

## RE-INVENTING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION FOR GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS

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### Abstract

*To make the Nigerian Early childhood education Programme to be effectively placed for global competitiveness, it should be the type of education that would enable the young members of the society acquire knowledge, skills and work experiences that are desirable to solve global challenges that face the world today. Such challenges range from poverty, climate change to financial problems and conflicts' that require global minded solutions which entail the use o appropriate skills. Evidences have shown that early childhood education has great positive influence on children's effectiveness, conception and social development in subsequence years, but the current happenings in the pre-primary education system in Nigeria are worrisome. These include shortage of teachers for specialized subjects, inadequate modern instructional materials, poor motivational strategies, bribery and corruption; inadequate training for capacity building; delay in payment of salaries and exhorbitant school fees, shortage of classroom and office accommodation for teaching staff etc. These situations often result to poor academic performance which in the end constitutes threat to national economy and global competitiveness. Therefore, the inculcation of global competency skills is necessary so that the young ones can invest a future that appropriately addresses global challenges. Hence there is need for total overhaul and re-invention of the Nigerian Early Childhood Education Programme for meaningful development of both the individual and the Nigerian nation to position its products for effective global competition.*

**Keywords:** Early childhood education, globalization, global competitiveness

### **Introduction**

Pre-primary education or early childhood education is that education or learning process designed for young children who are not yet of primary school age of six years. This type of education was given official recognition by the Federal Government of Nigeria and the National Policy on Education NPE (2013) respectively for better transformation of the system and good governance. The education system was tagged “Pre-primary Education”. A good preparatory step to entry into the primary school. The children’s age stipulated in the policy document was two to five years.

One of the ways through which pre- primary education can set the pace for global economy competitiveness is improved management. According to Anyahwu (2010) management is an integral part of any organization and it involves skillful, organization and utilization of resources (human and material) ) for the achievement of goals. In order to achieve maximum results in the early childhood level of education, the head teacher and the teachers must be skilled in management to be effective and efficient in both personally and in the implementation of the curriculum, in thinking out of the box, in trying new ideas, skills and strategies for different and in difficult situations. The head teachers and teachers should perform managerial functions such as planning, organizing directing and coordinating. Others include: provision and maintenance of school plant facilities, instructional and non –instructional functions, curriculum development and establishment of healthy school climate and culture as well as staff improvement which is the crux of this study.

According to Orebanjo in Amali, Bello and Okafor (2015) evidences shown that early childhood education has positive influence on children effectiveness, conceptual and social development in subsequent years. Therefore great effort need to be applied to improve on the existing curriculum for the interest and needs of the people and mostly for global economy competitiveness.

Some current happenings in the pre-primary education are worrisome. These include shortage of teachers for specialized subjects, inadequate modern instructional materials, poor motivational strategies by the administrators and government, inadequate training of staff capacity building, delay in payment of salaries, shortage of classrooms and office accommodation for teaching staff among others. These crisis situations often result into poor academic performance which in the end constitute a threat to the nation’s economy and global competitiveness. This therefore calls for improvement of the entire programme to achieve a “world class standard”.

### **The concept of Early Childhood**

Pre-primary education, the education given in an education institute to children before primary education, is also referred to as early childhood education and it includes nursery education, crèche, day care and kindergarten and Montessori school. (Afianmagbon and Nwokocha, 2012).

Early childhood starts from birth to 5 years of age and at this period, children need good care. Children education is the education and training given to the child from the moment of birth (i.e the period of dependent survival and the satisfaction of psychological needs) to a time when they can survive on their own. According to Olele and Achionoye (2004) Early childhood development and human development are closely linked. Early childhood development refers to the combination of physical, mental and social development in the early years of life. It is from Early childhood development that human development is attained, which invariably leads to national transformation that will enhance global competitiveness. Early childhood development according to Wosowel (2016) is defined as an organized series of learning experiences for children from 3 to 6 years of age. It can be seen as a preparatory stage or young children's development and the key foundation of any educational system. Educators agree that the early childhood period provides an excellent opportunity for the development of cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of the young child. The development of the child during this period is accompanied by the structuring of neural connections in the brain, physical growth in the general body, personality development and socio-emotional skills development.

### **Concept of Globalization and Competitiveness**

Global competitiveness arose as a result of a phenomenal development referred to as globalization or what Lagarede (2012) termed "the new world of interconnections". This development compels a new way of living, communicating and interacting.

The idea of the world community being transformed into a global village was initiated and introduced by (Marshall in 1960), Robertson (1987) sees globalization as an accelerated compression of the contemporary world and intensification of consciousness of the world as a single entity. Formal education is one of the greatest instruments in the process of globalization. Therefore, it is through formal education that the consciousness of the world as a single entity or being part of the global system could be actualized. It is in view of the above that other concept such as global competitiveness according to Wikipedia (2003), is derived from economic and econometric terms, as the ability and performance from which a sub-sector or country must be measured and compared in tandem with what is obtainable in other nations of the world as best practices. On the other hand, the world economic forum (2003), defines competitiveness as the set of institutions, policies and the factors that determines the level of production of a country.

### **Early Childhood Education in Nigeria**

Childhood education is the education and training given to the child from the moment of birth to the period of adolescence. It starts from the time when the child is totally dependent on some other people for survival and the satisfaction of need, to a time when they can survive on their own.

In Nigeria, primary education has been an integral part of the educational activities of the Missionary Societies like the CMS, Roman Catholic, the Baptist Mission, Presbyterian Mission and the Wesleyans Missions. Then pre-primary schools were referred to as the infant primary schools, consisting of infants 1 and 11. All through the colonial era, the various education codes and commissions made provisions for and recognized the role of the pre-primary education as supportive of other levels of the education. However, it was not until 1988 that the first official curriculum for pre-primary education was published by the Nigerian Education Research and Development Council (NERDC). The NERDC in conjunction with United Nations International Children Emergency Funds (UNICEF) came up with Early Childhood Care Development and Education (ECCDE) curriculum whose fundamental objective was to make available a

balanced and nationally accepted curriculum concerned exclusively with the education of young pupils (Anuna and Obi, 2006).

In the National Policy on Education, provisions were made stating the objectives and guidelines stated by the government to achieve and meet up with the needs of the early childhood care education program as an agent of socio- economic change and national development stipulated the goals of ECCE as enumerated in the National Policy on Education. Thus, the operational objectives of pre-primary and primary education as stated in the National Policy of Education (FRN, 2013) include;

1. Effecting a smooth transmission from the home to the school.
2. Preparing the child for the primary level of education.
3. Providing adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work.
4. Inculcating in the child enquiry and creativity skills through the exploration of nature and environment, art, music and playing with toys etc.
5. Developing a sense of co-operation and team spirit in the child.
6. Inculcating social norms; and good habits, especially good health habit. and
7. Teaching rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms etc. through play.

The above objectives are expected to prepare the child for future educational endeavors, which, if achieved can help the child grow up to become a contributor to national growth, and development and to be able to face global economic challenges.

### **The Challenges of Early Childhood Education in Nigeria for Global Competitiveness**

To be globally competitive however, we must be globally competent. The challenges that face the world today ranges from global poverty and climate change to financial problems and conflict which require globally minded solutions. Global competency skills are necessary so that young people can invest: a future that appropriately addresses global challenges. In support of the global knowledge and skills, the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, an initiative involving the U.S Department of Education and various private organizations and foundations, included global awareness as a major theme. The advent of technology and communication advancement has made global citizenship education a need rather than a luxury and more visible than ever before.

The best employers the world over will be looking for the most competent, most creative and most innovative individual. Creativity is as important as education and as literacy and we should treat it with the same status. Learners globally, need 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. A United State Advocacy Organization formed in 2002 developed a vision of the broader set of skills required for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These include core skills covered by the existing curriculum in most countries such as languages, mathematics, science and arts combined with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills such as environment awareness and the impact of globalization. These are complimented by learning and innovation skills, information media and technology skills and life and career skills.

Education for global competitiveness is not an option but a priority. Education is a motor for change; (Evans, Obinna and Ikpekgu, 2016). Liberal education students learn how to apply learning that empowers individuals and prepares them to deal with complexity, diversity and change. It is a well rounded direct programme where students are educated in multiply fields of study and not rained in a specific profession according to Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU,2007). Nigeria learners

today need higher levels of learning and knowledge as well as strong intellectual and practical skills to be able to play in the global completion successfully. According to the AACU in Evan-Obinna, & Ikpeko, (2016), Nigerian students can prepare for both responsible citizenship and global competitiveness by achieving the essential learning outcomes such as :

1. Acquisition of knowledge of human culture and the physical and natural world.
2. Studying in the science and mathematics, social science, humanities, histories, languages and the arts.
3. Acquiring intellectual and practical skills for inquiry and analysis, critical and creative thinking, written and oral communication, quantitative literacy, information literacy, team work and problem solving.
4. Developing personal and social responsibility; civil knowledge and competence, ethnical reasoning and action foundations as keys for lifelong learning.
5. Acquiring integrative and applied learning; synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies.

As technology continue to advance, people will increasingly be required to think in creative and divergent ways in other to address new type of problem.

### **Strategies to Improve Early Childhood Education for Global Competitiveness**

Education is an inevitable tool for sustained development and a tool for developing necessary human capital for economic growth and development to enable competitiveness. It is in this regard that Nigeria adopts education as an instrument per excellence for effecting national development (FGN 2007). Thus, the economic, social and political status of Nigeria and indeed the very fabric of Nigerian society depend on education. Education being the bedrock of all forms of development is simply a problem solver (Ezeaku and Ohamabi, 2015). In order to deal with the challenging times to face competitiveness and adjust to the inevitable frustrations posed by the problems, Nigeria needs a sound and reliable education system that needs to start from the formative stage of a child. In this direction, Aguokogno (2000) maintains that education is a process of acculturation that reflects what goes on a society. Lending credence to this, Ogba and Igu in Ezeaku and Ohambi (2012) maintains Early Childhood Education is viral level education and hence should be accorded necessary attention to ensure its effective implementation and management because children who attend early childhood education tend to be more positive and more able to work independently.

To be able to face the challenges of global economic competitiveness; the child should be helped to adjust to and display acceptable social behavior such as correct greetings, using appropriate language when speaking to others, dressing properly and obeying school rules and regulations (Ezeaku and Ohomobi, 2015).

The need for improving pre-primary education for innovative management to enhance global competitiveness cannot be overemphasized particularly at this period when the nation's childhood education needs to be properly managed so that the citizenry from the very beginning is inculcated with the right types of norms, values, attitude and behavior that will make the educational system functional and enable economic growth and development. All these call for total transformation and good governance in the system, regular touch and reforms on existing curriculum and the system to meet the taste of the season, internationally and globally.

For innovative management in pre-primary schools to enhance subsequent development in the education industry for the essence of global competitiveness from Early Childhood Education (ECE), the following steps as stated by Ezeakv and Ohomobi (2015) however could be appropriate:-

1. A common standard form of the programme should be operated. The curriculum, scheme of work and method of imparting learning experiences and duration of study, throughout the Federation must be uniform.
2. Only qualified teachers with special training in pre-primary education should be employed to teach the children.
3. A minimum qualification of Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) in Early Childhood Education should be possessed by teachers to teach the nursery schools / early childhood centers.
4. Teachers of early childhood education must be fully examined and should possess basic skills in pedagogy required to handle these children in and out of the classroom.
5. There must be good conducive environment that facilitates adequate instructions in ECE schools.
6. Government at the Federal State and Local levels should be in the fore –front to ensure adequate supervision and monitoring of schools.
7. Facilities such as specialized teaching materials, activity and play materials, books, desks, tables especially designed for pre-primary children should be distributed round all the Government schools.
8. Nigeria should often lay emphasis on the state of our schools internationally.
9. Quality monitoring units should be set up and backed with necessary logistic support.
10. Colleges of education across the country should be encouraged to mount more educational courses in their programmes to match schools internationally.

### **Recommendations**

In view of some challenges and the strategic measures taken in making the Nigerian Early Childhood Education globally competitive, this paper suggest the need to inculcate the high attitude and skills into pupils in pre-primary education which will aid in the establishment of a long time global competitive coexistence. The paper suggests further among others, the government stakeholders and school authorities’ should revisit the existing Pre-primary Education curriculum to reinvent therein necessary skills to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century which will go beyond reading, writing and mathematics. Then, the Nigeria Pre-primary education system will be of “world class”.

### **Conclusion**

Early Childhood Education is the branch of education theory which relates to the teaching of children from birth up to the age of eight.

This paper established the need to re-visit and improve the pre-primary Education system in Nigeria and to be properly managed so that its citizenry, from the very beginning, is inculcated with the right types of norms, values, attitudes, skills and behaviors that will make the programme globally competitive. It is supported that Nigerian learners today needs higher levels of knowledge as well as strong intellectual and practical skills to be able to act successfully in the global competition. The government should train and employ professionals to face the challenges of global completion. Non-professionals or quacks should be avoided in other to make the Nigerian Early Childhood Education a “world class standard “

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