

Qualitative Early Child Care and Education (ECCE) as a Panacea for Resolving Leadership and Good Governance Crises in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria, today, is in leadership and good governance crises. Efforts are organized to ensure that excesses in leadership and good governance are checked. One of the important measures to address the situation is education, and especially Early Child Care and Education (ECCE). The government on its part has outlined laudable early child care and education objectives and programmes to ensure that Nigerian child receives sound early child care and education, which subsequently lead to functional knowledge, skill and attitudes as bases for sound leadership and good governance. It is in view of this that the paper tries to explain how qualitative early child care and education can help resolve the present leadership and good governance challenges that are currently facing the nation in the present democratic dispensation.

Keywords: Early Child Care and Education (ECCE), Leadership, Good Governance Crises

Introduction

Early Child Care and Education (ECCE) has received much attention from both the government and non-governmental organizations in the world over. Scholars across the globe have concur that the care and support received by a child in terms of good health, nutrition and psycho-social care and protection are important in the formation and development of intelligence, personality and social behaviour. It is in view of this that the Federal Government of Nigeria, (2004) through its National Policy on Education allowed for the provision of this type of education for infants and children whose age range is between 3-5 year; and can be given in crèche, nursery and kindergarten schools. Education is a panacea to all human social problems. And education at this level may help resolve many social ills including leadership and good governance crises in this country.

Crises upon crises have bedeviled many parts of the country. In the south, the Niger Delta Militants, Odua People's Congress (OPC), the Bakkasi Boys and the Movement for the Actualization of Sovereignty and Survival of Biafra (MASSOB) have proved difficult to be subdued. And have remained defiant to all calls to lay down their arms. In the North the Jos-Plateau crises remains unresolved despite Federal Government intervention. As these were not enough to the list of crises Nigeria is faced with the hitherto unknown Jama'at Ahlussuna Liddawa'at Wal Jihad popularly known as Boko Haram sprung up to challenge the security outfit of Nigeria. All these crises are directly linked to the poor leadership and lack of good governance that is facing the nation. Many have abandoned their primary responsibilities of provision of basic necessities of life to the citizenry and protecting the citizens' life and property:- other words, they (leaders) have left the citizenry to their fate. This explains why the post-election violence was so notorious that the youth who were in their teens attacked and destroyed houses of the perceived architect of bad leadership and bad governance particularly in the Northern part of the country.

The Concept of Early Child Care and Education

Early Child Care and Education has been defined by many scholars to suit individual understanding and the country he comes from. Heffernan in National Teachers' Institute (2009) sees early child care and education to mean an educational programme meant for children of ages 3-5. It is educational programme designed for pre-school children and at training them for operation and mutually helpful living, and to foster in them consciousness of interdependence.

The National Policy on Education (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004) on the other hand, defined early child care and education as the education given in an educational institution to children prior to their entering the primary school. It includes the crèche, the nursery and the kindergarten. National Open University of Nigeria (2006) refers to early child care and education as the programmes initiative required for children from birth to pre-school age to make them thrive. These initiatives include early stimulation, nutrition and optimal interactive environment.

Objectives of Early Child Care and Education

The National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Development, Federal Government of Nigeria (2007) in Nigeria has clearly spelt out the objectives of this level of education as it affects the Nigerian child. These include:

1. To provide care and support that will ensure the rights of the child. These include the right to good nutrition and health, healthy and safe environment, psycho-social stimulation, protection and participation.
2. To inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys etc.

3. To provide adequate care and supervision for the children while parents/guardians are at work (on the farms, in the markets, offices, industry among others).
4. To effect a smooth transition from the home to the school.
5. To prepare the child to adapt successfully when his or her current context changes.
6. To develop a healthy, well-nourished adequately stimulated child able to achieve its fullest potentials.
7. To contribute to reduction of high infant and U-5 mortality rate. (Federal Government of Nigeria; 2007:45).

Concept of Leadership and Good Governance

Leadership as a concept has received the attention of scholars because of its central importance in the survival of human society. Without it the society will be in anarchy.

Okeke (1985) considers leadership as interpersonal influence exercised in a situation and directed through the communication process towards the attainment of a specific goal. Nwokafor in Bello and Abubakar (2007) defined leadership as status of dominance prestige acquired by the ability to control, initiate or set the pattern of behavior for others. To Tijjani and Shehu (2007) leadership involves the use of power, authority and influence in the process of managing human and material resources at work in order to produce results. Good governance on the other hand refers to the ability of people occupying leadership position to meet the yearnings and aspirations of the subordinate groups. In other words, good governance depicts the situation that makes the ruled to feel contented with what the rulers are able to provide in terms of basic necessities of life in the society and other expectations as well (Anifowose & Enemu, 1999)

Leadership and Good Governance Crises in Nigeria Today

Nigeria has today witnessed great upheavals that are threatening the corporate existence of the country. These have included the activities of Niger Delta Militants, Odua People's Congress (OPC), Movement for the Survival of Biafra (MOSOB), Jos-Plateau ethno-religious crises and the Boko Haram activities. There was also the post-presidential election violence that erupted in many parts of northern part of this country.

Leaders themselves have acknowledge the fact that most, if not, all of this violence is a bye product of bad leadership and poor governance. Governor Sule Lamido of Jigawa State recently blamed leaders for this perennial crisis that have persisted in the country. Delivering a speech at a workshop in Dutse organized by the Office of the Special Adviser of the President on Community Development and Participation, the Governor blamed the security situation in the country on the desperation of the political class quest for leadership at all cost. According to Lamido, the political class are now capitalizing on the exuberance of the youths to fan the embers of understanding and division in the society (The Leadership Weekend, Saturday, 23rd

July, 2011). In a similar vein, his counterpart, Governor Mu'azu Babangida Aliyu of Niger state has equally blamed the elites for the present security situation facing the country today Governor Aliyu reiterated that the security situation that engulfed the country was planted and perpetrated by elite against the majority of the population (The New Nigeria, Thursday, 21st July, 2011).

Quality Early Child Care and Education as a Panacea for Leadership and Good Governance Crises in Nigeria

Psychologists have made us to believe that the care and support children received are crucial in the formation and development of intelligence, and personality and social behaviour, (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2007). The best place therefore to tackle the leadership and good governance problem in Nigeria is no other place than at early child care and education centres. It is believed that if the children at these centres receive quality education at their formative period then they would grow into responsible adults. These responsible adults would provide the leadership that would steer the country out of trouble waters.

It is generally agreed that education is capable of resolving all human problems. Many Nigerian communities are today having early child care and education centres especially with the Federal Government intervention by directing local governments councils across the country to establish these centres in public primary schools (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004). This was meant to equally make early child care and education accessible and affordable to children of urban poor and those in rural areas. But the government must ensure that both private and public early child care education centres/schools in the country provide quality education at this level. Quality early child care and education to guarantee good leadership, good and governance for crises-free Nigeria, concerted efforts have to be made by stakeholders ensure that Nigerian children are well-served by these institutions.

a) Infrastructural Facilities:

Infrastructural Facilities are one of the important resources that may ensure quality Early Child Care and Education. These centres/schools must have adequate buildings (classrooms, libraries, storerooms, offices and laboratories), furniture and instructional hardware. The expectation of a model ECCE centre/school as regards to building is that the premises should be accessible and well-secured, have enough space for outdoor and recreational activities, and have solid and well-ventilated buildings with adequate toilets and urinary (National Open University of Nigeria, 2006). The provision of these facilities will make the school attractive and accommodative.

b) Staff Training:

Adequate arrangement must be made on pre-service and in-service training for teachers of pre-school institutions. The present arrangement where most teachers and care-givers in these institutions are untrained and unqualified staff must be stopped. It is no gain-saying that,

this category of staff would not provide the necessary training that can turn our children to heroes and heroines of tomorrow. Many of the ECCE centres/schools today engaged the services of school dropouts or at best secondary school graduates. In their stead, proper arrangements should be made by tertiary teacher training institutions to produce adequate and qualified teaching personnel for the ECCE centres. The National Policy on Education (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004) has clearly revealed that no nation can excel above the quality of its teachers.

c) Monitoring and Supervision:

For Early Child Care and Education (ECCE) to provide the right leaders and good governance of tomorrow there is the need for effective monitoring and supervision. Monitoring refers to the activity of measuring progress in plan or project implementation (National Open University of Nigeria, 2006). Monitoring is to ensure that appropriate manpower and materials are put in place for quality education in this level. The National Policy on Education (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004) had directed that the state Governments must ensure that both public and private organizations are meeting the policy directive. Supervision rather than inspection should be conducted to help guide teachers and proprietors/proprietresses in what should be done to ensure desirable development of the children.

d) Teachers' Welfare Package

Teachers one may say are the wheel that rotates any educational system. For teachers to put in their best they have to be well-motivated. The government through appropriate agencies is to ensure that teachers in early child care and education centres are not left to the mercy of profit-oriented proprietors/proprietress. Rather appropriate incentives must be provided to these teachers and proprietors/proprietress must be made to realize this and must be made to understand the dangers the lack of this pose to the future of these children.

e) **Adequate Number of Staff:** Adequate number of staff in early child care and education centres would guarantee that all the pupils' social, emotional, physical, cognitive and moral needs of the children would be met. The policy statement on the ratio of teacher to pupils in ECCE centres is 1:25 (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004). This was instituted to ensure that each child receive adequate attention to ensure the development of appropriate attitudes, skills and knowledge.

Conclusion

Thus, Early Child Care and Education (ECCE) have a positive influence on future challenges of children. Ejieh (2006) reported that investing in ECCE can yield high returns in all human activities. Early child care and education can guarantee good leadership and good

governance which will make Nigeria greater. This can only be possible if all stakeholders in the country have make the necessary sacrifices. These include adequate provision of infrastructural facilities; staff training, monitoring and supervision by appropriate bodies, adequate welfare package for teachers and the number of staff should be enough to cater for the children in these centres/schools.

Suggestions

1. Leadership training should be part of the learning activities to be organised for children in Early Child Care and Education Centres. Emphasis must be placed on good leadership and good governance.
2. Teachers at Early Child Care and Education Centres shall display high sense of responsibility in discharging their duties. This will go down well with the children as they are fond of emulating their teachers' explicit behaviour.
3. The government through its agencies must ensure that both public and private ECCE centres are effectively monitored to ensure adequate implementation of the guidelines on how to establish and run such centres/schools well.
4. Peace and conflict resolution education should be introduced in ECCE curriculum to help children appreciate the need for peaceful co-existence among members of varied ethnic, social, political and religious affiliation.
5. All ECCE centres/schools should employ the services of health and social welfare workers to attend to health and social adjustment needs of the children. It has been recognised that if the emotional problems are arrested during formative period of the children there is every tendency for them to become good citizens from where the future leaders of the country will come.

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