

Management of Early Child Education in Nigeria: Problems and the Way Forward

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Abstract:

This article discussed the problems facing the management of early child education programme in Nigeria. Data from secondary sources were used to support the various points raised in the discussion. The data were sourced from online and print material resources written and published by recognized institutions and authors. Inadequate funding, inadequate infrastructural facilities, shortage of care givers, inadequate national curriculum, inadequate instructional materials, corruption, poor supervision, insecurity and high number out of school children were identified as the problems facing the management of the early child education programme in Nigeria. Adequate funding, employment of professional teachers, provision of infrastructural facilities, provision of instructional materials, provision of national curriculum, ensuring effective supervision, fighting all forms of corruption in the ministry of education and ensuring provision of adequate security in all early child education centers were recommended by the writers as the ways forward to the management problem of the early child education programme in Nigeria.

Key words: Early Child, Education, Management, Programme, problems

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is administered by the federal, state and local governments. The Federal Ministry of Education is responsible for overall policy formation and ensuring quality control, but is primarily involved with tertiary education. School education is largely the responsibility of state (secondary) and local (elementary) governments (WENR, 2017).

The Nigerian educational system comprises of the basic education, the junior secondary school education, senior secondary school education and the higher education. According to WENR (2017) Nigeria's education system encompasses three different sectors: basic education (nine years), post-basic/senior secondary education (three years), and tertiary education (four to six years, depending on the program of study). According to Nigeria's latest National Policy on Education (2013), basic education covers nine years of formal (compulsory) schooling consisting of six years of elementary and three years of junior secondary education. Post-basic education includes three years of senior secondary education.

Primary school education covers grades one through six. As per the most recent Universal Basic Education guidelines implemented in 2014, the curriculum includes: English, Mathematics, Nigerian language, basic science and technology, religion and national values, and cultural and creative arts, Arabic language (optional). Pre-vocational studies (home economics, agriculture, and entrepreneurship) and French language are introduced in grade 4.

The basic education is made up of the early child education. The early child education was launched with the basic education programme in 1999 in Nigeria. According to Maduwesi (1999) the early childhood care education as the education offered to children who have not yet reached the statutory age of beginning primary school. He further maintained that it is a semi-formal education arrangement, usually outside home where by young children from about the age of 3 years are exposed through play like activities in a group setting through mental, social and physical learning suited to their developmental stages, until the mandatory age of government approved formal schooling.

The early child education is like every other form of educational system that is engulf with many challenges. This paper is aimed to discuss the problems facing the management of the early child education programme in Nigeria.

2. Concept of Early Child Education Programme

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in Nigeria was launched in 1999, with the goal of providing “free, universal and compulsory basic education for every Nigerian child aged 6-15 years”. The programme, however, was not able to take off immediately after its launch as it did not have legal backing. Therefore, initial UBE-related activities were carried out only in areas of social mobilization, infrastructural development, provision of instructional materials, etc. The UBE programme only took off effectively with the signing of the UBE Act in April 2004.

The main beneficiaries of the programme are:

- A. Children aged 3-5 years, for Early Children Care and Development Education (ECCDE);
- B. Children aged 6-11+ years for primary school education;
- C. Children aged 12-14+ years for junior secondary school education.

Its scope included the following expansion of activities in basic education:

1. "Programmes and initiatives for [ECCDE];
2. "Programmes and initiatives for the acquisition of functional literacy, numeracy and life skills, especially for adults (persons aged 15 and above);
3. "Out-of-school, non-formal programmes for the updating of knowledge and skills for persons who left school before acquiring the basics needed for lifelong learning;
4. "Special programmes of encouragement to all marginalized groups: girls and women, nomadic populations, out-of-school youth and the *almajiris* (*Qur'anic student*);
5. "Non-formal skills and apprenticeship training for adolescents and youth, who have not had the benefit of formal education.

The early child education is an organized education designed to prepare the children for basic education. Early child education is the first education children receives as formal. The contribution of the early child education to the social economic, political and technology advancement cannot be underestimated. National policy on education (2013) defined early childhood care education (pre-primary education) is an education given in an educational institution to children aged 3-5 plus prior to their enrollment in the primary school. National policy on education (2013) outlined the following as the objectives of early childhood care education:

- A. Effecting a smooth transition from home to the school
- B. Preparing the child for the primary level of education

- C. Providing adequate care and supervision for the children while their parent are at work (on the farm, in the market, office e.t.c)
- D. Inculcating social norms and values
- E. Inculcating in the child the spirit of inquiring and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toy. e.t.c.
- F. Developing in the children a sense of cooperation and team-spirit.
- G. Learning good habits and the rudiments of letters, numbers, colours, shapes and forms e.t.

The achievement of the stated objectives of early childhood education and care in Nigeria is brought about via the following means:

- A. establishing pre-primary sections in existing public schools and encouraging both community and private efforts in the provision of early childhood education;
- B. making provision in teacher education programmes for specialization in early childhood education;
- C. ensuring that the medium of instruction will principally be the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community; and to this end: (i) developing the orthography for many more Nigerian languages; and (ii) producing textbooks in Nigerian languages;
- D. ensuring that the main method of teaching in the childhood education centres will be through play, and that the curriculum of teacher education is appropriately oriented to achieve this;
- E. regulating and controlling the operation of early childhood education – to this end, the teacher pupil ratio is set at 1:25;
- F. setting and monitoring a minimum standard for early childcare centres in the country;
- G. ensuring full participation of government, communities and teachers' associations in the running and maintenance of early childhood education facilities.

The management of the basic education is under the local government. The administration and management of the programme is done by the local government authority.

2.1. Concept of Educational Management

Educational management is the act of planning, organizing, controlling and coordinating the educational resources (human and materials) in an effective and efficient ways to the achievement of educational objectives. Educational management is the application of human and materials resources in the realization of educational objectives through effective planning, organizing, controlling, coordinating and evaluating. Noun (2006) observed that educational management is essentially concerned with educational planning and administration. Educational planning is the exercise of foresight in determining the policies, priorities and cost of an educational system. Educational management can be conceptualized to mean a deliberate and systematic process of making plans to source, assemble, allocate and use resources to achieve the aims and objectives of the educational system. The scope goes beyond the school system to include micro and macroeconomics in the national economy.

The task function of educational management include instructional functions, staff or personnel services, student services and financial and physical resource management, school community relations. According to Noun (2006) the purpose of educational management among others includes:

- A. ensure adequate and effective planning of all educational services;

- B. provide efficient administrative and management control for the maintenance and improvement of the system;
- C. ensure quality control through regular and continuous supervision of instructional and other educational services and;
- D. provide adequate and balanced financial support for all educational services.

Educational management covers all educational institutions including secondary schools.

Secondary school management refers to the process of planning, organizing, coordinating human and materials resources of secondary school to realize the objectives of the secondary school. Secondary school education management is the systematic of using human and materials resources to achieve the secondary school objectives through effective planning, organizing, controlling, coordinating and evaluating.

3. Problems facing Early Child Education Programme Management in Nigeria

There are many problems facing the management of early child education programme in Nigeria. Some of them include; inadequate funding, inadequate infrastructural facilities, shortage of care givers, inadequate national curriculum, inadequate instructional materials, corruption, poor supervision and insecurity and problem of out of school Children.

3.1. Inadequate Funding

Adequate funding is very important in the management of educational programme especially the early child education programme. The development of the early child education programme depends on the amount of funds allocated for the administration and management of the programme. In Nigeria, inadequate funding have been a major problem facing the management of education especially the early child education programme. The Early child education programme drives its budget from the ministry of education both at the federal, state and local government authority. Ogunode (2020) observed that the annual allocation for the administration of education in Nigeria is inadequate and it is below the recommendation of the UNESCO 26% for developing countries like Nigeria. Ogunode, Jegede, &Ajape (2021) submits that inadequate funding is one major challenge facing the implementation of the early child education policies in Nigeria. The budgetary allocation for education in Nigeria is inadequate to implement the entire educational policies successfully, including the early child education. Amadi, (2013) opines that the government in spite of its efforts to set up policy framework for ECCE has not demonstrated enough commitment in terms of funding, monitoring and evaluation as well as establishment and management of ECCE schools the bulk of which still belongs to private investors whose main objective in profit making. The poor funding of the early child education is responsible for inadequate teachers, inadequate infrastructural facilities, shortage of instructional materials and poor quality of education.

3.2. Inadequate Infrastructural Facilities

Inadequate infrastructural facilities are another big challenge preventing effective management of the early child education in Nigeria. The infrastructural facilities require for the management of the early child education programme is not adequate. Infrastructural facilities refers to classrooms, offices, playgrounds, libraries, water, light, internet services, good road network, chairs, tables, desks, whiteboard, electronic set etc. Infrastructural facilities support delivering of quality education. Infrastructural facilities makes learning environment conducive. Ogunode, Jegede, &Ajape (2021) observed that inadequate infrastructural facilities like classrooms, chairs, tables and laboratories is another problem preventing effective implementation of the early child educational policies in Nigeria. According to the early child educational policies as stated in the working document, the

policies read that the government shall provide adequate infrastructural facilities to the children to learn in an environment that is comfortable. Inadequate infrastructural facility is one major problem preventing effective implementation of educational policies in Nigeria. No meaningful teaching and learning can take place without adequate infrastructural facilities available (Ogunode, Jegede, & Ajape 2021). Amadi, (2013) cited Eresimadu&Eze, (1998) who observed that facilities such as classrooms, libraries, staff, laboratories, and furniture are grossly inadequate in a greater number of the ECCE schools. Amadi, (2013) lamented that in many public early child center facilities in use are uncompleted buildings, makes shifts and car garages that are poorly ventilated most of which have only mats as furniture. This situation can never guarantee effective teaching and learning of these *tender lings* whose lives are further jeopardized.

3.3. Shortage of Care-givers

Shortage of professional teachers (caregivers) is a major problem affecting the management of the early child education programme in Nigeria. Care-giver are professionals teachers trained to handle children. These caregivers are in short supply in many public early education centers. A report by independent Newspapers (2019) submitted that there was a deficit of 135,319 teachers at the Early Childhood Care Development Education, 139,772 deficit in primary schools, and 2,446 shortage in Junior Secondary School across the nation. Several challenges have been identified as clogs in the realization of good access, equity and quality of education in Nigeria. This problem of shortage was also reaffirmed by Ogunode, Jegede, & Ajape (2021) who lamented that inadequate professional teacher is a big problem preventing the implementation of early child education policy in Nigeria. There are limited professional teachers available in the country that specialized in early child educational program. Professional teachers are needed in large number to successfully implement the educational programme relating to teaching and learning. NEEDS (2014) report that the primary education subsector requires 59,944 teachers, which is more than the capacities of all the teacher training institutions in the country. It is obvious that all educational levels are confronted with acute shortage of teaching staff. One of these is the critical issue of teacher shortage at all levels of education. There is a shortage of early child education teachers needed to attain the proposed 1:20 teacher-to-pupil ratio. This ratio is far from being met as the current ratio is 1:47. Never can quality education be achieved in educational institution where the number of students is larger than the capacity of the teachers. Therefore, the nation needed to produce 330,033 teachers annually in order to achieve the EFA goal by 2015 (Junaid, 2013).

3.4. Inadequate National Curriculum

Inadequate national curriculum is another problem facing the management of early child education programme in Nigeria. The early child curriculum was designed by the federal government and it contains all the things children are expected to learn in the centers. Adenike& Peter (2016) reports that curriculum is what and how of any educational enterprise. It is the vehicle through which any educational programmes can be successfully implemented. The ECE curriculum is an important written plan that includes goals for children's development and learning, experiences through which they will achieve the goals, what staff and parents do to help children achieve the goals and, the materials needed to support the implementation of the curriculum (National Centre on Quality Teaching and Learning (NCQTL), 2012). The early childhood curriculum helps to ensure that staff or teachers cover important learning areas, adopt a common pedagogical approach and reach for a certain level of quality across age groups. These descriptions about ECE curriculum indicates that it is an indispensable material in the business of implementing ECE programme. Its indispensability spurred the government of Nigeria to see to the development and production of National Early Childhood Curriculum for Ages 0-5years by NERDC, with the support of UNICEF. This curriculum was launched in 2007. As important as the curriculum is to the development of the early child

education programme in Nigeria, it has been reported by Viatonu, et al., 2011; Amali, et al., 2012; Okewole, et al., 2013) and Ogunode, Gregory & Jegede (2021) that the curriculum is not in many public early child education centers in the country.

3.5. Inadequate Instructional Materials

Inadequate instructional materials is another problem facing the management of early child education programme in Nigeria. Instructional material resources are educational aids that helps the teachers to teach well and learners learn well. Adenike & Peter (2016) submits that when resources are available for ECE programme at pre-primary school level, it helps the caregiver/teacher to nurture and support the development of young children, and to successfully implement curriculum while Chukwbikem (2013), acknowledge that the quantity and quality of resources available for any educational programme would determine schools systems capacity for the implementation of the type of educational programme. Adenike & Peter (2016) observed that in spite of the fact that resources are critical to successful implementation of ECE programme, they are not found in many Nigerian pre-primary schools, especially in the pre-primary section of public primary schools that belong to the government. Amadi, (2013) lamented that in many pre-school, Teaching aids like toys, diagrams, charts, pictorials e.t.c are invaluable instructional requirements that are lacking in most of the ECCE schools presently.

3.6. Corruption

Corruption is a very big problem facing the management of early child education programme in Nigeria. Funds allocated for the management and implementation of the programme is been mismanaged and looted by some officers within the ministries. Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) has urged President Muhammadu Buhari “to direct the Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice Mr Abubakar Malami, SAN to work with appropriate anti-corruption agencies to promptly probe allegations of corruption in the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs) between 2004 and 2020, including missing N3.8 billion documented in the 2017 Annual Report by the Auditor-General of the Federation. Ogunode, Jegede, & Ajape (2021) opines that institutional corruption in the ministries and agencies of education is one of the problems preventing the full implementation of educational policies, especially that of the early child educational policies in Nigeria. Institutional corruption refers to corruption that takes place in public and private institutions. Corruption is common to Nigerian public institutions. Corruption has penetrated into most educational institutions. Funds budgeted for a different programme in the ministries are been diverted into private banks. Many public funds meant for the development of education in Nigeria are been mismanaged. The limited funds provided for the administration of early child education in the various ministries, department and agencies of education equally diverted and this is affecting the early child educational programme. The high rate of corruption in the administration of the early child education programme is responsible for shortage of teachers, inadequate infrastructural facilities, shortage of instructional materials and poor staff development. According to SERAP: “Many years of unresolved allegations of corruption and mismanagement in UBEC and SUBEBs have resulted in decreasing quality of education for poor children while many politicians send their own children to the best private schools in the country and abroad, and thereby leaving behind generations of poor children.” No any meaningful management of education can take place under the atmosphere of corruption practices.

3.7. Poor Supervision

Poor supervision of early child education is another challenge to the effective management of the programme. Ibhaze, (2016) observed that no educational plan however excellent it may be can be

effectively implemented if the school supervision is ineffective. Supervision is vital in implementing early childhood care and education in Nigeria if success is to be attained. Awino (2014) and Adenike & Peter (2016) observed that it is important to supervise the early child education in order to gather information from children, caregivers, parents, communities, and general ECE environment. Supervision of ECE can be used to correct errors, modify practices where necessary and motivate as well as encourage all involved in its implementation (Awino, 2014). Ogunode, Jegede, & Ajape (2021) concludes that another factor responsible for poor implementation of the early child educational policies in Nigeria is the poor supervision. The supervision of the programme since inception has been poorly done as a result of poor funding of supervision and shortage of supervisors for the programme. Adenike & Peter (2016) observed that despite the immense benefits that supervision offers the ECE, the Nigerian ECE at pre-primary school level is not provided with these benefits as it is usually left unsupervised. This cannot allow effective implementation of ECE programmes at pre-primary school level in Nigeria. Many researchers like Osakwe, (2011); Nakpodia, (2011); Sooter, (2013) have concluded that the level of supervision of early child education center showed that supervision of the programme is ineffective.

3.8. Insecurity

Insecurity is another big issue affecting the management of early child education in Nigeria. No any meaningful school management can take place in the under environment that is not secured. School administrators, teachers and students are not safe in the educational institutions in Nigeria due to the high rate of insecurity problem facing the country. Local media reported that Gunmen kidnapped three teachers from a primary school in northwestern Nigeria on Monday. The security commissioner for Kaduna state, said that authorities had received reports that both pupils and teachers had been abducted on Monday morning in the BirninGwari area. Primary schools in Nigeria usually admit children between 6 and 9 years old. Report from the local media observed that Since December, heavily armed gangs have abducted and then ransomed off more than 800 Nigerian schoolchildren, rocking Africa's most populous country and drawing calls for urgent action from the U.S., the European Union and Pope Francis. Hundreds of school campuses have been closed across four states for fear of more attacks, leaving an estimated 20 million Nigerian children out of school, the highest total in the world due to terrorism and criminality (The wall street Journal 2021). Many school administrators and manager, teachers and children have been killed, some kidnapped and other displaced by the bandits, insurgents and Boko Haram members operating in the country. The high rate of attack on educational institutions have led to school closure in some part of the states in the Northern Nigeria. All these problems is affecting the management of the early child education programme in Nigeria.

3.9. Problem of Out of school Children

Another problem facing the management of early child education in Nigeria is the problem of the high number out of school children. The managers of the early child education programme are faced with problems of how to enroll the out of school children and ensure they access quality education. The World-Bank (2017) Nigeria stands out globally in its number of out-of-school children. Though the number is debated in the country, the latest estimates (based on the 2013 Demographic and Health Survey, DHS) indicate that 13.2 million of basic education school age children, i.e. age 6- 14 years old, are out of school⁷. This figure includes children who never entered school as well as dropouts. Unfortunately, the trend is also negative, as this figure represents an increase of 3.3 million from the 2010 estimate. An overwhelming majority of out-of school children -- 12.6 million -- are in the North. Out-of-school rates are also higher among girls, in rural areas, and among the poorest in society. At the national level, the out-of-school rate increased from 24 percent in 2010 for children ages 6-14 years to 30 percent in 2013 and remained highest in 2013 among girls (32 percent vs. 28

percent for boys), in rural areas (41 percent vs. 11 percent in urban areas), and among the poorest (72 percent for the poorest quintile vs. 3 percent for the richest). At the same time, there is variation in the composition of the out-of-school population across different geographic zones in Nigeria, with relatively higher out-of-school rates among: girls in the North in particular; children of nomadic pastoralists throughout the country; boys who drop out in the South East and South South zones; the so-called area boys (loosely organized gangs of mostly male street children and teenagers) in the South West; children of migrant fishermen in the South South; and, the children in the North East displaced by the Boko Haram insurgency. Though out-of-school children are a phenomenon throughout Nigeria with varying manifestations by zone and underlying supply- and demand-side drivers, broadly speaking, most out-of-school children in the North never attended school, while in the South they are mostly dropouts.

Way Forward

The following recommendations were made to address the above discussed problems: adequate funding, employment of professional teachers, provision of infrastructural facilities, provision of instructional materials, provision of national curriculum, ensure effective supervision, fight all forms of corruption in the ministry of education and ensure provision of adequate security in all early child education centers.

- A. The federal, states and local government should increase the funding of the early child education programme. This will aid effective management of the programme
- B. The government should employ more professional teachers (caregivers) and deploy them to the various early child education centers across the country. This will help to improve the quality of early child education in the country
- C. The government should provide more infrastructural facilities like admin blocks, offices, staff rooms, classrooms, chairs, tables, stable light, water, ICT facilities etc. This will aid effective management of the programme in the country
- D. More instructional materials like toys, diagrams, charts, pictorials should be provided in all the early child education centers
- E. The government should provide adequate national curriculum to all early child centers in the country.
- F. The government should ensure that the supervision of all early child education centers are done regularly and effectively.
- G. The government should monitor all funds released for the management of the early child education programme in the country and ensure the funds are used for the development of the programme. Anti-corruption agencies should be used to fight all forms of corruption in the ministries of education in the country.
- H. The government should provide adequate security in all the early child education centers in the country.

Conclusion

The early child education is an organized education designed to prepare the children for basic education. Early child education is the first education children receives as formal. The contribution of the early child education to the social economic, political and technology advancement cannot be underestimated. The management of the early child education programme in Nigeria is facing some problems. The paper identified inadequate funding, inadequate infrastructural facilities, shortage of

care givers, inadequate national curriculum, inadequate instructional materials, corruption, poor supervision, insecurity and high number out of school children as the problems facing the management of the early child education programme in Nigeria. Adequate funding, employment of professional teachers, provision of infrastructural facilities, provision of instructional materials, provision of national curriculum, ensuring effective supervision, fighting all forms of corruption in the ministry of education and ensuring provision of adequate security in all early child education centers were recommended by the writers as the ways forward to the management problem of the early child education programme in Nigeria.

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