Managing Early Childhood Care and Development in Kwara State, Nigeria: Problems and Prospect
Sub-theme: Early Childhood Education

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Abstract
This paper examines the Kwara State's effort at developing her Early Childhood Education (ECE) from the perspective of the World Bank grant, technical support by UNICEF's contribution and the UBE grant. While some measure of success could be said to have been attained, especially in widening access for age 3-5 year olds (17,816 enrolled in 2010), capacity training for teachers and caregivers, provision of grants to ECD schools to furnish their kindergarten classrooms as model centres, etc., there are still major issues to resolve just in the state but also nationally. The paper observed lack of a strong structure for ECD, underfunding, unprofessional ECD teachers and caregivers and inadequate facilities as some of the management challenges. It, therefore, recommended a distinct directorate for ECD, recruitment of professional teachers and caregivers, etc to raise the standard already attained.

Key words: Early Childhood Education, management, teachers, caregivers,
Introduction

The total development of the very young child (birth to five or six years), hitherto confined to the home, is now accepted worldwide as the real foundation of education. This acceptance is reflected in the plethora of conferences on the universal basic education incorporating an expanded vision or early childhood education as well as the many recent policies on them (Nigeria, Ghana, Malawi, Mauritius, Zambia, etc.) (Neugebauer, 2007; Nsameuang, 2009; SoVC, 2009) and huge funds expended on the implementation. Between the 1990 Jom tien Conference which produced Education for All (EFA) Declaration and 2000 World Millennium Summit, which produced the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), there were about seven other such conferences (Bruns, Mingat.Rakotomalala, 2003; UBEC, 2006; UBEC, 2009). The many international academic conferences and workshops in the last decade as well as the series of advocacy at both national and local levels also underscore the new perception of young children’s development.

The main objective of this paper, therefore, is to highlight the efforts of Kwara State of Nigeria towards early childhood education in line with global development and the successes recorded so far. It will also examine some of its serious challenges since its implementation began in 2006. The state is one of the states to have recognised its educationally-disadvantaged status in the country and to take steps to overcome it with the launching of its "Every Child Counts" education policy in 2006 as a strategy for achieving Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDG). However, there are still many hurdles to cross if the state is to remedy its educational deficiencies and also attain those goals. The major one of such hurdles is how to put in place good management for its neophyte Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) programme so that it does not lose steam.

One of the major factors that contribute to the success of any programme is effective and efficient management. This involves planning, organising, coordinating, leading, directing, motivation and evaluation. For a programme involving a multi-sectoral approach and for very young citizens without a ‘political’ voice to cry out, there is a need to keep a watch on its management. It is well known that the bane of educational development in Nigeria and others in Africa has been poor management (poor planning, implementation, funding, etc.) of laudable policies (Ijaiya, 2008). Examples include the Universal Free Primary Education (UPE) launched in Nigeria in 1976 and its predecessors in the former Western and Eastern Regions of 1955 and 1957 respectively, as well as the 6-3-3-4 system of education.
How Early Childhood Education (ECE) Conceived?

Early childhood education has come under different nomenclature in different places namely Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Ghana. Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) by UNESCO, Early Childhood Development (ECD) by UNICEF, Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Sinyolo, 2011, p. 14). Nigeria however, adopted the name 'Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development (ICCD)' with intent to care and support the child with good nutrition and health, psycho-social stimulation, protection and security among other objectives (NERDC, n.d., 11.4). Used interchangeably in this paper, the conceptualisation is the same all over, that is, a comprehensive or a holistic, collaborative, sectoral approach to the care of the very young citizens involving education, health, nutrition and physical development. Sinyolo (2009) describes ECCD services targeted at, cry young people, taking place before compulsory schooling and provided in different kinds or settings, including nurseries, childcare centres, creches, kindergartens, pre-schools and many other institutions similar to these (I). 14). Education International, (cited by Sinyolo, 2009), views ECCD as "education from a broader perspective - wholesome education that encompasses children's holistic development and learning, where care forms an integral part of a child's development and education.

Experience has shown that a good ECCD Centre should possess the following qualities: a conducive and safe learning environment; well ventilated accommodation and inviting exterior and interior; good and clean toilets; water supply; and electricity. Others include an appropriate curriculum that draws from the child's environment; adequate and appropriate stimulating materials; comfortable furniture, computers where possible, qualified ECCD teachers and caregivers with the right personality for handling children; and cooperation with the parents, especially for good feeding habits.

The Rationale for the ECE Rising Profile

The question is what could have been responsible for this phenomenal growth of public interest in ECD, especially in Asia and Africa?

Several reasons had been advanced apart from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1945 and the Convention of Rights of the Child, 1989 such as:

- The increasing faith in education as a potent mover of economic, political and social progress; a powerful weapon for wealth distribution, poverty alleviation, climbing of social ladder, eliminator of ignorance and disease and a catalyst of human capital development;
The African Union (AU) considers ECCD as a huge investment in Africa's very young citizens that can fast-track not just its human capital development but also means "... tomorrow's peace, stability, democracy and sustainable development" (Aidoo, 2008, p. 29, citing The OAU). According to Aidoo (2008) citing UNESCO, African States at the Seventh Conference of Ministers of Education of Member States decided to facilitate ECCD policies.

At a Pan African international seminar organised by Education International (EI) from 29 to 30 September, 2009, in Ghana, the following were highlighted as the need for ECE:

- Cyril Dalais, a UNICEF Consultant, in his keynote address called for special attention to be paid to Articles 6, 7, 8, 18, 28, 29 and 31 of the Convention of the Right of the Child as a guide to any intervention.
- That every child no matter his background, including disadvantaged children deserves to receive good quality early education as a right and to gain head start in life.
- These children are Africa's future and the time to prepare for tomorrow is today.

Early Childhood Education in Nigeria

As in many parts of the world, the education of children below six years was not on government's priority list for funding. It was considered the responsibility of the home and has always been part and parcel of every community's way of life to raise their children to imbibe their culture including the values, norms and religions with emphasis on preparation for adulthood.

The factors that contributed to the introduction of kindergarten or pre-primary services in those days are not far-fetched and still persist. The change is as a result of increasing number of girls enrolling and staying longer in western education and of more mothers in the twentieth century joining the workforce. This is one major factor that created the now popular day care centres in every nook and cranny of the country.

With the UBE law in place, implementation therefore followed in all the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). One of its pillars or cardinal foci was "Programme and initiatives for early childhood education and development" (UBEC, 2004, p.3). This move represents the Federal Government's first direct intervention in the education of children of 0 to 5 years. The management of the IECD was assigned by law to the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) at the national level and at the state level by the State Universal Basic Education
Board (SUBEB) though under UBEC supervision and coordination (UBEC, 2004). The focus of IECD was on children of age 3 to 5, leaving out children of 0 to 2 years. The strategy adopted by the government was to attach them to existing primary schools named referred to as Lower and Middle Basic schools (LMBS). While they exist, only two classes were made available for their accommodation, with each class manned by a teacher and a caregiver in many cases. However, some do not enjoy the services of both. It is either a teacher or a caregiver who combines the two functions.

This bold step by the Federal Government on IECD has a number of advantages: It is giving access to otherwise disadvantaged children in both rural and urban communities to formal pre-primary education and thus helping to equalise educational opportunities for Nigerian children; stimulating the children's interest in attending schools with their older siblings in tipper classes and thus preparing them for school life; creating awareness in the communities and among parents to send their children to school and being free; it made it easier for poor parents to decide to send their children to school; and it has also helped to bring more girls to school, especially in the rural areas and the educationally disadvantaged communities.

Managing IECD in Kwara State

The state is situated in the North Central geopolitical zone of Nigeria and divided into 16 Local Government Areas (LGA) and three Senatorial Districts with about 1.6 million population. It is, however, centrally placed between the educationally disadvantaged Northern and the educationally advantaged Western parts of the country and so shares in the drawbacks and the advantages of the two educationally. Whereas, the South and the Central Senatorial Districts of Kwara State can lay some claim to educational advantage in terms of higher enrolment, the North Senatorial District is considered educationally disadvantaged, with less enrolment, particularly girls. The same trend obtains in formal early childhood education programme. The state has substantial number of out-of-school children, especially girls. These opposing situations exist in Kwara State since its creation in 1972 even though it has always regarded education as its major industry (Ijaiya, 2004). As in other parts of the country, the state also witnessed the rise of working class mothers who have to leave their babies at home till late afternoon, giving rise to nursery education for 3 to 5 year old children and in the 1990s pre-nursery services; though such services were few. To speed up ECO activities in the state, a task team set up by the Honourable Commissioner for Education in 2009 led by Ijaiya was charged to do a situation analysis of ECCD sites in the state and prepare a
Strategic plan for implementation of the policy for the state. The team took a sample of five (5) out of the 16 LGAs and visited 31 centres. Six categories of centres offering ECCD services were identified based on their ownership:

- The workplace centres run by Women Associations caring for 0 to 5 year old children. For instance, the Women in College of Education (WICE) Child Development Centre, Kwara State College of Education, Ilorin (2);
- The Ministry-owned/LGA Centres by the Ministry of Commerce caring for 0 to 3 year old children (1);
- The local neighbourhood individual-owned day care centres locally called 'JeJe o simi' (literally, 'let the house rest') (20). They paid more attention to this group;
- The community-based NGO-owned day care centres for 0 to 5 year old children (1);
- The private individual/religious association-owned nursery/primary schools with some handling 0 to 5 year old and others 2 to 5 years only (4); and
- The newly introduced Government-owned centres attached to primary schools (3).

Apart from the last two groups (Nos 5 and 6), all the others are not strong financially; the government-owned being the strongest, though not necessarily the best. The qualities of the centres, therefore, vary considerably. The neighbourhood ones charge 20 to 50 Naira per day.

Even though the State Government is making serious efforts to improve the quality and access to ECCD, there are still many challenges to overcome. Most of them are management issues but strong enough to slow down the pace of its development. This paper intends to examine some of these issues while trying to answer the following questions:

1. What has Kwara State been able to do for ECCD?
2. How strong is the structure on ground for ECCD sustainability?
3. Is there a common curriculum to guide the teachers and parents?
4. How qualified are the teachers and the caregivers?
5. Are there enough facilities?
6. How integrated is ECD in the state?
7. Is ECD well funded now?

These questions will be addressed by looking at the progress and problems of ECCD in Kwara State. The intention is to make recommendations on possible way forward, which could be extended to the national level.
1. What has Kwara State been able to do for ECD?

In order to fast-track the development of education including IECD in Kwara State, the State Government put in place a bold reform programme called State Education Support Project (SESP) in 2008, which included Teachers' Professional Development (TPD), School Development Scheme (SDS), which covers ECD. The state was among the three states (Kano, Kaduna and Kwara) that benefitted from the World Bank grant. Its part of the grant was 17.3 million US dollars to finance its SESP programme from 2008 to 2011 (SESP Office). Part of the grant was put into servicing various programmes considered beneficial for the development of ECCD in the state. The intention of the State Government was to create model ECCD centres in the project LGAs to serve as exemplars for other public and private centres. A task team of which this writer was a lead person was set up by the State Ministry of Education to supervise SESP’s ECCD activities in the state.

I. Part of the World Bank (WB) grant was devoted to improving the quality of early childhood care and education through:

1. the training of nine ECCD experts through Early Childhood Development Virtual University (ECDVU) of Canada in Ghana and Tanzania;

2. sponsorship of ECO State Task Team members to WB international workshops held in Dakar, Senegal, 2008 and the Second Technical Workshop on Early Childhood Education in Cape Coast, South Africa, 2010;

3. school grant service tinder SOS- 244 schools with ECCD classes in 9 out of the 16 LGAs benefitted in 2011. A basic sum of N50,000.00 was given to each school's School Based Management Committee (SBMC) and an additional N1,000.00 per child depending on the number of children in each school to a maximum of N200,000.00 (SESP's Office);

4. purchase of educational materials- the grant mentioned above was used for the purchase of stimulating materials by each school. The method adopted is for each school to submit the list of materials they need to the State's Task Team for approval before purchase. The schools will then be inspected against their lists;
5. training of ECCO teachers and Desk officers. The state organised training of 491 ECCO teachers from all LGAs in a one week-long residential workshop in February, 2011;

6. training of caregivers in February 2011- Two hundred and fifty five (255) caregivers were also trained in another one week-long residential workshop. For both, private experts in ECCO were procured to undertake the training. Both training were in addition to the one organised and financed by the SUBEB;

7. production of Training Modules for teachers and caregivers with the input of UNICEF; and

8. advocacy and community sensitisation workshops on ECCO attended by Chiefs or their representatives, private school proprietors, community lenders, NUT and PTA executives.

II. In addition, the Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN) under OFID was also involved in the SESP giving technical support. They are involved in the 'turn around' programme of one of the three state colleges of education (Kwara State College of Education, Oro), for the training and production of teachers of early childhood education. This is to boost the growth and development of ECCO. Their technical support is slated for six years and the first set will be graduating this year. ESSPIN is also working with SUBEB to facilitate the development of ECCO in the state. UNICEF is also providing support in some local communities.

III. The contributions mentioned above are in addition to the 50% of the UBE grant to be spent on ECCO from the UBE Counterpart Funding arrangement between the Federal and State Governments annually (UNESCO, 2007). On the part of SUBEB, efforts had also been made to boost access and quality of ECCD in the state through:

- provision of stimulating materials (for example 1000 copies each of Alphabet Starter books and Alphabet Reading books; Phonics Word picture books, Workbooks; Lego; etc.), furnishing of some ECCD classes; provision of teachers and caregivers; supervision and monitoring of the centres; regular payment of teachers and caregivers' salaries; one training programme had been organised for ECCD teachers and caregivers; the setting up of ECCO Consultative Committee although lately moribund.
By 2010 school census, enrolment in public schools' ECCD had reached a total of 17,816 from zero in 2006 to include 8,978 males and 8,838 females in 774 centers in all the 16 LGAs including the rural communities. This is not a mean achievement even though it is not yet 'uhuru'. It has, however, helped to demystify nursery education as a preserve of the rich and the middle class.

2. How strong is the structure on ground for ECCD sustainability?

The structure of an organisation or a programme has been described by Mintzberg (1996) as "the sum total of the ways in which it divides its labour into distinct tasks and then achieves coordination between them" (p.170). Two issues are important here with regard to ECD namely: the quality and quantity of staff and the coordination of its various activities which include advocacy; sensitisation of stakeholders including the communities; training, recruitment, placement, transfer, discipline of teachers and caregivers; procurement and distribution of furniture and other learning materials, etc. Right now, the structure on ground for managing ECCD per se is unclear. The ECCD is administratively lumped with School Support Services (SSS) department at SUBEB. The SSS serves the whole basic education levels. There are Desk Officers deployed to ECCD but these are hardly part of the decision-making process. The training unit of SUBEB handles the training of teachers and caregivers; procurement is in the hand of procurement department, while planning and mobilisation are done by the Planning, Research and Statistics Department (PRS). These activities need to be coordinated.

What this translates to is that ECCD structure is weak in terms of leadership, organisation and coordination. This is already causing inertia on the ECCD activities at SUBEB level. ECCD is a big field now on its own and deserves to have a solid structure on ground for quality assurance and sustainability. It needs committed and well focused staff with job involvement to carry it to the next level beyond forming. UNESCO (2007) in its EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2006 on Nigeria challenged both the UBEC and SUBEB on the survival of the 3-5 year olds programme.

3. Is there a common curriculum to guide the teachers and parents?

The answer is no. A common curriculum has never been part of ECD history in Nigeria. Without a national curriculum, each school or class has been fashioning one for itself. Yet, a curriculum is far more than simply showing the course of study. It also indicates the philosophy, assumptions, the goals and objectives of the programme, among others (Halder, 2009); all of which the teachers and other stakeholders need as a guide to action. Although, a national curriculum has been prepared by NERDC but it is yet to reach the schools. The guidelines for IECD
policy implementation is also yet to be published though prepared. All these omissions are minus for IECD.

4. **How qualified are the teachers and the caregivers?**

The state started almost from zero with regard to professionally qualified ECE teachers and caregivers. It had to transfer teachers from the primary section to teach ECCD classes. In the absence of an official curriculum, each teacher prepares something to teach the children, usually covering the English alphabet, counting and storytelling. These teachers are subject to transfer any time by SUBEB. The caregivers too were also inexperienced and of low quality; many have just Senior Secondary School and Primary Six certificate. Onu, Obiozor, Agbo & Ezeanwu (2010) made similar observation in Nsukka, South East Geopolitical zone. The lack of quality human resources for ECO is a national problem that must be remedied. The educational managers in Nigeria still see human resources from the traditional perspective as a cost rather than an investment. It is the reason why SUBEB prefers transferring teachers and merging classes to employing more; and their re-training is severely limited because it was organised only once since 2006. In this era of competitive business, even in education, human resources are regarded as a profitable investment to an organisation because it is man that can turn the physical assets to capital (Agarwala, 2007). The caregivers in the local centres are untrained and are in the business to make ends meet. Government training has not been extended to them or to the private nursery/primary schools.

5. **Are there enough facilities?**

The facilities are certainly inadequate in most of the schools. Some classrooms are over-populated caring for over 60 children, especially in the big towns across LGAs. In addition, there are still thousands of children in the neighbourhood day care centres (the "Jeje o simi"), which occupy unconducive environment from backyard to verandas and makeshift wooden sheds and in some cases caring for 70 to 100 children and manned by one or two caregivers. They cannot even boast of toys or any stimulating materials. In many, the children sit on mats or long benches that are not convenient for sleeping. In spite of SUBEB 's and SESP's efforts to provide stimulating materials, most schools are still waiting. Hamza (2005) citing Ellyat affirms that the child should be the focus of learning and it should be through play as concurred by the National Policy on Education. The environment should, therefore, be rich to afford opportunity for pupil-pupil, pupil-teacher and pupil-environment interactions. The children can then explore, create and make discovery by him/herself and that way discover his/her own abilities and interest (Hamza, 2005).
6. How integrated is IECD in the state?

Integrated ECD implies a multi-sectoral approach to the care and education of the young children involving health, nutrition, education, security and protection. Kwara State had put in place an IECD Consultative Committee involving the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Ministries of Justice, Women Affairs, Information, Agriculture, Water Resources, Environment and Sanitation. The committee has been inactive for some time and the MOE is now at the stage of restructuring and resuscitating it. School feeding is also not yet in place.

7. Can the children in the various care sites be said to have equal opportunity?

This is certainly not the case. The quality differs from the environment, available facilities and resources including teachers and caregivers as well as quality of teaching. The local 'Je le o simi' ones cannot even claim any quality beyond keeping the children safe and in some cases, teaching of the English alphabet.

8. Is ECD well funded now?

The answer is no. The UBE matching grant, which is usually not regularly drawn by the state is hardly enough for IECD. The support of the WB grant and ESSPIN made a big difference in the development of ECCD. How to sustain that progress is a big challenge to the state and the Federal Government. ECD funding needs to increase to cater for the training of teachers with scholarship,

Conclusion

Kwara State has no doubt demonstrated strong desire and commitment to making ECCD work and achieve its aims and objectives through several activities. This has helped to increase access and achieve a measure of quality. Its sensitisation and advocacy programmes have worked to stimulate community interest up to the ninal areas. It, however, has to take it to the next level of sustainability and progress. But there are management challenges to overcome like the rest of the country. Right now, IECD has a weak structure that may not sustain it; funding is grossly inadequate; facilities are also a far cry from the expected; no uniform curriculum and teaching is poor, while there are too many children out of government control and in unconducive environment.
Recommendations
The following are, therefore, recommended to assure IECD progress in the state:

a. The IECD deserves to have a directorate of its own, headed by a Director who is a high rank officer, all ECO expert who will be participating at the top decision-making level in SUBEB and UBEC before it gets lost under SSS. The UBEC should see to this nationwide;

b. The IECD Consultative Committee needs to be resuscitated as a matter of urgency made tip of committed members;

c. The JECO funds need to be increased and put to better use by the Government while private and community participation should be encouraged;

d. Graduates from the ECO programme of the College of Education should be fully absorbed in to service and a career path created for the ECO professionally qualified teachers and caregivers. Capacity building should be a regular exercise;

e. The state should register all private day care centres in all LGAs and provide training for those registered at little or no cost;

f. The state should implement the minimum standard set for establishing ECO centres with a reasonable deadline for closure of the bad ones;

g. The national curriculum should be published by NERDC and UBEC should ensure that all the states of Nigeria implement it;

h. Impact evaluation should be conducted on ECO beneficiaries at the lower and middle Basic levels;

i. The Federal and State Governments should make available some provisions to reach the 0-2 year children; and

j. The state should continue to explore more partnership and grants to support IECD programme,

References


