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GLOBAL BEST PRACTICES FOR EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This article investigates the international standards for successful instruction and acquisition of early childhood education in Nigeria. This text elucidates the advantages of using optimal methods for both children and teachers, as well as how instructors may effectively facilitate the children's learning process. The article noted that several early childhood education programs in Nigeria had a limited understanding of children's learning. Consequently, it emphasized the need for immediate modifications in teaching and learning approaches that align with the character of the children. The article also outlined and analyzed worldwide exemplars for successful instruction and acquisition of early childhood education, including curriculum and teaching methods, educators and caretakers, involvement of families and communities, and quality assurance. After the discussions, pertinent recommendations were put forth. These recommendations suggest that stakeholders should contemplate the heightened utilization of [redacted] inclusive pedagogy methods that respect culturally significant, non-didactic teaching and learning modes, such as intentional participation and learning through play. Additionally, families and communities should actively participate by regularly exchanging information to engage in their child's education.

Keywords: Global, Best Practices, Effective Teaching and Learning, Early Childhood Education

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Introduction

The widespread acknowledgement of the significance of acquiring a quality education indicates that ensuring the efficacy of Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a top concern for several nations. Stakeholders, including politicians, decision-makers, academics, researchers, and individuals, have a global interest in high-quality early childhood education programs (Raikes, et al., 2015). Evidence from several fields shows that investing in a child's early development pays off over the course of their entire life in a variety of ways. Enhanced learning outcomes throughout adulthood and beyond are among these benefits (Shafiq et al., 2018). As a result of governments' investments in expanding access to early childhood education, the number of children enrolled in ECE has nearly tripled globally over the past 20 years. The percentage of people enrolled in ECE increased from 33 percent in 2000 to 62 percent in 2019, with low- and middle-income areas experiencing the largest increase (UIS, 2020).

But an increase in access does not always translate into an improvement in the ECE system at the same time. Effective early childhood education programs are rare and unlikely to significantly advance children's development in many countries throughout the world, including Nigeria (Biersteker et al., 2016). Even worse, children's cognitive and emotional development may be harmed by ineffective ECE programs. Children won't benefit from ECE to the fullest extent possible if programming efficacy isn't given enough attention, which might lead to poor development.

ECE is designed to support children's learning. Unfortunately, academic learning of addition, subtraction, and science is prioritized in such instruction in Nigeria. Eseyin (2022) claims that a limited understanding of early childhood education (ECE) exists in many Nigerian courses, which reduce it to a curriculum of letters and numbers. This is evident in the way that education is approached, using a direct teaching method for academic development in which children are instructed in the recitation and reading of numbers and alphabet letters, for example. Kids may retain and replicate a lot of information by copying notes.

According to Eseyin (2022), there has been a push for immediate modifications to teaching and learning strategies that take into account children's natural learning styles as well as mature thinking, a love of learning, creativity, and analytical and critical thinking. This context guides the investigation of global best practices for effective early childhood education teaching and learning, with the goal of enhancing the effectiveness of ECE programs in Nigeria if implemented.

Early Childhood Education: What Is It?

Early childhood education encompasses a wide range of services and initiatives for young children ages 0 to 8 years old (NAEYC, 2021). According to Eseyin (2022), early childhood education is the instruction given to children in a facility between the ages of three and five before they enter primary school. Early childhood education is described as instruction given to children in an educational institution before they enter primary school. It is categorized as pre-primary education under the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013). It consists of the kindergarten, nursery, and crèche.

Owojori and Gbenga-Akanmu (2021) assert that investment in early childhood education can provide significant returns since it has a positive influence on children's later-life effective, conceptual, social, and overall educational development. The foundation for cognitive, physical, and emotional development is set during this stage of life. In order to lay a strong foundation for health in later life, early childhood education is crucial during this period of intense, rapid growth and development.

Early childhood education is, in essence, the education that young children get throughout the formative years of their lives. It is an essential stage in creating the framework for a child's development and learning.

Best techniques for teaching and learning of ECE

In many countries, early childhood education has been a major governmental priority. A growing body of research acknowledges that it has a multitude of benefits, including social and economic ones; improved child outcomes and well-being as a basis for lifetime learning; reduced poverty and more equitable outcomes; and enhanced intergenerational social mobility. However, outstanding early childhood education instruction and learning are directly linked to these positive results.

The following were chosen as the main approaches that may assist effective ECE teaching and learning in Nigeria based on international standards;

1) Instruction and curriculum
2) Instructors and caretakers
3) Community and family involvement
4) Quality assurance.

Curriculum and pedagogy

The significance of ensuring quality through holistic pedagogies that are responsive to children's needs and that value creativity, cooperation, self-confidence, autonomy, active learning, and children's well-being is emphasized by

the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, the 2010 Moscow Declaration, and the 2014 Lima Declaration of Education for All (UNICEF, 2020). However, despite evidence that early intervention for children's development is critical, many nations fail to establish a comprehensive system for child developmental screening or expert support for curricular and pedagogical adaptation.

The resources and practices that support children's learning and development are referred to as the curriculum. It is a complex idea, especially in the context of early childhood education (ECE), with many moving parts, including curriculum, pedagogical approaches, and objectives (Taguma et al., 2012). A system of teaching and learning with specific themes, metrics, tools, and strategies to achieve the stated educational goals and objectives under the direction of the school might also be referred to as the curriculum. According to this, curriculum is defined as the instructional materials provided by a school that include all of the many classes, disciplines, abilities, knowledge, values, and learning objectives that must be instilled in the students (Abdullahi, 2020).

Eight units of curriculum—physical development, affective development, mental and language development, food and nutrition, harmful traditional practices, health and diseases, and society measures comparable to anywhere in the most developed world—have been made available to Nigerian students by NERDC and UNICEF (Okoroikpa & Onyeka, 2014). This excellent curriculum hasn't, however, been properly adopted to enhance ECE programs across the nation.

When it comes to teaching approaches, kids are engaged and naturally motivated to learn. Youngsters take note of what happens, converse, argue, and reflect on what they have learned. They also ask questions and come up with answers. Little ones pick up information and comprehension of the world via their exploration and learning; they also pick it up from books and other media, as well as from their teachers, families, classmates, and older kids. In order to meet the many learning needs of these children and enable them to benefit from all of these, early childhood educators or caregivers must use a variety of teaching methods.

Approaches or procedures used to educate learners are known as instructional methods. For learning to be effective in education, instructional methods and materials should be tailored to the developmental stage of the student, especially in the early childhood years. Learning will not take place if a teacher uses instructional strategies that are out of step with the pupils' developmental stage (Eseyin, 2022). The use of computers in the classroom, project-based learning, learner-centered approaches, active learning, game-based learning, and many

other methods are among the most recent advances in the teaching and learning of early childhood education (Abdullahi, 2020). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic-induced lockdown, online or virtual-based learning is the most popular approach at the moment.

Early childhood education recognizes that play and hands-on learning are the greatest ways for children to learn. A child plays naturally, impulsively, joyfully, satisfyingly, and self-initiatedly. Youngsters in this age range have an innate curiosity to use their senses to investigate their immediate environment. Both the representational and abstracted minds grow via play. Youngsters engage in a variety of play activities, including games with rules, object play, theatrical play, linguistic play, and physical play. This has further consequences on their learning styles, disposition, and drive. Creating effective study habits has a significant impact on one's future academic achievement. Children need opportunities from adults to explore and play. Moreover, children acquire knowledge via hands-on experiences and active participation in the educational process. As a result, the ECE curriculum actively and playfully takes into account the needs, passions, skills, and social context of the kids for whom it is designed. This approach's concept primarily depends on creating an engaging learning environment for the child. It is believed that children are active beings who generate their own information, and that adults serve as facilitators in the co-construction of knowledge during the teaching-learning process. As a result, in ways that are culturally acceptable, ECE curricula and pedagogy ought to encourage and provide a multitude of opportunities for ongoing positive interactions between teachers and students as well as between students themselves.

ECE Teachers/Caregivers

Despite being the most overlooked aspect of the educational system, the staff members running early childhood education courses are the single most important factor in determining the program's success and quality. The daily pedagogical and interpersonal experiences that educators and other staff members provide to young children are crucial to the effectiveness of early childhood education (ECE) programs. Studies supporting the link between the caliber of early childhood education and teacher qualifications, as well as improved results for social and cognitive development, emphasize the need to increase both the number and caliber of teachers (UNICEF, 2020).

The majority of the time, children in early childhood education (ECE) programs in Nigeria are looked after by underqualified, underappreciated personnel; this contributes to the high teacher turnover rates (UNICEF, 2020). This turnover might waste money spent on professional development and harm children's development. Furthermore, the stigmatization of male employees and the feminization of the field are tragically persistent aspects of the ECE professional environment that limit its effectiveness.

Certain attributes that improve the working environment for teachers align with those that improve children's experiences. For example, low student-teacher ratios reduce teacher stress, foster stronger teacher-student bonds, and thus indirectly promote student growth and academic outcomes. A greater degree of autonomy, support for demonstrating leadership, and the chance to participate in curricular decision-making should all be provided to teachers (UNICEF, 2020). Teachers and caregivers need to have outstanding early childhood education training in order to properly apply curriculum. Most ECE course teachers are unqualified and typically lack the necessary professional competencies. Careful coordination is needed between ongoing professional development and high-quality teacher preparation.

There aren't enough ECE teachers in most developing countries who are prepared to work in remote areas, speak the local language, or have the requisite cultural awareness. Creating incentive programs to educate and hire highly qualified educators for the most vulnerable schools might be one way to go. This is consistent with the National Policy on Education (FRN,2013), which specified that the primary language of instruction should be the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community. It also stated that the government's role should be to support the training of a sufficient number of qualified pre-primary school teachers by including provisions for ECE specialization and teacher retraining in teacher education programs.

Family and Community Engagement

It has long been known that one of the most important factors in the effective teaching and learning of early childhood education is a committed and well-trained teacher. Strong early learning takes place in the home environment as well. Because of this, an increasing amount of research shows that in order to successfully educate and learn ECE programs and systems, families and communities must be connected, and child-focused partnerships must be

developed (OECD, 2018). Active parenting has been linked to children's eagerness to learn as well as their cognitive, social, and emotional development.

Participation and involvement in the family begin in early childhood. In particular, family engagement strategies entail giving guidance, actively engaging in play, storytelling, singing, reading, and other experiences for their kid, as well as taking part in decision-making (UNICEF, 2020). Through the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), perhaps. Successful engagement boosts parents' self-esteem, fosters amiable and responsive relationships between parents, and enhances family well-being and financial stability, according to research findings (OECD, 2018).

Parental engagement and feedback are crucial in planning for an effective early childhood education program. Through consistent and positive center-to-home communication—such as providing progress reports, holding conferences, writing personal letters, and informing parents of events and activities—early childhood staff members may cultivate a strong connection with parents. ECE providers and teachers should actively seek out parent support by showing them how to interact with their kids at home in order to supplement the learning opportunities provided by the ECE facility. Following these routines would surely help parents feel more at ease and confident, as well as motivate them to take an active role in their child's upbringing and growth.

Quality control

Quality control is aimed for systematic monitoring and evaluation of any project, service, programme among others to assure that quality is maintained (Owojori & Gbenga-Akanmu, 2021). Regarding teacher preparedness, quality control is crucial for effective teaching and learning in early childhood education. The instructor's role in achieving this high standard is mostly based on their training, style of instruction, and length of employment. According to Okoroikpa and Onyeka (2014), teacher supervision is an instructional activity that centers on the communication between instructors and supervisors with the goal of enhancing teachers' professional competencies and raising school performance. A well-managed program is necessary to produce ECE of the highest caliber. The government, however, gives this little to no consideration.

Owojori and Gbenga-Akanmu (2021) assert that the government's pledges about the ECE policy have not materialized. It was demonstrated that poor quality, poorly equipped ECE courses are dispersed around the country. This happens as a result of inadequate oversight and inspection to ensure that quality and standards

are upheld. Furthermore, the quality that ECE programs may achieve depends directly on the funding they get and how it is used, both of which are influenced by political will and political capital investment (UNICEF, 2020). For example, low child-teacher ratios are inherently expensive, especially if teachers get equitable compensation. In a similar vein, professional development resources are necessary for meaningful interventions and teacher training. It is difficult to imagine a real improvement in the caliber of early childhood education in Nigeria without a significant financial commitment, careful planning, and resource allocation.

Assessment and supervision go hand in hand. According to Okoroikpa and Onyeka (2014), evaluation is the deliberate collection and analysis of information needed to make decisions; the majority of well-run programs engage in this process from the beginning. In order to ensure teacher professional growth, enhance teaching and caregiving, discover inadequacies so that improvements can be made, and raise overall kid achievement in ECE, good monitoring and assessment are essential.

Conclusion

The paper has examined international best practices for early childhood education teaching and learning in Nigeria. It has been shown that children learn in ways that may not align with those of adults. The benefits that early childhood education offers kids are driving up demand for the program; thus, it's critical that everyone involved are aware of internationally recognized best practices.

Recommendations

The following ideas are offered for effective ECE instruction and learning in Nigeria.

1) It is recommended that all parties involved look into the wider use of inclusive pedagogical approaches that respect non-didactic, culturally relevant methods of instruction and learning, such as intentional engagement and learning via play.

2) Early childhood development, age-appropriate learning environments and instructional strategies, and methods for teaching interdisciplinary foundational concepts—such as symbolic thinking and inquiry—should be taught to teachers with a focus on the value of positive reinforcement and interactions.

3) In order to be involved in their child's education, families should communicate with each other regularly.

4) To ensure widespread adoption, the government should create a curriculum framework or guidelines that embody national ECE objectives and are in accordance with pre- and in-service teacher training, monitoring, and evaluation activities.

5) In order to execute desired policies in early childhood education, policy makers should set up the necessary structures.

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