

Early Childhood Training and Education Neglect and its Implication on Children's Future Achievements, National Peace and Development: A Critical Review of Literature

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Abstract

According to the National Policy on Education (2004), government is expected to take care of educational need of its younger citizens. Failure of Nigerian government to implement this section of the policy appropriately creates an avenue for the private proprietors/investors, who established and operated schools for monetary and economic interest. Thus, formal childhood training and education is beyond the reach of many parents who could not afford to pay high school fees being charged by the private schools proprietors/investors. Thereby, making these 'poor' parents end up in keeping their children away from schools. Consequent upon which, many of these younger citizens find 'alternative' ways of surviving. The paper revealed that these 'abandoned children', as young as they are, engage in different economic activities. In rural areas, they work in the farm as farm assistant; involving in planting, weeding, harvesting crops, tending livestock and apply chemicals to plants where applicable. In urban cities, they work as vendors/hawkers, shoe shiners, car washers, scavengers, beggars and housemaids. These made the children to be vulnerable to accident, violence, kidnapping and become 'ingredients' in the hands of ritualist, traffickers and sexual exploiters (which made them to be HIV/AIDS carriers). Thereafter, these younger citizens either become rapists, prostitutes, thugs, hooligans, pick-pockets, drugs addicts and peddlers, armed robbers' or even hired killers, and thus, completely fit to be used as machinery in the hands of politicians to achieve their inordinate goals. Subsequently, these children (the hope and future of the nation!) constitute complete nuisance to 'the state' having discovered that 'the state' has truncated their destiny and that they are no longer useful for themselves. The paper, therefore, recommends that state of emergency should be declared in the education sector, where all stakeholders should meet to review the state of early childhood training and education. Government should also, adhere strictly to the United Nation 26% benchmark for education in the annual budget.

Keywords: Early Childhood Training and Education, Children's Future, National Peace and Development

Introduction

Education is *sine qua non* for human and nation's development. Education is light and life, as human beings cannot function properly without it. The importance of education especially to the children cannot be over emphasised globally. To this extent, Article 26(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 states, that 'everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory' (UN, <http://www.un.org/rights/50/decla.htm>).

Education and training required for the development of child must start early in their life, that is, from childhood. This is because, early childhood period is the time when children develop basic values, attitudes, skills, behaviours and habits, which will be long lasting (UNESCO, 2008). Thus, when a child is trained in the way he should go, he will not depart from it when he is old (Proverbs 22:6, The Holy Bible, King James Version, n.d.).

Adequate funding is required for the realisation of early childhood training and education. In America, for instance the state and local expenditures for child education and training exceed \$23 billion annually while federal expenditures is over \$17 billion, yet, the need for child educational care remains inadequate (Landry, 2005). Contrarily, in Nigeria, where literacy level is 61.3% and illiteracy level is 38.7% (<http://en.wikipedia.org/>), Nigeria still pay lips service to education development especially, for its younger citizens. According to the United Nation specification, each nation is expected to allocate 26% of its annual budget to education. However, Nigeria allocation to its general educational system is nothing to write home about. This is confirmed by Oseni (2012:1) who asserted thus

For the 2013 fiscal year, an amount of N4.92 trillion was presented as a budget in which Education sector got N426.53 billion which is 8.7% of the budget against international benchmark for developing countries which is 26%.

The consequence of this is that, early childhood training and education which forms the foundation for all other

levels of educational programmes is abandoned for private proprietors/investors to operate. This is a minus to child educational development, child future development as well as nation's development.

It is against this background that the paper examines the importance, cost benefits, and the impact of early childhood training and education neglect in the hands of private proprietors/investors. The paper also examines the effect of this on the future of the children as well as its implications for national peace and development.

Early Childhood Training and Education: A Conceptual Clarification

Early Childhood training and education is given different names by different education Scholars across the globe in the literature. For instance, it is referred to as "early childhood education" in Nigeria (National Policy on Education, 2004), "pre-school" "early child care" "pre-compulsory education" in the United Kingdom and United States of America (Goodman and Sianesi, 2005; Landry, 2005), "pre-school", "pre-nursery", "pre-primary" also in Nigeria (Obisanya, Nwokocha, Salawu and Osuji, 2006), even though their meanings tilt along the same line.

A cursory glance through existing literature on the concept reveals that different scholars have divergent views on the subject. For instance, NPE (2004) sees early childhood education as the education given to children before entering into the primary school. This type of education is a formal education which takes place in an educational institution. It includes the crèche, the nursery, and the kindergarten. Early childhood education to Akinola (2004) refers to different programmes initiative required for children from birth to pre-school age to make them blossom. These initiatives according to them include early stimulation, a situation whereby children are motivated and encouraged to learn. Also, nutrition in form of food, snacks, juice, biscuits are provided and optimal interactive are allowed whereby children do things together like clapping, singing and dancing in a conducive environment.

Nursery education according to Goodman and Sianesi (2005) are educational activities taking place in establishments regularly attended by the child outside his or her own home in order to participate in educational activities, before starting school. Relating the concept to what is being practiced in the United Kingdom and United States of America, Goodman and Sianesi stress, that pre-school include formal centre-based care in the form of nurseries (both Local Authority or independent), and other more informal settings such as playgroups, which also give children the opportunity to interact with peers and typically expose children to learning experiences. Early care and education to Landry (2005) and Maduwesi (2005), means the entire system of care and education services provided to young children prior to school entry. Landry's definition though simple, is very unique and all encompassing 'entire system of care and education' could be seen as covering medical, welfare and academic need of the children.

Obisanya *et al.*, (2006) see pre-primary as the first formal education children received under the auspices of the teachers. To them, other education could be received at home such as how to eat, how to use toilet, how to wear pant and so on, but pre-primary offer first formal education. The main concern of pre-primary education is to build the background of experience that is needed for the promotion of later attainment of academic skills. Given that, other levels of the education system are built upon it, 'any defect or impairment at this stage could go a long way in affecting the later intellectual ability and adjustment of the child'. In the same view with Obisanya *et al.*, is Nakpodia (2011) who sees childhood education as a preparatory step for primary education, a starting point for the child's general development and the foundation of Nigerian education system. To Ibiam and Ugwu (2009) pre-primary education is the education designed to develop the habits, attitudes and skills needed for primary education. Thus, pre-primary gives pre-knowledge and develop child's habits, attitudes and skills prior entering into primary school.

Early childhood education, to Ejie (2006), is education that is beneficial to young children for their educational development from school-entry age. Therefore, childhood education could be seen as a foundation upon which the success or failure of other levels of education depends. Thus, putting all these postulations together one can therefore rightly see pre-nursery schools as an institution established to cater for the children in the areas of cognitive and affective domain in preparation for the future academic challenges.

The Importance of Early Childhood Training and Education

Early years of a child is crucial, in the sense that, the quality of learning experienced at this stage determines to a great extent the overall functioning and adjustment to the environment later in life (Onu, Obiozor, Agbo, and Ezeanwu, 2010; Onyegegbu and Eze, 2012). This is because; early childhood care and education focus on holistic development of children through 'improved health, nutrition, socio-emotional and psychomotor development activities'.

The earliest years of a child's life are very significant as it forms the foundation upon which the future of child's lie. This is the period of radical mental and physical development. Early childhood education programmes according to Onu *et al.*, (2010), give children the opportunity to 'learn phenomenal amount of experiences' at

home and environments. The programme equally enhances better language acquisitions, better performance in Arithmetic and Social skills (Sacks and Ruzzi, 2005). It is the bedrock of other higher levels of education as it enhances school readiness, better school performance and social outcomes, higher graduation rates, lower crime and delinquency as well as decrease in welfare dependency (Sacks and Ruzzi, 2005; Olubor, 2009).

Another purpose of early childhood education as reasoned by Olubor (2009), Onyegegbu and Eze (2012) is to meet the safety, health, education and social needs of the children. In those days of economy buoyancy in Nigeria, like other nations in Africa, women used to stay at home taking care of the children (except few of them who were working) while men go to work. But in the present days, more women are entering the paid workforce; therefore, there is need for a safe and conducive place to keep the children while parents are at work (Obisanya *et al.*, 2006; Olubo, 2009). In similar vein, Goodman and Sianesi (2005), in their study on preschool system in the United Kingdom and United States of America, opined that early childcare and pre-school policies have become an important strategy of improving the well-being of children, 'either through the enabling effect that childcare has on allowing parents to work, or through other more direct effects of early education on children'. Thus, pre-school provides happiness, security and care for young children, especially at the time when their parents are at work. Parents feel happy and have peace of mind that their children are in safe hands while they are at work and their children enjoy playing and learning with their mates simultaneously (Obisanya *et al.*, 2006). Scholars in the field of child development such as Bloom (1964) have established that the placement of children in a healthy and conducive atmosphere for learning early enough are of vital importance. This is because experience gained at this period has been found to be of immense assistance to child's development and skills and acquisition needed for the other levels of schools (Zant and Camozzi, 1992) and their future development and advancement. Therefore, early childhood training cannot be overemphasised as it is a nursery bed from where children are been watered and nurtured to become citizens that will transform, build and develop the nation through application of developmental knowledge acquired early in their lives.

Further to the above, Jersild, Telford and Sawrey, (1975) observed that early childhood training and education influences children's effective, conceptual and social development in subsequent years of their lives. Early childhood training and education equally compliments home training, but it is not a substitute to home training (Obisanya *et al.*, 2006). Accordingly, it helps in preparing the child for his future schooling and also assists him to benefit fully from his present stage of development by equipping him for future living. That is, early childhood education and training involves educational activities which help the children to acquire behaviour patterns; abilities and skills that are very essential for effective citizenship in the society in which they live.

It should be noted that, early childhood training and education is recognised by the Federal Government of Nigeria. It is enshrined in the National Policy on Education where the objectives are well stated as well as the measures to be taken 'by the government' to realise the policy objectives. However, Onu *et al.*, (2010) note sadly, that despite the importance of early childhood training and education, most of the developing countries, Nigeria inclusive, pay lips service to the programme such that, the policies, programmes and budget of the nations have not reflected adequately policy decision towards its establishment.

Effects of Private Control of Early Childhood Training and Education

There is no disputing the fact that government at all levels in Nigeria has failed in the provision of early childhood training and education to the children in the country, despite the recognition given to the programmes in the National Policy on Education. This situation has so far made the private schools in Nigeria to thrive. However, the purpose for the establishment of schools by the private individuals and groups are commercial and economic gain or interest. In a situation where virtually all provision for early childhood training and education is made by these private groups, there are bound to be shortcomings in the implementation of the policy on this education programmes and problems in the realization of the objectives of such a policy. Ejieh (2006:61) asserted unequivocally that

Much of the shortcoming in the implementation of the national policy on pre-primary education hinges on the failure of the Federal Government to put into effect most of the measures it stated in the *National Policy on Education* aimed at ensuring that the policy objectives are achieved. Of all the measures the Federal Government undertook to take in order to facilitate the achievement of the objectives of pre-primary education, the only one it effectively accomplished is the granting of permission for private effort in the provision of pre-primary education in the country, with virtually no participation by the public sector.

Thus, while America, United Kingdom and other nations of the world are spending a lot of money to finance early childhood education, Nigeria is playing hide and seek game to the programmes, and neglect it in the hands of private groups. America for instance, is cumulatively spending more than \$40 billion dollars annually on early childhood programmes alone and with the notion that the programmes is still underfunded (Landry, 2005).

Another observation made by Ejieh and corroborated by Olubor (2009) is that running and operation of early childhood education is completely left in the hands of private operators of early education without adequate supervision by the government. The neglect on the part of government amounts to breach of rules and regulations guiding the nation's educational programmes. Thus, inadequate supervision has made private proprietors provide educational services in line with the values and priorities of parents in order to remain in business. For example, the play method of teaching which was advocated in the National Policy is not effectively used in most of the schools (Ejeh, 2006). Many of the available toys provided by the proprietors are for recreational purposes and not for instruction and learning. Lending credence to Ejieh's position is Olubor who posits that textbooks, nursery rhymes and other learning materials are inadequate in these schools and that many of the preschools "are in dilapidated uncompleted buildings without chairs and desks for the children to sit on and no ventilation while the kids are crowded into suffocating rooms".

Similarly, inability of the government at controlling high school fees is a great challenge towards education attainment of the children. Parents have to comply with the decision of the proprietors or withdraw their children from school.

The Cost Benefits of Early Childhood Training and Education

Cost benefit analysis generally refers to the tools and procedures needed to ascertain whether a proposed public investment is worthwhile (Amram and Kulatilaka, 1999). Cost benefit analysis helps to compare the costs and benefits of government policy or programme and is frequently used to evaluate the desirability of a given policy. It is an analysis of the expected balance of benefits and costs, including an account of foregone alternatives. Cost benefit analysis helps to predict whether the benefits of a policy outweigh its costs, and by how much relative to other alternatives.

Different scholars on early childhood education have asserted that investing in early childhood education yields high returns (Landry 2005; Barnett, 2006) and 'if you think education is expensive, try ignorance' (Derek Bok n.d. cited in Landry, 2005). Proper planning and investment in children's training and education early enough could bring about better living for the children later in life, consequently, bring about national peace and development. Early childhood training and education programmes need adequate funding (Landry, 2005). However, the cost of failure to fund education early enough (on time) could snowball into multiple spending thereafter; a case of a stitch in time saves nine. Thus, the money not spent for the development of these younger citizens early enough will be eventually used to rehabilitate them thereafter, and this could be counter-productive to national peace, socio-economic and development. This is in line with John Ruskin cited in Landry (2005) who avowed that "let us reform our schools, and we will find little need of reforming our prisons". Thereby, reformation of schools will lead to 'significant reductions in violent and nonviolent crime and in the rate of juvenile arrest, youth violence which include violence against others and violence against oneself (self-mutilation, eating disorders, and suicide)'. Therefore, the antidote to crimes which could lead to imprisonment could be easily subdued with positive early childhood education and development for the children (Landry, 2005).

Further to the above, according to Landry, individual, economy and the State as a whole will benefit, if early training and education is given priority. Better education means a better educated people in the society, healthier environment and better socialized population. In Landry's words "a better educated, better socialized and healthier population also is a better educated, better socialized and healthier workforce". Early childhood is thus, a preventive measure for criminal behaviour before emanating.

Challenges facing Early Childhood Training and Education

One of the problems facing Nigeria is the problem of providing quality education for its younger citizens. Onu *et al.*, (2010) observed that ineffective planning, accountability, poor management of resources and undefined curriculum are the major problems facing policy makers of education in Nigeria.

Government's negative attitude to the establishment of pre-school constitutes a major challenge for the realisation of early childhood training and education. The government has not been budgeting appropriately to education. For instance, government allocated a paltry sum of N426.53 billion which is 8.7% of total budget for the 2013 fiscal year. The effect of this is that a good number of nursery schools in Nigeria are being run by private proprietors/investors. Government's inability to participate fully in the preschool programmes in spite of its inclusion in the National Policy on Education poses a great challenge against the realisation of the programme as well as future advancement of Nigeria's younger citizens.

Therefore, the only option for the realisation of early childhood training and education is to be established and managed by private sectors (Individuals, Organisations and Churches), a clear departure from the policy statement of the programme as documented in the National Policy on Education. Lack of government adherence to the objectives of the policy in respect of adequate funding, infrastructural development, material and non

material resources and standard curriculum guidelines are serious threat to preschool development in Nigeria (Amali, Bello and Okafor, 2012).

Other challenges as noted by Ejieh (2006), Obisanya *et al.*, (2006) and Ossai (2012) was that most of the preschools have space and equipment problems. Buildings (classroom, libraries, storerooms, offices and laboratories), furniture and instructional hardware are lacking in many preschools. For instance, instructional materials which are very important in the teaching/learning process are not provided adequately in many of these schools. Toys and games which help in making children learn ‘with ease in contentment and active way rather than passive environment’ are grossly lacking in most of the pre-primary schools operated by private proprietors (Obisanya *et al.*, 2006). Also, many of these schools were been operated in industrial and business areas, church premises, community/town halls and residential buildings as well as other rented places. Thus, many of these pre-schools environments are below standard for lack of planning of the schools structures.

Further to the above, in his study on the quality of teachers which was carried out in some selected preschools in South Eastern part of Nigeria, Ezirim (2004) cited in Onu *et al.*, (2010) discovered that out of the 1,429 teachers in nursery schools surveyed; below 20% have Nigeria Certificates in Education (NCE). Many of these teachers have Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE) while others were still waiting to complete the requirements for university education. To maximise profits, the school proprietors/investors do pay these set of workers low wages. Apart from inexperience on the part of these set of workers, they also receive low wages. Thus, the teachers are not motivated, the consequence of which is low morale and poor attitude to work. In addition, the pupils may not be well taken care of which could affect pupil’s intellectual growth and development. Corroborating Ezirim (2004), are Obisanya *et al.*, (2006), they avowed that many preschool teachers in Nigeria today are school dropouts or “awaiting results” while the most qualified are holders of TCII Certificates. Teaching of young children, need qualified teachers, capable of imparting required basic knowledge to the children.

To this extent, Ejieh (2006) unequivocally concluded that there will never be adequate qualified teacher in the area of early childhood training and education as far as the government feels unconcern regarding this foundation aspect of education programme. Ejieh (2006:61) stated that

Significant provision is yet to be made in any public or private teacher training institution in the country for the production of specialist teachers in early childhood education. Even if any institution runs a programme for producing such teachers, it is doubtful if it can attract many clients, as neither the Federal nor any state government has established any nursery or pre-primary schools where graduates of such a programme can be employed. Work in private nursery or pre-primary institutions would probably have no attraction for specialist pre-primary teachers because of low wages and job insecurity associated with teaching in such institutions.

Going by the above, the establishment of department of early childhood education in the Colleges of Education as stated in the policy on education could be seen as effort in futility. This is because; those students that were produced from the department may not get suitable appointment after their study.

Early Childhood Training and Education Abandonment, Child’s Future Career Advancement, National Peace and Development

One of the responsibilities of the government is to take care of the educational need of its younger citizens which are being referred to as minor citizens. Since government fail to implement this section of its policy as stated in the National Policy on Education (NPE) appropriately, the door is therefore, widely opened for the private investors to establish pre-schools. Due to high school fees and its effect on family and family income, majority of the parents in Nigeria could not meet the expense of sending their children into private pre-schools. These put lots of families under emotional stress, as their children are being deprived of the most highly needed early education for their future advancement and development. Thus, future career and advancement of these children are in jeopardy, hence, many of them found their ways into various crimes as a form of economic activities, a case of devil finds works for an idler, while some were being misused in force/child labour.

In rural areas for instance, many of these children work in agriculture plantation, especially on family farms. They are used for planting, weeding, harvesting crops, tending livestock and applying chemicals to plants where applicable. In urban cities, these children work as vendors/hawkers, shoe shiners, car washers, scavengers and beggars and other forms of child (force) labour (International Labour Organization, 2005). This has consequently increased their vulnerability to child trafficking, accident, and they thus turn out to be ‘ingredients’ in the hands of ritualists who use them for all sorts of rituals. Street hawking especially is one of the most common forms of work for the children who are not in school in the country. These children sell cold waters, ice creams and ‘minerals’ drinks, in order to supplement family income. Thus, hawking of these products on the busy roads

exposes children to accidents. Apart from vehicular accidents, these children are also more vulnerable to violence, sexual exploitation, trafficking and HIV infection (Akpan and Oluwabamide, 2010 cited in Jones, Presler-Marshall, Cooke and Akinrimisi, 2012).

Further to the above, many of these children also work as bus conductors for several hours on daily basis. On the work, they learn how to cheat, to be aggressive to passengers, from where they graduate to stealing, hooliganism and even armed robbery. They are also exposed to drugs addiction and peddling. Some of these children later developed into hired killers, thugs, hooligans, pick-pockets and machinery in the hands of politicians who use them to achieve their inordinate goals. Thereafter, these children constitute complete nuisance to 'the state' once discovered that 'the state' has truncated their destiny and that they are no longer useful for themselves. For instance, the 'area boys' seen in Nigeria's cities are by products of delinquency. They roam about the streets 'pick-pockets' and extorting money while some of them engage in drug peddling and other nefarious and criminal activities. Perhaps, most of the people recruited as terrorists are products of poor attitude of government to children training and education in their early life.

According to Country Profile (2009), there are many children who are known as *Almajiris*, these categories of children are easily found in Northern part of Nigeria. They are some of the children who are being deprived of their right to early childhood training and education, as well as other welfare right. They have no access to adequate nutrition, health, shelter and social protection. The *Almajiris* are children who live and study under *Malam* (Islamic teachers). The responsibilities of *Malam* include provision of accommodation, feeding and caring for the *Almajiris*. The *Almajiris* parents are normally based in the rural area and for the fact that they cannot meet the need of these children often send them to urban areas to get Islamic education. Therefore, it is possible for *Malam* to have as many as one hundred pupils as his Koranic students, and in order to be able to meet "academic" and "welfare" needs of these children, usually send them out to beg for alms. In order for *Malam* to help the children, they must first of all help *Malam*. Accordingly, these young school-aged children are left to fend for themselves and *Malam* (National Human Rights Commission, n.d.). This is a monumental abuse of the children in Nigeria, now; most of these children have grown up to become nuisance and menace to the society.

Conclusion and Recommendation

It is evident that Nigerian government has failed in providing quality education for its younger citizens. The foundation as well as important aspect of education programme is beyond the reach of the masses, just as private proprietors/investors continue to charge high school fees which only a few wealthy parents could afford. Therefore, many of the younger citizens are already involved in crimes and other nefarious activities which have undermined their future careers achievement and consequently pose great danger to national peace, sustenance and developments.

The paper strongly recommends that 'state of emergency' should be declared in the education sector along with 'National Action Plan on education' to direct the activities of early childhood training and education. In addition, all stakeholders should meet to review the state of early childhood training and education and formulate ways of rescuing this important aspect of education. Government should participate actively in early childhood training and education to assist underprivileged children. Also, government should adhere strictly to the United Nation's 26% benchmark for education, in its annual budget, for the future development of its younger citizens, who are the Nation's hope for tomorrow, for the Nation to witness peace and development.

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