

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN NIGERIA

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Received 2021.09.11-Accepted 2021.10.20

ABSTRACT

This paper examines early childhood education and sustainable development in Nigeria. The purpose of this paper was to establish the relativeness between early childhood education and the attainment of sustainable development goals in the nation. In achieving this, four concepts and one theory were reviewed to seek how relevant early childhood education is towards fostering individuals to become capable citizens that can contribute their quota towards the attainment of a development that is sustainable in the economy. It was found out that early childhood education plays a vital role in the rate of attainment of sustainable development in the economy but it is not well implemented in the nation. It was then concluded that early childhood education can be seen as the bane to ensuring the attainment of development of a nation as well as the sustainability of that development. It was recommended that the proper implementation of early childhood education should be taken seriously by all concerned entities of the nation. It was also recommended that there should be enough provision, financially and otherwise, for the initiation of more institutions of early childhood education in the nation.

Key words: Early Childhood, Sustainable Development.

INTRODUCTION

Education is the process of reformation of individuals towards empowering them for contributing their quota towards the development of the nation as a whole. As it is well quoted, a society that is termed literate can achieve early development; thereby making education one of the backbone of the development process of any nation. The best time for an individual to be exposed to the rigorous process of education is when they are still tender because, at that stage, their brain is still very receptive to new ideas. This, I believe, then brought about the initiation of the branch of education known as "Early childhood education". That will then lead us to explore the definition of some core concepts concerning the topic under study.

Theoretical Framework

Ecological Theory by Urie Bronfenbrenner

This theory examines a child's growth in the context of the network of relationships that constitutes his or her environment. Bronfenbrenner's theory identifies various "layers" of the environment, each of which influences a child's development. This idea was termed "bio-ecological systems theory" recently to underline that a child's biology is a key environment that fuels her development. The combination of variables in the child's evolving biology, immediate family/community environment, and societal landscape fuels and leads his growth. Changes or conflicts in any layer will have an effect on the levels above and below it. To investigate a child's growth, we must consider not just the child and

her local surroundings, but also the interplay of the greater environment.

The microsystem– This is the layer that is nearest to the child and holds the components that the child has a visible touch with. The microsystem includes a child's relationships and interactions with her immediate environment (Berk, 2000). Family, school, neighbourhood, or day-care surroundings are examples of microsystem structures. Relationships have an impact at this level in both directions - away from and toward the child. A child's beliefs and behaviour, for example, maybe influenced by his parents; however, the child influences the parent's behaviour and beliefs. These are referred to as *bi-directional influences* by Bronfenbrenner, and he demonstrates how they exist at all levels of the environment. The interaction of structures inside a layer, as well as interactions across layers, is central to this theory. *Bi-directional influences* are powerful and have the largest impact on the child at the microsystem level. Interactions at the outer levels, however, can nevertheless have an impact on the inner structures.

The mesosystem– This layer connects the many structures of the child's microsystem (Berk, 2000). Examples include the relationship between the child's instructor and his parents, his church and his neighbourhood, and so on.

The exo-system – This layer defines the greater social framework in which the child does not play a direct role. The structures in this layer influence the child's growth by interacting with some structure in her microsystem

(Berk, 2000). Parental work schedules or community-based family resources are two examples. At this level, the youngster may not be actively participating, but he feels the good or negative force associated with the contact with his system.

The macro-system – This layer is the child's environment's outermost layer. While not a distinct framework, this layer is made up of cultural values, conventions, and laws (Berk, 2000). The consequences of broader principles specified by the macro-system have a cascade effect on the interactions of all other layers. For example, if it is the confidence of the philosophy that parents should be solely responsible for raising their children, that culture is less likely to provide resources to help parents. This, in turn, moves the constructions in which the parents function. The parents' ability or incapability to carry out that responsibility toward their child within the setting of the child's microsystem is likewise affected.

The chronosystem – This system takes into account the time dimension as it relates to a child's environment. Elements in this system can be external, such as the timing of a parent's death, or internal, such as physiological changes that occur as a child grows older. Children may react differently to environmental changes as they grow older, and they may be better able to predict how those changes will affect them.

More modern child growth theories accept that both a child's ecology and his environment play a role in change and growth. Theories are now focusing on the roles that each plays and the extent to which they interact in the ongoing development. The quality and setting of the child's environment are central to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. He claims that as a child grows, his or her interactions in these environments become more complex. As the child's physical and cognitive structures develop and mature, this complexity may emerge. So, given that nature continues on its course, how does the environment around the child aid or hinder continued development? Bronfenbrenner's theory provides an answer to this question.

Implication of the Ecological Theory to the Study

Bronfenbrenner sees the instability and unpredictability of family life we've let our economy create as the most destructive force to a child's growth (Addison, 1992). Children do not have the constant mutual interaction with important adults that is necessary for development. According to the ecological theory, if the relationships in the immediate microsystem break down, the child will not have the tools to explore other parts of his environment.

Children looking for the affirmations that must be present in the child/parent (or child/other important adults) relationship look for attention in inappropriate places. These deficiencies show themselves especially in adolescence as anti-social behaviour, lack of self-discipline, and inability to provide self-direction (Addison, 1992).

This theory has dire implications for the practice of teaching. Knowing about the breakdown occurring within children's homes, is it possible for our educational system to make up for these deficiencies? It seems now that schools and teachers must provide

stable, long-term relationships. Yet, Bronfenbrenner believes that the primary relationship needs to be with someone who can provide a sense of caring that is meant to last a lifetime.

This relationship must be fostered by a person or people within the immediate sphere of the child's influence. Schools and teachers fulfil an important secondary role, but cannot provide the complexity of interaction that can be provided by primary adults. For the educational community to attempt a primary role is to help our society continue its denial of the real issue. The problems students and families face are caused by the conflict between the workplace and family life – not between families and schools. Schools and teachers should work to support the primary relationship and to create an environment that welcomes and nurtures families. We can do this while we work to realize Bronfenbrenner's ideal of the creation of public policy that eases the work/family conflict (Henderson, 1995). It is in the best interest of our entire society to lobby for political and economic policies that support the importance of parents' roles in their children's development. Bronfenbrenner would also agree that we should foster societal attitudes that value work done on behalf of children at all levels: parents, teachers, extended family, mentors, work supervisors, legislators.

What is Early Childhood Education?

Early childhood education can then be seen as the education given in an educational institution to children before they entered primary school. According to Nworgu (2007), early childhood education can as well be seen as the care, protection, simulation, and learning promoted in children from age 0-5 in a day-care centre, nursery, or kindergarten. It is organized into three categories which are:

- Day-care
- Playgroup
- Kindergarten

These respective categories have their respective characteristics and functions that help in distinguishing one from the other. The day-care category consists of the simulation, care, protection and learning promoted in children that are within the age range of 0-2 years and they are charged with the duty of teaching toiletry habits and good conducts to these set of children; the playgroup category consists of the simulation, care, protection and learning promoted in children that are within the age range of 2-3 years and they are charged with the duty of teaching the art of reading alphabets, rhymes, poems, play with toys as well as the development of language skills through speeches; the kindergarten category consists of the simulation, care, protection and learning promoted in children that are within the age range of 3-5 years and are charged with the duty of teaching subjects like reading, writing and arithmetic (Nwivu, 2004).

In general speaking, early childhood education can then simply be said to be the foundational knowledge granted to children during their tender age that will then enable them to develop more in all ramifications towards enabling them to reach the stage at which they can become better citizens in the country. Early childhood care education has become an integral part of Universal Basic Education (UBE).

What is Sustainable Development?

It is the organizing principle for meeting human development goals while at the same time, sustaining the ability of natural systems to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services upon which the economy and society depend. Sustainable development has to do with economic growth and environmental quality protection, each reinforcing the others (Uche&Nwabueze, 2013). It can as well be seen as the development that meets the need of the present, without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their needs. It is a development that works to balance different needs against an awareness of the environmental, social, and economic limitations we face as a society. Development is frequently driven by a single need, without fully considering the broader or long-term implications. This kind of approach towards ensuring the development of a nation can bring about a lot of damage, thereby making the development process to be unachievable or fully achievable, which can therefore be termed as an unsustainable development. Education for sustainable development exposes and teaches individuals how to make decisions that consider the long term future of the economy. Hence quality early childhood education is holistic and a prerequisite for education for sustainable development.

Significance of Early Childhood Education to Sustainable Development

As well known, education can as well serve as one of the bedrocks of development of any society for a developed society is a literate society and education is what brings about literacy and it comes in variations with each of these variations having their respective role towards ensuring the sustainability of the development that a particular nation has achieved or attained. Early childhood is critical in preparing children to enter and succeed in the classroom, diminishing their risk of social, emotional and mental health problems and increasing their self-sufficiency as adults. It has the capacity to pre-emptively begin closing the educational achievements gap between low- and high-income students before formal schooling begins, also exposes children to the concept of cooperation and holistic development, learning how to share, cooperate, take turns and persevere within a self-learning environment, guided by professionals who have the children's best interest at heart. Several studies have reported that children enrolled in early childhood care education (ECCE) increase their IQ scores by 4 to 11 points by age five. Above all early childhood education also gives children the opportunity to participate in activities they wouldn't normally get to do at homes such as arts and crafts, science activities, sand and water play, music and movement, also makes children more emotionally prepared because they are already accustomed to a certain level of structure as well as being away from home. This is equivalently the case for early childhood education as regards the sustainable development of an economy. As formerly said, sustainable development is that kind of development that seems to be more beneficial to an economy and prone to be evident for a longer period, and early childhood education can make this to be achievable by contributing its quota in the following ways:

- Inculcation of social norms.
- Inculcation of the spirit of inquiry and creativity.
- Development of sense of cooperation and team spirit.
- Teaching of good habits, especially good health habits.
- Preparing children for primary level of education.

These are necessary things that need to be well-known by individuals for they all have their respective roles to play towards nurturing him/her to the right track of becoming that kind of citizen that any society that he/she finds himself/herself is expectant of and all these are best inculcated in young minds that are in their tender age for it is the best time for which their mind is receptive of things and these things can easily be stored and made a part of them for a long time, which is the purpose of early childhood education.

Impediments of Early Childhood Education Implementation

Like other forms of education, there seem to be one or more conditions or factors that can bring about the lesser success rate at which it is being implemented or instigated. These conditions are what we all see as impediments facing the success of early childhood education and some are vivid to our economy of today, which will be listed below:

- Lack of Professional Caregivers/Teachers
- Lack of Resources
- Non-Availability of Curriculum
- No Supervision
- Staff-Child Ratio
- Funding

Each of these impediments will be briefly discussed to state how they can hamper the success rate of the implementation of early childhood education.

Lack of Professional Caregivers/Teachers.

When we have professionally sound caregivers/teachers, the services rendered to the children will be equally yoked with it. This is so because one can only remit to almost perfection what he/she has better mastery of thereby enabling them to be professionals of their dealings. Unfortunately, this is not evident in most institutions of early childhood education in Nigeria because most of these institutions are engulfed with the idea of employing teachers that are not equally yoked with the basic rudiments of early childhood education (Olaleye&Omotayo, 2009; Amadi, 2013; Okewole, Iluezi-Ogbedu, &Osinowo, 2015; Osho, Aliyu, Okoli, &Onifade, 2013).

Lack of Resources

The amount of resources available, as well as their capacity to render the needed services, is a very vital thing to be looked at by several educators of the nation. This is so because the quantity and quality of resources available for any educational programme would determine the school system's capacity for implementation of the type of programme (Chukwubikem, 2013). Whenthere is bound to be enough provision of resources to work with, teachers of institutions of early childhood education will be able to work more adequately and efficiently.

Non-Availability of Curriculum

The curriculum is the vehicle through which any educational programme can be successfully implemented because, without it, there will just be a great amount of rigmarole in the activities that are to be conducted by the human components of any educational institution. The presence of curriculum in any educational institution brings about the proper coordination in the activities that are being engaged-in in that particular institution, for which institutions of early childhood education are not left behind. But this availability of curriculum is not evident in most institutions of early childhood education in Nigeria (Viatonu, Usman-Abdulqadir, & Dagunduro, 2011; Amali, Bello, & Okafor, 2012; Okewole, Iluezi-Ogbedu, & Osinowo, 2015). With the absence of curriculum in the institutions of early childhood education, learning will not move smoothly and thereby hampering the rate at which these children can be properly nurtured towards becoming better citizens that will foster the sustainability of the development of their economy.

No Supervision

Necessary supervision of activities of educational institutions helps in gearing them forward towards the attainment of the main purpose for which they are being initiated for and institutions of early childhood education are not left out in this quest. When supervision is not being carried out, the implementation of goals and objectives will not be effective. Supervision of institutions of early childhood education helps in promoting motivation, maintenance of basic standards, and identification of certain problems that face these institutions.

Staff-Child Ratio

This rationale refers to the number of children assigned to the care of each teacher in the institutions of early childhood education and this can as well hamper the quality of services rendered to the children by these teachers. Two forms are evident in educational institutions of today, which are greater children per teacher (otherwise known as lower staff-child ratio) and smaller children per teacher (otherwise known as higher staff-child ratio), and in most cases, the smaller children per teacher seem to be more preferred if the quality of services rendered by these teachers is to be improved upon and that is not evident in institutions of early childhood education in our economy.

Funding

Funding is a prerequisite that cannot be side-lined in any organization, be it educational or not. This is so because there are necessities that are to be met by these organizations for them to be effective and these can majorly be achieved if there are enough funds present in that particular organization. This can as well be accrued to the institutions of early childhood education and so, therefore, should not be neglected but rather paid more attention to for there are basic needs that both the teachers and the children under their care would need to enable them to work hand-in-hand effectively.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

This study as opposed to others hinged majorly on the concepts of catch them young as regards to inducting the mind of individuals so to enable them be more proficient

in handling matters that can result in greater sustainable development agenda of any nation at a very tender age. The second area of interest of the author which also serve its purpose onto the origination of the study is in the rate of inefficient individuals that are found littering the society with little or no means of contributing anything meaningful to the growth and development of our country Nigeria. The country Nigeria is a land full of lots of greater opportunities that are yet to be tapped into and the major area of concern for this draw back is set on the capability of its citizens /individuals in proffering the necessary means by which the aim of sustainable development can be achieved. These individuals, left with their vulnerable nature to growth and development, are therefore seen as being liable to cause a deterring effect on the economy of the nation towards thriving. This is then viewed as problems that can be averted with the prompt training of the mind in the right proportion at an early stage which is where the concept of early childhood education programme comes in,

Recommendations

The following are recommendations based on what has been discussed thus far:

Proper implementation of early childhood education should be taken seriously by all concerned entities of the nation.

There should be enough supervision for existing institutions of early childhood education to ensure the meeting of their basic requirements, financially and otherwise, to attainment better goals and objectives laid out for them.

There should be enough provision, financially and otherwise, for the initiation of more institutions of early childhood education in the nation.

To have qualified teachers in the classroom, pre-service teachers must go through teachers training colleges to obtain a certificate in early childhood education.

Develop an appropriate Early childhood education curriculum that would be useful to children 0 to 5 years, and supervision be carried out in schools by government, parents and school heads to examine educational progress from time to time.

Government can create campaigns, enlightenment to parents, create scholarships to encourage every child to benefit from early childhood learning, restructure the schools to support teacher effectiveness.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION AND FINDINGS

The author perceives the mind as a strong tool towards effecting the necessary and needed change in the society thereby bringing about the advocating of cultivating it as early as possible. The study highlights some deficiencies that are entangled with early childhood education thereby putting further the need for rectification

The findings presented in this study stipulates that the efficiency of early childhood education is majorly hindered by some noticeable factors such as inadequacy of facilities non professionalism of teachers and instructors charged with the sole duty of achieving this feat as well as the suitability of the course content to match with the opposed necessity for early childhood education. Putting all these into consideration, the

researcher further puts in some possible potent recommendations that will aid the higher functionality of early childhood education programme which ranges from finance to the teaching personnel involved.

CONCLUSION

It is very obvious that pre-primary education has a positive influence on a child's educational background later in life, so its policy should be effectively implemented as stated in the National policy on education, this certainly will enhance sustainable development in the country. Early childhood education can be seen as the bane to ensuring the attainment of development of a nation as well as the sustainability of that development. This is so because it has been proven thus far that early childhood education is the nocturnal requirement needed for the proper nurturing of an individual towards enabling him/her to become what is expected of him/her by the society in which he/she lives, which is mostly to be citizens that are capable of growing and developing the economy in their numerous ways.

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