

# Economic Implications of Early Childhood Education in Nigeria for Value Re-orientation, Poverty Eradication and National Development

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## Abstract

This paper deciphers the economic implications of the early childhood education in Nigeria for value re-orientation, poverty eradication and national development. The effective adoption of any educational programme by a country must be measured in the light of its economic implications for some fundamental development indices. The pertinent issue of early childhood education has been explained in the light of its nexus with value re-orientation, poverty eradication and national development. It is hoped that active government involvement and effective management of early childhood education in Nigeria will yield positive economic implications for value re-orientation, poverty eradication and national development.

**Keywords:** Economic implications; Early childhood education; Value re-orientation; Poverty eradication; National development; Nigeria.

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## INTRODUCTION

The National Policy on Education (NPE) simply describes the Early Childhood Education centres as Crèche, nursery and the kindergarten schools; the education is given in an educational institution to children (as preparatory) prior to their entering the primary school. It is the government's responsibility to establish the pre-primary schools that will promote the training of qualified pre-primary school teachers in adequate number, contribute to the development of suitable curriculum, supervise and control the quality of such institutions, and establish pre-primary sections in existing public schools (FRN, 2014).

Besides, the government is also responsible to encourage both community/private efforts in the provision of pre-primary education. Government is to make provision in teacher education programmes for specialization in early childhood education; to ensure that the medium of

instruction is principally the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community; and to develop the orthography of many more Nigerian languages, and to produce textbooks in Nigerian languages; to ensure that the main method of teaching at this level is through play and the curriculum of teacher education is oriented to achieve this; to regulate and control the operation of pre-primary education; to maintain a teacher-pupil ratio of 1:25; to set and monitor minimum standard for early child care centres in the country; and to ensure her full participation as well as that of communities and teachers associations in the running and maintenance of early childhood education facilities (FRN, 2014, pp. 7-8).

The National Policy on Education unequivocally states the purpose of the early childhood education. It shall effect a smooth transition from the home to the school; prepare the child for the primary level of education; provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work (on the farms, in the markets, offices etc.); inculcate social norms; inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys, etc; develop a sense of cooperation and team-spirit; learn good habits, especially-good health habits; and teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms, etc., through play (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014, p. 7).

To ascertain the effective management of this laudable programme several studies have been carried out in the field. For instance, Okoro (2004) carried out a research on the impact of early childhood education on academic performance of the child. The study revealed that the pupils that attended nursery school performed better in school subjects than those without early childhood education.

There was also a study by Omoegun, Longe, Ahimie and Agogidi (2009) on storytelling as a method of imparting societal core values, especially in children who are greatly amused and interested in folklore. Story telling was recommended as a means of collecting authentic and revealing research data from children. Ojameruaye (2010) carried out a study on promoting early child care and education. It reveals that many parents in Nigeria did not value education at this level due to distrust, poor quality, high cost and the belief that the child must be close to the warmth of the mother before the primary school age. There was also lack of orientation programme on this issue and this prevents children from attending early childhood education.

Besides, a study by Ukala (2011) on the resource capacity for the implementation of early childhood education in public and private schools reveals that government has been silent on early childhood education, its responsibility was only limited to approval, accreditation and licensing, and control of private proprietors that engage in this level of education. Similar studies by Asodike et al. (2013) on the way early childhood education centres were carried out in the country revealed that these centres have been left out in the hands of private establishments, with government's minimal involvement.

Given the above scenario, the state of insensitivity of the government has the danger of placing majority of children in public schools on problem of access to early childhood education as well as exposing those who may be interested to venture into it to high cost. The minimal government's interest could usher monopolistic competitive tendencies with parents who wish to send their children and wards being exploited by proprietors of private early childhood education centres through their outrageous charges. The evidences emanating from these studies in the field provoked this paper to fathom the economic implications of the early childhood education programme in Nigeria for value re-orientation, poverty eradication and national development. This is necessary to stimulate government's active participation and effective management of the programme.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This paper on the economic implications of early childhood education in Nigeria for value re-orientation, poverty eradication and national development is hinged on the System theory propounded by Parsons in 1951. The system theory views schools as learning productive organizations. It states that a system is consisting of defined boundaries within which individuals interrelate and interact in the performance of activities for the purpose of achieving educational goals. It is a conglomerate of individuals, personalities, structures, values, interests, needs, activities and programmes functioning for the achievement of common goals (Enaohwo & Eferakeya, 1989, p. 10). Okorie (2012) noted that the System Theory serves as a basis for the integration of scientific knowledge over a broad range. This broad nature of system theory enables it cover immense dimension of the physical, biological and social world.

Nakpodia (2003) corroborated that early childhood education and the system theory are intertwined. The application of the systems theory to early childhood education calls for synthesis of the relationships between the two concepts. The system theory is a check on the operations of early childhood education. It exposes the interrelatedness of the various components of early childhood education pursuits. The theory implies that the teaching and care given at Day Care Centres and Kindergarten bring about actual interaction between child and care givers to the extent that activities of the child are guided and directed in such a manner that the child is molded to see, think, behave, and believe in a particular way. This informs why the child at this level is taught reflective thinking, social habits, and health habits. These solicit for the child's early appreciation to imbibe these values.

The early childhood education is a production centre and also a field of teaching through which, means of livelihood is attained. It is viewed from the system theory that early childhood education has become a subject and a field of teaching. Therefore the teaching done by caregivers and minders at these centres emanate from the concept of the systems theory. The teachers are no doubt productive agents that must not be dispensed with for the viability of the programme. They represent important inputs in the system theory.

The system theory approach to early childhood education sees early childhood as consisting of interrelated parts including the government, private bodies, caregivers, children and parents functioning as a whole to attain a specific purpose of building up aptitudes in children for economic growth. Thus, this level of education consists of what can be described as production inputs for children in the early stage of life.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Early childhood is defined as a period from birth to eight years old. It is a time of remarkable brain growth, the foundation years for subsequent learning and manpower development. Early childhood education has been considered to be a pre-school, semi-formal education outside the home. These include the crèche, the nursery and kindergarten. This level of education varies in scope and seems to be closely linked to geographical locations. While the main thrust of some definitions is based on the age bracket, others consider the environment within which the education is delivered, others combine both (Ofurum, 2016).

Historically, early childhood education started with the British Colonial administration and later spread to their colonies like Nigeria who later imitated their Masters. However, the

Universal Primary Education (UPE), an initiative that afforded free education proved a better opportunity for children from poor homes. The UPE scheme offered the opportunity for more children to be enrolled and also created scarcity for household servants. The dire need of working mothers at that time for where to keep their babies, became the catalyst for the growth of Nursery schools in Nigeria. This further encouraged the National Early Childhood Curriculum which was formulated for children from 0-5 years to be taught health, nutrition, water and environmental sanitation, psychological care and early learning, child protection and rights. The curriculum also prepares the child for smooth transition to primary school and ensures universal access to primary education.

Further, early childhood development adopted the integrated approach. This becomes necessary to shift its scope from the unit approach of content presentation to thematic approach which is perceived as more robust and allows elastic infusion of contemporary issues. Eight themes are adopted for this age bracket - physical development, affective/psychological development, cognitive development, food and nutrition, health, water and environmental sanitation, safety measures and protection issues. These themes are taught in different subject areas using toys, picture books, musical instruments, games, story books, radio, television, songs/rhymes, poetry books, films, charts. This production process enables the child have a holistic approach to education and smooth transition to primary school.

## **ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

Education at early childhood is a production stage in education industry and is the key to manpower development and societal modernization. For this level of education to accomplish its set objectives, there is need for rational planning and implementation of the entire early childhood education system. Children at this stage of their life learn much from their parents, siblings, and immediate environment before they leave their home for formal education in the school. This first stage of education is essential in the development of any rational individual in a nation. This stage lays solid foundation for a lifelong learning and contributes effectively towards sustainable development where learning is progressive.

It has been pointed out that the concept of early childhood education has the connotation of the systems theory. Herein, system theory is made up of three basic dimensions: Early childhood education as a practice, early childhood education as a science and early childhood education as a subject for teaching and learning. Pre-school education or early childhood education as a practice sees education as an economic activity performed for livelihood that takes place before the school age of the child. Early childhood education as a science deals with the scientific study of the process of education before the school age. Early childhood education as a subject deals with the field of study. Early childhood education as a study focuses on skill acquisition, which impacts greatly on the latter life of the child and consequently national development. In essence, the physical, emotional and cognitive development of the child, if properly taken care of will be of great benefit as the child grows from one level of manpower production to another for national development.

The purpose of early childhood education is to prepare the child to meet the challenges of formal education which begins at the basic (primary) level. This level of education moulds the child through an interactive process in the sphere of life at home, Day Care, Crèche, the Nursery and the Kindergarten, that is targeted at an all encompassing personality development between age 0-5 years. The Universal Basic Education Act, 2004 has early childhood education as an

integral part of the scheme; at this stage, learning is largely based on play and the child's interest is to probe or inquire into issues. This is why learning therefore would entail development for the child's basic values, attitudes, skills, behaviour and habit which maybe long lasting. The government should provide, monitor, and supervise facilities and equipment used for this programme and develop a culture to promote their maintenance effectiveness. To be able to fathom the economic implications of the early childhood education for the developmental variables of value re-orientation, poverty eradication, and national development, this section has been discussed as outlined below:

### **Early Childhood Education and Value Re-Orientation**

The Federal Republic of Nigeria declared that the quality of instruction given at all levels of our national education has to be oriented toward inculcating the following values: respect for the worth and dignity of the individual; faith in man's ability to make rational decisions; moral and spiritual principle in inter-personal and human relations; shared responsibility for the common good of society; promotion of physical, emotional and psychological development of all children; acquisition of competencies necessary for self-reliance (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014, p. 5).

It has been observed that past ideas on values could no longer hold in contemporary times due to the influx of new ideas and values through mass media exposures and various e-net working. Thus, children are growing up without developing an adequate value system or moral code as a result of defective socialization (Adebanjo, 2002; Agbe, 2001; Unicef, 1997). To some extent, children are most times in a state of confusion. They are confused over what to do, how to do it, when and where to do it and why they should do it.

The most important skill a child needs to be taught is how to relate well with other people in the environment. There are certain basic value orientations which center on universal human problems or issues. Many a time, behaviours which children consider to be normal for themselves and their peers, are seen to be maladaptive or abnormal by their parents, teachers, and elders in the society (Omoegun 2004). Hence, the educational institution is established to lead children towards the things the society values.

In his study, Kamla-Raj (2009) placed emphasis on the importance of teaching the right values to children from an early age. In spite of so many vices as criminal acts, sexual immorality and cheating, eating deep into the fabrics of our society at such an alarming rate what has been entrenched into the subconscious of the child through instruction received early in life will help the child to avoid being pressurized or prone to develop such bad habits or vices. Parents are also encouraged to create quality time for their younger children when they would teach and enhance the development of appropriate values. School counsellors should emphasize the need for value re-orientation among pupils through group guidance (p. 8).

Genuine efforts are being made to emphasize programmes that will positively affect value reorientation of the Nigeria child by the Government, and non-Governmental organizations alike (Fajonyomi 2001). However, school and guidance counsellors recognize the fact that more creative strategies (such as story telling) could be helpful in influencing children value choices. Researchers have revealed that the choice of cultural values made by the people determines their emotions and overall behaviour (Ekanem-Epiken et al., 2004; Dansen, 2000; Nwamuo, 1996). The first step to changing one's value system with Ekanem-Epiken et al. (2004), Dansen (2000) is awareness. Inaccurate and self limiting values will continue to be accepted until the individual

examines such and makes efforts to change them. In most societies core values are assumed, understood and seldom discussed but exploring and discussing values are known to enhance harmony and belongingness.

Values that remain unclear or unexplored can create emotional tension due to the conflict that may arise between the belief (value choice) and the action that is being put in place. Thus, as children grow into adolescence, they may tend to develop maladjusted behaviour of various kinds. This is because any person trapped in a conflict state as this could feel miserable, confused and frustrated.. Adebajo (2002) and Agbe (2001) have been negatively influenced due to defective socialization. Once, values are internalized a child's ethical standards and moral acceptance become incorporated into the 'self' and this becomes part of the individual. As children approach and enter the adolescent years, they become increasingly able to generalize and conceptualize moral rules and principles (Animashaun 2004; Reid et al. 2002).

Asuru (2015) states that a nation's value system is what give it the general direction to act purposefully. Over the years, we have tended to misplace our individual values above national values. The school is a microcosm of the macro society; the larger society greatly influences the school. There is therefore urgent need for re-orientation and re-prioritization of our national values by changing the way we perceive and do things, by placing national interest above parochial interests. Also, the national educational aims and objectives of inculcating the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society, with well packaged affective education should be emphasized. Our education sector should be transformed for effective service delivery. Teachers must inculcate in the younger generation, the spirit of patriotism, industry, and dignity of labour, fairness, scholarship, commitment, consciousness, perseverance, tolerance and the like. This they can effectively do by being exemplary (p. 33). These are the driving forces in national development.

### **Early Childhood Education and Poverty Eradication**

Poverty eradication as perceived by (Mischo, Wahl, Strolmen & Wolf, 2013, pp. 193-206) has been on the international agenda for many years now, and a number of countries have made achievements in this direction. Poverty eradication through early childhood education should form an essential agenda of every government that believes that effective poverty eradication must be tide on the back of an educated populace. Many have designed good strategies on paper, through such mechanisms as ESIP (Education Sector Investment Plan), and this is a step in the right direction, but societies and governments must be willing to make real changes. What is missing in many cases is not the planning or the resources, but a real commitment to act. Abject poverty can be eradicated, if an enabling environment for learning is put in place. The poverty cycle can be broken, and the way is through education. This thrust will see the establishment of public and private early childhood education institutions, buildings and their refurbishment. A focus on early childhood education has an economic implication for belief in human capacity development, as an integral part of realizing poverty eradication and a pointer to a commitment to education programme (UNESCO, 2003, p. 15).

To break the poverty cycle, needs the provision of early childhood education for the poorest children. It will be necessary to generate new knowledge about the children - where to find them, their characteristics and their needs—so that educational policies, plans and programme implementation can be better informed. Teacher training, and consideration of local cultural practices and traditions, can help improve the effectiveness of early childhood education in poverty eradication, by making schools more relevant to poor children. The education system

needs to recognize the value of traditional culture, and be flexible enough to allow teachers to adapt the curriculum to the local community (Samuelson & Kaga, 2008, pp. 3-9).

Teachers need to be aware of the power in their hands to help improve the well-being of the poorest children through early childhood education. There is a need for more focused efforts by the donor community. Various organizations with the same goals must work together to enable programmes to be instituted on a sufficiently large scale. There is also a need for the improved monitoring of investments. Governments and partners must ensure that most of the investments intended for the poorest children through early childhood education reach them, and are not absorbed by a large administrative infrastructure. There must be a willingness on the part of the poor to help themselves. Poor people, especially women and girls, must be empowered to recognize, and act on the possibilities for change. They must be given the tools necessary to help them (Omoegun et al., 2009).

Besides, when children have been displaced and traumatized, either by natural or man-made disasters, they need special support to deal with their traumas. Parents in such situations are usually unable to provide the care, emotional support, and attention that would otherwise be given. Children do better in school when they have received appropriate stimulation to their cognitive and psychosocial development. Early childhood development programmes tend to benefit older girls, by freeing them from childcare duties so they can go to school. This is true and even more critical when conflict, and/or displacement, has disrupted extended family structures. Such programme as early childhood education also allows nutrition and health programmes to reach the very young child, and can promote tolerance, cooperation and an understanding of peace. Communities have tended to respond favourably to early childhood initiatives made by NGOs, but need training and start-up materials, so that parents can organize and sustain early childhood programmes, when external support is withdrawn or reduced. This programme can be a form of entrepreneurship or small scale business venture through which meaningful living could emerge in future (UNESCO, 2003, pp. 15-16).

All children should have access to schooling, and be prepared to learn. For the poorest children, this means early childhood education in their geographic area, no school fees, free books and no hidden costs. At least one meal should be provided per day. The community involvement must go beyond the level of financial contribution, and include involvement in the planning; management and monitoring of pro-poor programmes. Programmes must cater for the cognitive, affective and the psychomotor domains. In the delivery of social services curriculum and teaching methods must give consideration to the nature and experiences of the children.

For a poor parent, early childhood education must have a tangible outcome. The skills children learn on the street, or at home, are necessary for their survival. Organized education will need to compete with the relevance of early childhood education. Contrary to common beliefs, the poorest and marginalized groups do value education, but it must make economic implication for family survival. The pertinent question for educators is “What should constitute relevant early childhood education for the poorest children?” This is the education that helps them come out of poverty.

The above has serious economic implication for education planners who must be prepared to do research into the children’s background, and tailor early childhood education programmes according to children’s survival needs. National curricula should be sensitive to these needs and strive to achieve them by addressing specific poverty issues, linking the content of the early childhood education to the culture of the beneficiaries, and income generating

projects or programmes in the geographical area. This means that there should be a greater link between schooling and the world of work.

However, governments, in partnership with NGOs and communities, could provide more flexibility in the early childhood education system, so that it provides contemporary relevant educational content. Teachers should be trained to teach all children to attend to the social responsibility for a poor child. It is unlikely that teachers, who themselves are underpaid, can be expected to make extra efforts to ensure that all children within their communities fully exercise their right to early childhood education. Governments must provide incentive schemes for teachers who are willing to work in the poorest areas, and show good results. Nevertheless, teachers can be trained in the following areas, among others: Be perceptive of children in difficulties; provide emotional security for the poorest children; integrate children into the class, so that they care for each other; show genuine interest in the attendance and participation of children in school; be resourceful and establish partnerships within a community; adapt the curriculum to the experiences of the children; draw on children's life experiences to explain curriculum concepts; carry out remedial activities to ensure consistent achievement; test and measure learning; overcome barriers to the active participation of the poorest child in the class; assist the poorest girls to be successful in school; motivate children for lifelong learning; help children to create wealth and utilize opportunities for progress; and help children to understand the most critical health issues, and be able to protect themselves ((UNESCO, 2003, pp. 15-18).

### **Early Childhood Education and National Development**

The concept of national development focuses on the process of improving the quality of all human lives of a country. This could be looked at from three important aspects of the country, namely: Raising people's living levels, that is, their incomes and consumption levels of food, medical services, education, etc through relevant economic growth processes; creating conditions conducive to the growth of people's self-esteem through the establishment of local, political and economic systems and institutions which promote human dignity and respect; increasing people's freedom to choose by enlarging the range of their choice variables, such as increasing varieties of consumer goods and services (Todaro, 1982, p. 407).

The economic implication of early childhood education for national development therefore, is its relative profitability to economic growth and development. It is a measure of the expected yield of economic growth to early childhood education in terms of the future benefits accruing to education. Essentially, the educational sector of any economy particularly, the developing economies is very strategic as: a production centre of human capital; a supplier of trained manpower; an employer of the same trained manpower; and the main sector through which national identity and national goals and aspirations are given meaning and reality among the people; the biggest user of high-level manpower in both developed and undeveloped countries; the biggest industry in terms of employment, payroll and investment in plant (Owhondah, 2007); a leveler of opportunities; a major sector in occupational mobility; and a major weapon in the eradication of ignorance and poverty (Okeke, 1998, p. 10).

However, the desire to make education relevant to the people, has led to a greater involvement of governments in the provision of pre-schools in public educational institutions in the country. Thus, a significant increase in the proportion of government budget allocated to the education sector should be observed every fiscal year in line with UNESCO

recommendation of 26% budgetary allocation (Asuru, 2015, p. 29). This increase has been due to the increase in the size of the school system.

One of the implications of the governments' interests in the direct provision of pre-education and greater expenditures on this level of education is the need for a more effective planning for its development. Apart from trying to relate the expenditure to the objectives set for pre-school system the fear of training skills not required in the economy and the consequent increase in unemployment make it necessary that the development of the system be directly related to the needs of the economy.

Investment in high quality early childhood education is an excellent spending of money for the society that can lead to economic wealth in the future. Such investment easily pays off overtime by generating very high rates of returns for the participants, the public and the government. Further, this will yield more returns to economic development; and it is considered a sound fiscal policy which has huge potential long-term payoff. If children have high-quality early childhood education they will be better able to use higher education and job training later in life (Lawal, 2015, pp. 307-308).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This paper has deciphered the pertinent issues of early childhood education, value re-orientation, poverty eradication and national development. It is obvious that a direct relationship exists between early childhood education and each of the variables investigated. The early childhood education is therefore defined as value re-orientation, poverty eradication and a national development programme.

With active government partnership with communities and non-governmental organizations and effective management; the early childhood education will yield positive response to national values, provide youths with necessary skills for economic engagement and productivity, and make for radical future national development.

## **Recommendations**

In view of the conclusions made so far, the following recommendations are made:

- The government should be sensitive to the funding, management and control of early childhood education at the local, state and federal levels.
- The government should partner with individuals, communities and non-governmental organizations in the management and control of the early childhood education to make it meaningfully effective.
- The government should provide early childhood centres with the necessary facilities and credible staff to make them efficient and effective.
- The government should organize orientation/sensitization programmes for parents, sponsors and guardians of children/wards, to encourage them appreciate early childhood education in the light of its economic implications for value orientation, poverty eradication and national development.
- The government should be actively involved in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of the early childhood education at all strata of governance in the education industry.

- Finally, the government should have an upper hand in making the early childhood education effective at all levels of her jurisdiction.

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