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The Roles of Family and Community in Ensuring Quality in Early Childhood Education for Sustainable Development of the Nigerian Child

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Abstract

Quality early childhood education for sustainable development of the Nigerian child can not be achieved in the hands of the government and private individuals alone. The family and community members must be involved and this is why this study examined the roles of family and community in ensuring quality early childhood education for sustainable development of the Nigeria child. Descriptive survey design was used for the study. The study is limited to all the 43 public early childhood education centers attached to public primary schools within Awka south educational zone. The instrument for data collection was a 15 item questionnaire adapted by the researchers. The findings of the study among others revealed that both the community members and parents accepted their roles for quality early childhood education to include among others provision of teaching learning facilities in the schools, establishment of active PTA meetings that will assist in formulation of policies and decision making. The researchers concluded that to ensure quality early childhood education, the families and communities must stand up to their accepted responsibilities. The researchers recommended among others that the government should through the ministry of education organize capacity building workshops annually for the parents and communities to educate them of their expected roles towards ensuring quality early childhood education for sustainable development of the Nigerian child.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, Early childhood, Ensuring, Quality, Family

Introduction

Early childhood education is a very important aspect of Nigerian educational system. It has been defined in the National Policy on Education as the education given to children between the ages of 3-5+ in an educational institution prior to their entering the primary schools ^[1]. According to ^[2]. Pre primary education is defined as early childhood care, survival, growth, development and learning, including health education that supports children. Childhood education is therefore a preparatory school for children before they enter primary schools. This is to give them smooth transition to primary education and lay solid foundation for future education.

The demand for early childhood education also known as pre school education, nursery education and early years learning has increased in recent times. This is as a result of the understanding by parents that the aim of pre primary education is to foster the proper development of children, identify and address their problems, harness their potentials, mold their character, enhance their learning, equip them for life, so that their actions are channeled towards positive personal communal and global development in all aspects of life ^[5, 6, 7, 8, 9].

A child may suffer emotionally, socially, mentally and morally and even physically if trusted into the primary school without sustainable pre primary education experience. For Pre school education has a significant impact on the academic performance of the pupils in later years ^[5, 6, 7]. For effective and efficient unfolding and development of a child latent abilities, attitudes and other forms of behavior of positive values in the society in which he lives, pre primary education becomes imminent.

In support of the above, research evidences have shown that early childhood education is a period of critical importance on humans toward intellectual development and self sufficiency ^[10, 11, 8]. Early years in life are the most important years for the formation of cognitive, language, physical and social behavior of young children. That is why modern societies show serious concern for the education of their young ones by providing needed support to prepare them to succeed later in schools.

The federal government though left the establishment of early childhood education in the hands of private individuals and organizations showed prominence in where the objectives of

- pre primary education was stated to include among others ^[11]:
- To effect a smooth transition from the home to school,
 - Prepare the child for the primary level of education,
 - Provide adequate care and supervisions for the children while their parents are at work,
 - Inculcate in the child the spirit of inquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature and the local environment, playing with toys, artistic and musical activities etc.

The understanding of the importance of early childhood education by parents led to proliferation of pre school centers by private individuals without accompanying facilities to back it up. The quality of early childhood education was therefore affected. For these beautiful and laudable pre school objectives stated in the ^[1] and outlined above to be achieved, quality early childhood education becomes necessary. The aim of this study is to examine the roles the families and communities would play to ensure quality early childhood education for sustainable development of Nigerian child.

The word quality according to means peculiar and essential character, an inherent feature, a degree of excellence, a distinguishing attribute ^[12]. While defines it as, grade of goodness, excellence ^[13]. Quality education therefore is the education that is of high grade, works for every child, enables all children to achieve their full potential and promotes quality learning outcomes. It should encourage children to think critically, ask questions and express their opinions and therefore achieve high literacy, numeracy and life skills ^[14].

The word sustainable development was first mentioned in the United Nations General Assemble in 1987. According to United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the concept of sustainable development is difficult to define because it is continually evolving. An attempt was made by an organ of the United Nations, the World Commission on Environment and Development as the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their own needs ^[15].

In other words, sustainable development means the development that is viable and can be continued in future without constituting a problem to the present. Such sustainable development in early childhood education will benefit even the unborn children. In such a case all the available resources will be utilized to meet the needs of the children in a way that is not harmful to the present and future generation of the society. Education for sustainable development may be conceptualized as sustainable development attained through teaching and learning in both formal and informal situations ^[16]. Quality and sustainable education will start early in the child's life. This is why childhood education should be designed for sustainable development of the Nigerian child. It should concern every aspect of childhood education, ranging from decision making to the output of the school. The objective of sustainable development is to promote values and ethics and to impact on people's life styles and behaviours through the curriculum at different levels of education. It also aims at improving quality and coverage of education and on reorienting its goals towards sustainable development.

Education that will build up the child to acquire necessary skills that will enable him contribute effectively in the community now and in future cannot be left in the hands of private individuals and government alone. The community and the family must partner with the government to finance

early childhood education for quality outcome. Such education must be relevant to the problems, needs and aspirations of the community now and in future. Family and community involvement in early childhood education can improve the quality of pre school education provision, the quality of parenting and the home learning environment. It will give the community a sense of school ownership, so that the school is not seen as something outside the community. These links anchor the school as a supportive, attentive and relevant community institution.

Such link enhances children early development, their later academic success and high school completion, their social development and can result to high social cohesion. This is because according to ^[17], parents are the children's first and most enduring educators and what they do have powerful effect on children learning.

These involvements can take different dimensions. The community is made up of collections of different families and schools are built by the community for their children. The community that builds the school for their children have roles to play to ensure quality education at different levels for their children. This is because the output of the school will come back to serve the community and the quality of foundation laid for the children at this pre school level determines their academic success and quality of the service they will render to the community in future.

There is a pedagogical dimension to the links between the school and the family and communities. Children bring to school their family and community beliefs, practices, knowledge, expectations and behaviours. In the same way when they return, from school, they bring back to their families and communities new forms of knowledge, practices, behavior and skills. Children are involved in a continuous dynamic process of bridging the world of school and the world of home and community ^[14].

The involvement of parents in young children's education is a fundamental right and obligation. It is of opinion that ECEC services should recognize mothers and fathers right to be informed, comment on and participate in key decisions concerning their children ^[17]. It has been observed that parental engagement in ECEC services enhances children ^[19]. Young children development is not exclusively dependent on the input of parents and ECEC centers alone, children grow up in a neighborhood and are part of the community. The involvement of community in ECEC plays an important role in the development of young children. The earlier the role of the community the better the chances the children have of achieving at the school and in life. In general organization for economic co-operation and community development ^[17] assert that if the connection between the school and the community is strong, it becomes easier for the children to develop the skills needed to be successful socially, emotionally, physically and academically.

School family- community partnerships has now enlarged. It now includes mothers, fathers, step mothers, grand parents, other relatives and care givers, business leaders and community groups contrary to that of the past when it ended up with the mother or father assisting in schools, all participating in goal oriented activities, at all grade levels linked to the child's success in school. Parents- community partnership foster higher educational aspirations and more motivated learners'. To promote pupils growth and school success at every grade level and age, well thought out parent community school partnerships, linked to school success improvement goals are needed in every community.

Roles of the Family Towards Quality Early Childhood Education:

Family is made up of the father, mother children and other relations with the parents as the key players. Family involvement in early childhood education, refers to the formal and informal relations that parents have with early childhood education and care services. Parents in this study refer to the biological and surrogate parents to children under their care. Parents are by tradition the custodians of children; they take care of their total welfare including education. During the early stage of the child before formal education, the parents take care of the children together with other relations. Even with the advent of formal education, it has been observed that young children below the age of formal school have been primarily the responsibility of the parents and so their roles in early childhood education is recognized world wide. Parents serve as role models to their children and therefore play a vital role in laying a solid foundation for the children educational take off. The quality of foundation the parents laid for the children at this early stage can either make or mar the child education in future.

The parents have lots of roles to play in improving the quality of education their children receive especially at this early stage. They make the choice of their children school, pay their fees and relate with their children's teachers concerning the education of their children. They take part in taking decisions that affect their children in schools. According to [20] parents help to plan and run centers events and fund raising activities, accompanying trips, donating their time to improve facilities in school

It has been understood that when parents engaged their young children in learning processes, reading with them, providing them with educational materials like computer, games, talking to them about school and learning and engaged in other joint activities e.g. cooking together they succeed.

Parental involvement in the children's helps to give the children quality educational foundation for positive contributions to the community in future. The major roles the parents are expected to perform to help enhance the quality of early childhood education among others include provision of literacy rich home environment, quantity and quality cognitive stimulation, parental sensitivity and child centered emotional support and emphasis on the value of learning, others are provision of security for children through fencing of the school compound, donation of teaching facilities to the school, taking the children to school on time, provision of lunch for the child, visitation to the child's school, taking the child to library, having effective communication with the child to develop the language skill, assisting the child in doing home works and giving financial support to the school. When the families via parents execute the above functions effectively, the quality of early childhood education will improve.

The Roles of the Community in Ensuring Quality Childhood Education:

The school does not exist in a vacuum. It is a small community within a larger community. The school is the integral part of the community and proactively reaches out to it, both seeking its support in improving child friendliness and in turn supporting community development. The school is sensitive to the knowledge, values and traditions pupils bring from larger community, at the same time the pupils acquire new knowledge and skills they take back into the community [14].

Community involvement may refers to the connections between ECEC services and all forms of input and contributions by community services to ECEC. The community in this study include the members living within the preschool environment. These people have roles to play to ensure quality in the schools located within their community. In the view of [21], the needs of the community change its hope, values, expectations and aspirations. And these changes influence the education of the Nigerian child.

A strong community can act as a social network that supports parents to reduce stress and maintain positive emotion and give them tools for raising their children. In other words it takes a whole community to raise a child, if the social network is low, it may lead to low emotional involvement and cohesion. Community involvement means a higher level of social cohesion (mutual trust between neighbors and common values) and social control and collective efficacy [23].

It is expected of the community that they should provide the needs of the preschool located in their environment. It was emphasized that the community should contribute to meeting the needs of the early childhood education centers within their environment and this can be done through having active parent's teachers association (PTA) in the schools [24].

In support, [24] pointed out the roles the community could play to the success of early childhood education centers within their areas. They emphasized that the early childhood education program me is conceived, planned and managed by the community; the community also gets involved directly in the delivery, supervision, maintenance and evaluation of activities.-uses resources in the community to tackle community problems etc.

When the communities are diligent in executing the above functions, the quality of childhood education centers in their areas should improve.

Statement of the Problem:

Lack of adequate government support and involvement of private individuals in establishment of early childhood education centers without matching teaching learning facilities have jeopardized the quality of this level of education in Nigeria. Quality Education that will build up the child to acquire necessary skills for effective contributions in the community now and in future cannot be left to government and private individuals alone. This is the challenge that faced this study which examined the roles of family and community in ensuring quality early childhood education for sustainable development of Nigerian child.

Methodology:

This study which investigated the roles of the community and family in ensuring quality early childhood education for sustainable development of Nigerian child used descriptive survey design. The study is limited to all the 43 public early childhood education centers attached to public primary schools within Awka south educational zone with their 14,911 pupils (ASUBEB, 2014) as the population. Random sampling technique was used in selecting 5% of the pupils' population. This gave rise to 745 sample populations of families represented by the pupils used for the study as respondents. For the selection of community member's population, the entire Parent's Teachers' Association (PTA) chairman of all the 43 public primary schools in the zone were selected to represent community members since the population is small and manageable. This gave rise to 43 PTA chairmen as sampled population of community members as respondents.

The instrument for data collection was a 15 item questionnaire adapted by the researchers titled questionnaire on the role of parents and community in improving ECE centers (QRPCIECEC) designed for the parents and community members. The instrument was validated by two lecturers from department of early childhood and primary education and education foundations of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka respectively. Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient was used to determine the internal consistency of the items of the questionnaires.

The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.87 which shows that the questionnaire is reliable. The questionnaire was distributed

to parents through their children by the class teachers while the school heads gave out the questionnaire to the PTA chairman of their respective schools. The returns were 100%. The data collected was analyzed using mean and standard deviation. A mean of 2.50 and above indicated acceptance while a mean below 2.50 indicated rejection.

Research Questions:

1. What are the roles of the parents (families) towards ensuring quality early childhood education in Nigeria.
2. What are the roles of the community members towards ensuring quality early childhood education in Nigeria.

Table 1: mean ratings of parent on their expected roles for quality early childhood education

S/N	Items of the questionnaire	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Parents (family) are expected to :persuade the government to provide health care services to the centers	3.44	0.72	Accepted
2	Provide lunch for their children/ward	3.54	0.52	Accepted
3	Give quality nutrition to their children/wards	2.56	0.51	Accepted
4	Donate teaching materials to the learning centers	3.55	0.53	Accepted
5	Donate fund to the centers	3.50	0.66	Accepted
6	Provide security for the children through fencing of the centers	3.62	0.53	Accepted
7	Pay their children fees on time	3.03	0.68	Accepted
8	Help in disciplining the children	3.55	0.51	Accepted
9	Serve as volunteer staff to school functions	3.24	0.69	Accepted
10	Provide children with appropriate school dresses	3.60	0.51	Accepted
12	Provide safety rooms for the centers	3.41	0.72	Accepted
13	Help the centers equip their library	3.49	0.64	Accepted
14	Make endowment for the school	3.21	0.64	Accepted
15.	Attend the school PTA meetings	3.50	0.65	Accepted

The data presented in table 1 above shows that the parents representing the families accepted all the 15 items in the questionnaire as the roles families should play to enhance the quality of early childhood education in Nigeria. The mean

value ranges from 0.62 to 3.03. This show that the parents responses in all the items are above the cut off range of 2.50. The SD that ranged from 0.51 to 0.76 indicated that the parents mean ratings are not far from each others responses.

Table 2: The mean ratings of community members on their expected roles for quality early childhood education.

S/N	Items of the questionnaire	Mean	SD	Decision
1	The community members are expected to: Persuade the government to provide health care services to the centers	3.27	0.81	Accepted
2	Help in disciplining the children in the centers.	3.45	0.64	Accepted
3	Provide land for the centers for construction of play ground	3.13	0.74	Accepted
4	Donate teaching materials to the centers	3.55	0.53	Accepted
5	Donate fund to the centers	3.77	0.69	Accepted
6	Provide security for the children through fencing of the centers	3.52	0.50	Accepted
7	Persuade the philanthropists to donate to the centers	3.13	0.58	Accepted
8	Hold active PTA meetings.	3.15	0.55	Accepted
9	Purchase toys for the centers	3.24	0.66	Accepted
10	Provide sick bay for the centers	3.37	0.61	Accepted
11	Employ qualified teachers for the centers	3.60	0.58	
12	Construct classroom blocks for the centers.	3.25	0.81	Accepted
13	Use professionals in the community to hold workshops for the teachers.	3.47	0.62	Accepted
14	Help the centers equip their libraries	3.16	0.62	Accepted
15	Make endowment for the school.	3.51	0.86	Accepted

The data presented in table 2 above shows that the community members accepted all the 15 items as the roles they will play to enhance the quality of early childhood education centers in Nigeria. The mean value ranges from to 3.13to 3.77. This shows that the community members responses in all the items is above the cut off range of 2.50. The SD that ranged from 0.50 to 0.86 indicated that the community members mean ratings are not far from each other’s responses.

Discussions of the Findings:

The findings of the study in table 1 revealed that the family members accepted that for the quality of early childhood

education to improve in Nigeria, the families have to play the different roles listed in the questionnaire such as donation of fund to schools, payment of fees on time, serving as volunteer staff to the school among others.

The finding of the study is in line with that of [8] views which posit that families help develop cognitive skills that prepared the child for school, and believed experiences that help them to develop positive attitude to, and interest for school related activates when they encourage and take part in the child home learning.

The findings of the study further supported the findings of [21] who found out in their study that the parents should provide refreshments for children in nursery schools and that parents should work with teachers in providing the needs and requirements of the pupils.

The findings of the study in table 2 shows that the community members agreed that when they carry out the activities listed in the questionnaire in table 2 the quality of early childhood education in Nigeria will improve. This finding supports the findings of [24] who emphasized that community should help in the provision of land and also provide adequate security for the nursery school and participate in decision making. In addition, [23] views that the community should provide facilities and provide resource persons from the community during workshops for teachers and that the community should show interest in the schools located within their locality is in line with the views of parents in this study.

Conclusion

The researchers having examined different views of different authors on the roles families and communities should play in enhancing quality education especially at the early stage, discovered that young children development should not exclusively depend on the schools alone, since children grow up in families and are part of the communities, the input of families and involvement of communities in ECE should not be neglected. The researcher therefore concluded that for a sustainable development of the Nigerian child, the earlier the roles of the communities and families, the better the chances the children have of achieving at the school and in life in general.

Recommendations

The researchers based on the findings recommended that:

- 1 The government should through the ministry of education organize capacity building workshops annually for stakeholders in education especially the families and communities to educate them on their expected roles in ensuring quality in early childhood education.
- 2 The school heads should establish positive relationships with the families and communities through having active PTA meetings for determination of needs, formulation of policy and setting of goals for the schools.

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