

INTERNATIONALIZATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN NIGERIA FOR QUALITY AND PROGRESSIVE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Early childhood Education in recent times has become a global and popular enterprise. Along this line, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/early-childhoodeducation> (2010) theory reports that in the World Summit of 2001, the United Nations proclaimed the world's commitment to ensuring that every child is given the right to the best possible start in life. In pursuance of this ideal, United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (2010) organized the first World Conference on Early childhood Education in Moscow in September, 2010, thereby making this level of education an international affair. In the light of this declaration, there is need for government at all levels and private bodies in Nigeria to endeavour to adopt or promote global links of good practices that will boost Early childhood Education. The global links have been made easy through computer and information communication technology which have reduced the whole world to a circular village. It is against this background that this paper felt the need to discuss ways of internationalization of Early childhood Education in Nigeria for quality and progressive human development. The key points highlighted include Early childhood Education, internationalization of Early childhood Education, the strategies involved, challenges and ways out. It is on this premise that the paper concluded and made recommendations which include that care-givers and nursery school teachers should be computer literate to enable them always keep abreast with current global approaches to Early childhood Education, government should equip nursery schools with computer and ICT facilities and provide steady power supply for their regular operation.

The evolution of computer and Information Communication Technology (ICT) and other forms of scientific and technological knowledge has called for the need for international linkage in Early childhood Education. The linkage is relevant as it will help to bridge the gap in the knowledge of ideas and practices that are employed between colleagues with differing approaches. Along this line, Ogunleye (2014) stressing the relative impact of ICT on Business Education programme, maintained that education planners are under pressure more than before to invest resources to move their institutions towards more technology-based approaches to teaching and learning.

Research findings abound to prove that the Nigerian country is yet to link up well globally in the scheme of knowledge as it concerns new approaches, ideas or principles in education generally and Early childhood Education in particular. It is in this direction that part of a report of research finding Denga (2008) remarked that our attention to education in the last few decades has been focused primarily on the issues of national relevance. The scope of curriculum has been predominantly national and local. All the same, Ogunleye (2014) observed that Nigeria is still

backward in adopting modern changes in educational ideas and practices especially where they relate to use of computer and ICT knowledge. According to him, Nigeria is yet to have national school Nets.

With regard to Early childhood Education, it is evident that in this country, care and education given to young children, that is, children concerned in Early childhood Education is very much rooted in traditional methods which limits its operation quite below the level already attained by the outside world. Research findings show that teachers of Early childhood Education usually teach the young ones using the same approach meant for learners who are in the higher levels of education. The findings specifically reveal that most nursery school teachers usually adopt theory method instead of using play and pleasurable activities as stipulated by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014). Among the findings (Siddiqui, 2009 and Sooter, 2013) there is proof that most teachers use discussion and story-telling methods and in addition, always engage the young children in written calculations and exercises that are in most cases above their cognitive abilities. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014) in the National Policy on Education has recommended play as the most appropriate teaching method for Early Childhood Education. Also, there had been emphasis on the use of play, the world over, by Early Childhood Education proponents including Plato, Aristotle, Friedrich Froebel, Jean Jacques Rousseau and Jean Piaget, quoted in Siddiqui (2009).

Today, the introduction of computer and ICT in schools has made it easy to connect different countries of the world thereby bringing positive changes or improvements in educational practices for quality and progressive human development. The worry of this paper therefore, is that apart from the wrong method of teaching, there may be other inadequate practices in Early Childhood Education in this country which cannot foster education of young children considering their cognitive levels and conceptual abilities. It is in the light of this backdrop that the paper felt the need for internationalization of Early Childhood Education for unified approaches.

Key Concepts Explained

It may be relevant to explain the key words that constituted the caption of this presentation for clarity in the contexts in which they are used.

(a) Internationalization: Denga (2008) explained that the term 'internationalization' is synonymous with globalization which is the process of making something such as business to operate in a lot of different countries all around the world. Quirk (2010) defined internationalization as the act of making something international or bringing it under international control.

Today, the introduction of computer and ICT has reduced the whole world to a global home. In that situation, any approach, idea or technique employed to promote economic, educational, political, religious or social programmes in any part of the world can be universally connected to different countries through computer and other communication facilities. Relating this idea therefore, internationalization of Early Childhood Education is all about the practices that are involved in that level of education in a unified approach across nations through an interface in the areas of computer and ICT. It means linkage of different nations in all attempts to provide care and education for young children in nursery schools using computer and other related devices.

(b) Early childhood education: Early Childhood Education may be explained as education given to young children of pre-school age. Maduwesi (2003) defined it as the type of education designed for children who are not yet up to primary school age. These definitions are in consonance with the explanation (Nnachi and Ojigbo, 2013) that Early Childhood Education is the education for pre-

schoolers. In a broader sense, Mishra; Sharma and Bansal in Okeworo(2016) explained that Early Childhood Education involves a wide range of programmes, all aimed at the physical, cognitive and social development of children before they enter primary school. The central point in the various definitions given is that Early Childhood Education precedes primary education, hence, the term 'pre-primary' (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014).

Early Childhood Education operates in different forms namely Crèche or Day Care Centre, Nursery and Kindergarten (Maduewesi, 2003; Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014 and Nnachi and Ojigbo, 2013). In the explanations given by the authorities cited, Crèche or Day Care is a place that provides care and support for tender children (0-3years) of business or working mothers. Nursery is the educational programme meant for total development of young children between 3-5years through activities which stimulate social integration and intellectual growth. Kindergarten on the other hand is a school for five-year olds who will step into primary school when they age six. However, in Nigeria, the term 'nursery school' is generally used to connote Crèche and Kindergarten. In the context of this study however, 'pre-primary' and 'nursery school' will be used interchangeably with Early Childhood Education.

(c) Quality early childhood education and progressive human development: Quality according to Hornby (2010) refers to the standard of something when it is compared to other things like it. Hornby also explained it as how good or bad something is. In the context of this presentation, quality in Early Childhood Education is ensured when all the relevant elements that interplay in curriculum implementation are grossly adequate. Adequacy in this direction is decided in terms of availability and effective utilization of the elements which include teaching staff, learning materials, curriculum content, teaching methods and evaluation techniques.

(i) Teaching Staff: The role of teachers in educational system at all levels is immeasurable (Okeworo, 2016). It is in recognition of the roles of teachers that the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014) remarked that no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers. Ede, in Onu, Obiozor, Agbo and Chiamaka, (2010) argued that the success of any system of education depends to a large extent on the number of teachers and their qualifications, their devotion to duty and their effectiveness on the job.

Various theories on Early Childhood Education have stressed the relative qualities of pre-primary school teachers. For example, Eze (2002) using the Stimulus Response Theory, opined that teachers of young children should include those who can effectively inculcate in them the behaviours that reflect the needs of the society. Another theory, Piaget's Constructivist Theory discussed in Nnachi (2009) contended that pre-primary school teachers should be those who can adequately prepare the learning environment and allow children freedom of exploring the environment. The theory adds that teachers should always diagnose, prescribe, observe and guide children's activities. The third theory, Maturationist Classic Theory, according to Siddiqui (2009) opined that Early Childhood Education teachers should have solid understanding of child development which will enable them to make appropriate choices when planning activities or providing materials for children.

In summary, the three theories discussed emphasized quality of teachers of Early Childhood Education in terms of their ability to adopt international approaches to provide care and education which young children need for proper cognitive growth and functioning.

(ii) Learning Materials: Learning materials refer to instructional or support materials which help to boost instructional process. Philosophers, psychologists and educators through the ages have

stressed the need for rich or stimulating environment in teaching and learning at all levels of education particularly Early Childhood Education. The fact is clear that learning materials include stimulating environment that is usually emphasized in teaching and learning process. The fact is also noted that children in pre-primary schools are in their pre-operational stage of cognitive development which falls between 2 and 7 years (Piaget in Mangal, 2012). Children at that stage can only learn ideas and concepts by using objects or concrete materials.

Admittedly, quality is assured in learning materials if they are available and stimulating enough to enhance pleasurable activities by young children. It is on this basis that the United Nations Children's Fund (2008) prescribed instructional materials that are relevant for use for Early Childhood Education to promote learning activities that can enhance cognitive development and functioning of young children. Among the instructional materials include toys, table top materials (such as counters, building blocks, beads, seeds, bottle tops etc), old newspapers and magazines, calendars, cups, empty milk or tomato tins, posters and charts, picture books, slates, clay or plasticine, sand and water, chalk, crayons, pencils, chalkboard, movable alphabets and figures, jig-saw puzzle, matching cards, musical instruments (like rattles, jingles, bells), colour tablets and others. Quality of these materials is assured through their availability in their assorted and attractive forms and also relevance to the learning needs and styles of young children.

(iii) Curriculum Content: Curriculum may be viewed as organized learning experiences designed by or for the school. Ogunyemi (2009) defined curriculum as the planned and unplanned experiences received by learners in the process of their formal and informal education. To Okimedim in Okeworo (2016), curriculum is a set of courses and their content, offered at a school or university. In the contest of this study, curriculum is used to mean a programmed instruction or learning experiences meant for young children or children in the pre-primary school.

Today, there is increased awareness on the need to evolve an integrated curriculum that will guarantee excellent care and support for young children such that the Millennium Development Goals could be achieved. In this light, Early Childhood Education has moved to involve the integrated approach that addresses all the critical aspects of early childhood care which yields the highest dividends and the most sustainable gains for children and their families, communities and nations of the world.

In the face of the above, the curriculum is based on integrated approach and also shifts from the unit approach in content presentation to thematic approach which is more robust and allows flexible infusion of contemporary and international issues. It was on this basis that eight themes were adopted for ages 0-3 and 3-5 namely physical development, affective/psychosocial development, cognitive development, food and nutrition, health, water and environmental sanitation, safety measures and protection issues (Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council and United Nations Children's Fund, 2003). It is therefore on this premise that the quality of Early Childhood Education hinges.

(iv) Teaching Methods: In teaching and learning process, we talk of method to mean any deliberate device or technique adopted by the teacher to enhance the achievement of his lesson objectives. Mkpa (2003) defined method as the approach, process or strategy which the teacher adopts to suit his lesson so that the set objectives of teaching-learning process will be achieved. In this presentation, emphasis is on teaching method that is suitable for use in pre-primary schools.

According to Achinivu in Maduewesi (2003), children's lives are characterized by play or pleasurable activities. These, according to him, constitute their learning needs. It is in this vein that

ancient Early Childhood Education proponents including Plato, Aristotle, Friedrich Froebel, Johann Pestalozzi, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Jean Piaget and their modern colleagues quoted in Siddiqui (2009) and Nnachi and Ojibo (2013) contended that play should be predominantly used in teaching young children. All the same, research and philosophy of Jean Piaget quoted in Okeworo (2016) emphasized the power of play and stressed that it promotes the physical, intellectual, language, emotional and social (PILES) needs of children. Also, some play opportunities will develop typical individual areas while others will promote other areas and depending on the child's interests, will influence the development of skills in various areas (Tassoni in Okeworo, 2016). It is therefore important that teachers of young children should adopt play way method in teaching them.

(v) Evaluation Techniques: Evaluation, simply put, involves making value judgment based on what is observed, experienced or assessed. Ndubuisi and Nnachi in Okeworo (2016) opined that evaluation is a means of decision making and judgment about the appropriateness, goodness or badness, desirability or undesirability of events, processes, objects, performances, situations and so on.

By implication, the pre-school curriculum should be wholly child-centred (Bowe in Okeworo, 2016). The whole child principle according to Bowe implies that to enhance the development of the child, the teacher should attend to, assess and intervene in all the five domain areas namely adaptive, cognitive, communicative, physical and social/emotional domains. This therefore suggests that methods of evaluation in Early Childhood Education should include those techniques that can be effectively used to determine the performances of children in line with their overt behaviours which arise from the learning activities they have encountered. Specifically, evaluation techniques for Early Childhood Education take the form of rating scale, check-list, interview, oral questions and occasionally, written work (Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council and United Nations Children's Fund, 2008 and Mangal, 2012).

From the foregone discussions, it is noted that quality in Early Childhood Education is determined in terms of adequacy of teaching staff, curriculum content, teaching methods and evaluation techniques. With the advent of computer and ICT, it becomes pertinent to internationalize Early Childhood Education in line with the qualities and aspects discussed to enable pre-primary school teachers offer learning experiences that are in harmony with the international ideals.

Need for Internationalization of Early Childhood Education

It may be proper to justify the agitation for internationalization of Early Childhood Education in Nigeria as this paper advocates. This is necessary in order to sensitize all relevant stakeholders in the system on the need for the innovation in the contemporary society. Just as Emetarom (2011) observed, the world has come together through computer and ICT thereby interconnecting nations with ease. She added that in this 21st century, no country will improve its critical sector except it globalizes. Like every other sector, there is need for global education because of interdependence of our modern world.

In the light of the above, Umera-Okeke and Nneka (2011) opined that we need a profound shaping of education... Humanity is facing grave difficulties that can only be solved on a global scale. Education is not moving rapidly enough to provide the knowledge about the outside world and the attitudes towards other people that may be essential for human survival.

The main idea stressed above points to the need to use computer and ICT in education particularly in teaching and learning in order to identify problems which scientific devices should

address. In this same vein, Guthrie and Wigfield in Okonny (2014) maintained that ICT has stepped into the educational industry with its hardware and software to communicate between persons, establishments and so on, more convenient, fast and precise. In the face of this, teachers and care-givers in Early Childhood Education are challenged to properly equip themselves with relevant knowledge about the global trends to provide quality pre-primary education through the use of computer and ICT facilities.

Simply put, internationalization of Early Childhood Education will sensitize nursery school teachers, care-givers and other relevant stakeholders to operate in line with the international scheme by connecting different countries of the world through computer and ICT. Resorting to traditional or local ideas and practices as earlier stressed will not only limit the scale of Early Childhood Education but also will not prepare the young ones towards progressive human development based on the goals of the First World Conference on Internationalization of Early Childhood Education UNESCO (2010).

The Goals of the First World Conference on Internationalization of Early Childhood Education

The global concern for Early Childhood Education was popularized ever than before through the first World Conference in Moscow (United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2010) on internationalization of Early Childhood Education. The goals of the conference according to <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/earlychildhoodeducation./2010/theory> are as follows:

- reaffirm early childhood education as a right of all children as fundamental for development.
- take stock of the progress of member states towards achieving the Education for All (EFA).
- identify binding constraints to making the intended equitable expansion of access to quality early childhood education services.
- establish more concrete benchmarks and targets for the EFA goal towards 2015 and beyond.
- identify key enablers that should facilitate member states to reach the established targets.
- promote global exchange of good practices that will promote early childhood education.

The above goals are relevant because they focus principally on expanding the scope of Early Childhood Education across the world.

Challenges of Internationalizing Early Childhood Education in Nigeria

The need for a profound reshaping of education at all levels justifies agitation by this paper to internationalize Early Childhood Education in Nigeria. However, the paper has the vision that some factors will pose serious challenges in the deal. For example

(a) Lack of government support

It is obvious that in Nigeria, government does not give Early Childhood Education reasonable support. Onu, Obiozor, Agbo and Chiamaka (2010) also supported that government is still nonchalant over Early Childhood Education in this country. They observed that most nursery schools

are owned by private bodies who do not obtain government's support inspite of policy statements to encourage them. They further remarked that government's failure to assist has made the programme to face a lot of challenges like lack of trained teachers, quality curriculum and learning materials. Similarly, Nnachi and Ojigbo (2013) lamented that government does not support Early Childhood Education through critical supervisory, funding and regulatory roles in line with national policy. The implication of government's nonchalant attitude is that Early Childhood Education will lack the enablement mentioned which are crucial in coping with internationalization demand.

(b) Low income of nursery school managers

In addition to lack of government support, most of the managers of Early Childhood Education lack fund for effective running of the programme. This being the case, it is usually difficult for most nursery schools to afford money to procure computer and ICT equipment and facilities that are essential for internationalization services. It is pertinent to note that for internationalization of Early Childhood Education to be fully operational, it must require financial back-up. Sharing similar view, Ezeh-Origie (2014) while discussing issues in Nigeria technical education, observed that this aspect of education is practical-oriented and therefore needed a lot of materials for practicals.

(c) Lack of qualified teachers

Qualified teachers in the context of this discourse refers to teachers who are trained in Early Childhood Education and also in the knowledge of computer and ICT. Such teachers are seriously lacking in nursery schools in Nigeria. This agrees with the findings (Maduewesi, 2003 and Ezrim, 2004) that competent teachers for nursery school education in Nigeria is seriously lacking. As a matter of fact, most of the nursery school teachers are auxiliary teachers whom the private bodies or individual persons that own the schools can manage to pay meagre salaries within their limited financial resources. It is quite clear in the rarity of competent or qualified teachers to accept the poor condition of service in nursery schools except the few who agree to manage the situation pending when they will secure a greener pasture. The point therefore, is that in a situation where most of the nursery school teachers are not qualified, internationalization of Early Childhood Education will be a mirage.

(d) Poor power supply

Poor electricity supply in Nigeria has been a serious issue that disrupts economic, educational, political, religious and stoical activities of the people. In this circumstance, there is no doubt in the claim that use of computer facilities for assessing internationalization of Early Childhood Education programmes cannot yield reasonable success. This is in line with the observation (Ogunleye, 2014) that non-availability of electricity is a serious challenge to application of computer and ICT. Although use of electric generators may serve in the alternative, they usually disappoint due to occasional technical faults and lack of expert technicians to put them in good conditions. A situation like that is also a hindrance to the innovation in question.

(e) Inadequate computer equipment and lack of maintenance

It is common experience that computer facilities occasionally break down or develop technical faults that require experts to handle. In such a situation, nursery schools especially those located in rural

areas where qualified technicians are usually lacking, will always find the use of computer for internationalization services unreliable.

Conclusion

Education at all levels requires innovations that will boost quality in the system for progressive human and national development. In the light of this underpinning, there is need to internationalize Early Childhood Education in Nigeria for quality to prepare young children for useful future life.

Recommendations

Based on the points raised in this paper and the conclusion made, the following recommendations are given:

1. Government at all levels should support Early Childhood Education properly by making necessary provisions that will make the programmes operational in line with global demands.
2. Managers of Early Childhood Education should ensure solid financial base before establishing or operating pre-primary schools. This is crucial in order to enhance adequate funding which Early Childhood Education demands including provision of computer and ICT facilities for international connections in related practices.
3. Government should assist pre-primary schools to provide competent or qualified teachers and care-givers. In this vein, teachers who are well grounded in computer knowledge for the purpose of internationalization of Early Childhood Education practices are most preferable.
4. Government of Nigeria and management of Power Holding Company should endeavour to address the issue of incessant power failure. This will help to boost human activities that are linked with electricity including use of computer for internationalization of Early Childhood Education practices.
5. There is need for provision of adequate computer equipment and ICT facilities in nursery schools to ensure durability and proper functioning. Services of expert technicians should always be employed whenever there is need for maintenance or repairs of faulty systems used for international linkage in Early Childhood Education.

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