



Research Article

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Early Childhood Developmental Experiences as a Tool for Combating Future Security Challenges in Nigeria

Theresa Edirin Atakpo, Ph.D.

Department of Educational Management and Foundations,
Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria

Doi: 10.36941/jesr-2020-0018

Abstract

This paper examined early childhood developmental experiences as a tool for combating future security challenges in Nigeria. Education is the foundation of civilization over space and time. Thus it is seen by nations wither developing or developed as the main instrument necessary for the achievement of national security. Many nations therefore invest in education with the hope of achieving the needs of the society. Early childhood education is an integral part of teaching children in early life. The exposure of the child to pre-school experiences equips him for the next educational level and even for life. The paper recommends that the curriculum at this stage should emphasize functionalism or worthwhileness. It should consist of a play-based programme that emphasizes a pedagogical approach to education where children will be seen as requiring to learn with manipulative materials that will enhance their learning and also be taught the importance of hard work and dignity of labour. This will help to curtail some of the future security challenges in the country. A package for the early childhood sector was also proposed.

Keywords: Early Childhood; Developmental Experience; Security Challenges

1. Introduction

Education according to Hamidu (2013) is the complete mental and physical transformation of a person(s) as a result of the structured mode of training that the person(s) acquire to be more productive in a given society. Education therefore acts as a leeway to equip the citizenry with the required knowledge, values, skills and attitude to build a united, strong and an egalitarian society as enumerated in educational goals in the National Policy on Education (2013).

Education is the foundation of civilizations over space and time. Thus, it is seen by nations wither developing or developed as the main instrument necessary for the achievement of national security. Many nations therefore invest in education with the hope of achieving the needs of the society that is why Iyo and Daagu (2013) rightly stated that “a well laid educational system of any society translates it’s aspirations into reality.

Many children in Nigeria and Africa as a whole have no opportunity of experiencing the much needed early childhood education (Mefor, 2010). Having access to quality education is an undeniable right of every member of the society as spelt out by the world summit on the state of children all over the world and has made the inclusion of Early childhood care and Education (ECCE) in the Education for All (EFA) compulsory. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) views early childhood education as spanning the human life from birth to age eight. That is Early

Childhood education caters for children in pre-kindergarten through primary three and the curriculum emphasis is on play (Eliason and Jenkins, 1999). Early childhood education according to Darragh (2010) is very important and is the organized practice of educating those who are in the early stages of life, early childhood education lays a solid foundation for future living and learning (Aliyu, 2017) and is one of the most vulnerable stage of life. There have been a lot of arguments over the importance of early education for children. Some psychologists like Kagan (1973), Sears and Dowley (1983) do not believe that early intellectual deprivation is an obstacle to normal development or that attendance at nursery school in and of itself radically alters children's personality or improve their academic performance in later life because, most of these early childhood institutions rely heavily on traditional formal approach to pedagogy and as Osanyin (2002) asserted that the early children institutions seem to be seen as a mere downward extension of the formal school system. Okon (2004) is however, of the opinion that whatever the line of argument, it is necessary to know that early stimulation of the child intellectually serves a better opportunity for later intellectual development of the child.

There are two major functions of early childhood education. These are the custodial function and preparatory role of early childhood education. The custodial function of early childhood education is as it benefits working mothers and others which busy economic engagements and have no adequate and quality time to attend to the development needs of the child at home. In the same vein, the exposure of the child to pre-school experiences equips him for the smooth transition to the next educational level without much adjustment problems. Early childhood education, however, performs much more than custodial and preparatory functions.

Early childhood experiences gives young children adequate conditions to develop and learn to enhance their chances to become successful at school and to be adults well prepared for life (Ajayi, 2008; Aliyu, 2017; Smith, 2013). The exposure of the child to pre-school experiences equips him for the next educational level and even for life (Kazaure, 2013; Nmwamwenda, 2014; Osanyin, 2012). The curriculum at this stage of learning should consist of a play-based programme that emphasizes a pedagogical approach to education where children will be seen as requiring to learn with manipulative materials that will enhance their learning and also be taught the importance of hard work and dignity of labour. It is suggested that more concepts and structure be gradually added to the curriculum.

What Nigeria is particularly looking for according to Olokose (as cited in Osanyin, 2004) can best be identified as:

- Philosophers who can think of the way out of the squalor, poverty, insecurity and dishonesty in which we have found ourselves.
- Great scientist to remove diseases and misery from human existence.
- Liberators, who are able to deliver them from oppression and deceit.
- Leaders that would be sincere to the yearnings and aspirations of Nigerians.
- Godly men and women who can lead the Nigerian nation on to the path of moral and spiritual rectitude.

It is against this backdrop that the paper will examine the effect of pre-school experiences and how it equips the child for life.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Security Challenges in Nigeria

There is no clear cut definition of national security. National security has been defined in various ways by different people. Pateri (2014) viewed national security as the capability of a nation to overcome the multi-dimensional threats to the well-being of its people and its survival as a nation at any given time. In the same vein, Brown (2014) also defined national security as the ability to preserve

the national physical integrity and territory; of institutions and governance from disruption from outside and to control its borders.

Security challenges will literally mean inability to preserve the nation's physical integrity and territory and combating security challenges would mean finding ways to curb these challenges. Jimada (2017) argued that insecurity is the state of fear or anxiety stemming from a complete or altered lack of protection. Nigeria as a nation is painfully passing through a number of security challenges ranging from lack of basic infrastructure, collapse of vital institutions in the society, political and economic turbulence, moral decadence, poverty, terrorism, Kidnapping, corruption, insecurity of life and property, insurgency, banditry, poverty, religious intolerance, nepotism, cultism to mention but a few.

The effect of insecurity on the Educational system is enormous as enumerated in Hamidu and Audu (2017). Educational institutions most times are the worse hit for instance the incessant attacks of the Boko Haram insurgents in North-eastern Nigeria has led to the closure of many schools especially early childhood centres in that region of the country. Casualties of these attacks most times are teachers, other staff in the school and students also, students and staff are kidnap victims most times. All these result in low number of pupils/student enrolment in schools because of displacement of families of school children and school children themselves. All these also result in psychological trauma and health related challenges because many children in the attacked area are always anxious, uncertain, apprehensive have sleepless nights and are sometimes taking to displaced peoples camp to take refuge and retirement and relocation of teachers to areas not prone to attacks.

2.2 Factors Responsible for National Security Challenges

Security challenges can be attributed to various factors. For instance, Nigeria is a nation full of diverse people from different ethnic groups, cultures, cultural beliefs all with different backgrounds. Some groups, who feel they are disadvantaged, dejected or marginalized who have become embittered and have decided to vent their anger on someone or the government, pose great nuisance to the nation or can decide to become unruly and constitute menace to the society. Unemployment is yet another factor. There is therefore, no peace in the country. Even the younger generation today no longer believe in hard work or the dignity of labour which the national education goals number 4 derived from the philosophy of education supports: "the acquisition of appropriate skills and development of mental, physical and social abilities and competences as equipment necessary for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society" (FGN, 2013 p. 18). The saying that the end justifies the means has now been thrown to the wind. The quest for quick money without hard work has led many young people into engaging in negative activities such as yahoo, yahoo+, rituals, cultism, robbery, kidnapping to mention but a few.

The incessant Boko-Haram insurgents bombing in the North, kidnapping in the South West and militancy in the South has left a death toll of 935 in 2011 persons as reported by Human Rights Watch (2012) and Amnesty International (2012). Also, the recent abduction of 110 Dapchi and 300 Chibok female students as stated in Opeyemi (2016), depicts high level of insecurity in the country.

2.3 Education as a Tool for Combating Security Challenges

A cursory look at Nigeria's philosophy of education brings to lime light that a country's national goals can be achieved using education as a tool. In Nigeria's philosophy of education as stated in FRN (2004) section 1, No 4 p.6, we believe that:

- (1) Education is an instrument for national development (2) Education fosters the worth and development of the individual, for each individual sake, and for the general development of the society (3) Every Nigerian child shall have right to equal educational opportunities irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities each according to his or her ability. (4) There is need for functional education for*

the promotion of a progressive, united Nigeria”

Looking at the nations’ philosophy of education therefore, one would say that it was intended that our educational system should be one that would encourage effective communication, take note of individual differences that exists among the learners, give equal educational opportunities to all children and at the end of the day come out with a functional educational system. Assuming this was achieved, education would actually have been a tool for combating national security challenges.

2.4 *Early Childhood Developmental Experiences as a Tool for Combating Future National Security Challenges*

UNICEF (2016) views pre-school age as that age that corresponds to a critical period of rapid changes both physically and physiologically. The 1969 National curriculum conference was however the first time education of children between 3 to 5 years of age was mentioned and this declaration eventually led to the emphasis placed on early childhood education in the country. However, the early stages are the most important for growth and development, and they are the most difficult times in a child’s life. Development of the brain at such times can be affected by child abuse, or family violence as stated in Osanyin (2012).

Early Childhood Education according to the FGN (2013) aims are to:

“(1) Effect a smooth transition from the home to school;(2) prepare the child for primary education; (3) provide adequate care and supervision and security for children while their parents are at work (on the farms, markets, offices); (4) inculcate social, moral norms and values; (5) inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature the environment, art, music and the use of toys etc.; (6) to develop a sense of cooperation; (7) to simulate in the child good habits including good health habits; and (8) teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colour, shapes, forms, etc. through play”

Obiweliozor (2015) re-echoed the fact that research evidences from different fields of study over the years have pointed to the fact that the care & support that a child has in health, nutrition, psychosocial care and security are necessary for the development of intellectual, behavioural and social skills and, therefore, reiterate the importance of early child development.

Osanyin (2012) reiterated that research has amply indicated the significant role of the environment in the overall growth and development of the child. She further asserted that the development of a child is either facilitated or inhibited by his early childhood experiences. Montessori (1936) emphasized the importance of the child’s learning environment. She believes that the environment should provide for the child’s perfect freedom. That is the child’s learning environment should have necessary objects or materials of various kinds which could be used to help children learn. She also suggested that since the attention span of children is very short, children should be given freedom to change from one activity to another and that teaching-learning should be very practical involving the use of pictures, objects, visual and audio-visual materials.

There are various processes of learning for children. Okorodudu and Okorodudu (2002) asserted that psychologists have tried to determine such ways and device measures to harness them in other to promote effective teaching and learning among children. Generally, children are very curious and wants to do things according to their interest and cursorily. Children learn through play, experimentation and discovery process, by imitation, by listening and by observation and by engaging in many activities.

The process of learning for children is therefore a spontaneous one and when developmental experiences are worthwhile that is if they reflect the needs of the society while, using example of things found in the environment then learning will be purposeful and useful in future (Halet, 2016; Waller & Davis 2014).

3. The Problem of the Study

Research has shown children learn best in an environment which allows them to explore, discover and play. The problem with early childhood education in Nigeria according to Aliyu (2017) is the fact that most of the publicly owned centres there is the problem of lack of essential learning resources to lack of skilled instructors who cause the children to lose interest in education because they are not skilled in early childhood teaching pedagogy or believe they have been teaching for many years and as such have experience and may not want to change from their old way of teaching and doing things. So they cannot teach in a such a way, that the children can understand at their level. The common practice in most centres is that the children are exposed to rigorous academic exercise because they believe it will give them a head-start ahead of their contemporaries but this is against the provision of the National Policy on Education which stipulates the play way method of teaching as the main method of teaching in pre-schools.

Today in schools, activities or instruction turn out to be rote learning. Learning is not made meaningful or the learners are made to memorize and pass not to internalize or relate learning to real life situations. This is very dangerous for achieving functionalism. This is why these children will grow up and not be able to understand what they have learnt this in turn will promote laziness after all one cannot defend the education he has acquired and what matters today is wealth, but not how it is or the means it is acquired or obtained.

3.1 Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

Research Question 1: What is the perception of caregivers on how early childhood developmental experiences can serve as a tool for combating future security challenges in Nigeria?

Research Question 2: What package can be proposed to enhance early childhood developmental experiences so that it can serve as a tool for combating future security challenges in Nigeria?

4. Method

4.1 Sample and Participant Selection

The researcher randomly selected 456 female teachers from public school early childhood centres in Delta, Edo and Lagos State. Most of the participants have been on the job for the past 5 years.

4.2 Assessment and Measures

Interview and open-ended questionnaire were used to obtain information in the study. Question such as: "do you think that early childhood developmental experiences can serve as a tool for combating future security challenges in Nigeria?"

4.3 Ethical Consideration

The respondents were adequately briefed on the nature and purpose of the study. Their informed consent was sought for and obtained by the researcher. They were assured of the confidentiality of their responses.

5. Results

Research Question 1: Sought the perception of care givers on how early childhood developmental

experiences can serve as a tool for combating future security challenges in Nigeria?

Responses from over 96% of the caregivers that were employed in the study revealed that, early childhood developmental experiences can serve as a tool for combating future security challenges in the following ways

- Establish social relationships
- Helping the child in the exploration of the environment through toys, artistic and musical activities.
- Teach teamwork and co-operation
- Teach good health.

Osanyin (2007) noted that a child’s ability to respond to positive influences in the environment in the early years of life has been well documented in academic research, psychology and medicine. Agbakwuru (2019) reported president Buhari’s statement at the presidential villa on the 8th of August, 2019 while receiving Governor Umaru Fintri of Adamawa State. He said the lack of trust and the challenge of corruption plaguing the nation is the result of years of low investment in education. Speaking further, he said "Today, majority of Nigerians are below 20 years old, and it is projected that our population growth rate is one of the fastest in the world. This means any plan we have today must take into account, the needs of tomorrow". The president statement re-emphasizes the importance of an early start for children and developmental experiences as a tool for combating future security challenges in Nigeria.

Research Question 2: Sought a package that can be proposed to enhance early childhood developmental experiences so that it can serve as a tool for combating future security challenges in Nigeria?

Responses from the sampled caregivers have affirmed that early childhood developmental experiences can serve as a tool for combating future security challenges. They have also affirmed that Learning is not always made meaningful, the learners are made to memorize and pass not, most times to internalize or relate learning to real life situations because of time factor, inadequate supervision, lack of instructional aides to lack of awareness. This they also agree is very dangerous for achieving functionalism. This is in line with Aliyu (2017) who observed that in most publicly owned early childhood institutions activities or instruction turn out to be rote learning. Learning is not made meaningful or the learners are made to memorize and pass not to internalize or relate learning to real life situations.

There is therefore, the need for the introduction of an enhancement package into the early childhood education sector that will encourage a functional early childhood system in the country. The proposed enhancement package is depicted below:

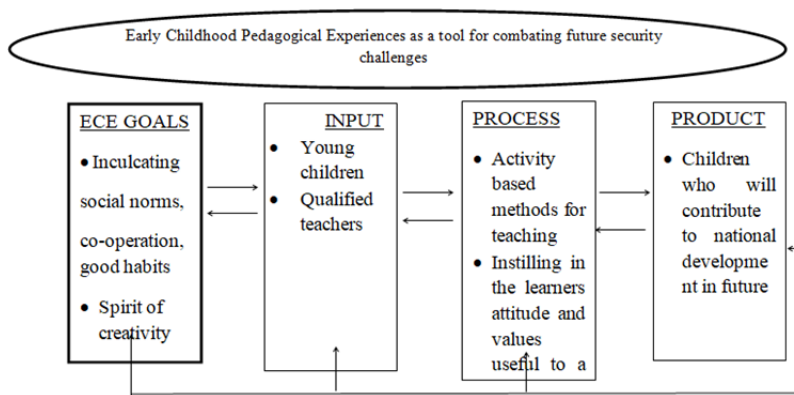


Figure 1: An activity – based package for ECE as a tool for combating future security challenges

The package consists of ECE goals, input, process and product. This package will contribute to the development of skills, talents and encourage creativity in the learner.

The package therefore is to give adequate consideration to functionalism by contributing to the development of talents and capabilities in the young children which will help to combat security issues in the future because it is what the children learn today that they will build upon in future.

6. Conclusion

The main thrust of the paper was to examine how early childhood developmental experiences can serve as an instrument for curtailing future security challenges in Nigeria. Responses from caregivers revealed that a functional early childhood education programme is capable of inculcating in the child developmental experiences which will help the child later on in life because the early childhood stage is the stage where characters are built personalities are formed and whatever they learn at this stage is what they would build upon in later in life.

7. Recommendation

The paper recommends that the proposed activity-based package for early childhood developmental experiences as a tool for combating future security challenges be adopted.

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