UBE scheme. Therefore, the Federal Republic of Nigeria: National Policy on Education sees early childhood/pre-primary education as the education given in an educational institution to children prior to their entering the primary school. It includes the crèche, the nursery and the kindergarten. As such, each early childhood care development and education (ECCDE) is the care - protection, stimulation and learning promoted in children from age 0-4 years in a crèche or nursery schools (NPE, 2013).

The sustainability of any society depends on the behaviour dispositions that are in turn dependent on educational values. Sustainable education must therefore begin in early childhood, as the values, attitude, behaviour and skills acquired during the period may have long-lasting impact on later life. Sustainable learning on the other hand can be understood from the point of developing attitudes necessary for current and future adaptability. Thus, education for sustainable development starts with the challenges related to the general societal environmental situation and inherent development opportunities (Rohweder, 2007 in Kadiri 2013). That is why for the society to continue to function well, it depends on mental and behavioural sustainability. When children are taught to behave well, promote and practice peaceful resolution among themselves that means they will grow up to respect peaceful coexistence which will in turn allow meaningful development to occur. UNESCO, (2006) in Kadiri posits that the framework for the implementation scheme for the UN decade on sustainable development stated that the goal of the decade is to integrate the principles, values and practices inherent in sustainable development in to all aspect of learning to encourage changes in behaviour that allow for a more sustainable and just society for all (Kadiri, 2013).

Early childhood care and education is a force for human dignity that carries lifelong benefits. It also a powerful motor for the sustainable development of societies over the longer term. No society can afford to leave any child behind. Early childhood care and education (ECCE) is a most powerful force for mitigating household deprivation and preparing children for school. International human rights instruments offer a solid framework for advancing the right to ECCE. He noted that early childhood care development centre can be used as vehicles for fostering integration and harmony among ethnically and religious diverse groups as children quickly learn to accommodate one another without prejudice to these factors as well as others like physical challenges (Gbadura, 2013).

Sustainable development could be described as the art of supporting, maintaining or keeping the progress or advancement being achieved in educational pursuit for meaningful goals. Thus the education of the young children (ECE) should be the kind of education that would sustain a meaningful development in both the children and their family and for nation building. Sustainable development could be viewed from various angles. Sustainable development as that which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs. To the layman, sustainable development means policies, structures and behaviours that are instituted and are also maintained over a period of time. Sustainability could be described as the act of supporting or bearing the weight of some responsibility for a long period of time. Sustainability is to encourage, support or keep a sound effort or project while development on the other hand, means the stage of advancing in different areas of endeavour e.g. in business, education and other profession (Oxford Dictionary, 2003 in Daniel, 2013). Thus for sustainability and development to be a reality then, there is the need for the relevant authorities to provide and sustain early childhood education by transforming it into an effective and

efficient school system so as to ensure that accountability is maintained and adhered to (Daniel, 2013).

According to Abdulwahab (2013), ECCDE is a lifelong education that revolves round the growth-survival of the child in line with their developmental milestone. It begins from the moment the child is conceived, delivered, brought home from the hospital and continues on when the child starts to attend play groups, kindergartens and nursery. Abdulwahab described early childhood education in form of a “black box of an aero plane, car engine of a car” that produces specific functions. It is similar to a factory or a laboratory where certain experimental tests are carried out; a foundation that upholds a structure, a wheel that fixed up tires, shock absorbers of a car and if early childhood care development and education is put in place at the early years, it would help to ameliorate a certain degree of defective problems that might obstruct child growth and development, and this has a long lasting effect on sustainable national development per excellence.

In another related development Nasir (2007) contended that, in developing countries, early children care tends to be associated with care services like nutrition, health and hygiene provided to young children. While in the developed world, early childhood care tends to be associated with social services provided for working mothers to cater for their children while they are at work.

Policy Objectives of Early Childhood Care Development and Education in Nigeria

The Federal Republic of Nigeria: National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Development in Nigeria (2007: 1-5) puts forward that, research evidence abound from many fields of study that the care and support received by child in terms of good health, nutrition and psycho-social care and protection are crucial in the formation and development of intelligence, personality and social behaviour. Since Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) aims to integrate interventions from the various sectors, the objectives of the policy derive from the national policies on education, food and nutrition, health and the child right acts, are as follows:

- a. Provide care and support that will ensure the right of the child to: “Good nutrition and health”, Health and safe environment”, “Psycho-social stimulation”, and Protection and participation”.
- b. Inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys etc.
- c. Provide adequate care and supervision for the children whose parents/guardians are at work (on the farms, in the markets, offices, industry, etc.
- d. Effect a smooth transition of the child from the home to the school.
- e. Prepare the child to adapt successfully, when his or her current context changes.
- f. Develop a healthy, well-Nourished adequately stimulated child able to achieve its fullest potentials.
- g. Contribute to reduction of high infant and U-5 mortality rate.
- h. Raise awareness of HIV/AIDs and promote protective behavior among children including OVCS.
- i. Inculcate acceptable social and culturally appreciate Norms, values and beliefs.
- j. Raise awareness on IECD policy in all communities by 2015.
- k. Build capacity of all stakeholders for IECD policy implementation.

- l. Support existing legislations to reduce all forms of abuse and denial of children rights.
- m. Establish and expand mechanisms for collaboration and coordination of IECD programme.
- n. Provide guidelines and standards to ensure quality service delivery.
- o. Establish a valid and reliable monitoring and evaluation system for all aspects of the IECS policy.
- p. Establish reliable management information system on IECD to facilitate research.
- q. Build strategic partnerships with government at all levels, the private sectors, civil society organization/NGOs, Development Partners and communities to mobilize resources for IECD implementation.
- r. Promote community participation, ownership and sustainability.
- s. Integration of Quranic system into IECCD.

Impact of Early Childhood Care Development and Education on Nigerian Children

The children of today need to be prepared for the vastly complex and rapidly changing world of tomorrow. The role of ECCDE as a responsive partner in child's survival does not restrict only to school education of a child but rather extended for the promotion of useful education which would in turn prepare the child to live to survive, grow, adapt and conform to globalize world, early childhood care development and education required. Hence, the pre-school education is one of immense significance as identified by Chijoke (nd: 94:95).

- a. A source of happiness, security and care for young children.
- b. Source of a good development of physical growth that makes pre-scholars active.
- c. Source of development of good language and social habits.
- d. Source of development of science and technological knowledge through special toys and gadgets which many parents may not afford.
- e. Source of good medical services.
- f. Forum for development of moral education and good emotional habits.
- g. Source of cognitive development in terms of their listening, speaking, reading, writing arithmetic skills through the power of play.

According to Nasir (2007), over time two factors have made it necessary for societies to put in place a systematic process for the education, care and upbringing of children before they reach the school age. He stated these two factors as: Women who traditionally are in charge of providing early care education, have been entering paid employment in large numbers in almost every county. The second reason is the increasing number of children, particularly from poor families, who come to school without the basic experiences and nutritional status needed for success in the formal school. This has a significant impact on the development of children generally but disadvantaged children in particular.

Myers and Lander 1989, UNESCO 2005 in Nasir (2007) highlighted the following benefits of ECCD on the learner:

- i. ECCD programme can have positive effects on the probability of children enrolling in school, help them make significant progress and improve their performances in the early year of primary school.

- ii. ECCD programme can achieve what is stated above because they are generally associated with chances of early enrolment in school programme, enhanced health and nutritional conditions and improved cognitive skills which generally improve the readiness of the child for the school.
- iii. ECCD programme also enhance the acquisition of social skills like interaction, co-operation, and tolerance by the child.
- iv. Poor children and other disadvantaged children generally benefit more from the multifaceted and integrated interventions that ECCD programme contains.
- v. ECCD enhances the chances of success in children who would otherwise have found it difficult to cope with the demands of the primary school because of their low level of preparedness.

Aparajita & Rita (2002) described ECCD as a lifetime of continuous learning and experiencing from birth to old age programme. They provide children a good start in life such as:

- a. Fosters in children the natural need for discovery and curiosity; and their desire to learn form the basis of lifelong learning; such interest is as asset that stays with them for the rest of their life and help to do better in later life.
- b. Respects and builds the parent to play the central role in child development.
- c. Supports parents in their skills as parenting, training on literacy, child development, health and nutrition, stimulate and create a good developmental environment for children.
- d. ECCD programme go much beyond school readiness, by preparing children for life and encouraging them to be open to learn and for life's opportunities. It also increases the children's self-confidence and other learning potential, improved social skills, more creative ways of thinking and problem solving.
- e. Involves mostly mothers in the caring process thus builds confidence and encourages parenting skills and become involved in the children's learning and development.
- f. Can reduce inequality in society by giving children from disadvantaged backgrounds a chance in life and in school.
- g. Concerned with the holistic development of children. ECCD involved many people including family, and community members, and policy makers. It forms an important component of integrated development work. If children grown up from an early age in a stimulating environment, they will experience the feeling of confidence and self-respect that comes from being able to act as an independent human being.
- h. Early stimulation and educational enrichment can promote creativity in young children. Early educational intervention providing stimulation and instruction during the pre-school years would make a difference in the children's preschool experiences.
- i. The more experiences/exposures we give the child at this age, richer is the divided. At No other stage is he able to benefit as much from an enriching environment as he can than at the pre-school stage.
- j. Pre-school year is the period of socialization. It affords the child opportunity of playing with other children and thus learns to share, wait for his turn and co-operate with others.

Implications of Basic Education on Sustainable National Development

The implications of basic education on national development cannot be over emphasized bearing in mind that education is the greatest investment that a nation can give to its people. It is an instrument par-excellence in the realization of viable national development. The UBEP (2002) described UBE as an educational programme which was launched and executed by the government and people of Nigeria to eradicate illiteracy, ignorance and poverty as well as stimulate and accelerate national development, political consciousness and national integration. It is an expression of the desire of government to entrench viable participatory democracy and enhances national socio-economic development as a consequence of a free and compulsory regime of basic education.

Ahmed and Muhammad (2012) asserted Basic Literacy as the foundation of all skills and requisite for economic development. That, it is helpful in the development of human relation, the economy, the potential and social structure of nations. Basic education is useful at the individual level in inculcating humanistic etiquettes and manners. Human benefits are intrinsically valuable and may also be instrumental in realizing other benefits of literacy; improved health, increased political participation and so on. He further reiterated that, basic literacy can contribute to broader social – economic processes of empowerment provided they take place in a supportive environment. An educated and skilled workforce is one of the pillars of the knowledge – based economy. Increasingly, comparative advantages among nations come less from natural resources or cheap labour and more from technical innovations and competitive use of knowledge. Education is one of the most powerful instruments for reducing poverty and inequality and for laying the basis for sustained economic growth.

Basic literacy is one of the most powerful instruments societies have for reducing deprivation and vulnerability. It helps lift earnings potential and expands labour mobility. A more educated society may translate into higher rates of innovation, higher overall productivity through firm's ability to introduce new technology. Basic education has an important relation with the culture. This is helpful in bringing the cultural change and preservation of the present cultural Norms and value. It is a tool for creating the political awareness among the masses. It helps them to understand the nature of government in their country and ways for effective communication with it for the solution of their problems. It possesses the empowering potential that can be translated into the increased political awareness and participation which in turn contributes to the quality of public policies and democracy (Abdulwahab & Alozie, 2015).

Early childhood care development and education (ECCDE) provision is becoming a growing priority, and has received increased policy attention, in many countries during the past years. Equitable access to quality early childhood education is increasingly viewed by policy makers as a way of strengthening the foundations of lifelong learning for all children and supporting the educational and social needs of families. It should not be forgotten that early childhood education is, first and foremost, for children. Education International, strongly believes that early childhood education is of great value to all children and should be equally available and accessible to all. Strengthening knowledge on the various approaches and practices on ECE adopted in different countries can contribute towards the improvement of policy on early childhood education through the identification of successes and challenges encountered in different contexts (OECD 2006 in Esu & Jordan 2017).

Early childhood education has enormous individual, social and economic benefits which strategized and strengthened sustainable national growth and development. For example, early childhood programs complement the roles of parents and other cares in raising children during the early years. The early childhood years set the foundation for life, ensuring that children have positive experiences and that their needs for health, stimulation and support are met, and that they learn to interact with their surroundings. Furthermore, early childhood education programs result in easier transition to primary school, better completion rates, reduced poverty and social equality (UNESCO, 2007 in Esu & Jordan 2017).

Children from poor families, immigrant children and children from other vulnerable groups may particularly benefit from ECCDE's equalizing factor before compulsory schooling. For example, access to ECCDE can help immigrant children develop and learn the local language. The OECD (2006 in Esu & Jordan 2017) further argues that early childhood education enables women to participate in the labour market, thereby contributing to economic growth. They posit: "Because economic prosperity depends on maintain a high employment population ration, the wish to bring more women into the labour market has been a key driver of government interest in expanding ECCDE services (Esu & Jordan, 2017)

The children of today need to be prepared for the vastly complex and rapidly changing world of tomorrow. This calls for an integrated and meaningful educational system. Our nation's future, its prosperity or poverty, strength or weakness depends on the care with which we build up the character, and habits of our children ...The pre-school years of the child is the period of maximum learning and intellectual development and hence gross potential educational significance'. The Indian Association for Pre-school Children Education (1972 in Aparajita & Choudhury (2002) reiterated the significance of Pre-school Education to national growth and development as:

1. The pre-school age is the most impressionable age in one's life. Whatever is learnt at this age gets so deeply embedded in a child that it becomes difficult to change later on. It is, therefore, the duty of the adults to provide rich experiences to the child and help him develop good habits, proper attitudes and a questioning mind.
2. The rate of growth and development during pre-school age is so rapid that the child is able to take in almost anything if it is given to him in a form in which he can understand it. The more experiences / exposures we give the child at this age, richer is the dividend. At No other stage is he able to benefit as much from an enriching environment as he can than at the pre-school stage.
3. Due to economic pressure that pervaded the country and the world in general, spread of women's education and social duties, many mothers are way from the home during the daytime for career and may be to supplement the family income. Also as a result of urbanization, joint mothers to leave their children at home and go to out to work. So, establishment of pre-school is also a social necessity these days, where young children can be looked after properly.
4. The tremendous wastage and stagnation that are seen in grade one and two in schools can be reduced and avoided if the children who join these classes are prepared in advance for formal schooling. A child who has had pre-school experience before joining the primary school adjust himself easily and successfully in primary classes because of his early preparations. It is through better emotional control, developing proper habits, before and attitudes. Such preparation in the pre-school helps him considerably in his subsequent education. So, pre-school education prepares a sound base for primary education.

5. With urbanization and industrialization, people are moving to cities, hence the day living space is becoming limited day by day. There is hardly any space for a child to move about, run and play at home. There is No scope at all for the child to investigate and experiment around, both of which are necessary for the child's optimum development. Hence, pre-schools with enough space and enriching environment for free movement and proper play equipment are perhaps the more positive to answer for children today.
6. The pre-school year is the period of socialization. Children love to play with other children, which they may not get at home. More so, during these years the peer group becomes increasingly important to them. In a pre-school, a child gets the opportunity of playing with other children and thus learns to share, wait for his turn and co-operate with others.
7. Among the educated mothers even very few mothers are able to understand the significance of early childhood years and accordingly treat their children. Since, in India majorities of mothers are uneducated, are unable guide their children properly, the home environment may Not be fully satisfying and challenging for the optimum growth and development of children. In this case, at least pre-school teachers are better trained, equipped and experienced enough in guiding and providing better environment to the young children once they are at pre-school.
8. Early stimulation and educational enrichment can promote creativity in young children. It was felt that early educational intervention providing stimulation and instruction during the pre-school years – would make a difference in the children's preschool experiences.

Nevertheless, Aparajita & Choudhury (2002) in Adekunle (2020) explained the impacts and prospect of pre-school education as an antidote to sustainable development as:

Pre-school as an extension of the family

A good pre-school provides positive experiences that most families try to give their children. It extends and supplement the parent's care in a way consistent with the values and goals of the child's family and culture. It strengthens the child's basic attachment to his parents and sustain them as major force in his personal development. Pre-schools are more successful when parents are deeply involved in them. In many communities, pre-school, as extension of the family will encounter problems of respect with the help of positive images of themselves, their parents, and their communities.

Pre-school as an Aid to Child Development

The years from 3 to 6 are an optimal period for mastering certain developmental tasks. Pre-school development care presents many opportunities to help a child to master such tasks as:

- Developing a sense of self, personal identity and sense of autonomy.
- Developing a healthy personal hygiene.
- Dealing with certain psychological impulses as with guilt, anxiety and shame.
- Learning how to get along with others.
- Mastering language and using it to produce desired results.
- Learning more about the symbols and concepts of culture (for example, numbers and letters, drawing "realistically").

- Acquiring concepts of space, time and objects.

Pre-school as Childcare Intervention

A Normal and happy family can with luck, fulfil all the conditions required for Normal development of children, but most families fail to do so for one reason or another. No institution can fully meet all the child's requirement but the families in trouble can find the help they need by taking elements from variety institution, including family care, foster care, residential care and pre-school. Even destitute family would function better if pre-school came to their permanent help. Pre-school then, can function as one component of a system of supports to the family, together with such components as social service programme, health program and programs to increase employment. The intervention function of pre-school is particularly important for three groups of children:

- I. Children who are Vulnerable:** Vulnerable children are whose development is at risk. Through special circumstances of birth physical endowment, or difficult life experiences, some children are particularly unable to measure up to developmental takes and problems. They have special needs for the continuity of care stimulation, affection, stability and thoughtfulness of a quality pre-school programme.
- II. Children who are handicapped or disabled:** Handicapped or disabled include those who suffer from such afflictions as severe mental retardation, physical handicaps, or a childhood psychosis. The care of these can be too much for even the most affluent family. Parents who must care for such child 24 hours a day, 7 days a week will be overloaded with responsibility. It will be a strain for the whole family and the child's development will suffer. Hence, in the case, pre-school can relieve such parents of a portion of their caregiving burden.
- III. Children from families who live in poverty:** Children from families in poverty are the third and by far the largest group for whom intervention maybe important. Not all poor children lack healthy and developmentally sound environment that pre-school provide. A quality pre-school program can identify the children of a community and assess their needs, can help make services available to them, and can involve the parents and help to strengthen the family.

Pre-School as Compensatory Education

Compensatory education is a special program for children with special needs, arising out of a cultural or economic difference from both surrounding community. The essential idea of compensatory education is that it should make up for some special disadvantage, providing disadvantaged children with the basic attitudes and skills which most other children acquire naturally during the pre-school years. This education has clearly defined goals and objectives chosen to prepare the child for what society will expect of him/her.

Pre-School as Developmental Care

Developmental care is also called as "quality care", which provides security and warmth, together with a range of developmental opportunities that parents normally provide when they have the necessary time and resources. These opportunities further include the chance to be with other children: individual attention to each child's strengths and needs, and activities designed to promote physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development. To ensure that these opportunities are provided pre-

schools are need to follow a carefully planned curriculum, using the services of consultants in health, education, nutrition, and other fields and encourage parents interest and involvement in all aspects of the programme.

Thus, pre-school is the place from where the children derive maximum benefits other than their homes. Hence, its physical set up, site, surroundings, plan and programs are of greater significance in achieving the goals of pre-school education. In order to effectively achieve a functional ECCDE for sustainable national development for all categories of school growing age, the researchers made the following recommendations The UBE Act should be clearly defined to stakeholders most especially to parents on key roles they can play towards enforcing child's education.

1. The learning environment should be enriched and made child – friendly for both pupils and teachers to trigger.
2. The government should employ more qualified and competent hands to undertake ECCDE programme, thus meeting the international global best practices.
3. Appropriate facilities, furniture should be adequately provided so as to meet-up with the teeming population.
4. Bette packages, incentives, fringe benefits should be expanded to teachers as obtained in other professions.
5. The budgetary cost for education should be robust so as to pave way for qualitative education for school children.
6. Periodic Capacity building for child educators in the area of Information Communication Technology, workshops, conferences, symposiums etc. will equip their professional skills
7. There should be regular monitoring and evaluation of staff development so as to arouse quality control and assurance in education leading to sets standards.
8. Vocational and entrepreneur educational skills and aptitude is a veritable tools for sustainable national development.
9. There should be sensitization, public enlightenment and campaign for full community participation.
10. Training and retraining of teachers through in-service in tune with new delivery strategy that would fast-track basic education in Nigeria and the world in general.
11. Considering the fact that education is an expensive enterprise, stakeholders (International Development Partners-IDP) should continue to usher – in their best towards ensuring lofty educational programmes.
12. The Law Enforcement Agencies and Judiciary should come together towards enforcing the implementation of the UBE Act and other related matters.

Conclusion

Education is described as the greatest investment that a nation can make for the quick development of its people. The dawn of basic education which encapsulate early childhood development and education, has indeed brought accessible and affordable, qualitative and quantitative schooling to door-steps of every Nigerian child, irrespective of social and physical condition, backgrounds and affiliations. Therefore, sustainable ECCDE is possible and realistic in the realization of EFA-SDGs when our educational institutions are equipped in line with global best practices, under the tutelage of a surrogate mother, guidance and professional caregivers whose

key interest ventured on child education. Putting and institutionalizing articulated ECCDE Programme remained the only alternative to succeed in the educational plans of the nation globally. This at the end, will usher-in considerable vulnerable children and street children back to school owing to the fact that they constitutes a threat to enviable sustainable national growth and development apparently.

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