



AWARENESS FACTORS AND THE CHOICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION AS A COURSE.

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ABSTRACT

Early Childhood Care and Education has come to stay. It has to be embraced by all stakeholders for it to accomplish its purpose. Everybody needs to tell the next neighbour about early childhood care and education in order to create the awareness that can spur our off springs to offer it as a university course. Two research questions guided the study. The research design is descriptive-Survey. The population of the study comprised all students in Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku, Rivers State. The sample of the study was 150 students in Federal College of Education (Technical) using simple random sampling technique. The study used researcher-made questionnaire. It was discovered that the government and the communities were not involved in creating awareness of early childhood care and education. It was recommended that both the government and the communities should be involved in creating awareness of early childhood care and education in order to make undergraduates offer it as a university course.

Keywords: *Early childhood education, Awareness, Government Involvement, Community Involvement, Choice*

INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Care and Education as a course suits all individuals since everyone is expected to be a parent. It is not a course to be handled with a

wave of the hand (Farok, 2017). Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is more than preparation for primary school. It aims at the holistic development of a child and broad information for lifelong learning and well being. Early childhood care and education has possibility to nurture and care for capable and responsible future citizens (Leo, 2018). In this way, according to Better (2018) early childhood care and education is one of the best investment a country can make to promote human resources development, quality and social cohesion and to reduce the cost of later remedial programmes.

Early childhood care and education refers to the development of care and education of children between birth and eight years old throughout history. Early childhood care and education has a global scope and raising for and educating young children has always been integral part of human societies. Arrangements for fulfilling these societal roles have evolved overtime and remain varied across cultures, often reflecting family and community structures as well as the social and economic roles of women and men. Historically such arrangements have largely been informal, involving family and community members. The formalization of these arrangements emerged in the nineteenth century with the establishment of kindergartens for educational purpose and day nurseries for care. Early childhood education often focuses on learning through play, based on the research and philosophy of Jean Piaget, which posits that play, meets the physical, intellectual, language, emotional and social needs (PILES) of children. Children curiosity and imagination naturally evoke learning when unfestered. Learning through play will allow a child to develop cognitively. Parents, teachers and caregivers determine the level of development of infants and young children's thorough interaction and play. Involvement is crucial for early learning and lays the foundation for future learning in school. The overarching goal of early learning is to ensure disadvantaged children enter school on time and are cognitively, socially and emotionally ready for school.

According to the Universal Basic Education (2013) in Nigeria, early childhood care and education was introduced to increase the access of children to basic education and impose the state of education in the country. In order for the aim of the early childhood education to be fully realized, the quality of the teachers will determine strength of the educational system and the value of the learners. Early childhood care and education is an attractive career option

for students who enjoy working with your children. The ideal early childhood education profession has a varied skill set, they are able to be both innovative and traditional, analytical and artistic, patient and commanding. Teaching young children requires a different approach than that applied to older children. Early childhood education professionals need to have a firm grasp on the developmental stages of early childhood.

According to the National Policy on education Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) the objectives of early childhood care and education were stated as follows:

Effect a smooth transition from the home to school. Preparing 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, and the markets, office etc). Inculcate in the child the spirit of inquiry and creativity, art, music and playing with toys, etc.

Develop a sense of co-operation and team spirit. Learn good habits, especially good health habits and teach the rudiments of numbers, litters, colours, shapes, forms etc through play. Without the establishment of early childhood programme in centers and institutions. The objective of early childhood and education will not be achieved that is why government said in the national policy on education federal government of Nigeria (2004), also state that government shall establish pre-primary sections in existing public schools and encourage both community and private efforts in the provision of pre-primary education, make provision in teacher education programmes for specialization in early childhood care and education. Where the government is not doing these, the people are discouraged and lack interests in the programme. It is the primary responsibilities of the government to announce to the public about the importance of Early Childhood Education and encourage people into it. The government should encourage young people to offer it in tertiary institution and also ensure tertiary institution have it as one of their courses, make provision for the institution and early childhood centres. If government make early childhood care and education attractive to the public and make them see reason for the education, one would be encourage to offer it.

Awareness is the state where in a subject is aware of some information and when the information is directly available. A good awareness brings and yields better results. Sending awareness to the public attracts their attention

and makes them know the information available at that point in time. Governments have a big role to play in the awareness of early childhood care and education because it is the bedrock of education. Education is the key to success and having successful people in the nation makes the nation developed without having the basic education training; one may not be able to cope at the primary to the tertiary stage in education.

According to Rex (2014) early childhood care and education is the most cost-effective investment to start a lifelong path of learning and ensure all children have a fair chance to reach their potentials. Without a trained early childhood educator such chances are not there for the children. Also Witt (2010) states that early childhood is a concerned prefect to the government, community and the parents. Improving the child care system is highly dependent on government support, according to national policy on education: section 2 federal government of Nigeria (2004) states that the responsibilities of government for pre-primary education shall be to promote the training of qualified pre-primary school teachers in adequate numbers, contribute to the development of suitable curriculum, supervise and control the quality of such institutions and establish pre-primary sections in existing public schools. Presently government are not fulfilling their responsibilities towards the pre-primary education, instead it is the opposite. At present the number of preschool education institution is increasing in geometric progression. Society has considered preschool education institution as a source of income. Some individual who do not have any training of preschool education set up preschool education institution unplannedly.

Regiu (2019) opined that governments have a unique opportunity to improve the developmental trajectories of children. Government also regulates the quality of these programs, and they have the data (and thus the visibility) on which services are provided and by what methods. For this reason, they increasingly play a critical role in connecting children and families with the suit to healthcare services required to ensure well-being. However, Chile (2018) asserted that Providing assistance by creating awareness efficiently is not easy to get it right, government could pursue an integrated, comprehensive approach linking health and social services and education programs. Currently, state and cities often struggle with integrating and coordinating services across the social safety net. For example, children receiving early intervention services may experience an interruption in

support when transition to preschool of kindergarten, and often not continued by a child's daily caregiver in childcare or preschool. Investments in health and education, then, may not achieve the same results as when they are effectively coordinated. In addition, data is fragmented across many stakeholders and systems, which makes it difficult for governments and systems, which makes it difficult for governments to measure performance and match output (the extent to which spending and services reach various child population) to outcomes (the impact of these services on child well-being). This lack of coordination also affects how families are able to navigate the system-especially those with less education or limited English proficiency. As a result, children often miss out available services.

Community Participation in Early Childhood Education

Community participation in school management has a great mistrust and distance between people and schools by nurturing transparency of information and a culture of mutual respect and by jointly pursuing improvement of school by sharing vision, process, and result (Henderson, 2019) contributed that community involvement and engagement at all levels of the school have been shown time and time gain to have significant short and long term benefits on the early choice of course. According to a recent policy brief from the national education association (NEA), "when schools, parents, families, and learning, students tend to earn higher grades, attend school more regularly, stay in school longer and enroll in higher level programs", with these important benefits in mind, it's clear that a focus on increasing community involvement programmes and opportunities should be a consistent goal of schools yes, it is parents' responsibility to care for their child. However, Ibeto (2019) added that like mothers, that it does not take the community to provide the best environment to provide the for nurturing the individual communities that encourages involvement from different professions after learning opportunities for all children.

Kingsley (2017) suggested that it is important to also prioritize community involvement in the form of sponsorship and donation programs. Do the early childhood teachers need Ipads or smart boards to engage children with new technologies? Cerate and publicize sponsorship and donation needs throughout one's community, give local organization and businesses the opportunity to partner the school in the community. The responsibility for

raising a well educated and citric-minded generation of children cannot rest solely on the schools.

Henderson and Map (2016) examined research studies that offered perspectives on the relationship between parent (and community). As a whole “these studies found a positive and convincing relationship between family involvement and benefits for the children, including improved academic achievement. When community involvement increases, the schools, parents and communities partner together, then great things can happen in the lives of children and young. It provides evidence to support the critical work of the early childhood education sector in delivering that best development opportunities and outcomes for children. There are number of ways in which early childhood educators can work with and support communities to help shape the future and wellbeing of the children. Early childhood education services cannot be a principal layer in bringing stakeholders together in a community partnership to strengthen the network of support around children as they grow and develop through their early years and into schools (Meye, 2018). (Community partnership and focusing on improving outcomes for children, will ultimately lead to positive outcomes of many people offering early childhood education as a course. Mcwilliam & Baily (2018) stated that involvement of community helps in children’s creating awareness of the course Early Childhood Care and Education and provide a platform for early childhood education services, schools and other early years services to work together in supporting local children. Possibilities include collaboratively planning transition programmes, and planning for the needs of children arriving at school. Early childhood educators can discuss their community results with a range of stakeholders to engage them in action that seeks to improve outcomes for the children of their community.

According to Kertoy (2017) in “raising awareness of the programme”, early childhood educators discuss children’s development with families, school and communities. It is a powerful tool for community to raise awareness of the importance of early childhood course and then lead action towards improving offering the course in higher institutions for a better outcome. With expertise in children’s development, the well-positioned to generate community momentum towards improving outcomes in their local community. Involvement of community participation in early childhood include:

Share the importance of early childhood development with families.

Parents and families are children's first and most important educators and have a significant outgoing influence on children's development. Other environment influence include access to quality early childhood education services schools and community resources. The cumulative effect of these influences, and the interaction between influences, determines how well children will develop and take advantage of opportunities that early childhood education services, schools and communities provide. In children's early years it is important for educators to work collaboratively with families to maximize children's development.

Statement of the Problem

The state of early childhood care and education as a course is very poor and the rate of students' enrollment is low. Early childhood care and education is not run in most of the Nigerian Universities. In addition, many people are unaware that the course like early childhood care and education is in existence. Some people asked questions like what is the course all about and so on.

Efforts made by the heads of the departments and staff of the few Universities offering it is being embraced have not been felt. Internal campaigns i.e going from school to school advertising the course and also encouraging the teachers who are interested to enroll for it, printing of flyers, sending of letter to places refused to make any impact. Therefore, the researcher deemed it necessary to investigate the awareness factors and the choice of early childhood education as a course in Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku, Rivers State. and education as a course

Research Questions

Referring to the purpose of the study, the following research questions were answered to obtain the finding of the study.

- What is the involvement of government in the choice of early childhood care and education as a course?
- To what extent does community participate in the choice of early childhood care and education as a course?

Research Method

The research design of this study is descriptive survey. Descriptive Survey Study was used because it helped towards the proper understanding of a social unit, hence an in-depth and comprehensive information concerning the

social unit obtained. It described the nature of existing conditions as it concerned the awareness and choice. The population of the study comprised all students in Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku, Rivers State. The sample of the study was 150 students in Federal College of Education (Technical). Specifically, five (5) students were selected from 30 department using random sampling techniques. The main instrument used for the collection of data was a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher titled “awareness factors and the choice of early childhood education as a course in Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku in Rivers State. The modified four (4) points likert relating to strongly Agreed (SA-4) Agreed (A-3), Disagree (SD-2) Strongly Disagree (SD-4), as optional on the questionnaire were used. The instrument consisted (15) items on the research questions raised on the study. The instrument was divided into (2) sections A & B respectively. Section A elicited information on personal data of the respondents while section B, contained the questions to be answered. The instrument was validated three experts in the field of early childhood care and education. Corrections and advice were properly considered thus making the instrument valid for the purpose of this study. The researchers and assistants administered the 150 copies of the questionnaire to the respondents in Federal College of Education (Technical), Omoku and collected the administered instrument after two weeks from the respondents. The data collected for the purpose of this study was analyzed using mean as a statistical tool

Results

Research Question One

What is the involvement of government in the choice of early childhood care and education as a course?

Table: 1 Responses

S/N	ITEM	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	TOTAL SCORE	NO RESPONDENTS	OF	MEAN
1.	Government is providing scholarship for early childhood	20	15	30	35	220	100		2.2
2.	Government campaigns for early childhood education.	15	30	25	15	175	100		1.8

3.	Government provides jingles to arouse people's interest to make early childhood education a choice in university	14	16	26	50	206	100	2.0
4.	Government has established pre-primary sections in existing public schools	45	35	15	5	320	100	3.2
5.	Government approved early childhood education programme in every university	15	5	40	40	195	100	2.0
								2.2

The table above shows that 100 respondents with the weight of (80) scores strongly agreed that education students, 15 (45) agreed, 30 (60) disagreed, 35 (35) strongly disagreed with the total score 220, 100 respondents and a mean of 2.2. More also, 5 respondents with the weight (20) strongly agreed, 30 (90) agreed, 25 (50) disagreed and 15 (15) strongly agreed that government campaigns for early childhood education with a total score of 175 and mean of 1.8.

Furthermore, 14 respondents with weight score of (56) strongly agreed, 16 (48) agreed 26 (52) disagreed and 50 (50) strongly disagreed that government provides jingles to arouse people's interests to make early child education a choice in university, with a total score of 206 and a mean of 2.0. Also, 45 (180) respondents out of 100 respondents agreed, 35 (105) agreed 15 (30) disagreed and 5 (5) strongly disagreed that government has established pre-primary section in existing public school with a total score of 320 and mean of 3.2. Finally 15(60) strongly agreed, 5 (15) agreed, 40 (80) and 40 (40) strongly disagreed that government approved early childhood education programme in every university, with a score of 195 and mean of 2.0. It was observed that the grand mean 2.2 of all the questionnaire item (1-5) is below cut off point of 2.5. Therefore it means that there is no involvement of government in the choice of early childhood care education as a course.

Research Question Two

To what extent does community participate influence the choice of early childhood as a course?

Table: 2: Responses

S/N	ITEM	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	TOTAL SCORE	NO RESPONDENTS	OF	MEAN
6.	Communities announce the availability of early childhood education programmes in their churches.	25	15	30	45	220	100		2.2
7.	Community involve in posting bills or advertisement of early childhood education programmes	20	5	40	30	205	100		2.0
8.	Community send town criers to send information on the importance of early childhood education as a career.	5	10	50	35	185	100		1.9
9.	Community provides scholarship for early childhood student teachers	20	15	35	30	225	100		2.2
10.	Community has established relationship with early childhood education organization.	30	35	15	5	260	100		2.6
									2.1

The table above shows that of 100 respondents, that 25 (40) strongly agreed, that 15 (45) agreed, 15 (30) disagreed and 45 (45) strongly disagreed that communities announce the availability of early childhood education programmes in their churches, with a total score 220 and mean of 2.2. Furthermore, 20 (80) strongly agreed, 5 (15) agreed, 40 (80) disagreed and 30 (3) strongly disagreed that communities involve in posting bills or advertisement of early childhood education programmes, with a total score of 205 and mean of 2.0. Also 5(20) strongly agreed, 10(30) agreed, 50 (100) disagreed and 35 (35) strongly disagreed that communities send town criers to send information on the importance of early childhood education as a career, with the total score of 185 and mean of 1.9. Furthermore, 20 (80) strongly agreed, 15 (45) agreed 35 (70) disagreed and 30 (30) strongly disagreed that communities provide scholarship for early childhood student-teachers, with the total score (weight)of 225 and mean of 2.2. Again 30 (120) strongly agreed, 35 (108) agreed, 15 (30) disagreed and 5 (5) strongly disagreed that communities have established relationship with early childhood education organization with the total score (weight) of 260 and mean of 2.6. This means that the grand mean 2.1 of all the questionnaire items (6-10) is below the cut off point of 2.5 therefore it means that communities do not involve in creating awareness of Early Childhood Care and Education for choice of early childhood education as a course.

Discussion of Findings

Findings in the work have revealed that there is no involvement of government in the choice of early childhood care and education as a course. It is the primary responsibilities of the government to announce to the public about the importance of early childhood education and encourage people into it, this is in line with the assertions of Janice Ford (2013) who opined that involvement of government improve access to and quality of early education and investment in early education can be an important component of improving the overall education success and eventually future employment and earnings of children. However, It is not in line with the study of Chile (2018) who asserted that Providing assistance by creating awareness efficiently is not easy to get it and does not relate to the choice of early childhood care and education as a course.

The result also revealed that communities do not involve in creating awareness for the choice of early childhood care and education as a course. This is in consonance with the study of Henderson (2019). Nevertheless, it negates the findings of Ibeto (2019) who added that it does not take the community to be involved in creating awareness for candidates to choose early childhood care and education as a course of study.

Conclusion

It was concluded that awareness factors relate to the choice making of early childhood care and education as a course in Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku in Rivers State. It is time to be involved in the early childhood education to give it a quality standard to achieve a better objective. It is a powerful tool for early childhood education services to raise awareness of the importance of early childhood development and the lead action towards improving outcome for children.

Recommendation

Government should provide scholarship for early childhood student-teachers
Communities should be involved in creating awareness on early childhood care and education to make people choose it as a course of study.

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