

## The Essential Responsibilities and Duties of a Caregiver in a Nursery School

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### **Abstract**

*The paper defined Early Childhood Care Development and Education (ECCDE) as a programme aimed at the holistic development of a child. It entails social, moral, emotional, cognitive, effective, psychomotor and physical needs of the child in order to build a solid foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing. It highlighted the importance of ECCDE programme by indicating that children whose early life development receives support, are more productive in life and that those who attended the programme hardly repeat classes less often in primary school. They are as well less susceptible to truancy and criminal tendencies, among other things. In addition, it defined a Caregiver as a person that takes care of small children/pupils in a basic school (nursery to junior classes in primary school) who should preferably, be a woman-formally known as Nanny. She should be trained to understand and have interest in children and relates well with them notwithstanding their cultural background. The paper also highlighted that the Caregiver should not be less than twenty-five years of age, physically and mentally sound, always clean and tidy, not arrogant and free from any communicable disease, amongst others. Some of the Caregiver's responsibilities enumerated in the paper includes helping children when accidents happen; assisting in their development and while facing difficulties; be present in school prior to pupils' arrival and close after each child leaves; show love, affection, acceptance, support, interest, as well as sympathy to them; and give special care to children with special needs. Furthermore, it identified some of the challenges faced by the Caregiver to include, among other things, large number of children under her care and pupils' individual differences but proffered some suggestions such as exposing Caregivers to periodic training and retraining in order to enhance their knowledge and sharpen their skills for effective discharge of their duties. It also suggested that considering the physical and emotional stress they face in discharging their responsibilities, Caregivers should be adequately remunerated and specially incentivized by their employers.*

**Key Words:** Caregiver, Nursery School, Essential, Responsibilities, Duties, Caregiver

### **Introduction**

Early Childhood Care Development and Education (ECCDE) goes beyond preparing the child for primary education. This is for the fact that it aims at the holistic or all-round development of a child (social, moral, emotional, cognitive, affective, psychomotor and physical needs) in order to build a solid foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing. There is no gain saying the fact that a school is a "home" away from home and that an effective safe environment plays a significant role in the successful implementation of early childhood care

education and development. However, for a child to feel free and relaxed in such an environment, the role of a Caregiver cannot be over emphasized as it is her that in most cases and time, the children spend their time with. It is the Caregiver that helps them to eat their food or sip their drinks, help them to ease themselves, and even clean or bath them, where necessary. In addition, she tidies up and prepare their classes including their playground, both indoor and outdoor. Moreover, she takes care of their belongings, where they sleep and while they are asleep. It is against this background that this paper found it important to articulate and highlight the duties and responsibilities of a Caregiver.

### **Caregiver**

A Caregiver is a person who looks after small children, old people, or sick person(s) either at Home, Hospital, and or School. In schools, a Caregiver who is sometimes referred to as “Nanny”, is normally a matured female of about twenty-five (25) years of age. Her main duty is to take care of small children aged from 0 month to six years, who are in most cases, in Creche, Playgroup, Nursery classes, and up to Primary One to Two depending on their ages and abilities.

### **Nursery School**

A nursery is a room where babies or small children are kept for caring. It can also be used in looking after them while they are sick or to sleep, feed them or play. Similarly, a nursery can be used to nurture and cater for new born babies, especially when they are born prematurely. A nursery can be found at home, hospital and in school. In a hospital, the babies or children are taken care of and treated by a Nurse under the guidance of a Medical Doctor. On the other hand, a Nursery School refers to where young children of 0-6 years of age are brought by their parents/guardians to be looked after or to be catered for and at the same time learn to acquire some knowledge. Unlike in a hospital, children in a nursery school are taken care of by a Nursery Teacher, assisted by a Caregiver who is known as Nanny. In Nigeria, Nursery School is of the following types:

1. Day Care or Creche for children aged 0 month to 3 years
2. Pre-Nursery or Playgroup for children aged 3 to 4 years
3. Nursery or Kindergarten for children aged 4 to 5 years

### **Early Childhood Care Development and Education**

According to Wikipedia (2021), early childhood education (ECE or nursery education) is a branch of education theory that relates to the teaching of children (formally and informally) from birth up to the age of eight years. It is described as an important period in a child's development since it affects his subsequent personality. ECE is also a professional designation earned through a post-secondary education programme. Hanga (2016), early childhood care development and education (ECCDE) or pre-primary education are services meant for children before they are enrolled into primary education. The programme entails

elements of both physical care and education that involves critical contribution to cognitive stimulation, socialization and physical development. Early childhood, which spans the period up to 8 years of age, is critical for cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. During these years, a child's newly developing brain is highly plastic and responsive to change as billions of integrated neural circuits are established through the interaction of genetics, environment and experience. The programme may also be provided before or after for primary school aged children. ECCDE includes a wide range of part day, full school day, and full-work-day programme under education, health, social welfare patronage and guidance, funded and delivered in a variety of ways in both the public and private sectors. The programme includes the crèche, the nursery, and the kindergarten.

ECCDE can also be referred to as the education and or care given to pre-school age children that help to make them develop physically and health wise due to the nutritious and balanced food they are provided with when coming to school. Similarly, these children are bathed early in the morning, have their teeth brushed, dressed in clean clothes by their parents/guardians and provided with early break-fast before going to school. This age corresponds to a critical period of rapid physical, cognitive and psycho-social development of the child.

### **Early Childhood Education Care and Development Important**

A child's early years according to Walden University (2021), are the foundation for his future development, providing a strong base for lifelong learning and learning abilities, including cognitive and social development. Well-established research continues to emphasize the importance of early childhood education as an essential building block of a child's future success. Moreover, one can safely say that the ECCDE curriculum prepares children for primary education and the programme also have positive impact on children during these years as it lays the foundation for subsequent learning and development. It is also argued that children whose early life development receives support are more productive in life while those that attended ECCDE programme hardly repeat classes in primary school as well as complete their primary education on time. More often, they require less remedial programme and are less susceptible to truancy and criminal tendencies. In addition, the children that pass through the ECCDE programme perform academically better than those who did not. This learning stage is so important and critical because it affords them the opportunity to learn, interact with their age group mates, other children, staff, and above all, the closest to them- their teacher and caregiver in the school.

Wikipedia (2021), describes ECCE as an important period in a child's development. It refers to the development of a child's personality. ECE is also a professional designation earned through a post-secondary education program. Early childhood education to Walden (2021), is a term that refers to the period of time from a child's birth to when he enters

kindergarten. According to Alvarado (2021), it is an important time in children's lives because it is when they first learn how to interact with others, including peers, teachers and parents, and also begin to develop interests that will stay with them throughout their lives. She further stated that it is a common misperception to aver that early childhood education is only about learning basic skills as it is so much more than that. "It is a time when children learn critical social and emotional skills and a partnership is formed between the child, their parents and the teachers."

Wikipedia (2021), stated that children who participate in ECE graduate from high school at significantly greater rates than those who do not. Additionally, those who participate in ECE require special education and must repeat a grade at significantly lower rates than their peers who did not receive ECE. The National Institute of Health (NIH), as cited by Wikipedia Free Encyclopedia (2021), asserts that ECE leads to higher test scores for students from preschool through age 21, improved grades in mathematics and reading, and stronger odds that students will keep going to school and attend college.

What is paramount here is that all those involved with early childhood education should understand their students and each of their specific needs and interests. It is only when they do so that such relationship can greatly influence their pupils on daily basis and build trust between them. Furthermore, studies have also shown that children learn more quickly and successfully when they are around the people they trust and are comfortable with. This by implication, indicates that Caregivers also play an important role in shaping the development of children at the early childhood stage, particularly when they are in school.

### **Caregiver in Nursery School**

A Caregiver to Watson (2021), refers to anyone who provides care for another person. He added that Caregivers are there to help with activities of daily living as well as to provide companionship for their clients. They develop close ties with those in their care to help with their day-to-day needs. According to Hanga (2017), a Caregiver is a person that takes care of children in basic school (nursery to junior classes in primary school) and preferably, a woman who is formally known as Nanny. The Nanny should be able to understand and identify common illnesses amongst the children as well as their behaviours taking into account their diverse interests and cultural backgrounds. To some, a Caregiver can be a person who gives help, protection or assistance to someone that may need help such as a child, old person or anybody that is sick.

According to Alvarado (2021), someone who enjoys working with children and wants to make a lasting impact on their lives will probably be happy with a career in early childhood education. "Helping children to learn and grow is a big part of it, but this field also provides lots of opportunities to grow yourself- not just in your knowledge but over-all in your social emotional growth as well. It can help you develop leadership skills and to become

a reflective practitioner.” It is also believed that staying with and watching small children makes someone happy, and at times, gradually learn a lot about how a child develops into an adult. Above all it is a rewarding to look after and help children in their time of difficulties.

### **Conditions of Being Qualified as Caregiver**

Alvarado further posits that to be a Caregiver, one must have any of the following qualifications:

1. School Diploma and 30 Credit Hours in Education.
2. High School Diploma and 15 Credit Hours in Education plus one year of experience with children
3. High School Diploma, General Equivalency Diploma plus two years of experience with children
4. First aid certification for all Full-time employees and all employees that are opening or closing a center.

As per Vivace Music Academy and Learning Center’s Educational Philosophy (2021), the following are also some of the conditions that qualifies one as a Caregiver:

- i. The required knowledge, skills and abilities.
- ii. The knowledge and experience of working with small infants and children.
- iii. The knowledge of safety issues concerning infants and children.
- iv. Ability to know and understand child illnesses.
- v. Skills in patience, remaining calm under pressure and in time management.
- vi. The ability to react and move quickly and get along with co-workers.
- vii. Flexibility in working with different age groups and be able to read stories to the children.
- viii. Ability to work in all types of environments:
  1. Inside and outside.
  2. Office, classroom, and kitchen.
  3. Cold temperatures outside.
  4. Steps or stairs.
  5. Slippery or uneven working surfaces.
  6. Working around moving objects.
  7. Irregular work hours and noise tolerance.

Accordingly, Hanga (2017), postulated that a Caregiver in a schools should:

- a. Not be less than 25 years of age and should be a female,
- b. Be physically and mentally fit,
- c. Be always clean and tidy,
- d. Not arrogant,
- e. Be free from any communicable disease,

### Essential Responsibilities and Duties of a Caregiver in Nursery School

According to Vivace Music Academy and Learning Center's educational philosophy (2021), it is the responsibility and duty of the Caregiver to:

- i. Supervise the children and treat them with dignity and respect.
- ii. Help children to become aware of their roles as integral members of a group.
- iii. Maintain professional attitude and loyalty at all times.
- iv. Attend all staff meetings and recommended training programme and conferences.

The following can also be regarded as part of the Caregiver's responsibilities/duties in a Nursery School:

1. **Help Children when Accidents Occur-** When an accident occurs, it is the duty of the Caregiver to take the affected child(ren) to the School Nurse or the staff responsible for First Aid for treatment and if serious, referral to the hospital or home, whichever is appropriate. In addition, it is part of the responsibilities of the Caregiver to ensure that all harmful things or anything that can cause injury to children are kept out of their reach.
2. **Children's Protection-** The Caregiver must see to it that children sit or play under a friendly weather condition in order to protect them from diseases such as cough, fever, or any sickness associated with change in weather condition.
3. **Ensure that Each Child Eats-** The Caregiver should make sure that each child eats his/her food and those that cannot do so are fed in order for them not to be hungry and distracted from learning.
4. **Always be Prompt to School-** The Caregiver must arrive at school earlier than the pupils to watch over them pending the commencement of lessons and should only leave the school after the last child has been picked.
5. **Custody and Retrieval of Pupils' Belongings-** The Caregiver must take care of the pupils' belongings such as lunch boxes, bags, shoes, socks etc including changing their clothes when they mess up.
6. **Display Love and Affection-** The Caregiver should love and affection to all the children, especially those under her custody and accept them no matter the situation they find themselves. She is expected to wholeheartedly support and commend them as well as show interest whenever they exhibit positive behaviour and empathized with them when worried, sick or in difficulties.
7. **Cleaning, washing, bathing and dressing:** She should clean their nose, wash their hands, lunch box, clothes the environment the sit and play bath them and dress them in school when necessary.
8. **Assisting pupils to eat their meals:** She should assist them to eat and drink their food or drinks or feed those that would be able to do so with love and affection.



9. **Arranging toys for pupils and their outings:** She should always arrange all the playing materials before and after playing and ensure that each child has something to play or they play as team or in groups. She should monitor and supervise that they play safely without quarrel or injury. She should also ensure that all the toys are properly in good order so as not harm the pupils from the beginning to the end of the play.
10. **Observing and supervising pupils movement while playing indoor or outdoor:** she should observed and supervised each child or in group to make sure that no child leave out of the place they are playing and that anything that would cause displeasure or injure any child is taken care of or removed from the reach of the pupils. Similarly, each child should be encouraged to take part as a team.
11. **Special care must be given to children with special needs:** plan special activities for these and give them a sense of belonging and encourage other children to accept and treat them normally. This would make them happy and continue to like coming to school and feeling of being the same like other children.
12. **Must be present in the school prior to pupils' arrival and closer:** the caregiver must be present to school before children and should not leave until children are picked. And ensure proper custody of pupils' belongings while in the school and handover to parents/guardians or person that come to pick them.
13. **Friendly to pupils:** Show love, affection, acceptance, support, interest and sympathy to each child under her care.

According to Montessori (1952), following the child, which is one of her principles means when one is observing the actions of the children, he/she should follow them in what they want to do. For instance, if they want to climb a ladder, they should be given the opportunity to do so but in a safe manner. In this context, Hanga (2017), stated that apart from the parents and teachers, Caregivers have an important role to play by always following the children under their custody. Whether in the school compound or in the classroom, children must be followed and helped with materials or objects that they can choose from. They should not be told what to do or what to choose, but rather be provided with what they want and stand back to watch them unless the need for help arises before one should intervene. What is important here is that teachers and Caregivers while observing the actions of the children should follow them in all that they need to do.

According to Montessori, the environment that may include either the indoor or outdoor play ground or classroom where children learn or play, should be prepared and have to be child-sized with activities set up for success and allow freedom of movement and choice. The environment has to be safe for the child to explore freely; and it has to be ready

and beautiful for the children so that it invites them to work and or play. The environment where the child lives, plays, study and sleeps, be it home or school, should be carefully organized and provided with all the things that will stimulate and arouse his interest. Similarly, the physical environment where the pupils play should have a large space to enable them move freely and should contain materials needed for physical exercises.

The classroom arrangement according to Hanga should provide space for free movement and interaction while allowing the teacher to see every corner of the classroom from his seat. It also includes classroom management and control procedures, as well as the way the space is organized, furnished and maintained. Similarly, the learning environment refers to the diverse physical site and contexts in which pupils learn, rest and or play such as indoor/classroom (learn, eat and sleep) outdoor/compound (play, explore, sit and discuss). This shows that pupils learn in a variety of settings which all has to be prepared by the parents/guardians or person assigned to take care of the pupils.

### **Challenges Faced by Caregivers Working in ECCDE Environment**

Anybody that knows what children are, understands the difficulties a mother face in the course of taking care of even a single child let alone two or ten or more. Definitely, there are bound to be many challenges associated with that and the following are some, which a Caregiver faces while performing her duties:

1. **Large Number:** in most of the Nursery schools, public and private, the number of pupils in a single class has exceeded the twenty-five stipulated by the National Policy on Education, which makes it difficult for the Caregiver to handle.
2. **Individual Differences:** in a situation where you have at least two pupils in a class let alone more than that, individual differences are bound to manifest based on either religion or language or economic/social status or behaviour and educational background of parents/guardians. This could pose a tremendous challenge to a Caregiver in terms of caring and meeting the needs of pupils from such background.
3. **Parental Attitude:** some parents/guardians are habitual complainants even on trivial and petty issues while others would never blame their children for any wrong doing but instead pass the buck to teachers or Caregivers and or even other pupils. Therefore, a Caregiver should be able to identify this type of parents/guardians and their children for the ease of her duties as well as to minimize emotional stress.
4. **Safety Practice:** curiosity is the habits of majority of children to make sure that they find out the true picture or meaning of what they don't know and as a



result of this they may injury themselves or damage, spoil things no matter how good, valuable, expensive that thing is. Sometimes children go beyond areas where they were asked or not allow to go, and they were doing this not without reasons but with intention and interest of wanting to know what was there that they were prevented of not going there. Therefore, Caregivers always have no time to rest in assuring that these children assigned to them were safe form any thing that may harm them or keeping away dangerous objects out of the reach of the children under their care (these include; protective cover on electrical outlet, control or knobs, medicine or first aid box. Heavy or injury objects, broken seats or any damaged facilities).

### **Suggestions**

1. Caregivers should periodically be exposed to training and retraining in order to enhance their knowledge and sharpen their skills for effective discharge of their duties.
2. Considering the physical and emotional stress they face in discharging their duties, Caregivers should be adequately remunerated and specially incentivized as well as occasionally recognized by their employers.
3. Parents/Guardians should foster good relationship and communication with Caregivers including disclosing to them special or peculiar needs of their children for proper attention and handling whenever the situation arises.

### **Conclusion**

It is very important and necessary in a Nursery school to have a Caregiver, especially female that takes care of pupils notwithstanding their population. The Caregiver must be an adult of at least twenty-five years old who should be physically and mentally sound with some knowledge and skills that enables her to identify children's individual differences. She should equally be in a position to identify with their interests, needs, attitudes, abilities and weaknesses while showing empathy to them in any situation they find themselves. Perception and awareness of the children under a Caregiver's custody are paramount likewise her ability to communicate properly and effectively with them and their parents. The effectiveness of a Caregiver can also be improved through adequate supervision, training and retraining from time to time to sharpen her knowledge in skills while adequate compensation and incentives are key in motivating her in the discharge of her responsibilities. Ensuring these, would facilitate the all-round development of the children as envisaged under the Early Childhood, Care and Development Education programme.

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