

Childhood Education: Critical To Achieving Sustainable Development Goal

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ABSTRACT

The early years of the child lays the foundation for solid or weak development. Much of the first two years of life are spent in the creation of a child's first "sense of self" or the building of a first identity. This is a crucial part of children's makeup—how they first see themselves, how they think they should function, how they expect others to function in relation to them. For this reason, early care ensures that in addition to employing carefully selected and trained caretakers, program policy emphasise links with family, home culture and home language. Regrettably, the Nigerian child suffers deprivation from lack of good social services in terms of poor nutrition, health care and access to safe water and sanitation, general protection from environmental hazards and insecurity. All of these gave justification for the formulation of National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Development in Nigeria (IECD), which was officially launched in October 2007. There is serious neglect of early childhood education programme and invariably might hinder achieving the 2030 global agenda of sustainable development. This paper therefore called for an overhaul of childhood education so as to facilitate the realization of the sustainable goals.

Keywords: SDG, Education, Child care, Development and Childhood.

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development is defined as development that is likely to achieve human needs and improvement of the quality of life and encompasses: reducing poverty, environmental Protection, sustainable natural resource management, water and food security [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]. Thus, it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs [6, 7, 8]. The United Nations itemised sustainable development into seventeen goals with one hundred and sixty nine targets to be achieved in the year 2030. This is officially tagged as global agenda 2030 meaning that these 17 goals with 169 targets are expected to be achieved by the year 2030 [9, 10]. Goal No 4 is regarded as very important and crucial and states: ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all [11, 12, 13, 14, 15]. The achievement of goal no 4 is instrumental and relevant for the achievement of the other sixteen goals. It is generally accepted that education is the key to development and individual

fulfillment. The level, quality and standard of education determines to a very large extent the level, quality and standard of individual lives and development. No Nation can arise above the quantum of its education [16, 17]. Thus, there is the need to maintain the three levels of the education system, but more especially the early childhood education stage because it is the bedrock upon which all other educational levels are built. Early childhood education is the starting point for a child's development and the foundation of the Nigerian educational system [18]. Once a child misses that early stage, it is usually difficult for the child to recover the lost ground. Early Childhood period has been shown to bring critical gains to children's social, emotional and cognitive development. [2] stated that the years between birth and age five are the foundation upon which successful (or otherwise) lives are built. [3] stated that the first five years is critical for a child's overall development and later life chances. It is a period of rapid learning.

[4] reported that neuro-scientists have identified early childhood period as the most critical period of a child's brain development and that it is now an established fact that humans learn more from birth to age five than they do in any other year. Presently there are many ill-equipped, substandard early childhood education centers scattered all over the

country, thereby hampering the foundation of the development of the child and sustainable development. If the foundation is faulty it will naturally affect the superstructure. Thus, this study is aimed at discussing the need to overhaul childhood education as a way to achieve 2030 global agenda for sustainable development [19, 20, 21].

Conceptual Framework Development

The concept of development according to [5] can be viewed from two perspectives, namely; as a state or condition-static and as a process or course of change-dynamic. Development is a multi-dimensional process involving reorganisation and reorientation of entire economic and social system towards improving the quality of human lives. In economic terms, development has been understood as achieving sustainable rates of growth of income per capita to enable the nation to expand its output faster than the population [5]. In sociological terms, the term 'development' is used to mean industrialisation, economic growth and the living standards associated with prosperity, such as increased life expectancy, health-care, free education, etc. The core values of development include:

- i. **Sustenance:** The ability to meet basic needs like food, shelter, health and protection (security).
- ii. **Self-esteem:** To be a person is having a sense of worth and self-respect, of not being used as a tool by others for their own ends.
- iii. **Freedom from Servitude:** Freedom is to be understood in the sense of emancipation from alienating material conditions of life and from social servitude to nature, ignorance, other people, misery, institutions and dogmatic

Early Childhood Education

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is an off shoot of Early Child Care (ECC). Traditionally, every culture has its peculiar way of caring for its young ones. Early child care as a concept gained popularity when mothers started engaging in other economic activities and jobs outside homes. Child care is

beliefs. Stating the objectives of development [1] identified the following:

1. To increase the availability and widen the distribution of basic life-sustaining goods such as food, shelter, health and protection.
2. To raise levels of living including in addition to higher incomes, the provision of more jobs, better education and greater attention to cultural and humanistic values, all of which will serve not only to enhance material well-being but also to generate greater individual and national self-esteem.
3. To expand the range of economic and social choices available to individuals and nations by freeing them from servitude and dependence not only in relation to other people and nation states, but also to the forces of ignorance and human misery. The indicators of development either from the Human Development Index (HDI), Gender Development Index (GDI), Human Poverty Index (HPI) are classified into:
Economic Indicators: Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and Types of Work (Economic Sectors)
Social Indicators: Education and Literacy, Health and Welfare
Demographic Indicators: Life Expectancy (37 -80 years), Infant Mortality (<10 ->100 per thousand), and Natural Increase (0 -4.7 %) [1].

sought outside the homes to hold brief while parents are at work or business. This is important because, the care and support received by a child in terms of good health, nutrition and psychosocial care and protection are crucial in the formation and development of intelligence, personality and social

behaviour. Although, ECC has been in operation for many years, Integrated Early Childhood Development is a novel idea to the country. It is a mixture of child care and incorporation of education at that early year of the child. The mission of ECC is different from ECE(D) and involves integration of both for meaningful result, which major focus is to educate the child as a whole individual, not only their minds. This implies that care and learning have to be integrated and of equal importance [6]. According to [7], the way childhood is shaped, says something about the society and its ways to distribute resources, rights and obligations. The National minimum standard for Early Child Care Centers (ECCC) in Nigeria was developed in 2007 to address the gaps and serves as guideline for operators and stakeholders so that both the practice and operation of Early Childhood Education will become standardized across Nigeria. Due to its place, this type of education is recognised by the Nigeria National Policy on Education [8] and is defined as the education given in an educational institution to children prior to their entering the primary school. There is clear evidence that early-year experiences have a significant influence on the all-round development and the later lives of any child.

On the other hand, some research evidence shows that early childhood education has a positive influence in children's affective, conceptual and social development in later years [9; 10]. The objectives of Early Childhood Education as highlighted by FRN [8] include:

- a. Effect a smooth transition from home to school.
- b. Prepare the child for the primary level of education.
- c. Provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work (on the farm, in the market or offices).

Relationship between Early Childhood Education and Sustainable Development

Child care and child education, although, are related, but vary. Froebel distinguishes between child care and child education

- d. Inculcate social norms.
- e. Inculcate in the child the spirit of inquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys and so on.
- f. Develop a sense of cooperation and team spirit.
- g. Learn good habits, especially good health habits
- h. Teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms and so on through play.

These goals are consolidated by the Integrated Early Childhood Development goals of 2007 for holistic and integrated child development that include:

- a. Provide care and support to the child in form of: good nutrition and health for children; A healthy and safe environment; Psycho-social stimulation; Protection and security.
- b. Inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys etc.
- c. Effect a smooth transition from the home to the school.
- d. Prepare the child to adapt successfully when their current context changes.
- e. Provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work (on the farms, in the markets, offices, industry, etc).
- f. Inculcate social norms - that is, culturally relevant skills and behaviours which allow them to function effectively in their current context. For effective care, development and education, early childhood care and education is classified into three levels, namely:
 - a. Day Care/crèche (for ages 0-2 years).
 - b. Nursery/ Play group; (ages 3-5 years).
 - c. Kindergarten (ages 6 years), [8].

and this view is the basis of education in Sweden. The idea of young children's education in Sweden is in its origin

strongly related to Fröbel and his view of making childcare different from the school education [11]. He had an idea about using the child's everyday life as a frame of reference for their education; that is, all the activities done in a home, like kitchen work, sewing, working with wood work, gardening, etc. This can be seen as a way of coming close to each child's experiences and what is known to them. The underlining principle is that learning should start from where the children are.

UNESCO ECCE Unit [12] made the distinction between childcare centers being for care and kindergartens being for education. Notwithstanding, the primary purpose of all early childhood programmes is to provide a high standard of care and nurturance due to the young age, emotional and physical needs of children. The idea of transforming knowledge to children, commonly practiced in school, has never been an alternative in ECC. Even though practice can have different qualities and give each child various experiences. Children have to be active in body and mind for being interested of what the teacher wants to teach and to get opportunities to learn. The early years of life according to UNICEF [13] are critical to the development of intelligence, personality and social behaviour. This period corresponds to a critical period of rapid physical, cognitive and psychosocial development. The quality and intensity of care, nutrition and stimulation a child receives during this period determines to a large extent the level of physical and cognitive development a child can attain [12]. [14] opined that early childhood education programme have been shown to bring critical gains to children's social, emotional and cognitive development. If a young child doesn't receive sufficient nurturing, nutrition, parental/caregiver interaction and stimulus during this crucial period, the child may be left with a developmental deficit that hampers his or her success in the day care, kindergarten, and beyond. According to

[3], all the information a child gained, language skills acquired and habits formed at this early formative years of life, frame the personality of an individual. At the global level, this fact is recognised and every nation is working assiduously towards providing quality early years education and care for the children.

The early years of the child lays the foundation for solid or weak development. Much of the first two years of life are spent in the creation of a child's first "sense of self" or the building of a first identity. This is a crucial part of children's makeup—how they first see themselves, how they think they should function, how they expect others to function in relation to them. For this reason, early care ensures that in addition to employing carefully selected and trained caretakers, program policy emphasise links with family, home culture and home language. Over the years, early childcare in Nigeria has metamorphosed from a single sector approach to a multi-sector pursuit, converging interventions in health, nutrition, care, stimulation, protection and participation of the child. The federal government adopted the integral and holistic approach in the education of the child due to the fact that child care, child development and child education are interwoven. Thus, the National Policy on Education [8] stipulates that it should be included in mainstream education. Formal education begins from early childhood education as provided in day-care centres and nursery schools to children aged 3 through 5 years. It is enriched by the informal traditional upbringing given to children from 0 through 3 years which makes them ready for school. Presently the provision of early childhood education is largely in the hands of private operators who mainly sees this as a mere money making venture. This necessitated the provision of the national minimum standard for early childhood centers across the nation [15]. This encompasses the basic requirements for establishing early

childhood education. Revamping of early childhood education is inevitable for achieving the global agenda 2030. This is because it is the foundation of other levels of education and development. This is vividly seen on the identified purposes of early childhood education as the National Policy on Education of 2014 highlighted.

At the early childhood stage, children learn to share and co-operate with others instead of developing the selfish tendencies. Exposure to childhood education goes a long way to teach each child how to understand and manage their emotions. The provision of early childhood education assists working class parents who have no relation or house help to take care of their children while they are at work. Also, children will be exposed to reading and writing. But it is worrisome that studies of early childhood care facilities and practices by the

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Early childhood education has enormous role, influence and relevance on a child's development, educational background and eventually is an inevitable tool for achieving the global agenda for sustainable development. Considering

Muhammad Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), UNICEF, the Federal Ministry of Education, UNESCO and other development partners such as DFID, USAID, World Bank, and JICA further paint a grim picture of the situation on the ground. The Nigerian child suffers deprivation from lack of good social services in terms of poor nutrition, health care and access to safe water and sanitation, general protection from environmental hazards and insecurity. All of these gave justification for the formulation of National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Development in Nigeria (IECD), which was officially launched in October 2007. There is serious neglect of early childhood education programme and invariably might hinder achieving the 2030 global agenda of sustainable development.

the present status of early childhood education vis-à-vis the 2030 global agenda for sustainable development, an overhaul of childhood education is critical.

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