

## **POVERTY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE, DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION: THE NIGERIA'S CASE**

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### **Abstract**

Early childhood is a unique stage in the life of an individual. Attention needs to be paid to it because of the pillar it serves for other stages. Education at this stage is crucial for a child being the foundation stage. Anything that affects the foundation of a building would affect the structure on it. In Nigeria, Early Childhood Education is ravaged by poverty. This paper is an examination of how poverty, in terms of inadequate and weak infrastructural facilities; limited access to school; inadequate and low quality teachers; lack of/inadequate policy thrust; and inadequate fund are plaguing Early Childhood Education in Nigeria. The paper suggests ways out of the poverty such as: the formulation of policies on Early Childhood Education and their implementation; adequate funding by government and private sector; provision of infrastructural facilities in the crèche, kindergarten, and nursery schools; increased enrolment in Early Childhood education; as well as orientation and re-orientation of parents/guardians towards enrolling their children for such education.

**Key Words:** Poverty, Childhood, Early Childhood, Early Childhood Care, Development, Education, Nigeria

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## **Introduction**

Five out of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) centre on health, nutrition and education of a child. Childhood stage is the foundation for inculcation of the social values, personal habits which are known to last a lifetime. Early childhood is a critical period for developing the brain to be able to handle information, express emotions normally and be proficient in language. If early years are thus not supported by or embedded in a stimulating and enriching physical and psycho-social environment, the chances of a child's brain developing to full potential is low. At this stage, a child's health, intellect, personality, character, emotional stability, among others, is moulded. A child development is thus a continuous and cumulative process so that what proceeds influences what follows. What follows logically is the crucial importance of investing in early years to ensure an enabling environment for every child, and sound foundation for life which is not only the right of every child but which will impact in the long term, the quality of human capital available to a country.

## **Conceptual Framework**

A child is a human being of between birth and puberty as well as a son/daughter of human parents. Whatever he/she experiences between birth and puberty constitutes his/her childhood. Childhood can also be described as the 'earliest years of a person's life'. Put concisely, there are three stages of childhood: early childhood (birth to about 5 years), mid childhood (6 to about 11 years) and late childhood (12 to about 18 years). Childhood education denotes the 'education in the earliest years of one's life'. It is the education which is provided for a person during his/her early years (i.e. period from birth to the period prior to becoming adolescent) and also provided for a child prior to entering primary school as well as offered to children of pre-primary school age, both formal and non formal.

According to the National Policy on Education, Early Childhood Education is provided in educational institution to children prior to their entering the primary school. (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004, p.6). Ibiam and Ugwu (2009) consider it as the education that is designed to develop the habits, attitudes and skills needed for primary education. According to Asaya, Ehigie and Igbinoghene (2006), it is provided in educational institution, to children aged 2 to 5 years plus, prior to entering primary school, in crèche, kindergarten, and nursery schools. The Crèche provides care and support services for tender children while their parents or guardians are at work or busy with other tasks while Nursery is a pre-kindergarten school for children between the ages of three and five.

### **Rationale for Early Childhood Education**

A number of factors make it imperative for early childhood education to be given priority in the educational system of any country. Studies have shown that early childhood education has significant impact on the academic performance of pupils (Barnard 2001; Miedel and Reynolds 1999). Early childhood education has been observed to impact and influence pupils' performance in spoken and written English, Mathematics, Integrated Science, Social Studies etc, as shown in the Continuous Assessment records. This study also revealed that there is a significant difference between pupils with pre-primary education and those without it in social skills. This finding is in consistent with that of Anderson (2002) who said that when children are exposed to early education, they will develop superior communication skills necessary physical ability, social unity needed in adult life and an increased cognitive and effective educational balance. Finally, the study observed that there is a significant difference between pupils who had pre-primary

education and those without in motor skills. The result indicated that the pupils with pre-primary education had greater tendency to perform better in motor skills. For example, study revealed that there is a significant difference between pupils who had pre-primary education and those without it in terms of academic performances-cognitive ability, social skills and motor skills (Osakwe, 2009). The performance of primary 4 children on the learning achievement tests also shows an established fact that children, who enter primary school with ECCE experience, are better prepared than those who do not and actually do better at school. Anderson (2002) is also of the opinion that when children are exposed to early childhood education, they develop superior communication skills, necessary physical ability and social unity needed in adult life and an increased cognitive and effective educational balance. Miedel and Reynolds (1999) are of the opinion that when families are involved in their children's early education, children experience greater success once they enter primary school and even in later life.

### **Purposes of Early Childhood Education in Nigeria's Context**

In Nigeria, pre-primary is expected to:

- effect a smooth transition from home to school;
- prepare a child for primary education;
- provide adequate care and supervision for children while their parents are at work (i.e. in farms, markets, offices etc);
- inculcate social norms; inculcate in a child, the spirit of enquiry and creativity through exploration of nature, environment, art, music and playing with toys, etc;

- develop a sense of co-operation and team spirit;
- learn good habits especially good health habits; and
- teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms, etc, through play.

### **Poverty and Indicators in Early Childhood Education in Nigeria**

The word ‘poverty’ means different things to different people. A school of thought views it in terms of material things and income level. Another believes that it entails the provision of security, freedom, self-esteem, and general well-being for an individual. United Nations Human Development Report (1997), cited in Alatis (2007) defines it as the denial of opportunities and choice most basic to human development. Poverty does not really entail wearing tattered clothes, living in wretched building/apartment, being dirty in appearance, lacking sanitation and ventilation but include dehumanization, degradation, permanent insecurity, and instability in all forms of essential family-community relationships. An individual that is affected by poverty lacks basic needs such as water, good food, health care, education, clothing, shelter, and others which determines the quality of life. Such individual thus lives low quality life and is bound to show physical, emotional, and psychological symptoms which can be observed by an observer.

In Nigeria, there are many indicators of poverty in Early Childhood Education such as:

**Limited Access to Schools:** In spite of the fact that Government is making efforts to ensure that the goals of Education for All, Universal Basic Education and the Millennium Development are achieved in the country, to put the foot of the country on the path of greatness, access to early childhood education remains low. According to Ige (2011), only small proportion of children aged 0 to 2 years and 2 to 5 years are attending crèche and nursery schools respectively. Adikwu

(2009) also reported that the expected enrolment in Early Childhood Care, Development and Education in Nigeria was 22 million but the actual enrolment was 2.02 million which indicates a shortfall of 19.98 million. Data in Table 1 further show the enrolment in early childhood education in Nigeria within the period 2007 to 2010.

**Table 1: Number and Enrolment in ECCDE in Nigeria: 2007-2010**

<b>Year</b>	<b>No. of Schools</b>	<b>Male Enrolment</b>	<b>Female Enrolment</b>	<b>Total</b>
2007	15,535	677,871	659,229	1,337,100
2008	18,193	813,461	768,566	1,582,027
2009	20,698	766,710	744,264	1,510,974
2010	23,249	933,550	892,307	1,825,857

Source: Universal Basic Education Commission (2010), in Federal Ministry of Education (2011).

#### The State of Education in Nigeria beyond Access

As indicated in Table 1, there were 15,535 ECCDE schools as at 2007 with enrollment of 1, 337, 100, which increased to 18,193 and 1,582,027 respectively in 2008. In 2009, the number of schools was 20,698 while enrolment had increased to 1,510,974 and 1,825,857 in 2010.

Gender disparity in enrollment in pre-primary education during the 3 year period could also be noticed in the table. Osakue (2011) also reported that children aged between 2 and 5 years who supposed to be in school are about sixteen (16) million but only 1 million are in school, representing 6.25%. Studies (Education Sector Analysis, 2006) show that 79% of pre-school centres in Nigeria were urban based with only 20.2% located in the rural areas. The prevalence of ECCDE centres in the urban areas is contingent on the fact that more workers (civil servants and businessmen/women) who can afford its cost abound in these areas. This is also coupled with the fact that there are opportunities to make money for the payment of fees in the urban areas unlike in the rural areas. In view of this, access to ECCDE in the rural areas has not been significant. It can be also being observed in the urban areas that many parents are skeptical about enrolling their children in early childhood education because of its cost. Many consider it not necessary and waste of time and money. A lot of children of early childhood education age in the rural and urban areas in Nigeria are thus not having access to such education.

**Shortage of Qualified Teachers:** Many authors (Onu; Obiozor and Agbo: 2010; Ibukun, 2009) had reiterated the role which teacher plays in educational system. They are so important in early childhood education because of the role they play in ensuring the provision of quality education for the clients. Unfortunately, early childhood education has not been having it smooth in Nigeria when it comes to the issue of teacher that will train the children. Over the years, dearth of qualified teachers characterized it in Nigeria. Ige (2011) observed and reported that most crèche in Nigeria are managed by old and illiterate women who lack the pedagogy of teaching and skill to handle children. In most of the kindergarten and nursery schools also, teachers with low qualifications such as Senior School Certificate (SSCE), Ordinary Diploma (OND) abound contrary to the recommended minimum standard for teaching (i.e. Nigerian Certificate in

Education). These days, many secondary school leavers without the teaching skill, are fond of patronizing the private nursery and primary schools for jobs prior to the time they would gain admission to tertiary institution. Most teachers are untrained and lack knowledge about the methodology of working with young children. The rate of turnover of teachers is thus extremely high in the preprimary schools in Nigeria.

**Shortage of and Decay Infrastructural Facilities:** Another issue of concern in Early Childhood provision in Nigeria is inadequate and weak infrastructural facilities in the crèche, kindergarten, and nursery schools. It needs not be overemphasized that classroom, library, laboratory, workshop, and equipment are germane in education provision. Unfortunately, educational system in Nigeria is characterized by inadequacy of these infrastructural facilities (Wasagu 2006; Federal Ministry of Education 2007). The case of early child care and pre-primary schools leaves much to be desired even though researches indicating that the physical environment of preschools has an important influence on the education and development of children abound in literature (Inan, 2009). In many of the early childhood education centres in Nigeria, the physical/learning environment is poorly designed, without ample space, furniture, toys, wholesome pictures and other materials which a child needs for stimulation, exploration, and simulation (Osakue, 2011). Many crèche, kindergarten, and nursery schools in Nigeria are also plagued by inadequate classrooms relative to the population of children. Ejeh (2006) cited in Onu, Obiozor and Agbo; 2010 reported that the nursery schools in Nigeria operate on university campuses, schools' premises, premises of industrial and business organizations, church premises, town halls, and residential buildings. Many children are usually huddled in a classroom, giving them neither the opportunity to move within the classroom nor any chance for social interaction with others while the teacher is unable to give individual attention to each child

(Osakue, 2011). Quite unfortunate is the fact that many nursery and primary schools operate in rented buildings (which are designed for residential living), dilapidated, uncompleted, and abandoned buildings. Due to cost consideration, many public and private crèche, kindergarten and nursery schools lack toys and other play/recreational facilities which are essential for keeping children engaged and developing their psychomotor skill at this level.

**Inadequate Funding of Early Childhood Education:** While it cannot be disputed that a lot of fund is needed to administer early childhood education, particularly in establishing schools, pay the teachers, as well as meeting the incidental day to day costs, the case of early childhood education in Nigeria can be likened to a beggar that has to feed from the crumbs/leftovers of the rich/wealthy individuals to survive. Over the years, there has not been adequate provision for early childhood education in the annual budget of Nigeria. Only the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of the system have been enjoying Government's funding. Better attention to early childhood education was noticed when the Universal Basic Education was inaugurated in 1999 where it forms one of its components. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) 2004 Act however provides for the utilization of 2% of the Consolidated Revenue Fund (CRF) for basic education delivery. 70% of this grant is however reserved for the implementation of states' level projects while 5% of the 70% of the UBE matching grant is reserved for early childhood education. The poor funding of early childhood education by government has thus given room for the private sector to take over the level of education from government. Since he that pays the piper, dictates the tune, the private sector has dominated everything which has constituted problem for government, particularly how to checkmate their influence in the sector.

**Varying Textbooks:** The importance of textbooks and instructional materials in the teaching-learning process cannot be overemphasized (Ajayi 2007). Pupils/students need to read further to

understand the difficult concepts in lesson. Textbooks also assist teachers in achieving lesson's objectives. In Nigeria, textbooks being used by private and public ECCDE centres are inadequate for children and also vary. Most parents of children in private schools expect government to provide everything for their children. In most states, list of recommended textbooks are usually given to primary and secondary schools at the beginning of a term or session but early childhood education is often neglected. This gives room for authors to produce different textbooks for sale to schools. Such textbooks however vary across states and schools. In some states, textbooks are being recommended by Association of Private Schools' Proprietors that dictates the policies at this level in view of the fact that almost 80% of crèche, kindergarten and nursery schools in Nigeria are owned by private individuals.

**Lack of/Inadequate Policy Thrust:** Policies are meant to guide a system. Over the years, policies to guide the administration of education system have been formulated and implemented in Nigeria. While other education levels such as primary, secondary, and tertiary are enjoying policies, the story is different in the case of early childhood education. Even though the National Policy on Education indicates that government will play supervisory, funding, and regulatory roles for early childhood education, few governments run preschool centres in Nigeria while those owned by private individuals are not closely monitored or supervised by government agency. In fact, there is no organized government regulatory body charged with this responsibility unlike the case of primary education which the National Primary Education Commission (NPEC) supervises at the national level and the State Primary Education Board (SPEB) supervises at the state and local government levels. Early childhood education has thus become an 'all comers' affair in Nigeria which is a metaphoric ill wind that blows no one any good. The major policy on early childhood education in Nigeria came into force in 2007 and

brought about the integration of Early Childhood Education (ECCDE) as part of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme (FME, 2007) thus making it a rights based, holistic, and inter sectoral programme covering education, health, food and nutrition (Federal Ministry of Education, 2008). Prior to this time, ECCDE was an all comers, private ventures with little concern about the access to it, quality and operations.

### **The Way Out**

It is not a gainsaying that early childhood is a very important stage in the life of an individual. As such, education that is provided at this stage needs to be given priority in view of its impact on the other education levels. The impact of poverty on the provision of early childhood education cannot be over emphasised. The level of education has unfortunately been ravaged by poverty. In view of the effect of this poverty on the provision of early childhood education in the country, it becomes imperative for it to be tackled by government and other stakeholders in education.

**Adequate Funding of Early Childhood Education:** As applicable to other education levels, government should provide substantial fund for early childhood education in the annual budget. Early childhood education should be encouraged by the government by providing pre-primary educational facilities (class-rooms, instructional materials, and equipments) needed for the success of the programme. Private providers of early childhood education should ensure that they operate in decent environment. It thus becomes imperative that minimum standard in the provision of infrastructural facilities should be followed. Parents should also be involved in their children's early education experience by providing the necessary materials.

**Recruitment of more Teachers for ECCDE Centres:** Both government and private pre-primary schools' proprietors should ensure that adequate and quality teachers are recruited for the teaching of children in the early childhood schools in Nigeria. The minimum teaching qualification (NCE) should be adhered to while recruiting teachers for the schools. It is however imperative for teachers that are available in the schools to be given regular training through seminars and workshop so that they can be properly developed which can go a long way in improving their effectiveness in the schools and improve the quality of education they provide for the children in those schools.

**Need for Training of Teachers in Early Childhood Education:** Teachers/Caregivers who are working in Day Care Centers/Nursery Schools in Nigeria without any training/qualification in Early Childhood Education should be made to acquire proficiency training through in-service programme. Regular workshop, seminars and conferences on Early Childhood Education should be organized for teachers/Caregivers in Nigeria to keep them abreast of current innovations and best practices in the field.

**Orientation of the citizens towards enrolling their Children in ECCDE Centres:** In view of the limited access to early childhood education in Nigeria, government should initiate advocacy programme that would sensitise the parents/guardians so that they can show more interest in early childhood education. There should be proper enlightenment campaign on the importance of early childhood education.

**Need for Policies on Early Childhood Education:** Government that serves as the regulatory organ for education in the country needs to make the provision of early childhood education compulsory for every child prior to entering primary school in Nigeria. Although, it has just been

made a policy, there is need for government to work towards the implementation of this policy. In this regard, the existing public primary schools in Nigeria should be mandated to inculcate pre primary section in the schools. This thus implies that additional infrastructural facilities should be provided by government so as to cater for the increase in enrolment that will follow the implementation of such policy.

**Support by Private Sector:** Private sector and non-governmental organization should also support government in the provision of such education. This can be achieved through the provision of cash, facilities and donation of infrastructures to early childhood schools.

**Adequate Monitoring of ECCDE Centres:** Government agency in charge of monitoring and approval of schools should organize regular monitoring of the schools so as to know the situation report. They should also be morally upright while discharging their duties. They should thus shun financial and kind gratification in the course of monitoring and approval of schools. Adequate supervision of Daycare Centre/Nursery Schools by the Ministries of Education to ensure that providers keep to the required minimum standards.

**Support by Educational Planners:** Educational Planners should provide adequate programmes, policies and curriculum for early childhood education.

**Proper focus on Early Childhood Education:** Government should infuse a programme of Early Childhood Care Education into the curriculum of Teacher Education at the NCE level, since the minimum teaching qualification is Nigeria Certificate in Education. All the Colleges of Education, and other NCE awarding institutions should introduce a programme on Early Childhood Education.

## Summary and Conclusion

Over the years, Nigeria has been ravaged by poverty menace which has been having serious effect on the educational system. Early childhood education has also been having its share of the education poverty. Presently, acute shortage of infrastructural facilities, teachers, fund, policies, and curriculum, characterized early childhood education in Nigeria. As the country is making efforts towards achieving Universal Basic Education, Millennium Development as well as the Education for All goals, it becomes imperative for this poverty to be eradicated in early childhood education so that the country can achieve enviable feat in education and these goals.

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