

Political Ideology and National Economy in Early Childhood Care Education for Sustainable National Development

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Abstract

Investment in early childhood care education is a cost-effective technique that can prevent childhood disadvantages, leading to higher levels of economic profit for the community, individual, and country. These services also provide essential childcare to support working parents. Despite the growing evidence and global consensus on the importance of Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE), it remains under-resourced and comparatively neglected as a policy issue that has yet to attract resources needed to expand access and deliver quality services for all children. This study maintains that educational reform since the middle of last century has been driven by ideological principles and now plays a vital role in shaping the mind-set mainly of young people. Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) is no exception. It also argues that political ideologies play a crucial role in shaping policies and that, national economy in ECCE is a reflection of the ideologies of its political actors. This study therefore recommends that, there is need for adjustment of policies with emphasis on leadership quality and competency. Political Parties should be driven and supported based on ideologies and not personality make-up.

Keywords: Politics; Ideology; Economy; Education and Development

Introduction

Education is an indispensable tool in nations building. It is a process and systematic training, and instruction designed to transmit knowledge and acquisition of skills, potentials and abilities which will enable an individual to contribute efficiently to the growth and development of one's society and nation. The purpose of education is to improve the quality of life of its people in society. The foundation of any building will depend on how solid and strong that building is able to stand for the test of time. Furthermore, education is important for providing direction to humans, while society has been trying to impart new skills, knowledge and ideas from one generation to another. Education is still also a key instrument for developing the national economy in Nigeria. It is the reason many countries globally spend large sums of money to offer education. Thus, education contributes to national development and transformation by reducing poverty, which fosters security, peace, and self-reliance. Qualitative Education for sustainable national development in early childhood Education must provide that systematic training and design that will transmit knowledge and acquisition of skills that will enable the child grow, develop and contribute to the development of his or her society.

According to Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013), early childhood care and education is the type of education given in an educational institution to children aged 3-5 years prior to their entering primary school. This is to say that early childhood Education is a special kind of education provided for children, in an institution. It can be said to be a "formalized educational process to which children between ages 2 to 5 plus are subjected to designated early childhood care and education institution" (Georgeson, 2017). Early childhood education results in social, emotional, moral, and cognitive development gains that spill over into the later phases of development. Child development studies have reiterated that all nations should raise their expenses on early childhood education, paying significant attention to sustainable and practical programs and policies. Early childhood education has developed numerous practical and policy initiatives to implement and sustain quality within developing African states.

Children's experiences in the first five years of life are critical for their well-being and provide the foundation for lifelong learning. Inequalities in early childhood development (ECCD) begin early and tend to persist over time (Cranston, 2023). Young children who participate in quality early childhood education (ECCE), preschool, or pre-primary education¹ are more likely to begin primary school on time, less likely to drop out, and more likely to complete more years of schooling (World Health Organization, 2018). By reducing repetition rates and boosting learning outcomes in primary schooling,

investments in early learning have the potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of education systems (Georgeson, 2017). These services also provide essential child care to support working parents. The negative experiences, including cultural and tribal attitudes, incompetent teachers, political instability, and exposure to war and violence, are major factors that inhibit the realization of quality early childhood education in Nigeria (Aladegbola & Jaiyeola, 2016). Moreover, low family income, chronic corruption, and poor environmental conditions in Nigeria have aggravated the situation in terms of barriers to the development of early childhood and care. Sustainable practices in Nigeria instead of other practices from other parts of the world can be instrumental for promoting early childhood education (ECCE) and enhancing its prospects for advancing sustainable national development. Sustainable national development means, to make the world a better place for every one without destroying possibilities for the next generation to live a happy and quality lives. It is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs.

The Development of Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) in Nigeria

Early childhood care education (ECCE) is on the reform agenda in Nigeria, intending to provide developmental care and support for children during their formative years to enable them to acquire the skills needed for future success and learning within the school. It is anticipated that this success will significantly accrue benefits for the socio-economic development of society. Despite Nigeria undergoing significant transformation since being in contact with the European cultural elements, promoting universal access to ECCE remains a critical challenge for policymakers and educators in Nigeria. According to Aladegbola & Jaiyeola, (2016), Nigeria has emerged from European contact with what is termed as a "bruised cultural identity" that has affected child development in Nigeria in a significant way. Mothers play a crucial role in children's education, and this role continues to undergo substantial shifts in Nigeria during contemporary times. Various studies discuss the changing perspectives of childhood in Nigeria by identifying the substantial gains in acknowledgement of the rights of children (Guda & Mando, 2020). Poverty is a key obstacle to the welfare of children and education.

Missionaries first established ECCE in Nigeria during the colonial era (Samuelsson, Li & Hu, 2019), and Nigeria's education system was influenced by British culture after independence was gained in 1960. Historically, there was no government policy on ECCE. In the colonial era, in the last century,

the forms of ECCE were kindergartens and infant classes, introduced by missionaries into western and eastern Nigeria. Infant classes were designed for children not yet ready for elementary education. ECCE in Nigeria is mainly a postcolonial development (Cullier, 2017). With the phasing-out of infant classes, some parents began to clamour for nursery schools due to the increased number of working mothers and growing parental awareness about education (Okparaugo, 2021).

Before independence in 1960, ECCE provision had been mainly located in the voluntary sector's hands without the government's support (Cranston, 2023). The Nigerian educational policy's foundation was modelled after the British education system (Cullier, 2017). Until 1977, Nigeria went on following the inherited British education policy and did not incorporate ECCE into the public education system (Cullier, 2017). ECCE gained recognition in 1977 when it was introduced in the Nigerian NPE. At that time, provision was mainly located in the private sector (Adenike, Akinsemolu, Adejoke and Ogunkoya, 2021), and the government's responsibilities were limited to regulatory roles. Although government support for private participation may have led to an increased number of ECCE services, it failed to guarantee access and affordable ECCE. The 1977 NPE was revised in 1981, 1988, 2004, 2007, and 2013 to guide the Nigerian education system (NPE 2013). According to the latest revised 2013 NPE, ECCE is described as the education provided for children before they start formal schooling (at 6 years). The latest ECCE policy objectives and measures to enhance implementation are derived from the 2013 NPE. It describes the system and provides a policy analysis with the help of official documents. Thus, only one year's pre-primary education for 5-year-olds is provided free by the government in public schools. Since this document formed the basis for the official recognition of ECCE in Nigeria, it is the legally binding policy instrument to achieve ECCE goals. In response to the international protocols and as a reaffirmation of the country's commitment to the global Education for All (EFA) report and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Nigeria initiated reforms and implemented changes in the framework of and approach to education (NPE 2013), including ECE. In 1999, the national government introduced the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme. This was reformed with the signing of the UBE Act in 2004 to include the ECCE programme in every public primary school in Nigeria (Richter, Daelmans, Lombardi, Heymann, Boo, Behrman & Lancet Early Childhood Development Series Steering Committee, 2017). This reform was designed to ensure unfettered access and equity to quality education for all children, irrespective of their background.

Thus, the 2004 UBE and the reviewed 2004 NPE recognized ECCE as a part of the Nigerian education system and it was brought under Basic Education in the latest 2013 NPE alongside primary and junior secondary schools. The UBE programme provided for every public primary school to include an ECCE section catering for children aged 3–5 years, to ensure successful implementation of the scheme (Cullier, 2017; NPE 2013). A key aspect of the Nigerian ECCE system is that it comprises a mixed economy of providers: private organizations (i.e., individuals, local communities, and religious organizations) and the government (Adenike, Akinsemolu, Adejoke and Ogunkoya (2021).

Most ECCE services in Nigeria are provided by the private sector and operate on a commercial fee basis without government subsidy, while public provision is expected to be free (Adenike, Akinsemolu, Adejoke and Ogunkoya (2021). Neuman, McConnell & Kholowa (2014) refers to this type of ECCE provision as the childcare market; this is an ECCE system that runs private and public-funded provision. Morgan & Waite (2017) describes this market system as ‘a situation where there is minimal or no government intervention in early years education’. She notes that these forms of childcare markets are found in low-income countries where there is ‘no control on childcare entrepreneurial activities; no routine information collected; no regulation, and no subsidies’ (Morgan & Waite (2017). She further asserts that this type of market exacerbates inequality. This market system could have significant implications for cost, quality, and access for children and families in Nigeria as the government intended to provide ‘unfettered access and equity in education’.

Philosophy of Early Childhood Care Education

Every educational innovation has a philosophy, i.e. the overall idea or viewpoint of its innovators. For early childhood education, the philosophy is that every learner who has gone through 9-year basic education should have appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and long-life skills, as well as the ethical and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning, as a basis for scientific and reflective thinking. It is expected that every teacher should key into this philosophy, such that it guides your thinking, lesson preparation, delivery and evaluation. The early years (0-5) are crucial for the development of an individual and any support given at this stage helps to promote development. This period requires people who are knowledgeable, such as specialist care givers and teachers. This people need to be equipped for the task hence, the need to train them in ECCE to be able to handle these children effectively. Care givers and teachers of young children should possess some of these qualities like enthusiasm, kindness, gentleness and tolerance (Georgeson, 2017).

Political Ideology and National Economy in Early Childhood Care Education

The term ‘ideology’ emerged from the political and revolutionary turmoil in France at the end of the eighteenth century (Cranston, 2023). It was originally associated with a profound shift in a ‘world view’ from an essentially disposition based on superstition and religious dogma to a disposition based on scientific and logical thought rooted in the Scottish Enlightenment associated with two Scottish philosophers Adam Smith and David Hulme (Smith, 2009). It is a disposition that initiated the period of intellectual thought now known as ‘Modernity’ in Western and other English-speaking countries and resulted in significant financial prosperity for some and devastating relative poverty for others.

However, during the subsequent 100 or so years its meaning evolved into the present conception based on fundamentally different sets of axiomatic principles concerning a society’s social and economic arrangements in particular the relationship between the State, its institutions, the family and the individual. In present-day democratic and capitalist countries policy and practice in Education, particularly in ECCE, has been influenced by three dominant political ideologies which are competing for our future. They are: Conservatism, Liberalism and Social Democracy.

Each of these ideologies has a set of powerful social and economic principles, often adopted by people with fervent belief though there are significant contested variants and overlaps both within and between them (Guda & Mando, 2020). The struggle between these ideologies is embedded in the political contexts of many countries and often underpins profound social and economic upheaval from violent revolutions to consensual re-alignments (for example, the UK in the 1960’s, Sweden in the 1990’s) and the cyclical national election procedures in all democratic countries.

Of the three democratic ideologies conservatism has perhaps the longest lineage in history. Its variant or extreme form, referred to as neo-liberalism, has been and continues to be highly influential, particularly in present-day USA (Okparaugo, 2021). In basic and perhaps over simplified terms, one of conservatism’s dominant principles is often referred to as the laissez-faire principle. This means that the State should play a minimalist role in social and economic affairs and allow individuals to flourish whose behavior is driven by self-interest and the accumulation of wealth and prestige. Extensive provision of welfare is regarded as counterproductive to encouraging self-discipline and the ‘work-ethic’. Welfare should only be provided by the State as the ultimate ‘safety net’.

Over the past 50 years’ considerable attention has been paid to Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) by governments, parents, professionals and academics alike (Harrison & Boyd, 2018).

Throughout the developed world and increasingly in developing countries. ECCE has been at the forefront of ideological influence, professional expertise, research activity and government prescription. Many academics have long and distinguished careers generating the evidence and assembling the arguments in support of ECCE. An overwhelming case for the benefits to young children themselves, to parent and families and to society as a whole has been well supported and documented by research since the 1980's (Follari, 2015).

Not until fairly recently however have governments begun to take the arguments seriously. In particular, attention has focused on both the expansion and improvement of services for young children in the years before formal school begins. Many now take the position that access to such services should become a universal right for young children and, as such, be enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Okparaugo, 2021). However, there is divergence between countries (and often within countries) about how services should be expanded and improved. The basis for this divergence is rooted in both ideology and culture which in Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1979) of childhood is referred to as the macro-level of influence on our human identity and subjectivity.

In contrast, at the heart of Liberalism is the freedom, well-being and welfare of the 'individual' though there is some divergence between the original principles of Liberalism and individuals being liberal-minded (Okparaugo, 2021). It is taken for granted that if individuals seek to improve themselves morally, socially and educationally society will also improve. Liberalism maintains that the State should allow individuals to be free from constraint to choose their own life-style, to be free to express their views/opinions without fear of punishment or recriminations as these matters according to Liberal ideology make a profound contribution to the 'sum of human happiness', and to choose how they are governed by the State. Coupled with this, people are expected to be self-reliant, tolerant and to show respect for others. Cooperation at all levels of society, respect for human rights and social justice and the provision of welfare for the vulnerable are also basic principles of Liberal ideology.

Critically important for education is that the State should pursue policies aimed at providing opportunity for all irrespective of 'race', gender, socio-economic status, sexual preference and disability. Social Democracy, described in the UK as the Third Way (Follari, 2015), is a relatively new ideology and has some overlap with Liberalism. The hallmark of Social Democracy is the concept of the Managed State whereby the State promotes social inclusion, social justice and individual happiness

such that every citizen can participate, should they so choose, in fair and free social services (including Education, medical services and leisure activities) provided by the State throughout their lives. Inevitably such extensive provision by the State requires citizens to pay relatively high taxes in countries where Social Democracy is dominant., for example, in Sweden.

However, Social Democracy should not be confused with the ideology of Socialism where the State controls the social and economic affairs in the name of egalitarianism. Under Social Democracy individual choice is paramount. Equality of opportunity in Education is regarded as a mechanism for the redistribution of wealth and prestige by individuals taking advantage (or otherwise) of the opportunities available. Furthermore, Social Democracy seeks to reconcile equality with pluralism and life-style diversity by explicit recognition that in all its institutions, and also in the family, there should be 'no authority without democracy' and that an individual's rights and responsibilities are reciprocal. The application of these principles requires anyone who is invested with authority such as parents, teachers and school principals to negotiate their decision -making with students and children and not to resort to authoritarian dogma.

In the words of Harrison and Boyd (2018), political ideology is a system of definite views, ideas, conceptions, and notions adhered to by the political class or political party. It is always a reflection of the system predominant at any given time and they shape the way societies envision governance and societal organization. It can also be seen as diverse belief systems that shape how individuals and societies perceive governance, societal organization, and values. In essence, political ideologies serve as guiding principles that inform the creation, modification, and implementation of policies across various domains, significantly impacting the direction and character of a government's decisions. In more specific terms, ideologies held by various political actors is connected to the policies they make based on the influence they exert in the making of such policies including educational policies. Cranston (2023) noted that political ideologies offer a vision of an ideal society, outlining fundamental principles and goals.

For example, liberalism emphasizes individual freedoms and equality, while conservatism values tradition and stability. Here's a brief overview of some prominent ideologies: □

- i. **Liberalism:** Emphasizes individual freedoms, human rights, democracy, and free-market capitalism. It seeks to balance personal liberty with social equality. Conservatism: Values tradition, authority, and gradual societal change. Conservatives often advocate for the preservation of

- established institutions and cultural norms. □ **Socialism:** Focuses on collective ownership of resources, aiming to reduce economic inequality. Socialists seek to establish cooperative forms of governance and redistribute wealth. □
- ii. **Communism:** Advocates for a classless, stateless society where the means of production are collectively owned. It envisions a system where wealth and resources are shared equally.
- iii. **Fascism:** Characterized by authoritarianism, nationalism, and a strong central government. fascist ideologies often involve a dictatorial leader and a rejection of individual liberties in favor of the state. □
- iv. **Anarchism:** Rejects hierarchical structures, including government, in favor of voluntary cooperation and decentralized decision-making. Anarchists strive for a society without rulers. These ideologies are fluid and can manifest in various forms, adapting to cultural, historical, and geopolitical contexts. Additionally, many political systems incorporate elements from multiple ideologies, creating hybrid models

The Role of Political Ideology on Early Childhood Care Education

There is a relationship between political ideology and ECCE like the two are inseparable. Ekpiken & Ifere (2015) address this by saying that “they are both necessary for the functioning of the social system of the society”. One of the ways through which political ideology impacts ECCE is exhibited through the manifesto, candidates presented for elections and in a bit of a way, the policies developed and issued by the government in power. This led to Olayinka (2018) positing that “political party influences planning, administration and management of the educational sector in power.” Further, going by the words of Olayinka (2018), “implementation of educational policies operate within the political framework of the community”. Therefore, political administrators, primarily represented by the government in power, set the direction of educational policies.

In more definite terms, politics bears an overarching influence on Early Childhood Care Education. It is, however, key to note that, political ideologies formed by political parties or governments draw a lasting impact on the educational structure obtainable in a country; Nigeria is no different. Lack of political ideology has been considered as one of the contributing factors worsening the educational system (Erezi, 2019). This point’s weight was solidly captured in a statement once made by a former deputy governor of Ekiti State, Modupe Adeola Adelabu, when she said, “Education has been established as the foundation of ideology in any society. Its efficiency is felt in a society where the

politics have an ideology, where Nigeria is lacking, thus suffering our educational system” (Erezi, 2019).

The Benefits of Qualitative Early Childhood Care Education

Early Childhood Care Education has enormous individual, social and economic benefits. Early childhood care programmes complement the roles of parents and other caregivers in raising children during the early years. The early childhood care education sets the foundation for life, ensuring that children have positive experiences and that their needs for health, stimulation and support are met, and that they learn to interact with their surroundings. Governments' interest in the economic benefits of ECCE is reflected in the African targets for early education, known as the African Targets. These targets, which were agreed at the Africa Union summit in 2006, simply set targets for childcare places for children aged 0.3 and 3 to mandatory school age, to be achieved by 2010. While such ECCE policies, which focus on employment and gender equality, are essential, they are unfortunately inadequate. There is need to go beyond the provision of childcare places to comprehensive services for children, that take the needs and the rights of children into account. This approach is supported by Morgan & Waite (2017), which argues that early childhood programmes should have as their core objective the well-being and holistic development of children's capacities.

The purposes of Early Childhood Care Education Curriculum include: To acquaint the child with basic scientific and technological skills. Specifically, the curriculum intends to equip the child with the following skills: enquiry, intellectual, manipulative and societal values. Thus, teaching each topic of the contents, the teacher should aim at inculcating the above skills; Inculcation of value re-orientation, civic and moral responsibilities as well as good family living; acquisition of skills of poverty eradication. laying of foundation for knowledge and application of ICT In testing achievement in early Childhood education curriculum, the curriculum objectives of intellectual, enquiry, manipulative and social values skills must be given serious consideration (Georgeson, 2017).

- i. **Intellectual Skills:** This is the skill that enables the individual to clarify goals, examine assumptions, discern hidden values and evaluate evidences. Intellectual skills include observation, interpretation, analysis, inference evaluation and explanation. It helps the child to recognize problems and find workable means of reaching solutions. The implication in testing is that items must include graphs, diagrams, tables and figures.

- ii. **Enquiry Skills:** Aim to teach pupils about examining sources and making decisions on their usefulness in classroom context. The skills include ability to identify differences, question objective situations, seek patterns, hypothesis, experiment, make sketches, measuring, recording and classifying.
- iii. **Manipulative Skills:** These are the skills which a person learns to handle objects with precision. It involves the use of hand and body to execute tasks. It is ability to manipulate things. Examples include throwing, catching, kicking, rolling, cutting and writing. It helps children develop fine motor skills. The child's small muscles (e.g. fingers wrist and fine co-ordination are developed).
- iv. **Societal Values:** Skills Society is a self-perpetuating group of humans broadly distinguished from other groups by mutual interest, participation in characteristics relationships, share values and common culture. What are Nigerian cherished values? They include high moral integrity, fair play, honesty, social justice, sportsmanship, hospitality and patriotism. In planning a test, a blueprint must accommodate these skills. Questions or tasks should also be posed so as to call for the manifestation of these skills. The section of curriculum on evaluation guide is important in any attempt to correctly measure the objective of the curriculum.

Challenges Facing Early Childhood Education (ECCE) Development in Nigeria

Despite the increasing significance of ECCE, various challenges have continued affecting its effective roll-out. They include financial constraints, inadequate learning and teaching resources, a high ratio of children to teachers, socioeconomic factors, and poor remuneration. These are discussed below:

i. Inadequate Learning and Teaching

Many teachers lack sufficient learning and teaching facilities and resources ideal for early learning. They include inappropriately ventilated classrooms, safe, clean water, inadequate play materials, and playgrounds (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). It means that teachers lack the resources necessary for implementing early childhood education development effectively. This deters the implementation of sustainable learning environments that are needed for helping deprived children to have better academic performance.

ii. Socio-Economic Factor

Ill-health and malnutrition are factors linked to the socio-economic factor. Such factors can substantially damage children's cognitive processing capacity. Children whose cognitive development

is impacted by malnutrition and ill-health may need more instructional hours to learn several skills. Thus, implementing ECCE can be critical, particularly for low-income states in Nigeria (Young, 2014).

iii. Financial Constraints

Financial challenges can result in the ineffective implementation of ECCE. At the macro-level, various states in Nigeria have grappled with the enormous debt burden owed to the International Monetary Fund and World Bank fiscal policies, including the Structural Adjustment Programs. Debt-servicing programs are heralded as partly responsible for a substantial government funding reduction for subsidized education, school, and healthcare-related expenses (Souto-Manning, & Rabadi-Raol, 2018). Consequently, families have more responsibilities in implementing ECCE programs.

iv. Inadequate Staff and Poor Remuneration

In Nigeria, the ratio of teachers to children has elicited attention among researchers, particularly factors that affect learning and teaching processes. Early childhood education development has not been left out, and research demonstrates that there has been a rise in the teacher-child ratio (Souto-Manning, & Rabadi-Raol, 2018). The ratio remains quite critical in ensuring quality outcomes and fostering sustainable development. In addition, ECCE teachers have poor remuneration terms.

Relevance of Early Childhood Care Education for Sustainable National Development

Children have a right to do well, develop their full potential and live within a sustainable world. There is also a need to enhance children's awareness about sustainable national development to make more progress during the coming years. The health of children, behaviour, and learning during early years, act as the foundation for increasing the probability of school success and their ability to participate in society and community (Hedefalk, Almqvist & Östman, 2015). In addition, the development and growth of young children are significantly impacted by learning opportunities, economic resources, interaction, and education offered by adults-whether in services, at home or other community environments. The fields that have contributed to this evidence are psychology, anthropology, neurosciences, and sociology. The field of neuroscience has demonstrated the way brain architecture develops during early schooling years through a process that is quite sensitive to external factors (Hedefalk et al., 2015).

Home experiences and other care settings like communities, kindergartens, and daycare centres interact with genes, thus impacting brain architecture development and establishing a crucial foundation for the future. Alternatively, psychology studies discuss the way children develop various skills, including

cognitive (mathematics, language, and literacy), socio-emotional (prosocial behaviour and empathy), self-regulation, attention, persistence, and executive functions (Samuelsson, Li & Hu, 2019). Anthropology and sociology demonstrate the role played by culture and context in child development. Contrarily, economics depicts how this investment leads to better returns and lower costs on fighting crime and disease (Young, 2014).

Given the evidence for early childhood care education benefits for societies and children, investments in ECCE are perceived to be an integral aspect of sustainable development. Ideally, such investment in ECCE will lead to healthier, better-educated children and a peaceful and prosperous future. Early childhood for sustainable development (ECCE) has all the possibilities to lead children into interest, knowledge, and values that will support a more sustainable life and world, since children by nature are open-minded and curious toward the world around them, including humans and animals. Education starts at birth. Since the United Nations (UN) has pointed out ECCE (pre-primary education) as a quality aspect of lifelong learning in education globally, educators must take Education for Sustainable National Development seriously and develop it to become part of all children's life. It should be among the most important elements in young children's education (Richter, Daelmans, Lombardi, Heymann, Boo, Behrman, & Lancet Early Childhood Development Series Steering Committee, 2017).

The first years of life are the most critical, as the foundation of values, attitudes and personality will guide feelings, behaviour, and thoughts for the rest of the life. Notably, the structures of attitudes and values developed during the early years are the permanent and strong roots for someone's whole life. These structures will always be utilized as references for major decisions challenging women and men. These first values ascertain moral and ethical behaviours in life. When one encounters complex and challenging situations, the values that initially carved the personality will guide resolutions and options, behaviours, or reactions. Thus, if Nigeria desires adults within the next generation to be stewards and protectors of the planet, it is crucial to include the study of nature and the relationship between people and the environment into the ECCE curriculum or program. Anything deeply lived, felt, and practiced during the early human development years can remain for the rest of an individual's life. Children are quite interested, sensitive, and curious regarding the elements of nature. Hence, ECCE, from the early beginning, needs to incorporate creative experiences as well as exploratory activities with elements like seeds, water, wing, plants, and flowers. Children are also emotionally touched and intellectually interested in nature. According to evidence, adults living in large towns recall unforgettable moments

they experience during their infancy. This can be an efficient educational strategy to consider in these early dispositions, interests, and curiosity (Richter et al., 2017).

Thus, Nigeria should include the study of nature as a key area of activity within ECCE. Currently, with the global concern for environmental degradation, the subject continues to attract political interest. Furthermore, Nigeria governments must recognize the significance of ECCE in the development of a sustainable society. Early childhood education, ECCE, has not yet been part of great national decisions. Perhaps, this is because the impacts of ECCE are only acknowledged in the long and medium-term or due to the fact that children are still perceived as citizens of secondary importance when other aims, objectives, and challenges of a nation are taken into account. This is why Nigeria government should demonstrate their priority of children by putting them on the national agenda.

Conclusion

Early childhood care education aims to holistically develop a child's socio-economic, physical, and emotional needs to create a solid and robust foundation for well-being and lifelong learning. ECCE has the potential of creating able, responsible and caring future citizens. Experiences in children's early life influence their capacity to comprehend biases and stereotypes, thus becoming productive and healthy society members. In situations where formal educational programs are lacking, non-formal education can be used as an important aspect of a community program or to offer grandparents and parents opportunities to discuss what can be done differently in day-to-day life to effectively bring about sustainability. To ensure children's full potential is in tandem with sustainability, it is crucial to develop a vision for ECCE and other vital measures.

In a nation like Nigeria, ECCE needs to be considered an important right for ensuring quality health care, nutrition, and education provision. ECCE is also the best investment that countries in the region can make to foster human resource development, social cohesion, and gender equality. Investing in ECCE is also critical for combating inequalities in the education sector. This is because many children from deprived communities do not have exposure during their childhood. The other relevance of ECCE for sustainable national development is that quality early childhood care education can increase the chances of children earning better wages when they join the labour market.

Recommendations

- i. There is the need to improve early childhood teachers' self-esteem.

- ii. Most basic school teachers' skills should be developed to fully utilize some of the modern technologies in curriculum implementation such, the traditional chalk and duster approach which is still dominant in ECCE school pedagogy.
- iii. Provisions for reliable services should be made available by the government, electricity should be improved for the maintenance of the equipment provided.
- iv. Sustainable development should be added to the already existing courses of concerns in school curricular subjects.
- v. There also needs to be greater transparency in Nigeria's ECCE system.
- vi. Curriculum innovation should address skill acquisition based on pupils abilities and interests.
- vii. There is need for adjustment of policies with emphasis on leadership quality and competency. Political Parties should be driven and supported based on ideologies and not personality make-up.

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