EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: THE POLICIES THAT AID ITS OPERATION

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ABSTRACT

Education in Nigeria no matter the level is geared towards the total development of the individual into a sound and responsible citizen, who would create an impact in the development of the nation. Early childhood education should therefore engulf all these principles or goals with the support of the government to ensure quality because every child matters. Without quality, national development as well as self-actualisation would be impossible. The National Policy on Education makes further allocation for the provision of education at all levels. Learning is primarily a social activity and participation in the social life of the school is central for learning to occur''. Teachers principally determine or orchestrate what is learnt and how what is learnt is learnt. The dynamics or approaches of learning among children are therefore largely dependent on the teachers, what these teachers teach and how they facilitate what they are teaching.

KEY WORDS: Early childhood, Education, Theoretical framework, Socio-cultural theory, Nigeria

Introduction

Early childhood education would be defined as the processes of learning whether formal or informal which children engaged with within a teaching and learning environment to enhance their development. Early childhood education is the crux of development for child and it is vital for the nation to take initiatives to ensure that children get appropriate education commensurate to their level of development. Theorising about the importance of early childhood education, Education International (EI) (IIOOL, p.L) stated that high quality ECE provides the foundation for life-long learning and stimulates children's social, emotional, physical, cognitive and linguistic development. The earliest word made by a child consists of blabbing and other types of non-verbal sounds, some of which are used to attract attention, to engage in imitative play, and to take part in games during the first year of life (Skutnabb-Kangas + Dunbar, IIOIO). The vocabulary grows gradually at first- at III months an average child has a vocabulary of between two and three words, at IIV months it has approximately IXV, at IIIL months it knows IIXOO words (Smith, IIOOM). At

the same time children learn how to combine words into grammatical sentences, and are building up a structure of meanings in which the words are related. However, the meanings of words are at first very vague and inaccurate, but greater elaboration and depth of meanings develops with time and as a result of listening and asking questions (McIvor, II00L).

According to Wolff and Ekkehard (II000), language develops slowly and gradually for children in schools, perhaps because these children are rewarded less for using it and more rapidly at home, probably because of their greater association with adults (Macdonald, II00II). Wolff and Ekkehards (II000) argue that learning is faster for the children of more educated parents. In children, much early sound takes the form of monologues that accompany action which helps to control behaviour (Johnston, II00L). According to Riojas-Cortez (II00I), this is most common at the ages between two and four. A great deal of speech when others are present is 'egocentric' because the child does not put his/herself in the position of the listener, or worry too much about whether the message is being received. However, at some point middle childhood speech becomes more 'sociocentric'-the child addresses his/her hearer, considers his/her point of view and also tries to influence him/her, or actually exchange ideas with him/her (Niparko, Tobey, Thal, Eisenberg, Wang, Quittner + CDaCl Investigative Team, II0I0).

Conceptualisation of Early childhood Education

Different scholars such as Maduewesi (II00x); Holst (II0I0); Härkö nen (II0III) among others came out with different conceptualisation of early childhood education. For instance, Holst (II0I0) see early childhood education as the education for children ranging from zero or birth to eight years of life. He continues that in some cases, early childhood education is start from nursery education or pre-primary as the case may be. In spite of this confusion on the appropriateness sphere early childhood education and defined it as ''a variety of processes and mechanisms that sustain and support development during the early years of life: it encompasses education, physical, social and emotional care, intellectual stimulation, health care and nutrition'' (Holst, II0I0, p. I). This means that early childhood education deals with a whole range of process combined rather one straight up process. Härkö nen (II0III) provides a variety of definitions for early childhood education or pre-primary education as he calls it. Firstly, she argues that early childhood education is a practical science, which deals with the processes of learning or education before the official school going age. This means that early childhood education is versatile and dynamic in its operations to accommodate the different idiosyncrasies of those involved within that circle. She continues that early childhood education engages in the development of child´s personality. This also means that early childhood education encompasses basic care which natures the child but prepares him or her for further transition primary school of other phases as the case might be. Secondly, she argues that early childhood education ''is an inter-active process in the sphere of life at home, day care and preschool that is purposefully aimed at an all-encompassing personality development of between the ages from zero to six years'' (p. II). This being the cares, teaching and learning into one broad functional sphere where the child gets nourished for all round growth. She adds that this definition creates room for preschool or considers pre-school as part of early childhood education and are integrated into one functional entity. Pre-school therefore which deals not particularly with issues of teaching and learning but with the general development of the child takes into consideration both formal and informal processes of education and the dynamics of learning amongst the children who fall within this category. Also, Härkö nen (II0III) argues that early childhood education can be defined as a research area which deals with the dynamics of care, support, learning and teaching within the ages of zero and six.

In Nigeria, Maduewesi (II00x, p. ID) defines early childhood education ''as encompassing the overall social, physical, and intellectual development and education of children below the age of six years''. This means that early childhood education aims at the development of the child as a whole and not just the cognitive or physical

aspect. Ejieh (IIOOL, p. XD) offers another definition of early childhood education in Nigeria by considering it to be ''pre-school education programmes of various sorts for children below the official school-going age (usually six years) mainly to prepare them for education in primary schools." Ejieh's definition focuses, more on the age of preschool as well as its ability to prepare children for primary school education. NPE (IIOOV) and its revised editions of IMDI, IMMD and IIOOV defines early childhood education as including the crèche, nursery and kindergarten as other institutions for such education, where children below the age of six to be instructed in a formal setting.

From the definitions above, it is clear that preschool is a part of early childhood education especially since pre-school most often do not have specific nationally guided curriculum but focus more on care and support for the individual to learning basic things about life. Härkönen (IIOIII, p.IIIII) combining all three previous definitions provide a more soothing and rigorous definition of early childhood education by theorising it as ''early childhood practice, early childhood education science, early childhood education subject and early childhood thinking as a wholesome system''. This definition takes early childhood education beyond the boundaries of teaching and learning, research, cognitive abilities or developmental foregrounds for the children to the processes that the child goes through from the ages of zero to six. As such whatever meaningful activity that takes place within this period and which contributes to the development of the child can be considered as part of early childhood education. This line of thinking is seconded by Morrison (IIOIII) who argues that early childhood education can be defined as the teaching of young children whether informally or formally up until the age of about eight. He continues that pre-school is, a subset of early childhood education, denotes the education of children from birth to age four or six in some nations. So pre-school is undoubtedly a part of early childhood education. Sommer et al. (IIOIII) offer an alternative definition when they argue that early childhood education involves activities as well as experiences in some cases that are aimed at effecting developmental changes in children before they formally enrol in elementary school. These activities can be directed towards area of teaching, learning, and other vital processes, which children can engage in to keep them developing mentally and otherwise. These definitions if nothing but one thing agree on the single idea that early childhood education deals with learning for children whether formal or informal but turn to differ about the specifications of this. Within a married of definitions, it is vital to adopt a single definition which would inform the rest of the study and shape how early childhood education is understood or not understood as the case might be.

Holst (IIOIO) argues that early childhood education has been given different names in different parts of the world and has been made to include or exclude a variety of things as a result of this different names. He continues that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for example refers to early childhood education as early childhood care and education, while the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) see or refer to early childhood education and care. The World Bank on the other hand brands it as early child development, while the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) calls it early childhood development. Education International on its part maintains the name of early childhood education. All these appellations take into consideration different processes and activities that this concept embodies or involves as it strives to contribute to the development of the child. Holst (IIOIO) adds that all the above categorisations and names contribute to the cognitive and other domains of child development making early childhood education, education occurring before (in cases where they are such) compulsory schooling which is provided in a variety of settings like pre-schools, kindergartens, nurseries, childcare centres, crèches and other similar institutions. This variety of settings is informed by the importance of early childhood education and the different initiatives instituted by different nations to cater for this part of the population.

Early childhood is the most critical period for cognitive and social development, the acquisition of languages and early literacy. Children are active

learners from birth, and the first years are vital. Early childhood education (ECE) should be recognized as a first step of basic education, as a fully integrated sector within national education systems. Provision should be universally accessible and free for all children. From this perspective, it is vital to trace the history of early childhood education both at the international level and at the national level to show the relevance of the same if the dynamics of early amongst is to be understood.

Explanation of key concepts

An operational definition of concepts defines a concept solely in terms of the operations (or methods) used to produce and measure it. These concepts are explained below.

Learning

Ormrod (IMMM) look at learning from two standpoints, which is, from the cognitive and behavourist angles. From the cognitive perspective, Ormrod (IMMM) says that learning is a relatively permanent change in mental associations due to experience. In other words, it connotes an internal change in behaviour that cannot be seen or observed. Learning is seen to have taken place when some permanent changes occur (Ormrod, IMMM). In the context of behaviourist perspectives, Ormrod (IMMM) sees learning as a relatively permanent change in behaviour due to experience. It denotes a permanent change in behaviour, that is, an external change that can be observed or seen. In this study, the objective is to explore the dynamics of learning among pre-primary school learners in formal and informal education processes.

Pre-primary school

Pre-primary school is the foundation stage of schooling system. In other words, it is considered as the bedrock of other levels of education. In Nigeria context, the pre-primary education, as pronounced by the policy, is that phase which prepares the child for primary school. In other words, the phase prior to primary school is the area of focus. In Nigeria, the Universal Basic Education Act of IIOOO quotes pre-primary, which has to do with pre- primary school given to children between ages three to five, as an integral part of basic schooling. It epitomises the first significant step in achieving the goals of Education for All (EFA).

Dynamics

This concept 'dynamics' is commonly used in physics, mathematics and other allied disciplines. In recent time, it has found expression in the education. In education, dynamics describe how forces act on the education system resulting in motion of the education system. This study seeks to unravel the forces that impact learning among pre-primary school learners in the formal and informal education processes.

Formal education process

Formal education is seen as a systematic, organised education model, structured and administered according to the set of laws, policies, norms and acts, presenting a rather rigid curriculum as regards objectives, content and methodologies of teaching and learning. From all indications, this is characterised by a contiguous education process which necessarily involves the educators, the learners and the classrooms that constitute the institution. In this study, formal education process is the pre-primary school in Uyo senatorial district.

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Informal education

Informal education is a direct opposite of formal education process. Informal education does not correspond to an organised and systematic setting of education, rather, it is locally based and relates to people in their local community. It does not necessarily include the objectives and subjects usually encompassed in the conventional curricula. Instead, it is characterised by the integrated involvement of people of all ages, use of community learning resources and research to bring about community change and recognition that people can learn through, with and from each other to create a better world (Jekayinfa, IIOII).

Language

Neves (11011) look at language as a system of representation that enables persons to encode and convey meaning through the production and combination of signs. Language is a system of communication which is based on words and the combination of words into sentences. Language is made up of tens of thousands of signs which are combinations of form and meaning. Form in verbal language is a arrangement of sounds, in written language for instance, a sequence of letters, that is, depending on the kind of writing system one is referring to.

Mother tongue

Mother tongue is regarded as the language a person acquires from birth. This can be viewed as the language a child acquires first and in which he/she begins the first verbal communication. The Kenya Institute of Education (11011) look at mother tongue as the initial language a child acquires in his/her community. Gupta (IMMC) declares that the mother tongue is linked to ancestral background. This is the language which is spoken by a parent or parents of a child in a particular community. Sollid (1100D) sees the mother tongue as the language a child acquires and uses in communication with his/her surroundings. However, this language is often used by children most of the time.

Theoretical perspectives that inform my study

Vygotsky was born in Russia in the year IDML to the Jewish family. He had interest to history, philosophy and language studies. Lev Vygotsky was the first person who developed the idea of the sociocultural learning theory. Kozulin (11011) assert that Vygotsky's work got recognition mainly after his death. He devoted most of his energy to the description of sociocultural learning theory and this theory has become the best part of his work.

There is confusion among novice researchers between Vygotsky's (IMCD) sociocultural learning theory and the social constructivism. One school of thought says that there is no different between the two theories, while another school of thought believes that there are distinctions between the theories. Scholars like Packer and Goicoechea (11000) look at social constructivism as an important of social processes in individual knowledge building. In other words, social constructivism is based on a social ontology that insists that human agents do not exist independently from their social environment and its collectively shared systems of meanings ('culture' in a broad sense) (Risse, 1100C). On the other hand, sociocultural perspectives focuses on the learning from a cultural point of view and emphasises the interdependence of social and individual processes in the co-construction of knowledge in individual (Packer + Goicoechea, 11000). Sociocultural approach looks at the cultural amplifiers as personal and social resources that mediate between the social and the individual construction of meaning (Vygotsky, IMCD).

From all indications, it is clear that there is a weak distinction between the two theories. Sociocultural learning theory emphasises role in development of cooperative dialogues between children and more knowledgeable members of the society. That child learns the culture of his/her community (ways of thinking and behaving) from the interactions. In the context of social constructivism, knowledge is individually constructed and socially mediated. By participating in a broad range of activities with others, learners appropriate (internalise) the outcomes produced by working together, these outcomes could include both new strategies and knowledge (Fosnot, 11011)

Though there is a closeness and interrelationship existing between sociocultural learning and social constructivism theories, I decided to adopt sociocultural learning as the principal theory for this study. Palincsar (1100X) argues that the two theories overlap and are by no means discrete. The dynamics of learning among pre-primary school learners are conceptualised around the blended notions of participation and acquisition. Sfard (IMMD, p.x) observe "in recent time educational research is caught between two metaphors, the acquisition metaphor and the participation metaphor." It is pertinent to say that the acquisition metaphor characterises learning in terms of knowledge gain and concept development. In the context of the participation metaphor, it is characterise in terms of participation in the activity of a community. Furthermore, Sfard (IMMD) assert that focusing exclusively on one metaphor and

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ignoring or neglecting the other may lead to theoretical distortions. For instance, exclusive dependence on the acquisition metaphor may leads to the philosophical dilemma of trying to explain how individuals can acquire knowledge of something that is not known to them. On the other hand, exclusive dependence on the participation metaphor can make explaining how knowledge is generated across contextual boundaries difficult. Sfard (IMMD) say that the acquisition and participation metaphors offer complementary accounts of learning.

Sociocultural learning theory

Socio-cultural theory maintains that learning is an active process in which the context plays an important role (Vygotsky, IMCD). According to Goos (IIOOV), learning is not just an individual matter but develops within a social context. Sociocultural learning theory place the social context at the centre of learning, and that without it the development of the mind is impossible (Cole + Wertsch, IIOOI). This is because learning is mediated. Lantolf (IIOOO) argues that Vygotsky finds an important role for what he calls 'tools' in humans understanding of the world and of themselves. According to Lantolf (IIOOO), Vygotsky advocates that humans do not act directly on the physical world without the intermediary of tools. Whether symbolic or signs, tools in Vygotsky's view are 'artefacts' that is created by humans under specific cultural (culture specific) and historical conditions, and as such they carry with them the characteristics of the culture in question (Turuk, IIOOD). It is applied as aids in solving problems that cannot be resolved in the same way in their absence (Leach + Scott, IIOOIII). In turn, these artefacts also exert an influence on the people who use them in that it give rise to hitherto unknown activities and hitherto unknown ways of understanding phenomena in the world. Therefore, artefacts are subject to modification as they are transfered from one generation to another one. However, each generation tries to rework them in order to meet the needs and aspirations of its people and communities (Turuk, IIOOD). Vygotsky (IMCD) argues that the role of a psychologist in this context is to understand how human social and mental activity is organised through culturally constructed artefacts. Furthermore, Vygotsky (IMCD) maintain that the sociocultural environment presents the child with a variety of tasks and demands, and engages the child in his world through the tools. In the early stages of development, Vygotsky contains that the child is completely dependent on other people, usually the parents or other family members, who initiate the child's actions by telling him/her as to what to do, how to do it, as well as what not to do (Turuk, IIOOD). Parents or other members of the family, as representatives of the culture and the channel through which the culture navigates into the child, actualise these instructions primarily through language. On ways in which children do appropriate the cultural and social heritages, Frawley (IMMC) recounts that the child acquires the knowledge through personal contacts and interactions with people as the first step (interpsychological plane), thereafter, assimilates and internalises this knowledge adding his personal value to it (intrapsychological plane). However, the transition from social to personal property in Vygotsky's view is not a 'mere copying work'. Rather, it is a transformation of what had been learnt through interaction into personal values (Turuk, IIOOD). Vygotsky (IMCD) submits that this is what also happens in schools. Learners do not merely copy teachers capabilities, instead, they transform what teachers give them during the processes of appropriation.

Vygotsky (IMCD) says that psychology has deprived itself of crucial information to the understanding of complex aspects of human behaviour by refusing to study consciousness. The refusal in Frawley's (IMMC) view has restricted the role of psychology to just the explanation of elementary connections between a living being and the world. According to Frawley (IMMC), consciousness distinguishes human behaviour from other living organisms and links a person's knowledge to his/her behaviour. The consciousness arises, functions and develops in the process of individual's interaction with reality based on his/her socio-historical practices (Lantolf + Poehner, IIOIV). Vygotsky (IMCD) maintains that socially meaningful activity has to be considered as the explanatory principle for understanding consciousness and the scholar (Vygotsky) rejects any attempt to decouple consciousness from behaviour.

Lantolf and Pavlenko (ımmx) opine that the latter understanding of consciousness in teaching is embodied in the concept of metacognition that includes functions such as planning, voluntary attention, logical memory, problem solving and evaluation. John-Steiner and Mahn (ımmL, p.ımm) argue that sociocultural theory emphasise that education should be concerned "not just with theories of instruction, instead with learning to learn, developing skills and strategies to continue to learn, with making learning experiences meaningful and relevant to the learner, with developing and growing as a whole individual". John-Steiner and Mahn (ımmL) contains that the sociocultural learning theory asserts that education can never be value-free, rather, it must be underpinned by a set of beliefs about the type of society that is being constructed and the types of explicit and implicit messages that will best deliver those beliefs. The beliefs should manifest also in the ways in which teachers interact with the learners.

According to Turuk (ıı0oD), sociocultural learning theory has a holistic perspective about the act of learning. Kozulin (ıı0oıı) contain that the sociocultural learning theory is against the idea of the discrete teaching of skills. Instead, Kozulin (ıı0oııı) maintain that meaning should constitute the central aspects of any unit of learning. Any unit of learning should be offered in all its complexity rather than skills and knowledge offered in isolation (Turuk, ıı0oD). Sociocultural learning theory focus the importance of what the learner brings to any learning setting as an active meaning-maker and problem-solver. Furthermore, the theory acknowledges the dynamic nature of the interplay between teachers, learners and tasks and provides a view of learning as arising from interactions with others (McInerney, ıı0oıııı). Ellis (ıı0oo) asserts that sociocultural theory assumes that learning occur not through interaction, rather, in interaction. The learner first succeeds in performing a new task with the help of another person such as teacher or parents and then internalise the task so that he/she can perform it on his/her own. In this way, the social interaction that takes place is advocated to mediate learning (Turuk, ıı0oD). According to Ellis (ıı0oo), the sociocultural learning theory goes further to say interactions that positively mediate learning are those in which the learners scaffold the new tasks (Lantolf, Thorne, + Poehner, ıı0ıx).

Fundamental to Vygotsky's perspective on development and learning is that higher mental functioning in the child is develops from his/her social life (Vygotsky, ımCD). In the first instance, the language and other semiotic mechanisms offer the means for ideas to be talked through and communicated on the social ground and, following the process of internalisation, language and other semiotic modes offer the channels for child's thinking. Vygotsky (ımCD) opine that the relationship between language and thought is direct, and that cognitive development results from social communication. Furthermore, Vygotsky describes the social construction of knowledge within a certain zone he refers to as a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). In my next section, I intend to focus on Vygotsky's notion of the ZPD as it enhances ways in which children learn.

Early childhood education in Nigeria

In Nigeria, the history of early childhood education dates back to the early ımth century with the coming of Christian missionaries who brought with them formal education of the Western world. The earliest form of early childhood education in Nigeria according to Fafunwa (ımCV), was organised by church members especially wives of missionaries who spend their time teaching and taking care of children. They continued this for about an hour every Sunday when parents were attending church service. Since the attendance of these services was never consistent, children never completed a program, also especially because there was no formal curriculum until the missionaries started establishing schools (Fafunwa, ımCV). Akinbote, Oduolowu, and Lawal (ıı0oı) argue that the first or earliest church based schools were actually formal schools operating in several informal settings. And the teachers who were attached to these schools were usually experienced or trained members of the church who had been groomed in teaching the scriptures and possess full or credible knowledge of the scriptures to the class. These classes often took place on Sundays

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between 10 to 11 a.m. The teachers often began by introducing several short choruses, after which they conducted prayers sessions before proceeding to teach short stories from the bible. These lessons often ended which assessment, which comprised of question and answer sessions.

The learners often enjoyed these lessons because it was practically learner centred and full of activities like hand clapping, singing and drama. After several Sundays, these schools often transform to pre-primary schools or nursery schools as some called it. These schools then began on Mondays, concluded on Fridays for about four hours daily, and were taught by women with limited education. Pupils or learners in these schools were mostly children of church members, although the children of a few non-members were admitted(Oduolowu, 2010). There was no formal age for schooling at this level since children were admitted from the age of one to seven. The curriculum of these schools focused largely on bible doctrines and principles, which constituted the core of missionary work. To enhance the understanding of the bible and to make new meaning basic mathematics or arithmetic, counting, memorization, and songs constituted part of the content. As the classes went on, the pupils were subsequently promoted to primary schools which were created as the needs arise or as the schools became bigger and learners progressed (Oduolowu, 2010). These early childhood education and care centres became child-minding facilities for parents most of whom were farmers who daily went to their farms and needed people to take care of their children or worked outside of their immediate environment since especially due to low levels of development.

Oduolowu (2010) articulates that as time went on other preschools were established Government Reservation Areas for the children of Europeans living in such areas as well the few elite Nigerians who had grown along the ranks. But with the advent of independence, there was economic changes which let to development and the creation of several new schools as more and more Nigerians desired to be educated and emulate the examples of their colonial masters. Furthermore, the increase in women activism and job quarters for women created further needs for early childhood education and care centre. The practice of hiring maids, and leaving children with grandmothers had grown out of fashion as more and more women wanted to show case themselves as educated and advance the course of feminism (Oduolowu, 2010). Obanya (2008) further argues that preschool has gradually grown popular in Nigeria as a result of the increasing awareness of the benefits associated with early childhood education.

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With the increasing popularity of preschool, the Nigerian government took several steps to maximise the benefits of preschool both for the nation and for the individuals. These steps in the early days culminated in three National Policy on Education policies (NPE, 2004), however, Gabriel (2011) argues that government efforts in enhancing early childhood education ended at policy level with little or no practical contributions made towards enhancing the discipline. Oduolowu (2010) adding to this, further theorise that the cost involve in advancing early childhood education as well as the global economic crunch of the late eighties and early nineties made government spending on early childhood education difficult. The rippling effects of HIV/AIDS and other diseases like malaria, military coups, and military rule had devastating effects on developing countries.

Oluwafemi, Nma, Osita, and Olugbenga (2014) and Newman and Obed (2019) argue that the current National Policy on Education (2013) in Nigeria makes several provision for early childhood education. This section of the policy, which pertains to preschool, encourages participation from both the private sector and different communities to contribute towards the development of this discipline. The policy outlines nine point agenda for the early childhood education. NPE (2013) outlines several ideas about the philosophy of education in Nigeria. It points out that education in Nigeria aims at empowering Nigerians to live in unity and harmony as indissoluble, indivisible, sovereign and democratic nation build on principles of equality, justice and freedom. It also seeks to promote solidarity in Africa as well as world peace through practical understanding. The philosophy of education is built on five basic believes that:

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a) Education is an instrument for social change and national development,

ii) Education is vital in promoting a united and progressive nation,

iii) Education brings to the lime light the creative skills and potentials of citizens for self-actualisation and society development,

iv) Education is the right of every citizen of Nigeria regardless of his or her social status, gender, colour, religion, tribal origin, or contextual individual challenges.

v) Education should be functional, of great quality, comprehensive and address the needs of the Nigerian society (National Policy on Education, 11011, p. 1).

Education in Nigeria no matter the level is therefore geared towards the total development of the individual into a sound and responsible citizen, who would for the development of the nation. From the philosophy of education and the basic believes about education the goals for education in Nigeria are developed. According to the National policy on Education (11011), there are five goals of education in Nigeria and these goals form the backbone of early childhood education in Nigeria. These goals are:

a) The sound development of the child or individual into a morally patriotic and effective

citizen,

b) The immediate and total incorporation of the individual into the Nigerian community

in particular and the world in general,

c) The provision of educational opportunities which are qualitative and equally accessed by all citizens of Nigeria at all levels of the social strata, both within and outside the formal education system,

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d) The inculcation of national unity, national consciousness and values in the education
    system,
e) And the development of physical, mental, social, and psychological competencies, abilities
 and skills with which the individual will contribute positively to the wellbeing of the nation (National Policy on Education, 11011, p. 11).

To ensure the realisation of the goals of education in Nigeria, the National Policy on Education (11011) points out several steps the Federal Government of Nigeria must take to facilitate the provision of education as well as the achievement of these goals. The Federal should therefore ensure that:

a) All educational engagements beginning from early childhood education to university education must be learner centred to guarantee maximum self-actualisation,

b) All teaching regardless of the level should be practical, experiential, activity based and powered by information and communication technology,

c) Education would be driven or directed to meet the needs of the community,

d) All arms of the government should work together to promote the establishment of resources needed by schools like reading clubs whether in schools or in the

community, community libraries, playgrounds amongst others, to ensure effective and enhanced learning,

e) Incentives are allocated to foster and promote the study of sciences at all levels of the educational ladder,

f) Continuing education should be promoted and made part and parcel of the educational process

g) Education is provided in the language of the immediate community or the mother tongue beginning from preschool to the first four years of basic education. Every child shall must learn one Nigerian language (p. ıı).

Early childhood education should therefore engulf all these principles or goals with the support of the government to ensure quality because every child matters. Without quality, national development as well as self-actualisation would be impossible. The National Policy on Education makes further allocation for the provision of education at all levels. The NPE (ı101111, p.111) points out the following to ensure quality:

ı.   Respect for self-worth and dignity of the individual,

ıı.   Faith in the individual's abilities to make seasoned and rational decisions,

ııı.   Interpersonal human relations enhanced by moral and spiritual principles,

v.   Shared responsibility for the development of the society, promotion of the development of the child psychologically, physically and emotionally

x.   The development of functional competencies and skills appropriate for self-reliance (National Policy on Education, ı101111, p. 111).

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NPE (ı101111) further articulates that basic education in Nigeria is provided to children between the ages of o to ıx years old and this is divided into four sections. The first section is o-v early child care development and education, and these is principally in the hands of individual providers, communities, and social development services. This is provided in day-cares and crèches and is not considered part of the formal education system because there is no official curriculum or guideline concerning what is to be done at this level of the educational ladder. The second section spans x-l years and this is referred to as pre-primary. The pre-primary which is considered part of the formal education has formal guidelines provided by the Federal government for education. The third section is primary education which spans over a six years period, running from c-ııı years approximately. The last section is the junior secondary which runs for three years from ıııı to ıx.
However, for purposes of harmonisation, monitoring and policy coordination the Federal Government of Nigeria instituted the Universal Basic Education (UBE) to guide the provision of basic education both formal and informal. The UBE has as objectives:

a) Developing and promoting a strong consciousness in all Nigerian citizens for education, as well as a robust commitment to the continuous promotion of education.

b) Providing free, compulsory and universal basic education for all Nigerians within the school going age.

c) Providing measures for the eradication or reduction of school drop-out (excluding Early Child Care Development and Education) through enhanced efficiency, teacher efficacy, quality and relevance.

d) Providing through specific interventions, complementary approaches and the general promotion of Universal Basic Education support which suits the learning needs of young Nigerians who for one reason or another had dropped out of school.

e) Ensuring that all young Nigerians of school going age acquire levels of numeracy, literacy, life and communication skills which is commensurate to their level on the educational ladder. As well as civic, moral, ethical and security values vital for developing habits of lifelong learning or becoming a lifelong learner.

The UBE therefore creates a platform for the provision of basic education both formal and informal. Though there is no formal curriculum for Early Child Care Development and Education, these objectives of Universal Basic Education helps to guide all providers of informal education on what direction to direct such education. It also offers some guidance to parents, so they can have an idea what they are paying for and be able to measure if these objectives are met.

Drawing from the goals of education in Nigeria, the National Policy on Education theorises a five-point goal for Basic Education in Nigeria. These points are as follows;

ı) Equip every child within the school going age with basic skills and knowledge for wealth creation, educational advancement and entrepreneurship.

ıı) Build and groom young Nigerians to be patriotic, and perform their civic duties thereby contributing to the socio-economic development of the nation.

ııı) The raising of morally upright and politically correct Nigerians who possess the skills and ability to think individually, as well as who appreciate the dignity of labour.

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   v) Encourage the drive for nation building, national consciousness, and peaceful co-existence regardless of the state of the individual or tribal affiliations.

   x) Provide every opportunity necessary for the development manipulative skills which will empower the child to function within his or her full capacity in the society (National Policy on Education, ııoıııı, p. x).

Taking into consideration the philosophy of education in Nigeria; the five basic believes that inform the philosophy of education, the five goals of education in Nigeria, the seven steps the government is expected to take to ensure the achievement of educational goals, the five point agendas that must be taken to ensure quality education in Nigeria, and the goals for basic education in Nigeria, the National Policy of Education clearly articulates eight key constructs which culminates into the purpose of Early Child Care Development and Education (ECCDE) in Nigeria. These key constructs inform the provision of ECCDE in all parts of Nigeria. It becomes vital to carefully articulate them in this study especially because of the discordant voices (as already theorised earlier) expressing themselves in the field of early childhood education and particularly in the definition of early childhood education. Since there is a division in the academia whether early childhood education should include both day-care or crèches (referred to officially or from a policy perspective in the Nigerian context as Early Child Care Development and Education) which is informal education and preschool which is formal or just preschool, it becomes vital to understand government legislature on this issues so as to provide a thorough platform for the study of "The dynamics of learning amongst pre-primary school learners in Uyo Senatorial District, Nigeria: An investigation of formal and informal education processes". This also becomes extremely relevant

because learning is continuous especially in the **N**igerian context where both **ECCDE** and preschool and mutually inclusive or mutually enforcing. **T**hese key constructs are as follows;

a)   **E**nsure smooth and stress free movement or transition from home to school.

b)   **E**quip the child with basic skills for primary education

c) **P**rovide intensive and adequate security, supervision and care for children while their parents are at work or at different individual engagements.

d) **B**uild in every **N**igerian or the child social norms as well as moral values necessary for active and responsible citizenship.

e)   **B**uild in the child a conscious desire for knowledge and creativity through the exploration of nature or inspiring artefacts like music, other forms of arts, the environment, toys and many other resources, which would help sustain the spirit of enquiry in the child.

f)   **I**nstil in the child or develop cooperative skills or a sense of cooperation and teamwork, which is vital for nation building and national development.

g)   **E**mpower the child to develop good habits, especially good health habits towards his or herself and towards others.

h)   **E**mpower the child with basic skills of numbers, shapes, forms, colours, and letters amongst others through play (**N**ational **P**olicy on **E**ducation, ꞮꞮ0ꞮꞮꞮ, p. Ɪ0).

The key constructs which make up the purpose of **ECCDE** provide guiding principles for the provision of education at this level and it gives government and the other stake holders a way

of structuring **ECCDE** in **N**igeria though it doesn't constitute part of the formal education system. **F**urthermore, from the purpose, it is clear that **ECCDE** is the backbone of education in **N**igeria especially since it is where the foundation is laid for future engagements. **A**kinbote et al. (ꞮꞮ00Ɪ) argue that every child's ability especially a child within the **N**igerian context ability to fully maximise his or her potentials or 'God given talents' is highly dependent on the kind of encouragement and stimulation the child receives from his or her home or immediate surrounding environment. **H**owever, since **N**igeria is an under developed nation with high rate of socio-economic imbalances, poverty, and unemployment, many parents cannot afford to provide their children with the necessary encouragement and stimulation required total development. **I**n addition, because of high unemployment, most parents are either busy in farms or working in big cities and have little or no time to provide the care, support and stimulation needed by children for all round development. **ECCDE** is therefore the principal way of mitigating this circumstances and providing the children with the necessary care, support, and inspiration or stimulation needed for their development. **I**n **ECCDE**, the child is provided with necessary opportunities and tools to stimulate mental, physical and psychological development, which is not readily available at home. **T**he purpose further caters for children with disabilities whose parents most often lack the ability, skills and knowledge to detect and deal with such disabilities. **M**ost parents cannot even detect these disabilities in their children early leading to further damage. **T**he challenges or disabilities could be physical like deafness, partial or complete, short sightedness, long-sightedness, amongst others. **T**he challenges could also be psychological or emotional ranging from restlessness, fear, etc. **T**he teachers' experts and teachers in **ECCDE** who are highly skilled in early childhood development, psychosocial and cognitive development, could help detect such challenges and provide vital advice, and or care alert necessary authorities, or the parents so that further steps can be taken for the development of the child. **T**o

this effect, the **ECCDE** is quite vital in the modern world, for the care and security of the child when their parents have gone to works. Ejieh (IIOOL) further argues that proper emotional, social, physical and cognitive development of the child. **ECCDE** is also empowered by experts in brain and or child development and these experts have argued that from o to four or five years is very critical in all areas of development for the child especially character and personality development (Gabriel, IIOIIII). The purpose of **ECCDE** in **N**igeria must be met for the values and benefits to be manifested in the child. To ensure that these eight key constructs, which make up the purpose is met, the **N**ational **P**olicy on **E**ducation articulates a ten point steps that the **F**ederal **G**overnment must take to ensure that this purpose is met. These steps are as follows;

I.   The Federal government will set standards and create monitoring mechanisms, which would ensure that the standards are continuously met in **ECCDE** centres.

II.   The government shall develop and distribute curriculum and support materials like the **I**ntegrated **E**arly **C**hild **D**evelopment **P**olicy, **I**ntegrated **E**arly **C**hild **D**evelopment **C**urriculum, **N**ational **M**inimum **S**tandard for the establishment of **E**arly **C**hild **C**are **E**ducation **C**entres, **I**ntegrated **E**arly **C**hild **D**evelopment **I**mplementation **G**uideline and all other curriculum or support materials that will enhance the implementation of the **ECCDE**.

III.   The government must encourage individual, community and private efforts in the building of new or the enhancement of existing **ECCDE** centres based on the standards provided by **N**ational **M**inimum **S**tandard for the establishment of **E**arly **C**hild **C**are **E**ducation **C**entres.

v.   The government must make allocation or provision in teacher education studies or programs for specialisation in early child care and education, as well as the retraining of teachers who had previously specialise in different areas but now want to specialise in early child care and education.

x.   The government must also ensure that the curriculum of teacher education programs especially early childcare and education is directed or oriented towards the play-way method

    I.   The government will also ensure that **ECCDE** **C**entres take or assume the following caregiver children or infant ratio:

        I.   **C**rè che shall be I:IO

        II.   **N**ursery will be I:IIX

    II.   The government shall develop **ECCDE** curriculum and support materials for nationwide implementation.

    III.   The government shall directly control and supervise the quality of **ECCDE** centres to make sure that they are of the same standards nationwide.

    v.   The government will also make provision for the production and effective utilisation of instructional and learning materials in quantities that would be commensurate to the number of centres and students.

    x.   The government will also take measures to insure that the language of teaching and learning or medium of instruction is principally the mother tongue or the language used by the immediate locality where in is the school located. To ensure this, the government will:

a) **D**evelop and enhance the orthography of more **N**igerian languages to ensure that all languages may be used as the language of teaching and learning.

b) **E**nsure the writing of new textbooks and the translation of existing ones, develop supplementary materials and other instructional or support materials into **N**igerian languages (**N**ational **P**olicy on **E**ducation, IIOIIII, p. IO).

It is therefore clear that the success of **ECCDE** in **N**igeria is dependent on both the government and the private sector or the individual responsible for the centres. **M**aloney et al. (IIOIX) argues that without direct government input and support, the early childhood education would not succeed. **A**lthough the **NPE** makes adequate provision for government action and intervention, policy most often fails to be translated into practice. **E**jieh (IIOOL) argues that because of funding challenges, little government subsidy and community input, most early childhood education centres function as a manifold unit, that is both formal and informal education spanning from **ECCDE** and pre-primary. **O**luwafemi et al. (IIOIV) argues that only a few child-care and or child-minding centres function in such manner and the trend is changing with these institutions operate both **ECCDE** and pre-primary and later apply for licence to operate as **ECCDE**, pre-primary and primary school. **T**hey continue that most of these schools or centres admit children from whatever age their parents are willing to part with them, while others only admit from the ages of two, and later translate to pre-primary or

primary school as the case might be between the ages of v to c. **T**he number of children in this **ECCDE** centres vary from one to the other and these depends on the place where the centres is located or the teachers who teach in the schools or centres.

Conclusion

This study is very significant because it brought out the concepts of early childhood education and the theoretical framework supporting it. **P**re-school children's ability to learn through the language of immediate community or mother tongue does not only preserve the cultural values of the people, but ensuring that learning is permanent in the children. **F**urthermore, it develops in the children readiness to learn and strengthens their identity.

Recommendations

I. **A** conducive environment should be created to ensure that the children's physical and emotional states are stable for the learning to take place.

II. **A**dditionally, there should be attitudinal change on the part of pre-primary school's teachers to accommodate children.

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