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EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: LANGUAGE, TECHNOLOGY AND DEMOCRATIC CULTURE

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Abstract
Education, globally as well as in Nigeria was majorly divided into four (4) levels; the Early Childhood, Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Education. The early childhood education serves as the foundational level of all other education by providing the children with a good preparatory ground for further education. It is the key development of the success or failure of the subsequent levels of the child's education because the rest of the educational system was built upon it. If early childhood education was built on a shaky ground, it could negatively affect the whole educational system of a child. This paper therefore, is going to discuss the concept of early childhood education in Nigeria, language, technology and democratic culture, its relevance as well as challenges of its application in early childhood schools and care giving centers. Furthermore, the paper made suggestions and recommendations on how the challenges faced by Early Childhood Education in Nigeria can be solve.
Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Language, Technology and Democratic culture

Introduction

Early childhood education is the largest sub-sector of any educational system and offers the largest opportunity to contribute to the transformation of societies through the education of the younger ones. It is the basic foundation for preparing citizens who will later contribute meaningfully to the technological and socio-political advancement of societies. In a rapidly changing world, early childhood education is essential for an individual to be able to acquire knowledge, access and apply information to behave or act in conformity with the societal expectation. Such ability must include language, technology and democratic culture, globally improved early childhood education is essential to the creation of effective human capital in any country. The need for the young children to be taught in a language that they would understand (mother tongue) cannot be over emphasized. Children whose early child language was not the language of instruction in school are more likely to drop out of school or fails in early grades. UNESCO (2010) States that children's first language was the optimal language for literacy and learning throughout early child daycare centers. In spite of the growing evidence and parental demand, many educational systems around the world insist on exclusive use of one sometimes several privileged languages.

Beside the field of education has been affected by technology, which has undoubtedly affected teaching and learning. In this technology-driven age, everyone requires it to survive and early childhood education is not an exception in this. It is in realization of this that the Federal Government of Nigeria in the year 2013 integrated ICTs in education in Nigeria. To actualize this goal, the document states that government will provide basic infrastructure and training at the pre-primary and primary schools. Unfortunately, the application of technology in early childhood centers/pre-primary schools in Nigeria has over the years suffered setbacks ranging from limited infrastructure to lack of interest on the part of parents.

As earlier stated, early childhood education is the foundation for education not only in Nigeria but all over the world. With the return of the country into civil rule, there is advocacy to embrace democracy as model governance. This therefore means producing citizens who are democratically cultured. Therefore, we have to fully entrench democratic values in early childhood centers/pre-primary schools where majority of the citizens would have access so that it becomes part of them when they grow into adulthood.

Early Childhood Education and Language in Nigeria

Early childhood education is the level of education that develops in the individual the capacity to read, write and calculate. Early childhood education is the education given in schools/centers for children aged normally between 2years to 5years plus. As earlier stated, it is the key to the success or failure of the whole educational edifice because the rest of educational system is uilt upon it. It is the foundation of the whole level of education everywhere in both the developed and the developing countries as well as in urban and

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rural areas (Fafunwa, 2004).[5] This explains that pre-primary education is the beginning of any educational system that offers the unique opportunity to contribute to the transformation of societies through the education of the younger ones. Language is the most important aspect in the life of all human beings. We use language to express inner thoughts and emotions, to make sense of complex and abstract thought, to learn and communicate, to fulfill our wants and needs, as well as to establish rules and maintain our culture. Language can be seen as verbal, physical, biological innate, and a basic form of communication. Behaviorists often define language as learned behavior involving stimulus and a response. Often time they refer to language as verbal behavior, which is language that includes gesture and body movement as well as spoken wards (Arnold, 2005).

Understanding the importance of language which is the medium of instruction, the UNESCO (2010) stated that the medium of instruction in the early childhood shall be the language of environment (mother-tongue) for the first two to three years. During this period , English shall be taught as a subject. From the fourth year, English shall progressively be used as a medium of instruction and the language of immediate environment and French shall be taught as subject. Similarly, UNESCO (2010) encourages the use of the mother-tongue instruction in early childhood education. It highlights the advantages of mother tongue education right from the start to include the following:-

- Children are more likely to enroll and succeed in schools
- Girls and rural children with less exposure to a dominant language stay in school longer and repeat grades less often.
- Children in multilingual education tend to develop better thinking skills compared to their monolingual peers.[7]

Early Childhood Education and Technology in Nigeria

Development is partly determined by the ability to establish a synergistic interaction between technology innovation and human values. Sustainable development leads to fulfillment of society ideals considered relevant to the needs and aspiration of the society. Factors which influence such developments are based on human ability to explore, invent and utilize. Technology broadly speaking is the body of knowledge devoted to create tools, processing action and extracting materials. The term technology is wide and everyone has their own meaning of technology. We use technology to accomplish various tasks in our daily lives including classroom. The need for application of technology in early childhood education cannot be over emphasized. Technology has profound impact on the teaching and teaming in our pre-primary schools. Some of these are:-

Technology Promote Individual learning: - at the early stage, Children can be taught how to use mini computers to play games and other internet facilities so that they can later know how to make personal research online and educate themselves. When children are in control of what they learn, they will have no fear of making mistakes and this will encourage them to explore more about a specific subject.

Technology Promotes Children Engagement in Classroom: - Since educational technology like digital white boards are interacted, teachers caregivers can have the opportunity and chances to teach the younger children using this interactive white board. Also, the integration gasification technologies keep children entertained and attentive while in the classroom, because game remove that boring atmosphere in the classroom.[8]

Dewey Theory (1859-1952): This theory applied scientific approach to the concept of early childhood education. He studied the behaviour of the children in his school, and using scientific approach, tried to determine the best way to make provision for their education. Like Pestalozzi, Dewey was concerned with the child and the type of knowledge and experience, which adults expect the child to acquire. Through his work with children, Dewey discovered that learning in early childhood takes place better if practicalized. He therefore advocated that the project method of learning should precede the study of separate subjects in early children education. However, unlike the other educators, Dewey was not specific in his formulation of the aims of education. From the works of these great educators we can deduce that the general aims of early childhood education are geared towards:

(a) The preparation of the child for life.
(b) The spiritual and moral development of the child,
(c) Helping the child to live fully at each stage of development, so that there will be self fulfillment of each stage leading to full preparation for the life of maturity.
(d) Providing for the full growth and development of the child at his own pace and interest and introducing him to the store of knowledge which will enrich his adult life.

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(e) providing a free and stimulating learning environment that would enable the child to develop his potentials.

Challenges of Technology application in Nigeria Early Childhood Education

The low level of technology in Nigeria early childhood education in attributable to several factors, some of the factors include

- Limited poor information infrastructure
- Lack of inadequate ICTs facilities in pre-primary schools/daycare centers.
- Absence/frequent electricity interruption.
- Lack of limited skills among teachers.
- Inadequate education software.
- Poor management on the part of pre-primary school administrators and government.
- Lack of maintenance culture.
- Lack of interest on the part of the children/parents.

Solutions to the Challenges of Technology application in Nigerian Early Childhood Education

In order to ensure that full application of technology in Nigeria early childhood schools/daycare centers, the following efforts should be taken:

* Government should ensure that technology policy statements are translated into reality a technology implementation commission should be founded and be given the power to technology facilities in early childhood schools/centers and mortar their use efforts should be made by ministry of education (at federal and state level to post teachers skilled in ICTs to teach in early childhood school/center to impact skills to the children.
* The federal ministry of mines and power should work towards stabilizing electricity supply in Nigeria

Early Childhood Education and Democratic Culture in Nigeria

There is no growing advocacy to embrace democratic governance. As the democratic ideas are being espoused the inherent benefit are projected. It is apparent that such democratic ideas go beyond politics and electoral process to daily interactions at home, business and classrooms. There is order to produce a society in which democratic culture is deeply entrenched; we need to start from early childhood schools/centers so that as these children grow under prevailing democratic climate, it becomes easy to apply it in all our personal and official engagements. Democratic culture is a culture in which individuals have fair opportunity to participate in the forms of meaning-making that constitute them as individuals. It is about individual liberty as well as collective self-governance. Council of Europe Higher Education Forum (2006) defines democratic culture as encompassing democratic values, ways of knowing and acting, ethical judgments, analytical competencies, and skills of engagement. It includes concern for the sustainable well being of fellow human beings as well as the environment in which we live. It also includes awareness of and concern for human rights as well as openness to the cultural diversity of human experience and willingness to give due consideration to the views of others.

For a democracy to survive and flourish a critical mass of its citizens must possess the skills, embody the values, and manifest the behaviors that accord with democracy. This therefore calls for the teaching of democratic culture rights from the pre-primary (early childhood) schools/centers where majority of the populace will have access. Through exposures to education through relevant curriculum materials and resource, the prospective learner-citizen would embrace and display the following desirable qualities and characteristics. According to “Dubey and Barth”, looking at things with a democratic slant, believing in decency and fair play, forbearance and respect for others, keeping abreast with the customs, traditions and nationalistic ideals of the country, believing in the idea of progressive improvement of society, subscribing to the earnest desire to promote the general welfare and pledge to raise and safe-guard standard of living of all and possessing an ardent belief in universal education emphasizes that classroom dispensation of a variety of curriculum perspectives may not only lay solid foundation for a perpetuation of democratic principles and just society but max also positively influence fashioning out of youths and children alike who are expected to be acutely aware of the characteristics of democracy and be committed to its ideals.

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The Nigeria philosophy of education expects the individual who has been effectively groomed in the ideals of democratic culture to possess and display the following characteristics:

- Self-confidence and initiative.
- Power of imagination and resourcefulness.
- Appreciation of man and of liberty:
- A sense of compassion for the less fortunate:
- A sense of respect and tolerance for others:
- Social attitudes and values such as cooperation, participation, interdependence, honesty, open mindedness, integrity, trustworthiness, diligence, obedience, etc.

Conclusion

Early childhood education in Nigeria offers the unique opportunity to contribute to the transformation of societies through the education of the younger ones who are the Leaders of tomorrow. If we must succeed as a nation, we must give pre-primary (early childhood) education its pride of place. Most of our early childhood schools' centers today do not have qualified language teachers/caregivers who will lay a solid foundation into these fragile learners. Where they exist, they consider teaching/are given as their secondary job.

Suggestions

This paper advances on the following suggestions and recommendation.

1. Qualified language teachers/caregivers should be employed to teach in early childhood schools/centers especially the first two to three years so as to lay a solid foundation for the children
2. Government should provide modern teaching and learning technologies to all the early childhood schools/centers in Nigeria in order to enhance teaching and learning process. Schools/Centers administrators and managers on their part should put schools/centers technologies to the use they are meant for.
3. The teaching of democratic culture should form the integral part of the schools/centers curriculum. The schools/centers administrators and managers on their part should exhibit democratic principles in all their dealings with the children. They should be aware that children learn better by imitation.

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