

## EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE EDUCATION AND THE CHALLENGES OF INSECURITY IN NIGERIA

*Rosemary Unwaunyin Agba, Ph.D; Princewill O. Ejekwu and Friday Ogobi Ndifon, Ph.D*

### **Abstract**

*The Nigerian educational system is facing a lot of challenges ranging from circular, methodology funding, resources and many others, which have always been discussed and are presented without the government doing anything about it. The most pressing problem is almost forgotten because people hardly think about it. This is “insecurity”. In this paper, insecurity as it affect educational generally, and early childhood care education in particular was discussed and some tips presented as a way forward for parents and pupils to use as a guide in order to be security conscious in order to avoid situations that will expose the Nigerian child to kidnapping and or abductions which has been hindering progress in education. The federal republic of Nigeria is called upon to consider security issues as being a top priority in order to save the Nigerian child from insecurity which is ruining future of our children.*

Education in Nigeria has since been experiencing a lot of challenges. One of the major challenges being the abduction of the 276 school girls from their dormitories in Chibock, Borno State at a time the students were writing their final year examination. Maishianu (2021). After this, a lot of kidnapping and or abduction have been taking place in the country. In short it has become a norm. In April 2021 more than 150 students were missing after armed men raided a school in Kaduna State. This attack was said to be the tenth of such attacks and mass kidnapping of children since December 2020. There are many other cases of abduction and kidnapping of school children currently in Nigeria. In Calabar, Cross River State Nigeria, parents are being kidnapped leaving children with no one to cater for or children are being kidnapped so that parents will run around for ransom. This is taking place in all states of the federation. This is the situation in Nigeria. In this paper the situation as it affect education generally and early childhood education in particular will be x-rayed. Then recommendations made in order to help save the Nigerian child.

### **Early Childhood Care Education**

Early childhood education is the education given to prepare them for the primary level of education. It could be referred to as pre-primary education. It is defined in the National

Policy on Education as the education given in an educational institution to children prior to their entering the primary school. FRN (2004) it is the first level of education and part of the basic education. At this level, children from 0- 5 years plus are given adequate care while their parents are at work, farm or doing their business. More of care is given to children at this level than teaching. Recently in Nigeria, only one year is given to the pre-primary section in the public primary schools. Other day care centres or nursery schools as the names may apply, belong to the private sector. What the government does is to supervise, to ensure that standards are met. From the age range, it is clear that the children are still tender and require adequate attention for successful transition from here to school.

### **The Challenges of Early Childhood Care Education in Nigeria**

Early childhood care education which is the first level of education does not exist in isolation. Generally, education in Nigeria is experiencing lots of short comings. There are a lot of challenges associated with the early childhood care level of education Amadioha, (2017) in his research identified nine (9) challenges of early childhood education. These are;

- Lack of teaching and learning resources
- Low teacher-pupil ratio (over crowded classes)
- Inadequate trained teachers and caregivers
- Less emphasis on play and discovery learning
- Lack of family involvement
- Too much emphasis on examination
- High tuition fees
- Low motivation for teachers and caregivers
- Lack of proper supervision

Also Kolesnik (2017) presents problems of early childhood education in Nigeria as follows

1. Many early childhood education institutions do not offer quality services, irregular and substandard education is provided and the care of the children is often unsatisfactory.
2. Lack of qualified teachers. These institutions under-pay the teachers teaching to low employment rate only the unqualified agree to the low pay.
3. High tuition fees. Where there is a good nursery school with qualified teachers and caregivers, the fees will be so high that the parents will not be able to pay. They rather settle for the schools poor facilities and unqualified teachers indecent care is given to children since those employed to handle the children are not qualified for their positions. They therefore do not know how to care for the children.
4. Implementation of the policy of mother tongue or Local Language. In many of the institutions English Language is used as the language of instruction which is not supposed to be. Children would have learnt more if their mother tongue were used as the language of instruction.
5. Lack of supervision. The ministry of education is supposed to supervise the early childhood institutions but this is rarely carried out.

6. There is no incentives from the government so their salaries are low, thus no motivation at all.

Akinrotimi and Olowe, (2016) presented the following as challenges of early childhood education in Nigeria.

- a) Professionally qualified caregivers and teachers
- b) Resources – lack or inadequate
- c) Early childhood curriculum
- d) Professional development
- e) Supervision
- f) Staff – child ratio
- g) Funding

Observation made from the writings of Amadioha (2017), Kolesnik 2017 and Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016) is that security challenges were not even mentioned as one of the challenges of early childhood education in Nigeria. Meanwhile, if the Government decides to solve all the above identified problems or challenges of early childhood care education, the programme will still not go on smoothly without the safety of the children. There are other challenges identified by them that are common. These are staffing, resources teacher-pupil ratio, funding, high tuition supervision and the use of the curriculum and methods of teaching. One of the three writers Kolesnik (2017) identified the fact that Local Language is not used as directed by the government for easy understanding. He also identified the fact that families are not carried along. This is wrong because the caregivers will do this work easier when they work with the families because the families started the work while the care givers are continuing from there. There should be a link between the past and the present for a better future. Finally he identified the issue of placing emphasis on examination. The three writers have identified all together ten challenges of early childhood education. These have to be attended to for the effectiveness of early childhood education in Nigeria in a safe school environment that children will learn peacefully.

### **Challenges of Insecurity in Nigeria**

Security simply put is the safety of individuals. It is a primary responsibility of government to ensure that its citizens are safe at all times. Human security now, observe that Human security is concerned with safeguarding and expanding peoples vital freedoms. It requires bot protecting people from critical and pervasive threats and empowering people to take charge of their own lives. There are various categories of human security. These are; economic security, health security, environmental security, personal security, food security, community security and political security. 7 elements (2018).

To ensure the safety of its citizens, a good government must make provision for the above 7 elements. When this is done, there will be freedom and calm. Everyone will live in peace. Without these, the entry country is not secured including its citizens.

### **What is Insecurity?**

The dictionary meaning is uncertainty or anxiety about oneself; lack of confidence. It is also seen the state of being open to danger or threat; lack of protection. Thus non provision of the 7 elements at will cause the citizens to be doubtful of their life and existence. They are never sure of what is going to happen next. They find it difficult to plan ahead. This does not in any way encourage growth and development.

Nigeria is experiencing serious insecurity at the moment. The pattern of insecurity seems to be regionalized. In the south, militia groups are disturbing here and there. In the east and south, kidnapping is very high, ritual killings are all over in the east and west, in the north there is insurgency and in the entire country, assassinations here and there? Generally, considering the happenings in Nigeria, one can confidently say that Nigeria is no more safe. Many people travel but could not reach their destinations not because they had accidents and died but because they may have been kidnapped. Some people are taken away from their homes or offices for ransom to be paid some are tortured till they die, some are just shot dead. There is no safe place in Nigeria, urban and rural areas alike. This could be linked to the poverty experienced by hard working citizens except those in politics who care not really suffering but forcefully putting themselves there to torment the citizens.

### **Education and the Challenges of Insecurity in Nigeria**

As at 2015 according to the World Bank research, Nigerians population as at then was 73 million making Nigeria the most populous country in Africa and by revaluation, the country was said to be the richest in Africa then. As it concerns education, Ubong (2016) explains that the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) indicates that 40% of Nigerian children between the ages of 6-11 years are not attending primary schools especially in the Northern part of the country. It was also observed that 45% of the then population was made up of children bellow the age of 15 years. With a population of 173 million were under 15 years of age. If 40% of the number were not attending school, it means that about 31 million Nigerian children may end up as illiterates. These is because sources of insecurity. That is why the situation is getting worse. Many of those who were not matured yet as at then have matured and joined those who were already in the business of kidnapping and others. With the situation on ground, Ubong (2016) inquired, “which parent is happy to let a child leave the safety and comfort of home to face dangers on the way to school or while in school?” it has been difficult since these security issues surfaced in Nigeria.

Parents find it difficult to choose between sending children to school and loosing them and keeping them safe at home without going to school to plan the future of our children who are leaders of tomorrow.

Idoko (2021) observe that the United Nations Educational Scientific and cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has expressed concerns that the attack on schools and abductions of students have impacted natively on the development of education in Nigeria. She further observed that it is an attack on the connected development organization org. (CODE) (2021) report that kidnapping and abduction of school children has become a phenomenon in

Nigeria. It started 7 years ago with over a thousand students kidnapped already. Recently the trend has accelerated with kidnappings in Dapchi 110 girls in February 2018, Kangar North North-Western 300 boys in December 2020, Kangara. (North central Niger State) 27 boys in February 2021; Jangebe Zamfara State 279 girls in March 2021.

Lawal in CODE (2021) noted that the psychological and social consequences of these on parents and guardians are too grievous to describe and the abducted children often have to live with the scare for the rest of their lives for an education when schooling itself has its own share of challenges if going to school has become like preparing for or going for war, then what chances do the average Nigerian child have for a better education? In the same vein, Lawal (2018) observes that the recent abduction reveals the absence of safety measures in schools. He reports the case of a girl who said she saw them with her own eyes blocking the gate and they has to climb the fence to find a way of escape. She said “no matter what security is put in place, I honestly don’t think I can go back to this school”. I have a lot of friends who went missing.

Many children have stopped attending school due to abductions and kidnapping. This is happening across all the states of Nigeria. It is really ruining the Nigerian education system.

### **Early Childhood care Education and the Challenges of Insecurity in Nigeria**

As earlier explained, early childhood Care education does not exist in isolation. As the other levels of education are negatively affected so, it is the first level. The children at this level are still young and tender. They require adequate attention for effective care and successful transition for home to school. At this age, the children depend on adults for their livelihood. They are taken to and from school. While in school, they rely on the adult for instructions on what to do and what they should not do. Report across the country indicate that insecurity really is ruining early childhood education in Nigeria. In Cross River State, there are reports of abduction and kidnapping of children on various occasions. Two instances are cited here. There is a report by Cross River Watch (2014) of a 4 year old Effiong Edet who was abducted at Ekorinim axis of Calabar at about 8.30 pm who when the children were playing outside. Also Edem, (2018) reported how 2 primary school pupils were abducted by unknown persons from Government primary school Ikot Efanga Mkpa in Calabar municipal council of cross River State. In Akwa Ibom State Onuegbu (2020) reported in vanguard how 2 pupils (two siblings of ages 4 and 3 years) were abducted from a primary school in Afia Nsit by an unknown woman suspected to be a child trafficker.

In River State, Ekeinde (2007) reports that a 3 – year old boy was kidnapped while he was being taken to school by the family driver in the morning. Also in ondo State Dayo Johnson, (2021) gave a report on how 2 nursery pupils were abducted by gunmen when their mother left them in the car to open the gate of her house. She couldn’t find her children when she returned to the car.

In Kaduna State as in many other states in the north, it has been hail. Children are being kidnapped/abducted here and there; in short it has become a lucrative business. They

believe that money is made from kidnapping or abducting children more because the parents will run to several places to look for money in order to save the lives of their children.

In Kaduna, a parent explained that she had 5 of her children in the school Salihu Tanko Islaamiyya Primary school Kaduna/Mina Junction Rafi Local Government Area Niger State. All 5 were kidnapped but the two youngest were returned later ages 2 and 4 years leaving the ones of 6, 9 & 11 years.

It is observed that abduction was carried out in secondary schools and tertiary institutions but recently it has extended to the nursery and primary schools. Ekeinde (2007) and Arise news (2021) meanwhile these are the most delicate set of people going to school. What then should be done in order to ensure the safety of the Nigerian child?

### **The Way Forward**

Parents, teachers' guidance, caregivers, students children and many others that are concerned have been lamenting. Will the future of our children be blocked as a result of abduction/kidnapping? Education is said to be our key to success. Does it mean that our children will not succeed in life? In the words of Hawkins (2021) "with increasing incidents of attacks on schools and kidnapping of students, the entire educational system in northern Nigeria is at serious risk if nothing is done urgently to put a halt to the attacks and abductions". We can't just fold our hands and allow our children to suffer. Keeping them safe at home would not help them either. Something has to be done to save the Nigerian child.

The family is always seen and noted as the child's first school. Parents have a responsibility of teaching the children to be security conscious. Let the children know that any strange person around them should not be trusted, that while at home, in the market, at school on the way, they could be attacked. They should learn to raise alarm where they do not understand what is happening around them. They should call the attention of any adult around them for help.

Adedeji, and Marco (2021) suggest that assessment should be done to find out schools that are prone to attacks so that the children in such schools will be relocated to safer schools. There should be strong security network developed using the commentary youths, whenever children are in school, they should be taught security education.

To Atakpo (2020) the entire early childhood curriculum is built in such a way that when implemented the child will be equipped for future security challenges because the content is rich and involves the total development of the child with a lot of emphasis on social skills, relationships and team work.

Also Pope and Romito (2020) observed that stranger abductions are rare, that most abductions and kidnappings are carried out by family members or acquaintances. So they suggest that children should be trained to be aware of their surroundings, how to identify a threat and how to react. From the age of 3 years, they suggest that the children should be guided by the following tips by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to prevent abduction.

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- Stay away from strangers. Explain what makes someone a stranger. Note that even someone with a familiar face is a stranger if you do not know him or her well.
- Stay away from someone who is following you on foot or in a car. Don't get close to them or feel as though you must answer any questions they ask you.
- Run and scream if anyone tries to force you to go somewhere with them or tries to force you into a car.
- Memorize a secret code word. Tell your child not to go with anyone under any circumstances unless that person also knows this code word.
- Adults shouldn't ask children for help for example a child shouldn't trust grown-ups who ask kids for directions or for help finding a pappy or latten a child who is approached in this way should tell the person, wait here and I will check with my mom or Dad and then find his or her parents right away.
- Always ask for help when you are lost. If you are lost in a public place, ask someone who works there for help.
- Always ask for permission before going, how you will get there, who is going with you and when you will be back. Be home at the agreed upon time or else find a way to contact home directly.
- If your child is lost or missing, being able to provide information quickly to the authorities will save them valuable time in searching for your child so parents/guardians/caregivers should be ready with:
  - Be prepared with a good description of your child. Have a close-up photograph of your child taken every 6 months. Keep tract of and write down details about your child's appearance, such as height and weight, eye color, birthmarks, scars and identifiable mannerisms such as hair-twisted
  - Have your child finger printed. Check your local police department for instructions
  - Stay calm. You are more likely to remember helpful details if you can remain calm with terse a guide, many children will be saved from abduction/kidnapping.

Above all the federal government of Nigeria should re assess the issue of security as Adedeji and Marco pointed out, they should address the long term security treat in the country. Security measures should be put in place as it is rightly observed by Lawal (2018) that the attacks on schools frequently has exposed the absence of security in the schools.

### **Conclusion**

It is observed that the greatest threat to life at the moment in Nigeria is the issue of insecurity. This is spreading to all other sectors of the economy. Food production is reduced leading to increased hunger, prices of food items are increasing on a daily bases since farmers are not safe. Many teachers combine teaching with other forms of businesses since the salary is not more enough to feed the family. This distraction has caused the teachers/caregivers not to concentrate on the children left under their care. With this, the safety of the children is not guaranteed. Abductors or kidnappers may go to schools when the teachers are out of the classes to pick the children from the classrooms without anybody noticing. The situation is so

bad that the federal government has to do something urgently so save the situation before it becomes unbearable.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are made:

- 1) The parents should continuously insist on security consciousness so that the children will know what to do at all times.
- 2) The teachers should implement the curriculum as it is observed that the curriculum content is rich enough to instill security consciousness in the children
- 3) The government should supervise and ensure that appropriate content is taught to the children to ensure acquisition of appropriate skills that will help the child to grow in the larger society and be safe.
- 4) Government should undertake the training of security guards in the community among the youth to avoid external attacks on communities.

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