
Commercializing Early Childhood Care Development and Education (ECCDE) in Dwindling Nigerian Economy: Implications for Economic and Socio-Cultural Development

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Abstract

The global society which Nigeria is inclusive has come to realize the importance of education. From birth, the child is taught by his parents, family and community. However, due to industrialization and modernization, the society has become complex and sophisticated. This has made ECCDE indispensable. Nigeria as a developing nation did not allow ECCDE to be an integral part of education until recent times, precisely at the instance of the emergence of Universal Basic Education (UBE). The ECCDE has the responsibility of inculcating good morals, norms, values, creativity, co-operative spirit etc in the child. The child that learnt these skills and virtues grows with it and becomes useful rather than becoming a problem to the society. Unfortunately, the ECCDE programme is commercialized as most of the public schools do not have the facilities and as such do not offer such programme. Since it is left in the hands of private providers, it becomes the bane because very few persons access ECCDE due to the high fees charged by the Proprietors. ECCDE elude majority of the children especially in the rural areas hence it amounts to dash of hopes. It is therefore recommended among other things that the government should provide ECCDE as a social service in lieu of commercializing it to close the gap of inequality and proffer solution to societal ills.

Life is a stage. Early childhood is a stage that is very critical in the life of every human being hence it has become a global phenomenon. From time immemorial, the child from birth is nursed and nurtured adequately in all parts of the world because to

do otherwise means jeopardizing the human specie or race. The nursing and nurturing is undertaken by the societal members especially the child's family. The child is taught to get acclimatized to his immediate environment. It is therefore not surprising that an English Philosopher and practical educator, John Locke propounded the doctrine of 'tabula rasa' which means that the child's mind at birth is like a blank state and all learning come through the senses and the environment (Okoh and Omordu 2013). The essence of the 'tabula rasa' doctrine is that extra care should be accorded the child and the environment should be prioritized by the parents. This is to ensure that the child's senses do not emulate negative aspects of the environment. Since the content of the environment consists of the good, the bad and the ugly. To this end, it behooves the parents to teach the good aspects to the child.

Considering the fact that society has become increasingly complex and sophisticated, Early Child Care Development and Education (ECCDE) is indispensable. ECCDE has been recognized and established years ago in developed countries such as the United States of America and Finland. In fact, developed countries had made ECCDE part of their formal education system and they have been reaping the good result of such initiative.

In contrast to the above, many developing countries are yet to realize the need for ECCDE in their education system. Some developing countries have made provision for it but are yet to integrate it into the formal education system. Nigeria as a developing nation is caught up in such web. Over the years in Nigeria, ECCDE was not allowed to be part of education policy of the government. The age long apathy of the government on ECCDE was however brought to an end at the instance of the introduction or establishment of the Universal Basic Education (UBE). Also, recently the provisions of the National Policy on Education have brought to the fore, the concern of government for this level of education as it has made ECCDE an integral part of education in Nigeria.

It is imperative that we applaud the government/National Policy on Education for making ECCDE an integral part of the education system. ECCDE is designed to develop the child by inculcating social, moral norms, values, good habit, spirit of enquiry and creativity, co-operative spirit etc. (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2014:7) Having incorporated ECCDE into Nigeria education system, it is expected that it would be adequately implemented to bring about the much desired development. Economic and socio-cultural development is key to national security, stability and development. When a child is developed through ECCDE by acquiring all the relevant skills and knowledge, he or she in turn enhances development in various aspects such as morals, economic, social etc in the country.

Human capacity development efforts are now strategized in the way of starting with children hence the common slogan "catch them young". Similarly, the Holy Bible, Proverbs 22: 6 states that "we should train up the child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it". Unfortunately, this all important level of education has not received proper sponsorship or implementation by the government rather it has left it in the hands of private providers. These private schools charge exorbitant school fees which very few parents can afford hence making ECCDE

inaccessible for the common man's children who constitute a higher percentage of the population. This scenario has far reaching implications on the socio-cultural and economic development of Nigeria. It is a truism that crèche or nursery programmes are not undertaken or run in most of the public primary schools which have a greater percentage of the children especially in rural areas. Here brings to the fore, the commercialization of education as it were. It is also understandable that education is in the concurrent legislative list but the worry is that the public schools do not have programmes for ECCDE. Therefore the thrust of this paper is to explicate the concept of ECCDE, dwindling economy, commercialization of education and the economic and socio-cultural implications of commercializing ECCDE in Nigeria.

Meaning of Early Childhood Care Development and Education (ECCDE)

ECCDE refers to the care as well as educational programme designed for children at the early stages of their lives. This early stage ranges from birth to four years. It is an educational programme designed to develop the child in terms of physical, language, cognitive, emotional and social at the pre-primary level of education. It is also viewed as physical, social, psychological and mental growth and development of the child at the pre-primary level of education. Ojameruaye cited in Asodike and Abdulrahman (2013:46) views ECCDE as "the care and education of (5+ or 6 years as in the case of Nigeria), focusing on children's survival, growth, development and learning including health, nutrition, hygiene as well as cognitive, social, physical and emotional development". In a nutshell, ECCDE is the care, development and education given to children from birth to the period of exposure to primary school experience in the formal, informal and non-formal settings (Asodike and Abdulrahman, 2013).

History of ECCDE in Nigeria

Early Childhood Care Development and Education existed informally from the laps of mothers which Osokoya (2017: 25) posits that "through informal education, the Nigerian child learns to explore and exploit the environment". At pre-independence, early childhood education emerged with the introduction of western education in Nigeria by the missionaries. According to Kosemani and Okorosaye-Orubite (1995:33), the first school which was introduced by the Wesleyan Methodist Mission on 24th September, 1842, under the auspices of Rev. Thomas Birch Freeman, in company of Mr. and Mrs. Williams de Craft was called "Nursery of the Infant Church". There was no specific age for enrolment at that time, the grade of individuals that were readily available were children, hence the name "Nursery of the Infant Church".

Nigeria education passed through so many reforms during the pre-independence era until 1951 when powers were given to each region (Eastern, Western, Northern regions) through the regional heads to practice education based on the interest of their people which Fafunwa in Ogbondah (2016:84) referred to as "era of self determination to education". Prior to this period (regionalization) there was inequality in the delivery of education across the country, the northerners were lagging behind because of their rejection of Christian education (Okoli 2016). She further stipulates

that the demand for modern education became so high after the World War II that the then colonial administration included it in its annual report. This led to the introduction of regionalization policy by Authur Richard's constitution of 1946, and was fine-tuned later by John Macpherson's constitution of 1951. Immediate attention was given to Macpherson's constitution advancement on regionalization policy, the country was split into three (3) regions, Northern, Western and Eastern regions. Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Chief Awokoya, were the leader of the Western region and the Minister of Education respectively. Chief Awokoya presented a proposal of Universal (Free) Primary Education (UPE) Scheme to be implemented in the Western Region by 1955. He did this based on Obafemi Awolowo's first budget speech indicating health and education as his priority (Kosemani and Okosaye-Orubite, 1995). Soon after the UPE flagged off in the West, other regions followed, but it was recorded that only the UPE in the west was able to stand the test of time. Kosemani and Okorosaye-Orubite (1955) posit that UPE in the Western Region received a relative measure of success. However, the success was not sustained due to some flaws in the standard which Ogbondah (2016) recognizes one of the reasons to be enrolment of under-aged children into the primary school. The quest for successful quality and equality education scheme continued, conferences were held, commissions were established until another scheme UBE was flagged off on 30th September 1999 by President Olusegun Obasanjo in conformity with the Jomtein Declaration and framework action on Education for All EFA 1990. However, the UBE outlined its scope which includes early childhood education. This took effect as soon as it was signed by the Nigerian President in 2004 and passed by the National Assembly. From the foregoing, Early Childhood Care Development and Education has been a worthwhile programme inculcated in the UBE Act of the National Policy of Education (NPE) 2004.

ECCDE as an Integral Part of National Education System

ECCDE became an integral part of National Education System through the Universal Basic Education Scheme which was a nine (9) year uninterrupted education scheme and accepted by government and the people of Federal Republic of Nigeria as a reformed programme aimed at providing greater access to education and to eradicate illiteracy and poverty throughout the country. Based on the objectives earlier mentioned in this discourse, its scope is centered on Early Childhood Care Development and Education (ECCDE). Government's provision of ECCDE was made clear stating its purpose and government's duties towards achieving effective implementation of the programme.

Purpose of ECCDE

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014: 7) outlined the following as the purpose of ECCDE:

- (a) Effect a smooth transition from the home to the school;
- (b) Prepare the child for the primary level of education;

- (c) Provide adequate care, supervision and security for the children while their parents are at work;
- (d) Inculcate social and moral values;
- (e) Inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and the use of toys, etc;
- (f) Develop a sense of co-operation and team-spirit;
- (g) Stimulate in the child good habits, including good health habits; and
- (h) Teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes. Forms etc through play.

Government Duties towards ECCDE

The duties of Government toward ECCDE are as follows:

- (a) To set and monitor minimum standard for ECCDE centres.
- (b) Develop and disseminate curriculum materials.
- (c) Encourage both community and private efforts in the establishment of ECCDE centres based on set standards
- (d) Make provision for teacher education programme and retraining of teachers specialized in ECCDE.
- (e) Ensure that the curriculum of teacher education is oriented towards play-way.
- (f) Ensure that ECCDE centres adopt the following caregiver infant ratios (i) crèche 1:10 nursery 1: 25
- (g) Develop suitable ECCDE curriculum for nationwide implementation.
- (h) Supervise and control quality ECCDE centres.
- (i) Make provision for the production and effective utilization of learning and instructional materials in adequate number.
- (j) Ensure that the medium of instruction is principally the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community and to this end will:
 - Develop the autography of more Nigerian languages and
 - Produce textbooks supplementary readers and other instructional materials in Nigeria languages.

Importance of ECCDE

ECCDE is of immense importance, Abdulrahman-Yusuf in Asodike and Abdulrahman-Yusuf (2013) outlines the importance of ECCDE as follows:

- ECCDE is a right, recognized in the convention on the Rights of the Child which has been ratified by almost all countries of the world.
- Early Childhood is a period of remarkable brain development that lays the foundation for later learning. Therefore, access to ECCDE will generally give children the needed foundations for better performance later in primary and secondary schools, and perhaps at the tertiary level.
- ECCDE can provide the children with knowledge of imbibing good health habits which ultimately improves their well-being, especially in developing countries where hygiene practices are lacking.

- ECCDE is socially cost-effective in the long-term: it is more cost-effective to institute preventing measures and support children early in life than to compensate for disadvantages as they grow older.
 - Affordable and reliable child care provides essential support for working parents, especially mothers, and enhances women empowerment and household income and welfare.
 - Investment in ECCDE yields very high economic returns, offsetting disadvantage and inequality, especially for children from poor families.
- ECCDE is an opportunity to avoid or reduce developmental problems thereby bringing lasting benefits to individuals and society. These early years of life are a window of opportunity to lay a strong foundation for a child's life. Children that had no access to early and quality education often fall behind their more advantaged peers in the primary school up to the tertiary level and at the adult stage, they earn less and engage in all sorts of immoral social behavioural acts.

In line with National Policy on Education (2013), government integrated Early Child Care Development and Education as the care, protection, stimulation and learning promoted in children from age 0 – 4 years in a crèche or nursery. Uya in Ekwukoma (2016) posits that pre-schools or day care centres where ECCDE is delivered have critical roles to play in early childhood development as they work together with the home. Maduwe in Ekwukoma (2016) adds that the committed and caring disposition of caregivers, the provisions of functional toys to develop properly as they step out from home into the society as their peers and others is very necessary.

Dwindling Economy

A dwindling economy is an economy that is tilting downwards or negatively. It means a country whose economy is experiencing decrease in Gross National Product (GNP), decrease in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), decrease in Per Capital Income (PCI) and other measurable economic indices. Nigeria is experiencing dwindling economy because irrespective of the fact that the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics recently reported that inflation rate decreased to 11.6% in May, 2018, the reality is different. In support of the above, Ocheni, (2018:27) reports that “the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (NBS) has been posting a positive outlook on declining inflation rate and the economy. But the real picture hits you when you go to make purchases at the various markets”. The above is a confirmation that there is inflation in Nigeria. Furthermore, Okanezi and Hanachor (2018:1) asserts that “in recessionary economies like Nigeria, the populace are in constant state of agony and anguish. The challenging situation manifests in less trade and industrial activities, high rate of unemployment, and experience of inflammatory trends by economic analysts”. In Nigeria, all the attributes of dwindling economy are conspicuous. There is high level of unemployment, less trade and industrial activities as well as inflation. All these translate to poverty of citizens with its attendant consequences.

Commercialization of Education

Commercialization of education is the use of educational institution or programme to maximize profit as opposed to the expectation of the citizens. Ordinarily, people thought that school or education is a social service which the government ought to render to her citizens or people. The opportunity granted to voluntary agencies to manage schools is an example of commercialization of education. The voluntary agencies in the contemporary Nigeria are the Missions and Proprietors (private providers) of education. These voluntary agencies charge fees arbitrarily because they are not regulated by the government. This has equally edged out people from enrolling because of its expensiveness.

Economic and Socio-Cultural Implications of Commercializing ECCDE in Nigeria

Nigeria indeed transferred education from the exclusive to concurrent and residual legislative list hence both states and the federal government can handle education. More so, private hands are allowed to own and run schools which is synonymous with commercialization. This scenario has far reaching implications on the children vis-à-vis socio-cultural development. A reflection on the purpose of ECCDE as provided in the National Policy on Education shows that ECCDE should inculcate social, moral norms and values. Social in this context refers to issues of society and the way it is organized. This means that the pupils are supposed to get inculcated about some societal issues at their level. Norms is also listed in the purpose of ECCDE. According to Abercromie, Hill and Turner (2000).

Norms are expectations about appropriate conduct which serve as common guidelines for social action. Human behavior exhibits certain regularities which are the product of adherence to shared norms..... The term refers to social expectations about correct or proper behavior. Norms imply the presence of legitimacy, consent and prescription pp234.

Moral as one of the purpose of ECCDE is derived from the word 'mores'. Sumner (1906) defined mores as "the patterns of cultural and moral action which contributed to the continuity of the human group. Mores are traditional, prescriptive standards which maintain the social group by regulating individual behaviour".

Another concept among the purposes of 'ECCDE is values. Peil (cited in Atemie and Girigiri (2006:3) defined values as "a conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of the desirable which influences selection from available modes, means and end of an action". Values depict the belief that something is right and wrong and what is worthwhile in life. Based on the meaning of values as explained above, it is very important that every child be availed the opportunity to know what is considered as value or important. This lesson is important because knowledge is power. The reason why a lot of people (youths) venture into irrelevant activities that either lead to their death or cause a set back for their community or nation is because they were not taught at the right time. Hence

those involved in secret cult think they are doing a meaningful thing whereas they are threading the part that leads to destruction of their lives or reproach to their family, community and the nation at large.

Furthermore, ECCDE aims at inculcating in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music etc. This aspect of ECCDE purpose exposes the child to creativity and exploration. It is at this stage that talents are discovered. Those who are good in the manipulation of psychomotor are detected at that stage and encouraged to develop in such area of knowledge. Apparently, the commercialization of ECCDE has denied more than sixty percent of Nigerian children the opportunity to identify and nurture their talents. This of course impedes the spirit of the slogan 'catch them young'.

The development of a sense of co-operation and team-spirit is a very important objective of the ECCDE. Children whose sense of cooperation had been developed from that early stage grow up with it. They understand the necessity of interaction, conformity, working together with others to achieve a goal. It is important to note that cooperation is progressive while non-cooperation is conflict, unproductive and retrogressive for both the individual and the society in general.

Conclusion

The essence of this study is to find out the economic and socio-cultural implications of commercializing ECCDE. It is found that ECCDE is very important in the development of the child. Unfortunately, in Nigeria, ECCDE is commercialized to the extent that most public schools do not offer the programme. This has affected the economic and socio-cultural milieu of Nigeria. The solution to societal ills as well as the fortune of Nigeria to a large extent is dependent on providing ECCDE programmes in public schools.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made for this study;

1. Nigeria should ensure that 26% of the country's annual budget is allocated to education.
2. The private providers of ECCDE should be regulated by an authorized agency.
3. The government should fashion out ways of implementing ECCDE in public schools. The policy on mere paper is not enough.
4. Special teachers should be trained to teach in this level of education.
5. The universal policy of equality of educational opportunity is marred if ECCDE is left in the hands of private providers.

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