



Early Childhood Education (ECE) Curriculum for National Development

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ABSTRACT

A good curriculum is the foundation for any Solid educational project embarked upon, because it determines what should be taught and learnt while considering the needs and aspirations of the learners and the society at large. Thus, curriculum in early childhood is tied to a concern for developing the child's physical, social, cognitive and emotional development. This paper examines the curriculum contents of ECCDE, the strategies to be employ for proper implantation of ECCDE curriculum, and the benefits of ECCDE where also, discussed, the paper concludes with recommendations to all stakeholders on why all hands must be on deck to ensure successful implementation of ECCE curriculum; such as government should ensure adequate supply of instructional materials to ECCE CENTRES for proper implementation of the curriculum contents; and that parents should appreciate the value of early childhood education by sending their children to ECCE Centres before reaching primary school age.

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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood care education according to the national policy on education (2013), is the education provided in an educational institution to children prior to their entering into the primary school, which includes the creche, nursery and kindergarten. The responsibilities of the government in pre-primary education shall be to promote the training of qualified teachers in adequate numbers, contribute to the development of suitable curriculum, quality assurance and control quality of its teachers and the improvement of early childhood care education centers. This is because the early years of a child are the most crucial and basic to any other educational systems. They influence how the rest of childhood and adolescence unfold. FRN (2013) recognized early childhood care development education as the instrument geared towards self-realization, better human relationship, individual and national efficiency, national consciousness, national unity as well as towards social, cultural, economic and technological progress.

Educating a child is very important. It is very important to recognize that high quality

education early in life gives children the best start that last forever in their lives. For young children, care and education cannot be separated. Young children learn through play and learn best when receiving quality care. MacEwan (2013), opined that a child who develops well physically, mentally, socially and emotionally during early years will be more likely to be a good and productive member of the society.

The National Policy of Education (2013) recognizes the fact that formal education of a child apparently starts from about the age of 3 years, hence the prescriptions on pre-primary education as contained in the policy document. The official sound philosophies, goals, quality education, effective curriculum as well as conducive learning environment. This improvement with increasing exposure to Global International Organizations and contact with United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The United Nations declaration on human rights broadens the perception of Nigerians about children education and their needs. This contact resulted in a new

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and improved realization of the relevance of early childhood care education as the potential need for societal development.

Nigeria intervention in early years learning and development is firmly rooted in the national philosophy on education which is premised on the development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen as well as the need for educational opportunities to all Nigerian children irrespective of their background. Between the ages of 3-5 years a child forms important concepts about himself, the people around him the word. This is a critical stage in a child's life because early concepts have very strong influence all through later life. Therefore, many pre-primary schools aim at helping the children developed physically, emotionally, intellectually, and socially.

Preprimary education has become a popular and acceptable means of supplementing a child's home education and offering alternative child care arrangements for working parents. Early childhood care education has been understood by educationist to be of tremendous importance to early childhood years, in laying foundation for subsequent learning MacEwan (2013). It is important as future learning depends on the satisfaction and successes achieved in these early years. These early years of children are rapid period of development in cognitive, affective and psychomotor; therefore, these years must be well moulded to challenge the years ahead. Preprimary institutions are places where children are first introduced to formal education and experiences which are quite different from the ones acquired at their various homes, as a result of the nursery centers with broader and more complex environment comprising of wider range of adults, peer groups and school facilities.

Education is an indisputable requisite for improving the social and economic conditions and early childhood care development education plays a crucial role in this context. As such, the federal republic of Nigeria recognized the importance of early childhood care development education in Nigeria FRN (2013), spelt out the following objectives of early childhood care development education as following; effect a

smooth transition from home to the school, prepare the child for the primary education, provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work, inculcate in the child the spirit of inquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys, develop a sense of co-operation and team-spirit, learn good habits, especially good health habits and teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms through play.

To realize these lofty objectives, Okewole, Iluezi and Osinowo (2015), noted that the early childhood care development education curriculum was designed along the aforementioned objectives by Nigeria Education Research Development Council (NERDC) and recommended for use for all early childhood centers. However, it should be noted that private individuals and private organizations have been officially licensed to provide early childhood control and assurance in the system. However, in recent years, government especially at the state level has embarked on establishing early childhood care development education centers in every public school, not much had been known about this gesture. Early childhood education has been suffering in the hands of unqualified and inexperience teachers resulting to children receiving ineffective education and adequate care, which is bound to affect their eventual growth and intellectual development.

Curriculum Contents of ECCE

Early childhood care and education (ECCE) refers to the period from birth to eight years. The objective of ECCE is to nurture the children for their physical and mental development and to prepare them for schooling with right attitudes and habits (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment-NCCA, 2007). Young children learn quickly and are often filled with curiosity about the world around them. Schools and daycare centers that work with the youngest of children have such a unique opportunity to guide pupils and families toward a lifetime filled with love for learning. Curriculum is an important part of this process. Curriculum is

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everything that students learn. It can be implicit or explicit, planned for or spontaneous. Children learn so many things through play.

When two four-years-olds work together to set up a dollhouse, they are learning language about family, relationships, and furniture. They are learning different perspectives about how to organized things, planting the seeds for critical thinking, or knowing how to think from multiple perspectives. The learning that happens through play cannot be replaced by any other learning, as it is self-directed, creative, and authentic (NCCA, 2007). A teacher's role during children's play is to watch and provide language to help children describe what they are experiencing. Teachers also provide rich settings with ample opportunities for different kinds of play. They observe and notice what kinds of play their students gravitate towards, and they work on ways to enrich and diversify these inclinations.

Young children approach learning in different ways, each bringing a unique set of attitudes, habits, and preferences to their interactions and explorations. Approaches to learning are the foundation that affects how children learn in every other content area. It encompasses children's engagement, motivation, and participation in the classroom. By understanding how to support this area of early development, adults can foster children's creativity, curiosity, confidence, independence, initiative, and persistence as they carry out their intentions, solve problems, and engage in a variety of learning experiences (Weiner, 2016).

Many of the abilities in this content area have been described as "executive functions," which are increasingly organized in state and national standards as crucial to children's development. Executive functions include being able to break down a task into its components, organize a plan of work, follow through on it, and reflect on the success of one's efforts. All the component of the curriculum - the daily routine, the arrangement of the learning environment, and its adult child interaction strategies - work together to encourage the abilities on approaches the learning.

Another area of the early childhood care and development education (ECCE) curriculum is the social development. This approach gives adults the tools they need to help children develop strong and positive relationships with adults and peers. Teachers learn how to create a positive climate in the classroom as a foundation for social learning. The social skills children develop contribute to their readiness for school and their ability to meet a variety of challenges throughout their lives. Creating a warm and nurturing environment in the early childhood care and development not only helps children form trusting relationships with others but also promotes learning in all areas. Surrounded by a positive and supportive classroom climate, children are likely to become engaged and motivated learners. Within this environment, activities and interactions are planned around the key developmental indicators (KDIs) in social and emotional development listed below (Wener, 2016).

1. Self-identity. Children have a positive self-identity;
2. Sense of competence. Children feel they are competent;
3. Emotions. Children recognize, label, and regulate their feelings;
4. Empathy. Children demonstrate empathy toward others;
5. Community. Children participate in the community of the classroom;
6. Building relationships. Children build relationships with other children and adults;
7. Cooperative play. Children engaging in cooperative play;
8. Moral development. Children develop an internal sense of right and wrong; and
9. Conflict resolution. Children resolve social conflicts.

The ECCE curriculum also promotes movement abilities, fitness, and healthy behaviour where children are physically active, as such, the teachers use children's physical actions as a gateway to learning in all areas of the curriculum. This helps educators develop effective, engaging,



teaching strategies and learning activities that promote the sequences of physical development that are essential for this age group. Learning personal care skills and acquiring habits that foster lifelong health are another important part of this curriculum area. The physical development and health content of ECCE curriculum according to Weiner (2016) include:

1. Gross-motor skills: Children demonstrate strength, flexibility, balance, and timing in using their large muscles.
2. Body awareness: Children know about their bodies and how to navigate them in space;
3. Personal care: Children carry out personal care routine on their own; and
4. Healthy behaviour: Children engage in healthy practices.

The ECCE curriculum also shows the powerful connection between language and literacy. The ECCE curriculum focuses on this connection by providing meaningful language and literacy experiences for children during every part of the daily routine. Since speaking, listening, reading, and writing develop together, all these activities are promoted in early childhood programmes. During the past three decades, researchers have learned a great deal about how language and literacy develop in young children. Based on these findings ten key developmental indicators (KDIs) in language, literacy, and communication has been identified. These developmental milestones according to Weiner (2016), are the basis for planning literacy-related experiences in ECCE classrooms.

1. Comprehension: Children understand language;
2. Speaking: Children express themselves using language;
3. Vocabulary: Children understand and use a variety of words and phrases;

4. Phonological awareness: Children identify distinct sounds in spoken language;
5. Alphabetic knowledge: Children identify letter name and their sounds;
6. Reading: Children read for pleasure and information;
7. Concepts about print: Children demonstrate knowledge about environmental print;
8. Book knowledge: Children demonstrate knowledge about books;
9. Writing: Children write for many different purposes; and
10. English language learning: (If applicable) Children use English and their home language(s) (including sign language).

Young children are experimenters and testers from birth. If we observe young children as they explore their world, we will see them using science processes such as observing, classifying, experimenting, predicting, drawing conclusions, and communicating their ideas to others. These processes can be calling the preschool scientific method because they are the early forms of abilities adult scientists use. These abilities according to Weiner (2016) are highlighted as follows:

1. Observing: Children observe the materials and processes in their environment;
2. Classifying: Children classify materials, actions, people, and events;
3. Experimenting: Children experiment to test their ideas;
4. Predicting: Children predict what they expect will happen;
5. Drawing conclusion: Children draw conclusions based on their experiences and observations;
6. Communicating ideas: Children communicate their ideas about the

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- characteristics things and how they work;
7. Natural and physical world: Children gather knowledge about the natural and physical world; and
 8. Tools and technology: Children explore and use tools and technology.

Furthermore, children learn about their social world from the moment of birth, and observing and interpreting group behaviour in preschool is an important part of this. The early childhood classroom can be a perfect setting for acquiring the basic knowledge, skills, and attitudes children need to live as contributing citizens in a complex society. The key dimensions of learning in this content area are captured in the social studies (Weiner, 2016). These include:

1. Diversity: Children understand that people have diverse characteristics, interest, and abilities;
2. Community roles: Children recognize that people have different roles and functions in the community;
3. Decision making: Children participate in making classroom decisions;
4. Geography: Children recognize and interpret features and locations in their environment;
5. History: Children understand past, present, and future, and
6. Ecology: Children understand the importance of taking care of their environment.

Because young children are concrete thinkers, age-appropriate social studies experiences start with children's own lives and help them relate new learning to what is familiar. After their family, the classroom is the first society that young children belong to. For them, early social studies learning grow from their interactions with the people and materials in the preschool setting. For example, children learn about human diversity by interacting with adults and classmates, trying on different roles during pretend play, reading books, exploring the arts,

and going on field trips. Similarly, participating in the classroom community is a scaled-down version of the decision-making process in society at large. Children participate in small decisions about classroom jobs and materials, and discuss ways to handle shared problems. Likewise, taking care of the indoor and outdoor learning environment is a rehearsal for their becoming stewards of the planet (Weiner, 2016). Learning about people and the roles they play in their families, neighborhoods, and schools prepares children for the expanded social world they will encounter as they grow older.

Strategies of ECCE Curriculum Implementation

Curriculum implementation strategy is valuable for helping students to develop confidence and self-esteem. Curriculum implementation strategy calls for actual doing in order to bring messages home to the learners. The following according to Aliyu (2009) are some of the strategies used for ECCE curriculum implementation.

a) Puppetry

Puppetry is important in ECCE because it allows pupils to develop their imagination and creative ideas and see how they can transform them into activity. Puppetry involves many activities varying from speaking to acting and writing.

b) Miming

Miming is simply acting out something without using words. It is the easiest kind of dramatization to prepare and carry out because it does not depend on difficult ideas (Aliyu, 2009). Pupils can act any situation in ECCE through miming. Since the voice is not used, body movement, gestures and actions are essentials.

c) Playlets

A playlet is a short play that is used to express story or idea. Playlets are particularly useful for illustration of some points during the course of a lesson. In playlets, costumes, make



ups, objects, furniture may be used, but they are not often essential.

d) Games

The ECCE curriculum can also be implemented using games. This is because children like to play games, both in and outside the school environments (Ogunsanya, 2008). Games are developed and used in ECCE classrooms in order to achieve some educational objectives, especially that of developing good social relationships and practical skills. They also stimulate and sustain pupils' interest in the study. It makes learning process more natural and realistic. It also makes learning more permanent and recall is easier.

e) Story Telling

Story-telling is an illustrative account of an event related to human experience and learning. It could be true story (non-fiction) or a fictional story (Folktales). Learning is made easy and the recall is easy through using story telling method. According to Odedokun (2005) in Aliyu (2009) story telling is a method of developing attitudes, decision-making and communications skills. This method of teaching is very appropriate for passing across cherished and acceptable cultural values to young ones.

f) Role Play Method

Role play is a popular tool for portraying a social institution, and usually a spontaneous unrehearsed play. In this method, there is usually no prepared script to be memorized, it does not involve elaborate preparation and there may be no rehearsals. Participants share in the performance by being emotionally involved with the limits of their past experience. This method is ideal for attitude development, mastering, decision-making and improving communication skills.

UNICEF (2010) defined early childhood as a time of remarkable brain development that lays the foundation for later learning. ECCE is therefore a right recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989, which should be made as benefit for early child. Early childhood education and care supports children's survival,

growth development and learning health. It is therefore, essential for improving the well-being of Nigerian children and for the nation's sustainable development. The performance of the child in the first years of formal education and contributes to other EFA and MDGs goals.

Other benefits of ECCE are as follows;

Biswas (2013), highlighted that pre-primary education has become a popular strategy to protection of drop-out from formal education of children all over the world. Early Childhood Development (ECD) and pre-primary education are widely recognized as having a significant impact on the performance of children in basic education programmes. Similarly, pre-primary education ensures a smooth transition to the primary education and lays the foundation for lifelong learning Biswas added that development of a child begins within the family and mostly depends on the parents. Educated parents are able to prepare their children for the smooth entry into formal education but no doubt, uneducated parents are unable to do this. Therefore, protection to drop-out from formal education of a child is very necessary for a nation. For this reason, pre-primary education is especially important for a nation.

From another perspective, Oguntuashe (2010), opined that children whose early life development receives support are more productive in life. On the other hand, UNICEF (1998), stated that these children repeat classes less often in primary school, they complete primary school more often, they require less remedial programmes and they are less susceptible to truancy and criminal tendencies. Oguntuashe further argued that investing in ECCE appears to be a rational way to tackle the massive failure rates observed in our children's performance in West African School Certificate Examination (WASCE). Other benefits of ECCE are as follows: Investing in ECCE facilities the attainment of social and gender equity by providing a robust base from which children of deprived backgrounds, those with special needs, girls and others who encounter discrimination can draw on in later life.

Early life intervention enables the child to bond not only with his/her parents but provides an important point of entry into the child's community. This prepares the ground for social mobilization, civic engagement, participation, patriotism and the like. Improvement in early childhood care and development means an improvement in other programmes that are integrated with it such as Maternal and Child Health Care.

Swartout (2015), similarly argued that early childhood education can produce significant gains in children's learning and development. High quality early childhood education assists many at-risk children in avoiding poor outcomes, such as dropping out of school. Although the benefits seem to cross all economic and social lines, the most significant gains are almost always noted among children from families with the lowest income levels and the least amount of formal education. Moreover, studies also indicate the ECCE produces persistent gains on achievement test scores, along with few occurrences of being held back a grade and being placed in education programmes. Other long-term benefits include decreased crime and delinquency rates and increased high school graduation.

Early childhood care education is an asset of great value, because it is the foundation for other educational levels henceforth should not be neglected or relegated to the background. The implementation of ECCDE curriculum requires the collaborative effort of all stakeholders, including the government, parents / guardians, the school authorities and the community at large. Likewise, considering the volatility of ECCDE, knowing full well that, the products of the educational system of the country is largely tied to the effectiveness of the pre- school education; the need for more coordination cannot be over emphasized.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were offered based on what was discussed.

1. Government should ensure that there is adequate and appropriate supply of

instructional materials for the implementation of early childhood curriculum in the ECCE classrooms attached to all the public schools.

2. Workshops and seminars should be organized for the teachers for effective coverage of curriculum contents of EECDE.
3. Qualified and Professionals in ECCE only should be employed to teach, in ECCE classes for good service delivery.
4. There should be training and retraining of teachers on the appropriate use of techniques for the correct implementation of curriculum in achieving the goals of early childhood education.
5. They should be adequate monitoring and supervision of ECCE Centre.
6. Parents should appreciate and recognize the value of ECCE by sending their children to these centres before reaching primary school age.

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